

Democracy 2.0

Bringing Democracy into the 21st century

Jean-Gabriel Bergeron

October 2016

First I would like to underline the effort deployed by the House of Commons to improve the democratic legitimacy of the institution that governs our country. I also want to underline how lucky we are as Canadians, to be able to attempt to influence the democratic process without having to resort to violence.

The intention of my brief is to propose a new electoral system that would break the democratic paradigm of the past millennia and proposed a new way of doing things that would leverage 21st century technology and significantly improve the democratic legitimacy of our government.

The foundation of my proposal is a reform to the electoral system as well as the voting power that each MP holds in the House where their power is directly linked to the result in their district. The secondary parts of my proposal, expressed in this brief, regard party financing and the ability of the average citizen to track what the MPs are doing in their name in the House.

Electoral System

Multi-Representation with proportional voting rights

I am not an expert of nomenclature so please bear with me as I explain my system.

My system would keep Canada's federal electoral districts as is as well as the current rules that exist in modifying the electoral districts within the country.

In each district, multiple MPs would be elected. Each party would still be limited to present one candidate per district. All candidates that obtain at least 10% of the vote would be elected or the candidate that received the top 3 results. The approach that results in the highest number of MPs being elected would be selected. The approach used could vary district by district based on the result of the election. I used 10% as a democratically significant number based on the fact that official party status in the country varies from obtaining 3.5% of the seats¹ to 20% of the popular vote².

The intent of this part of the proposal is that more people can be heard in the House even if they don't represent the largest group in their district.

The power of the MPs would be based on two potential approaches:

Option A: the voting power they would have in the House would be equal to the percentage of vote they got against the number of people who voted in their district.

Option B: the voting power they would have in the House would be equal to the percentage of vote they got against the number of people who are eligible to vote in their district.

Appendix A: provides an example on how the results would have been in the Hull-Aylmer district under option A and option B.

The proportional voting power of MP would be supported by modern technology both in the form of a computer system that would tally the result of the vote as well as an App that would provide information to the parties on the number of votes in their favor. This would be required in order to establish the support that they have when they present a motion, since it would no longer be a simple matter of the number of MPs that support it, but would also need to consider their actual voting power.

The current physical seats in the House of Commons would be reserved for the candidate who received the most votes in each district. Additional floating seats would be made available to the other MPs when they have a right to address the House, or alternatively, videoconference technology could be leveraged so that they participated in the House. Limiting ourselves to physical boundaries of a building in the age of modern technology is no longer required. Current offices of the Houses would be provided to the MPs that obtain the most votes, other facilities would need to be provided for the other MPs near parliament hill.

This system achieves the 5 principles outline by the committee. (See Appendix B for details).

Party Financing

To democratize party financing and to increase accountability between MPs and their constituent, party financing should be decided by each voter who would established who would get their contributions and the amount of which would be completely finance publicly. The notion that the current financing is private is misleading considering that current donations benefit from a significant tax deduction, meaning that a lot of the donations are actually paid by public funds at the end of the day.

I propose instead that each Canadian be able to donate a certain small amount of public funds (ex 2\$) to an MP or party every year. Initially, unallocated funds would be redistributed between the MP and party based on the percentage of allocated funds they received. After a few years, once Canadians are familiar with the system, these funds would remain unallocated.

MP accountability Portal

This would be a Portal that would use modern search algorithms to allow voters to keep track of how MP voted on issues and the arguments they raised in the House of Commons. Topic Tags would facilitate research by issues (for example: Environment, Economy, etc.)

Different views and indices of the information could be maintained in that Portal by the Political Parties, the Press, Lobbying Group and, Academic Institution, providing different entry points to the voters to keep track on how their MPs represented them on different issues.

Reference

1-House of Commons Procedure and Practices Second Edition, 2009, footnote 15.

<http://www.parl.gc.ca/procedure-book-livre/document.aspx?sbdid=73cc891e-0676-4773-850b-ccdcb472ad8c&sbpidx=2>

3.5% of districts.

1-La procédure et les usages de la Chambre des communes, deuxième édition, 2009, note en base de page 15.

<http://www.parl.gc.ca/procedure-book-livre/Document.aspx?sbdid=9DEFAEC1-C6DC-4247-95A0-91EE644C8BFD&sbpid=9A7B77DB-C979-4A39-88B6-D534212CCA6B&Language=F&Mode=1>

3.5% des comtés.

2-Encyclopédie du Parlementarisme Québécois

<http://www.assnat.gc.ca/fr/patrimoine/lexique/groupe-parlementaire.html>

20% of popular vote or 9.9% of districts.

20% du vote populaire ou 9.9% des comtés.

Appendix A

Example: In the Hull-Aylmer district:

Under Option A:

Greg Fergus would have 0.51585 votes when it comes to voting on laws and motions in the House.

Nycole Turmel would have 0.31359 votes when it comes to voting on laws and motion in the House.

Étienne Boulrice would have 0.07749 votes when it comes to voting on laws and motion in the House.

The remaining 0.09307 voting power of the district would be lost since the above candidates couldn't claim to be speaking for those voters.

Each vote has a direct and permanent impact to the power balance in the House.

Under Option B:

Greg Fergus would have 0.36243 votes when it comes to voting on laws and motions in the House.

Nycole Turmel would have 0.22033 votes when it comes to voting on laws and motion in the House.

Étienne Boulrice would have 0.05444 votes when it comes to voting on laws and motion in the House.

The remaining 0.3628 voting power of the district would be lost since the above candidates couldn't claim to be speaking for those electors.

Appendix B

- 1) Effectiveness and legitimacy: each vote counts and has a permanent and consistent impact to the balance of power in the House.
- 2) Engagement: since each vote would really count, that politician would have an incentive to increase participation and that more people would have their voice heard; this system would both increase voter participation and increase the inclusion of additional groups in the political process. There is a potential for greater collaboration and enhanced social cohesion since more people would be represented in the House but the system itself can't provide guarantees to this effect since it depends greatly on the behavior of the politician.
- 3) Accessibility and inclusiveness: the process of voting would be identical to what it is today, only the interpretation of the results on election day would be more complex.
- 4) Integrity: the process would be able to leverage all the current safeguards that we have in place to ensure integrity of the vote.
- 5) Local representation: Local representation is increased since the system maintain the current district approach but increases the number of representative that each district has. More voters will likely have a better perception that they are better represented in Parliament.