

**A submission to the ERRE,**

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## Introduction

The only problem with our democracy starts and ends “with the ballot we use and the question we are asked”. I wrote that in 2006. I believe that to this day. This proposed measure fixes that.

This hybrid voting system is a combination of nothing unheard of. It uses Instant Runoff Voting (IRV). It’s the same single member districts we used in 2014. It does, however, restore the proper role of a Member of Parliament (MP) as a representative of the people, not a party. The voters make decisions on two very different and important questions using majority rule, both times.

Each voter has two ballots on voting day. One IRV ballot is used to elect a MP in each of the 338 districts. The second IRV ballot is used in a nation wide election to choose a five year legislative mandate for Parliament. The result of these 339 elections is a House of Commons with a national agenda to follow and MPs on two sides of the House of Commons. There is no party in power.

This proposal is presented in three parts.

Part 1 lists the main elements of **recommendation #1** for our elections showing how our federal politics will be very different and more voter friendly.

Part 2 breaks apart the Committee’s principles (all compound statements), briefly addressing each one to highlight how they strongly relate to this proposed measure.

Part 3 comments on aspects of Instant Runoff Voting that need work, and **recommendation #2** addresses two IRV issues.

## Part 1: The main elements of recommendation #1.

**I recommend two ballots on voting day, both using IRV.** Some things change, but many things stay the same. Parties are just as important as before, but they will no longer sit like parties of occupation in our House of Commons. Two ballots help voters make two very different decisions. This is nothing like Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) systems that use two votes to elect MPs by plurality and more MPs using lists. This is also different from First Past the Post (FPTP) and any Proportional Representation (PR) system, in that the voters get to vote on two clear and different questions with a very good chance at majority rule, both times.

These are the important elements of my recommendation:

- **A Vote on Representation** uses IRV to choose a MP in each of the 338 districts, as is the Constitutional right of every voter.
- **A Vote on Party** uses IRV to choose a mandate for the new Parliament in the form of a party's election platform. Think of it as a national "preferendum" on promises. To be on this ballot, parties must affiliate with a majority of candidates in every geographic region of the country. For example, a party needs to run 17 candidates in the 32 districts comprising Atlantic Canada.
- **Elections Canada** must ensure that every promise in the party election platforms meets the Specific Measurable Achievable Realistic Timely (SMART) standard. "Spend more" is not a promise. "Do better" is not a promise. Elections Canada sets criteria regarding the way promises are to be described. Public debate will likely focus on which party has presented the most realistic, measurable and desirable national agenda. Parliament will hold the PM accountable for the implementation of the national agenda. For example, a promise buried on page 22 of a party's election platform document, that was never mentioned during the election campaign ... is not, upon election, all of a sudden the priority that a party thinks it is.
- **Party election platforms** will be made available on a government website, all at the same time, for everyone to see, at least two weeks before voting day. These documents must be submitted to Elections Canada by Close of Nominations (that's the official deadline for candidate registration too, currently set at 21 days before the vote).
- **The elections** are held at the same time and place, with voters casting two separate ballots, ideally into two separate ballot boxes, ranking up to 3 choices in each of the two elections.
- **Ballot box totals** are rolled into district counts. District counts for the Vote on Party are rolled into a national count. IRV is used to determine the winner in each election.
- **The Leader of the party** that wins the Vote on Party becomes the Prime Minister (PM).
- **The Prime Minister** invites supportive MPs, regardless of affiliation, in districts that have shown a decided preference for the winning national agenda, to form the **Government Side** in the Commons. Constituents in these districts will expect their MP to accept.
- **All MPs not joining the Government Side will form the Opposition Side** in the Commons. MPs in opposition are still expected to help deliver the mandate of the vote. Positive contribution during committee work is welcome. Amendments are a good thing. Constructive criticism is too. By the end of Third Reading, they will decide if the Government Side has delivered on a promise made to the people.

## Part 2: Addressing the principles.

Here are some justifications of my proposed measure in relation to the committee's principles.

**Re: 1) Effectiveness and Legitimacy:** This principle has three requirements that are easily met by a two vote system using IRV for representation and party election platforms.

**1a. The intention of the voters is not distorted when electing representation.**

The voters get the most popular candidate as their MP regardless of their affiliated party. MPs will know that affiliation with a party, a leader or an election platform is not the big reason they get elected.

**1b. That the will of the voters is fairly translated.** Upon choosing the national agenda, After an election, the winning party can't pick and choose which election promises they really intended to do. A party cannot claim a national mandate based on the widespread election of popular candidates.

**1c. The true intention of voters is strongly linked to the election of representatives.** FPTP hardly tries. IRV does better. Properly recorded IRV results (see Part 3) can show just how popular the MP is. Imagine the winner in a seven candidate race actually placing in the top three on every ballot. It would be something for every candidate to strive for, regardless of affiliation.

**Re: 2) Engagement:** This principle has 6 aspects.

**2a. Encourage voting.** Actually being asked two clear questions on voting day will help a lot. Two separate votes shows respect for voter intelligence. IRV gives everyone a chance to give a full and honest informed opinion that counts.

**2b. Encourage participation in the democratic process.** A parties should be a place where people of like mind come together to make common cause for political change. Having two separate votes and the resulting partyless Parliament will allow parties to focus on the development and promotion of good public policy for next time

**2c. Foster greater civility in politics.** With MPs representing their constituencies, rather than parties, MPs will be more inclined to work together as equals. That's the opposite of FPTP with its 39% one party in power, and PR's house of endless squabble.

**2d. Foster greater collaboration in politics.** MPs, regardless of affiliation, will be inclined to prove to their constituents that they are part of the solution when it comes to mandate delivery, not part of the problem.

**2e. Enhance social cohesion.** Election campaigns are where the battle for agenda belongs. After the votes are in, everybody should accept decisions clearly supported by majorities.

**2f. Offer opportunities for inclusion of underrepresented groups in the political process.**

Having a vote just on representation will open the door for independents. A good candidate will be a good candidate even if affiliated with the “wrong” party.

**Re: 3) Accessibility and inclusiveness: This principle has three elements.**

**3a. Avoid undue complexity in the voting process.** It is far simpler for voters to mark their genuine preferences than agonizing over how to use their one X. Unlike PR, it’s short list politics. Using IRV limited to 3 picks, means that voters will go to the polls prepared to give their honest opinion.

**3b. Respect the other principles.** My comments only deal within inclusiveness.

**Regarding effectiveness and legitimacy:** All voters will have representation. It’s the very definition of inclusiveness.

**Regarding Engagement:** With IRV and the separation of ballots, no one will be living in party “safe” ridings that make the effort to vote seemingly pointless.

**Regarding Integrity:** Traditional elections using polling stations, a secret ballot, and ballot boxes ... shows no favourites. E-voting is convenient for those who have access to, and understand computers, however it has been proven to be highly susceptible to hacking.

**Regarding Local representation.** PR is primarily about their lists and their issues, while FPTP is too much about the parties and their issues. Two votes using IRV allows voters who don’t care about the issues, can still vote on the representation they want.

**3c. Support access by all eligible voters regardless of physical or social condition.** Canada does a good job of helping those who need help to vote.

**Re: 4) Integrity: This principle has three elements.**

**4a. It safeguards public trust.** Seeing a voter cast a ballot shows a strong democracy. Having people counting the ballots is also proof of a strong democracy. This participation from both sides adds credibility to the counts.

**4b. It’s secure.** A walk to the polling station to cast a secret ballot into a ballot box works. Casting a secret ballot into a secure ballot box overseen by trained individuals, addresses this concern.

**4c. It preserves vote secrecy for individual Canadians.** The polling station procedures used in 2014 sufficiently randomizes a voter’s ballot among other ballots before the counting process begins. Anything that electronically captures your vote can only hide it. Then, you have to trust “them” not to peek.

**Re: 5) Local representation:** This principle cites four elements.

**5a. Ensure accountability.** It's one MP per district. It's one voter, one vote and it's one voter, one voice. Unlike PR, every MP knows who their constituents are, and every voter knows who their representative is.

**5b. Community.** It is highly likely that in an election using IRV that, on the clear and single question of representation, a large majority of constituents will find someone who "knows" their community. Parachuted candidates may not have the FPTP chance of winning.

**5c. Access to MPs regarding local needs.** Single member districts offer the smallest number of constituents per MP in the smallest geographic area possible. Unlike PR super districts, local concerns are as local as they can be.

**5d. Participation in the democratic process.** The back door to government is closed. Constituents will be more likely to believe that their MP represents them and really wants to help resolve problems with current government services and policy interpretation. Voters, and everyone else wanting something changed, will have to go to the parties to see their concerns incorporated into a popular national election platform for next time.

## Part 3: Recommendation #2: a good version of IRV

**Any IRV is better than none, however, I recommend that it should address the problems of "donkey voting" and vote splitting.** It allows voters to make popular decisions together in one trip to the ballot box. It tries much harder than FPTP to find a majority.

**How do instant runoffs work? According to Wikipedia:** Ballots are initially counted for each elector's top choice. If a candidate secures more than half of these votes, that candidate wins. Otherwise, whoever is in last place is eliminated from the race. On any ballot ranking this defeated candidate, all the candidates ranked behind him or her move up one ranking. The top choices on all the ballots are then counted again. This process repeats until one candidate is the top remaining choice of a majority of the voters. When the field is reduced to two, it has become an "instant runoff" that allows a comparison of the top two candidates head-to-head.

**Mandatory ranking of all choices is a bad idea.** Voters have a natural end to their preferences. Some honest opinions may go three deep, others may go farther. When does a voter's honest opinion end if all the choices must be ranked? Please go to Wikipedia for a reasonably good description and examples of the "donkey voter".

**A maximum of 3 selections, makes it as easy as 1-2-3.** Choosing the artificial limit of 3 makes it possible to manually count the ballots in a reasonable length of time.

**Use Patterns to count the full results.** Patterns are the sequence of preferences marked on a ballot. For example, with 6 choices, and a limit of 3 rankings, there are 150 unique voting

combinations. A 6 choice IRV election requires 96 totals for result determination. Whereas some versions of IRV counting practices have vote counters hanging around all night, an efficient IRV counting process will allow the vote counters to go home after pattern totals from each ballot box are recorded and rolled up.

**About that small problem with vote splitting in IRV.** A made in Canada IRV should do something about a campaign strategy that works against the will of the majority. A minority can win when one side, in a badly divided electorate, accidentally splits their votes the wrong way. In some cases, the other side will do everything they can to help make that happen. This problem can disappear by adding an extra recount.

**Here's a simple 9 vote example to illustrate how important an extra recount is.**

4 voters indicate choice A as their first and only preference,

3 voters rank choice B first, and choice C as their second preference.

2 voters rank choice C as their first and only preference.

- The count of first preferences shows A with 4 votes, B with 3, and C with 2.
- After C is dropped off the ballot, A wins with 4 votes over the runner-up B with 3.
- 4 out of 9 is not the majority any electorate should be looking for. Maybe it will have to do, but IRV should try harder to find a majority result for the electorate.
- A more popular result may be found by dropping the runner up, B, and restarting the IRV process. In this case, Choice C gains 3 votes by way of B, and reaches a majority with 5 of the 9 votes, earning the right to win in an “upset” over A.

**Finding a majority is the primary purpose of IRV.** Therefore I propose that in the event IRV does not find a majority winner, that an extra recount (in which the runner-up is dropped first) be used in your “made in Canada” version of IRV. It may not find an alternative with a majority, but it should at least try.

## Summary

**Recommendation #1:** Same day elections having two IRV ballots, one district **Vote on Representation** and one national **Vote on Party** election platforms. The winning Vote on Party election platform becomes the mandate (national agenda) for Parliament. The Leader of the party that wins the Vote on Party becomes the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister then invites MPs, regardless of affiliation, from districts favouring the winning mandate, to join the **Government Side** of the Commons. All remaining MPs go to the **Opposition Side** of the Commons.

**Recommendation #2:** Use a version of IRV that allows a voter to rank 1, 2 or 3 choices, and adds an extra recount to find a majority winner when the original IRV does not.

## **Conclusion.**

Our democracy needs two ballots on voting day. By using IRV both times, we get clear questions and give clear answers with one vote for representation and one vote for party election platforms. Why do so many countries around the world use PR? Because the parties have won and the people have lost. It's not too late for Parliament to deliver fundamental democratic fairness to all Canadians with simple straightforward majority rule. Trust the people. Respect the people. After all, it's their democracy.

Submitted to the ERRE by Ralph Anderson, Ottawa West - Nepean, October 2016.