

Brief submitted by: Trevor Ball

Summary:

- PR is vastly preferable to FPTP or AV (in every measure against the committee's mandate, with the possible exception of local representation)
- STV is my preferred form of PR, mainly because it maximizes voter choice
- I prefer multi-member districts to single member districts, mainly because it's impractical for any one individual to represent all the diversity of any given district
- If a referendum is required to implement change, it should be done after at least one election using the new system, as was done in New Zealand
- I support electronic voting systems, as a way of supporting more voter choice, but it's important to invest appropriately in terms of design and implementation
- I do not support mandatory voting, on the basis that it would result in distorted outcomes and dilute representation
- I also propose consideration of another system (which I've called Direct Representation) that would give virtually every voter representation of their choice

I believe the primary goal of electoral reform should be to provide every voter with representation of their choice (out of basic fairness; this seems to me to be the very definition of democracy). Currently under FPTP, this is categorically not the outcome; in the last federal election, more than half of all votes were cast for candidates who did not win, and even among those cast for candidates who did win, several (including mine) were "strategic" votes, cast not for the voter's first choice, but for an alternative who had a better chance of winning and keeping an even less preferred candidate from winning.

AV might be a slight improvement, but is still a majoritarian system that limits voter choice to only candidates in a particular riding, requires most voters to settle for representation that is not their first choice, and completely ignores a significant minority of voters (those who "lost" by not having their vote count toward the candidate who won).

Therefore my opinion is that a proportional system is vastly preferable to both FPTP and AV, because a much larger percentage of voters would get representation closer to their choice. I would enthusiastically support any proportional system, but my preferred form of PR is STV, because it maximizes voter choice (by allowing voters to select individuals rather than parties, and to select from a larger pool of individual candidates) and eliminates single-member districts.

I know that part of the mandate of the committee is "local representation". I consider that unfortunate, because I think ideally it should be up to the voter whether they want to vote for a local candidate, a party leader directly, or for that matter any candidate across the country; why should I be limited to very few candidates who happen to live close to me? If I live in Ontario but identify closely with a candidate in Alberta, why shouldn't I be able to have them as my representative?

Accepting "local representation" as a criterion though, STV (and several other proportional systems) can be designed to provide representation by geography. My ideal system would have the entire country as one big multi-member district, but I realize that won't be acceptable to most people, so I suggest STV with approximately the same number of MPs, apportioned across approximately 30 districts, with no fewer than 3 MPs per district (preferably more). Each district would represent a major city (e.g. one district for Toronto, one district for Vancouver), a region for smaller urban/suburban areas (e.g. one district for Peel region), a larger rural area (e.g. one district for Northern Ontario, and one for Yukon/Northwest Territories/Nunavut), or in the case of the smaller ones, a province (e.g. PEI).

I strongly believe that multi-member districts are preferable to single-member districts because it is plainly impossible for any one individual to represent all the differing opinions and values of every one of their constituents. It makes far more sense to have a group of representatives that can represent the diversity of their district in microcosm. It also benefits constituents to have more than one MP to whom they can go, in case for whatever reason their MP isn't addressing their local needs (as in the high profile case of Tom Wappel a number of years ago who allegedly refused to help a constituent because he had supported Wappel's opponent in the election).

In terms of the committee's mandate:

- **Effectiveness & Legitimacy:** PR would unquestionably be the best outcome, by a wide margin, as all (discounting rounding errors) voters would have representation of their choice, which FPTP & AV cannot even come close to. The more choice given to voters (i.e. the more they are allowed to select individual candidates rather than parties, and the more individual candidates are available to them to vote for) the more effectively the system will reduce distortion and translate voter intention into representation.
- **Engagement:** PR would be the best system to provide voters with confidence that their votes would actually matter and they would get representation of their choice. Also, the elimination of false majoritarian systems would provide the encouragement necessary for MPs from different parties to be more civil and cooperative with each other, because it would become the norm that multiple parties would need to work together to form stable majorities. Furthermore, whereas current minority situations where small localized swings of support can result in large changes in seat counts, providing opposition parties incentive to destabilize parliaments and trigger elections opportunistically, proportional systems would ensure that MPs are encouraged to work within existing parliaments, because seat counts wouldn't likely change much in another election called soon, and voters would be more likely to punish parties that triggered unnecessary elections.
- **Accessibility & Inclusiveness:** Most PR systems are simple enough to explain and understand, especially for a 21st century population more educated and engaged than the 19th century population. Nonetheless, it will be crucial to invest in adequate voter education, presumably via Elections Canada. For accessibility (by those with a disability or who don't feel capable of voting independently, voters should be allowed to be accompanied by a trusted individual of their choice who could assist them.
- **Integrity:** Larger lists of candidates would require larger ballots, which is why I tend to support electronic voting systems, but certainly great care must be taken in the design and implementation of those systems, so that will also require appropriate investment, but I believe democracy is priceless; the improvements in fairness and effectiveness will be worth every penny. I understand that some people may have concerns about electronic voting, so I suggest in-person voting with a touch screen interface (essentially a simple app that would allow voters to rank the candidates available to them) and a printer which would print their ranked list. The machine could electronically tabulate votes, but the printed lists would provide a hard copy backup in case of technical problems or disputed results. (I suspect this hard copy would be necessary to provide integrity that most Canadians would consider adequate to support these changes.) The whole experience would be very much like using an ATM, which is something virtually all 21st century Canadians can be expected to be capable of.
- **Local representation:** As discussed above, PR systems can provide the same level of local representation as FPTP or AV, but I actually view local representation as a hindrance, limiting voter choice. STV and MMP sufficiently provide the advantages of local representation, even if they don't have a single representative per district.

Referendum:

FPTP is virtually indefensible, and electoral reform is absolutely required, but lack of voter education combined with fear of the unknown has prevented electoral reform provincially to date. Therefore, although I do agree that broad public support is necessary to legitimize reform, I think the best approach is to follow the example of New Zealand, where reform was implemented, and a referendum was performed after the population had the opportunity to see the new system in action for some time. I fully expect that an educated population will support reform.

Mandatory Voting:

I do not support mandatory voting. I'm concerned that forcing somebody to vote will only waste resources and their time (as they're likely to spoil their ballot) or distort results (as they might vote in protest or randomly). I also don't consider it fair to those who care about voting, as their vote is diluted by votes by people who don't care as much but whose votes count just as much.

Online/Electronic Voting:

I don't think online voting is secure enough at this point in time that it can be trusted. As outlined above though, I do support in-person electronic voting as a way to increase voter choice and support proportional systems while preserving the integrity of the electoral system.

Direct Representation:

I also have another system (which I've dubbed Direct Representation) to propose, which I haven't seen described elsewhere, but which has the advantage that every vote truly would count (no rounding error whatsoever) and is also quite simple. Similar to STV, a number of multi-member districts would be apportioned, and voters would rank candidates in their district. The difference from STV would be in how the votes are counted: votes would only be reallocated from the bottom (eliminated) candidate in each counting round, until only the prescribed number of MPs are left. (I.e. Votes would not be reallocated from candidates who had reached the threshold needed to be elected.) Each MP's vote in parliament would then count for the number of the votes they accrued in the election. This therefore eliminates any rounding error, and provides true representation by population.

This system is analogous to how shares are voted in a public corporation, where voters are substituted for shares, and the representatives are essentially proxies for the voters. This sort of system would have created chaos in the 19th century, but in the 21st century, it would be very manageable; I expect that the worst case is that there may be a need for investment in more clerks or more technology for the clerks to do their job, but surely this wouldn't be onerous.