

Brief for the Parliamentary Committee on Electoral Reform

Laura Conroy, October 07, 2016

INTRODUCTION

On the following pages I present my vision of a democratic Canada. To the members of the Committee on Electoral Reform: I invite you to dream big on this 150th anniversary of our ingenious federation, and recommend the broad and ambitious reforms that will modernize our political institutions.

These proposals aim to democratize and develop the better aspects of our existing institutions by embracing innovative cooperative federalism and instituting broad-based bicameralism. Local Representation is substantially re-imagined, and means are provided to realize the apparent public desire to vote directly for programmatic leadership and express disapproval. These proposals further aim to create an intuitive, easy to use system for voters, one which dramatically improves the equality and efficacy of each vote, while compiling votes in a way which reduces distortion and increases the diversity, quality and legitimacy of representation. Opposing principles of representation, such as the mutually exclusive district requirements of local and proportionate representation, are resolved by an intuitive appeal to our second chamber, rather than by introducing undue complexity as in the case of alternative proposals such as MMP. The result is a system which provides pluralism without obstructionism, consensus building without coalitions, and improved accountability and policy outcomes in our governance.

It may seem overambitious at first blush, to propose constitutional change. But since, as Marc Mayrand has recently suggested, “changes to the Elections Act should reflect broad consensus” the political, rather than procedural, threshold for support is not necessarily higher for constitutional change than it would be in the case of more modest recommendations. This proposal also includes incentives to encourage Provincial and Territorial support, and is specifically designed with an aim towards simplicity and intuitiveness that may help it to garner popular support.

OVERVIEW OF PROPOSALS

PLURAL PARLIAMENT	
Proposal: democratize and diversify representation in our existing institutions	
The Sage Senate Expert & Partisan: career politicians with vision & experience Proportionately elected Programmatic representation May form government	The Cooperative Commons Non-Incumbent & Non-Partisan: ordinary Canadians on trans-jurisdictional teams Locally elected Constituency representation Holds government to account
Good Government Effective single party governments Accountable to an independent House of Commons Directly elected on the same ballot as the Senate	Regional Representation Move & Improve Regional Representation Grant provincial governments a tie-breaking vote in Federal Parliament Maintain the current (Senate) formula, if desired

INTEGRATED ELECTIONS

Proposal: coordinate across jurisdictions to allow citizens to vote in the same place, on the same day, in the same way

National Election Day

All elections, be they Federal, Provincial or Local/Municipal take place on the same date

Generates national attention around elections for even the smallest jurisdictions

Predictable fixed election cycles

Same Polling Station

For each voter, the location of their polling station will be the same for elections in all jurisdictions.

No more irregularly scheduled By-Elections

No Re-Districting Required

The Universal Ballot

A simple but sophisticated ballot

Voters rank the alternatives of which they approve

Can be used in the same manner, with almost any voting system

Can Include Write-In, Recall and Spoiler options

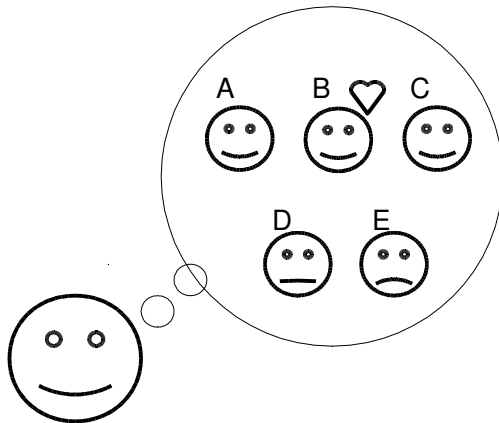
Participation of Provinces, Territories & Indigenous Nations

This proposal can be implemented with full or minimal cooperation with other jurisdictions, according to their level of interest.

In either case, jurisdictions maintain the full independence of their electoral commissions.

RANKED APPROVAL VOTING

Proposal: implement a versatile voting system which is easy to use & hard to game



THE UNIVERSAL BALLOT

RANK ALL THE CANDIDATES OF WHICH YOU APPROVE

2	A
1	B
3	C
	D
	E

INTUITIVE CONTESTS

Equal-Vote

Votes count equally in at-large elections of proportionate bodies.

Vote-wasting is minimized.

Most-Preferred

In single-winner & small-set elections, the most-preferred choice receives the most 1st rankings.

Most-Approved

In single-winner & small-set elections, the most-approved choice receives the most approvals

Winner in a Run-Off

In single-winner & small-set elections, this is the recipient of majority support after a series of instant runoffs.

LEGITIMATE RESULTS		
Electing a Single-Winner: GOVERNMENT	Electing a Proportionate Body: SENATE	Electing a Small Set: HOUSE of COMMONS
<p>The results of three contest are announced, determining the party or parties which are Most-Preferred, Most-Approved, and the Winner in a Run-Off. Ties are permitted.</p> <p>The party winning the most contests forms government.</p> <p>In the rare case that several parties may be tied in having won the most contests, then the Senate decides amongst those parties which will form government.</p>	<p>Parties will have a share of the vote in the Senate exactly proportionate to the number of 1st ranked votes they receive, providing they qualify by meeting a minimum threshold of support of 6% (as recommended by the Law Commission of Canada in their report on Electoral Reform). To reduce wasted votes, any voter preferring a non-qualifying Party will have their support transferred according to their rankings.</p>	<p>Voters elect teams of local candidates to represent them simultaneously at the Federal, Provincial, and Local levels.</p> <p>The selection process proceeds through an ordered list based on the same intuitive contests employed in the election of Governments. In this case however, a candidate need only win one contest to be elected.</p> <p>Ties are permitted and runners-up are included where necessary to complete the set of representatives.</p>

MEETING THE MANDATED OBJECTIVES OF THIS COMMITTEE

MORE EQUAL & EFFECTIVE VOTES

Single District Elections allow direct voting while reducing barriers to new participants, & eliminating disproportionality, the over representation of swing ridings, and exaggerations of regional differences.

Expressive ballots and the combined use of a plurality of selection measures reduce distortions of the public will commonly caused by vote splitting, electioneering, selection failures, and strategic voting.

GREATER PARTICIPATION & ENGAGEMENT

Simplified Elections: the scheduling, location and manner of voting is unified across jurisdictions rendering elections more accessible to a broad range of typically non-voting groups. Voter input is increased without increasing effort, since more institutions are subject to elections while the number of elections in a given period remains approximately consistent with our current system.

National Election Day : reduces scheduling conflicts for working voters and facilitates the development of voting habits by allowing increased household planning, civic culture, and increased national media attention raising public awareness and dialogue during election periods.

Reduced Apathy: direct districting, intuitive selection measures, increased voter choice, competitive elections in all areas, the increased effectiveness of votes and the virtual elimination of wasted votes are all likely to reduce apathy and increase turnout by improving public trust in the process and the integrity and legitimacy of election results.

Inclusion: the high turnover of non-incumbent local representatives as well as increased access and opportunity for members of underrepresented groups to serve directly in politics will expand the social network of political engagement, thereby encouraging increased participation. In particular, the

political participation of young persons, care-givers, and residents of remote and sparsely populated regions is facilitated by the team-based structure of local representation. The inclusion of young, mobile, inexperienced & otherwise under-represented groups is further facilitated by reduced barriers to the formation of new parties which may represent their interests. These potential voters will also particularly benefit from the national media coverage and unified voting process of elections in all jurisdictions and regions.

IMPROVED QUALITY AND DIVERSITY OF REPRESENTATION

Elected officials are more accountable due to the increased independence of parliamentary oversight, increased choice & competition in elections, and ballots which include the expression of approval and options for recall. Local representatives are also more accountable to the outcomes of public policy, given that they operate simultaneously at the local, regional and federal levels. The selection of single-party governments maintains the accountability and effectiveness of the executive.

Single party governments directly elected by consensus rather than false majorities reward broad appeal and accommodation without the need for coalitions and the disproportionate leveraging of fringe parties which sometimes results from them. Partisan strategies are removed from confidence votes. Increased opportunity for the development of new ideas, movements and parties will likely improve outcomes, as would increased cooperation between jurisdictions. Pluralism is achieved without obstructionism by the use of tie-breaking votes.

More inclusive representation is achieved as improved turnouts and accessibility of elections expand the scope of representation by including more Canadians in the process. Single districts ensure that Canadians from all areas of the country are equally appealed to by those seeking election. Team-based local representation facilitates the representation of districts which are diverse, disperse, and/or remote. The use of teams also offer improvements in the work/life balance of local representatives, thereby improving the quality of their work, while significantly reducing barriers to participation that currently stand in the way of women, caregivers and youth.

Systemic conflict of interest is reduced by achieving independence of oversight, the separation of programmatic and constituency representation, the creation of non-incumbent local offices, and the adoption of average salaries for parliamentarians.

Finally, Canadians are provided with a greater diversity of forms of representation, including effective regional representation, true proportionate representation, programmatic representation, direct and descriptive representation in civil assemblies, and enhanced local & constituency representation.

SAMPLE DETAIL ON IMPLEMENTATION

COOPERATION

This proposal was designed to be adaptable to varying levels of interest and cooperation from other jurisdictions, however for brevity full cooperation is assumed in the following detail.

In the case of full cooperation, all jurisdictions will coordinate in their scheduling of elections, placing of polling stations, and use of the universal ballot. Provincial and Territorial parliaments will re-introduce second chambers. The election of Provincial or Territorial Senates & Governments will occur 'at-large' and in the same manner as the election of the Federal Senate & Government. Teams of local representatives will be elected in local districts to serve simultaneously in their Regional & Federal Commons.

COSTING

This proposal aims to realize expanded representation while maintaining or reducing the overall financial costs of our political institutions. This is achieved by several means including the cooperative and predictable administration of elections, and by the recommendation that representatives receive a salary comparable with some sort of average in their jurisdiction. The latter measure not only manages costs to the taxpayer, but also increases the quality of representation in two ways: first, by increasing the similarity of experience between the representative and their constituents and thus strengthening their bond; and second, by reducing the undesirable selection bias of prospective candidates interested in personal gain. For the following payroll estimates, I use recent Statistics Canada figures for median family income. Supposing the Federal Government is responsible for the salaries of local representatives, for up to 3x the number federal delegates allotted to each region, then under my model I estimate the annual federal payroll for representatives (Local Representatives and Senators) to be a maximum of 55,644,600\$, a more than 20% reduction of the current payroll for MPs and Senators. This is based on a scenario in which no redistricting is required, and consequently the slate of local representatives nationally may be over-inflated at total ~1500 officials. Compare this to the current total number of local representatives in Canada (MPs + MPPs) at 1087 officials. With redistricting optional for each region, the total number of local representatives nationally could be reduced to a more moderate ~800 officials. Federal support for the salary of local representatives could in this scenario be achieved at a substantial reduction of current costs, while still offsetting the costs to regions of introducing second chambers. Furthermore, while the number of local representatives is increased, the number of constituency offices is reduced by combining regional & federal offices, so this model provides a further reduction in taxpayer costs on the approximately 120 million dollars spent annually at the federal level alone to provide this essential service.

ELECTION CYCLE

YEAR 1 : FEDERAL ELECTION	Elect the Senate & Government <i>Choice of Federal Parties</i>
YEAR 2: LOCAL ELECTIONS	Elect Local Representatives* <i>Choice of Local Candidates</i>
YEAR 3: REGIONAL ELECTIONS	Elect Provincial/Territorial Senates & Governments <i>Choice of Regional Parties</i>
YEAR 4: LOCAL ELECTIONS	Elect Municipal Governments* <i>Choice of Municipal Leadership</i>

By-Elections: If an elected office is vacated before the end of its term, then an interim appointment will be made by a civil assembly randomly selected from the represented district. A by-election for the affected district will be balloted on the next National Election Day.

*Turnovers in municipal and local offices are offset to improve stability in governance and compensate for the inexperience of non-incumbent local representatives.

BALLOTS

The ranked-approval ballot can be used by cooperating jurisdictions, such as municipalities, for elections under IRV, STV, FPTP, approval voting, true proportionate voting, and many other systems.

I recommend voting systems for three types of elections: 1) election to a proportionate body, such as the Senate; 2) election of a single winner, such as the Government; and 3) elections to select small-sets, such as teams of Local Representatives.

The proposed systems all use the same ballot, and invoke the same intuitive principles of counting votes equally and selecting the most preferred, most approved and 'majoritarian' winners.

SELECTION FORMULAS

When selecting a single winner or small set of winners, some complexity is needed to accurately aggregate individual views. For this, I recommend the combined use of several intuitive selection measures, the consensus of which determines the winning candidates or parties.

Here are some advantages of using several simple selection measures rather than one complex measure:

- Election results derive from simple and intuitive contests which ordinary voters can grasp, thereby empowering voters with a sense of the effectiveness of their vote, and legitimizing the results.
- Strategic voting is discouraged since it is unlikely to be applicable to all measures. Research modeling Bayesian Regret across voting systems has shown that reductions in strategic voting yield more faithful translations of voter intentions into results.
- The proposed system is similarly less susceptible to the formal distortions that plague single-measure approaches, such as vote-splitting, electioneering (eg/ cloning), and selection failures (electing a candidate no-one wants), since these are unlikely to apply or occur in the case of more than one measure.

The three selection measures employed for electing single-winners or small sets are:

- Selection of the Most Preferred (receives the plurality of 1st rankings).
- Selection of the Most Approved (receives the plurality of rankings).
- Selection of the winner in an Instant Runoff conducted by Hare's method (wins a 'majority' by means of the staged elimination of low-performing candidates and the corresponding redistribution of votes).

The Senate and Government are elected on the same ballot.

The Senate is elected Proportionately. A relatively high threshold of 6% is recommended, being offset by the transfer of voters' support when their first choice fails to meet the threshold.

A single-party Government is elected directly and by the consensus of the above 3 measures.

If desired, an official opposition can also be selected.

Local Representation is re-imagined as teams of non-partisan, non-incumbent, ordinary Canadians, elected by a diversity of means and cooperating vertically across jurisdictions to improve the outcomes of public policy and provide high quality constituency representation. Local Representatives are elected by the same measures used to elect the Government, applied in an ordered and additive manner to select a small set of 2-4 winners in each district.

DISTRICTS, DISTRICT MAGNITUDES, SEAT DISTRIBUTION, VOTE-WEIGHTS

Riding boundaries need not be changed to implement this proposal.

All elections are conducted 'at-large' (in a single district).

The Federal District is the country. The Regional Districts are each Province or Territory.

Local Districts may be based on the existing riding boundaries for Provincial and Territorial Assemblies.

The number and boundaries of local districts are determined by each region, and can be changed at any time without disrupting the federal arrangement.

The District Magnitude (the number of representatives elected in each district) is flexible and can be determined on a district-to-district basis according to the needs of the region and the dispersion of its population. The recommended range is 2-4 representatives elected to each local district.

Local Representatives within a region determine who amongst themselves will be sent as delegates to occupy Federal, Regional and Local seats. Local seats may consist, optionally, of constituency offices, municipal assemblies, or local parliaments. Teams of local representatives are encouraged to rotate seats throughout their term and to caucus regularly in regional, sub-regional, and/or local groups.

All Local Representatives within a region have an equal vote.

All Local Representatives, regardless of which seat they occupy, are entitled to vote in both the Federal House of Commons, and in their regional House of Commons.

The number of seats and the weight of votes cast in the Federal House of Commons are adjusted proportionate to the population of each region.

The assignment of Senate seats is straight forward and based on the achievement of thresholds of support. In the case of both the Senate and the House of Commons, seat numbers for regions and parties approximate voting weight but are not exactly correlated.

FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS & DETAIL

Sample detail elaborating on the estimates, evidence, and implementation of the above proposals is available from the author upon request. Samples are also available for variants of this system, including scenarios with differing degrees of regional participation, and for models which incorporate the following additional elements:

- Mandatory voting of representatives in Parliament
- Verifiable anonymous voting with simple auditing mechanisms,
- The use of recall, write-in and spoiler options on the Universal Ballot
- Expanding voting options with electronic voting , including continuous and direct voting
- Local primary processes, local parliaments, campaign funding and reform
- Democratizing lobbying, and providing representation to geographically disperse communities
- Extension of Suffrage to minors with demeny voting, and to all residents in a jurisdiction consistent with the principle of rule of law
- Processes for constitutional amendment including periodic review and alternative means of entrenchment which do not violate the principle majority rule.
- The use of civil assemblies, in particular to democratize and modernize the institution of the Crown: to improve regional representation; to provide independent oversight of appointments, procurement and parliamentary procedure; and to re-establish the supremacy of constitution over convention which protects us from authoritarianism.