

# Presentation to the Electoral Reform Committee

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by

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## **Acronyms used in this presentation:**

FPTP=First-Past-the-Post

STV=Single Transferable Vote

AV=Alternative Vote/Ranked Ballot/Preferential Ballot/Instant Runoff

PR=Proportional Representation

MMP=Mixed Member Proportional

## **Content Summary:**

**Part 1: Borda Count method for counting AV** – a very simple, more accurate counting method for AV ranked ballots. It counts all preference levels, does not drop candidates with the least first preference votes, and assigns more value to higher preference levels. It can even correct for a candidate that receives a majority of over 50% but is still not the most preferred choice. Examples will be shown.

**Part 2: lessons from the 2005 BC STV Referendum** - lessons can be learned from the B.C. Citizens' Assembly/2005 Referendum process in B.C. which did not serve B.C. citizens well.

**Part 3: AV does not exaggerate false majorities** – I don't believe that it is even mathematically possible for AV ranked ballots to create larger false majorities. Several examples will show how AV can correct for false pluralities/majorities.

**Part 4: the PR lobby in Canada and Concluding Remarks** - the PR lobby has prevailed on every provincial reform attempt since 2000 and voters gained nothing each time. Not this time I hope. The voters' interests should take priority over electoral ideology. To that end AV is probably the best option at this moment.

## Part 1: Borda Count method for counting AV ranked ballots:

The Borda Count method addresses three counting issues that arise with the usual counting method for AV ranked ballots. The first two issues could lead to **the most preferred candidate not being selected** when:

1. The candidate with the fewest first preference votes is dropped, yet there may be strong second and third preference support for that candidate from the other voters (see **Table A** on the next page): or
2. A candidate receives an outright majority of over 50% yet would not be the most preferred candidate if all ballot preferences were taken into account (see **Table B** on the next page).
3. The third issue is the argument that second and third preference votes that are transferred and added on to other first preference votes should not be worth as much as the first preference votes, and that seems to be a fair concern.

NOTE: the Borda Count is often regarded as a separate electoral system but I have treated it as just another way of counting ranked ballots within the AV electoral system.

In the following table 100 voters ( $40 + 29 + 31 = 100$ ) ranked candidates A, B, and C from first to third preference using a ranked ballot.

100 ballots were cast →	40	29	31
1 <sup>st</sup> preference	A	B	C
2 <sup>nd</sup> preference	B	C	B
3 <sup>rd</sup> preference	C	A	A

Candidate A would be the FPTP plurality winner with 40 first preference votes (40% of the votes) even though 60% ( $29 + 31 = 60$ ) of the voters preferred A the least.

### Table A:

The usual AV ranked ballot counting method is now applied to the data in the previous table. Therefore, candidate B, with the least first preferences, is dropped along with the 29 first preference votes for B.

As a result, the 29 second preference votes for candidate C in the middle column are then transferred to the last column and added to the 31 first preference votes for C. The result is that C now has 60 votes.

100 ballots were cast →	40	<b>29</b>	→ <b>31+29 = 60</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> preference	A	<del>B</del>	C
2 <sup>nd</sup> preference	<del>B</del>	C	<del>B</del>
3 <sup>rd</sup> preference	C	A	A

Candidate C would then be the AV second round majority winner by a solid margin with 60 votes (60% of the votes).

NOTE: This scenario in Table A is referenced in paragraph 42 of “Plurality-Majority Electoral Systems: A Review” on the Elections Canada website.

### Table B:

Now change the ballot counts to 60, 29, and 11 (total 100) for the three columns and again apply the usual AV counting method.

100 ballots were cast →	<b>60</b>	29	11
1 <sup>st</sup> preference	A	B	C
2 <sup>nd</sup> preference	B	C	B
3 <sup>rd</sup> preference	C	A	A

With this new data candidate A would be the clear majority winner (for either FPTP or AV) with 60% of first preference votes after the first round of counting.

Tables A and B are examples of the first two counting issues discussed at the top of page 2. **The incorrect candidates were chosen in both tables** by using the usual AV ranked ballot counting method. Those mistakes will be corrected on the next page by applying the **Borda Count** counting method instead.

This means that;

1. No candidate will be dropped;
2. Every preference will be weighted according to its preference position ;and
3. Every preference level of every vote will be used to calculate the totals.

The calculations below may look complicated on first glance, but they are not.

**Table A recalculated using the Borda Count method.**

100 ballots were cast →	40	29	31
1 <sup>st</sup> preference*** <b>Worth 3 points each</b>	A 40 x 3 = 120 points	<b>B</b> <b>29 x 3 = 87 points</b>	C 31 x 3 = 93 points
2 <sup>nd</sup> preference <b>Worth 2 points each</b>	<b>B</b> <b>40 x 2 = 80 points</b>	C 29 x 2 = 58 points	<b>B</b> <b>31 x 2 = 62 points</b>
3 <sup>rd</sup> preference <b>Worth 1 point each</b>	C 40 x 1 = 40 points	A 29 x 1 = 29 points	A 31 x 1 = 31 points
*** With four candidates the 1 <sup>st</sup> preference is worth 4 points, the 2 <sup>nd</sup> worth 3 points, etc. ***With five candidates the 1 <sup>st</sup> preference is worth 5 points, the 2 <sup>nd</sup> worth 4 points etc.			
Total for all preferences of A Total for A = 120 + 29 + 31 = 180	120 points	29 points	31 points
Total for all preferences of B <b>Total for B= 80 + 87 + 62 = 229</b>	<b>80 points</b>	<b>87 points</b>	<b>62 points</b>
Total for all preferences of C Total for C = 40 + 58 + 93 = 191	40 points	58 points	93 points
<b>Using the Borda Count method, candidate B is now the clear winner instead of C.</b>			

**Table B recalculated using the Borda Count method.**

100 ballots were cast →	60	29	11
1 <sup>st</sup> preference <b>Worth 3 points each</b>	A 60 x 3 = 180 points	<b>B</b> <b>29 x 3 = 87 points</b>	C 11 x 3 = 33 points
2 <sup>nd</sup> preference <b>Worth 2 points each</b>	<b>B</b> <b>60 x 2 = 120 points</b>	C 29 x 2 = 58 points	<b>B</b> <b>11 x 2 = 22 points</b>
3 <sup>rd</sup> preference <b>Worth 1 point each</b>	C 60 x 1 = 60 points	A 29 x 1 = 29 points	A 11 x 1 = 11 points
Total for all preferences of A Total for A = 180 + 29 + 11 = 220	180 points	29 points	11 points
Total for all preferences of B <b>Total for B = 120 + 87 + 22= 229</b>	<b>120 points</b>	<b>87 points</b>	<b>22 points</b>
Total for all preferences of C Total for C = 60 + 58 + 33 = 151	60 points	58 points	33 points
<b>Using the Borda Count method, candidate B now defeats the majority winner A.</b>			

## Part 2: Lessons from the B.C. Citizens' Assembly and the 2005 STV (Single Transferable Vote) Referendum

Important lessons can be drawn from the B.C. Citizens' Assembly and 2005 referendum. That whole process looked very democratic and voter centred on the surface, but the reality was something else. A good reason for not repeating it.

**1. Citizens' Assembly:** has received almost universal praise. Below is a partial list of why I think the Assembly failed to keep focused on the voters:

- a) They proposed STV, a complicated form of PR, as the only option. A simpler majoritarian option like AV could have been presented as well.
- b) STV was inaccurately promoted as "Simple as 1, 2, 3". Larger ridings and a very complex counting system made it anything but simple;
- c) The ordinary voter did not understand the complicated STV counting system;
- d) One statement used to defend the complex nature of STV was "You don't have to understand how a car (computer) works to use it". In other words "Use STV even though you don't understand it";
- e) Claims that STV would elect more women or increase voter turnout didn't stand up to scrutiny. Prior election results from Ireland where STV is used did not support those claims in 2005 and do not support those claims in 2016. Same with the "every vote will count" claim. In three member ridings about 25% of votes are wasted. Four member ridings waste about 20%.

**If we are looking for engagement and trust from the electorate then a fundamental tenet of any electoral system should be that the average voter readily understands both how to use the system and how to count the ballots.**

**A proposed system must be accurately and fully presented to the electorate such that the claimed benefits can reasonably be realized once the system is implemented. Hypothetical or misleading promises don't serve anyone well.**

**2. BC-STV referendum in 2005:** almost passed with nearly 58% voting "yes" (60% was required to pass).

- a) Yet, looking more closely at the results, it was really "change" and not STV that the vast majority said "yes" to;

- b) Ipsos-Reid polls taken three weeks and one week before the 2005 referendum showed that two-thirds knew “very little” or “nothing” about STV. I suspect that number was much higher than two-thirds because I talked to hundreds of people between 2005 and 2009 and most voters who had voted “yes” knew little about the STV system. However, they voted “yes” because they wanted change and because they put their faith in the Citizens’ Assembly. I think that one of the reasons the 2009 referendum was defeated solidly was because the voters actually learned more about what they had almost passed in 2005 and realized that it wasn’t what they had been led to believe;
- c) Voters did seem to understand that they would be ranking their ballots so I suspect that if the much simpler AV system had been implemented in 2009 that the vast majority of the electorate would not have known that it wasn’t STV.
- d) In reality the 2005 referendum probably nearly won under the cover of the ranked ballot part of STV which fit nicely with the “Simple as 1,2,3” promotion.
- e) FPTP advocates claim the 2005/2009 B.C. referenda results as an endorsement of FPTP. That is not accurate. Many who voted “no” still wanted electoral reform. They just didn’t want STV.

The STV advocates and Citizens’ Assembly were frustrated that STV was not implemented after the 58% “yes” results. Some felt democracy had been subverted.

**But what purpose would implementing STV have served when the overwhelming majority of the “yes” voters knew very little about what they were voting for?**

**This question is still ignored by STV proponents who continue to claim that 58% “supported” STV.**

### **Part 3: the AV electoral system and “false majorities”:**

It is often claimed that AV creates “even bigger false majorities”. I am not aware of any valid evidence to back that up. Using hypothetical results from only one election is not valid evidence.

Ranked ballots (as long as voters rank more than one choice) are designed to avoid false majorities/pluralities by creating voter consensus such that it is pretty much mathematically impossible to create a false majority. The AV ranked ballot will either:

- a) validate a FPTP “false majority” and leave the seat count relatively unchanged or even increase it; or
- b) correct a FPTP “false majority” and decrease the number of seats a party wins.

Tables 1 to 5 below show how “false majorities/pluralities” can be validated or corrected for. In Tables 1, 2 and 3 the AV counting system actually decreased a Conservative majority as well as two Conservative pluralities.

**Table 1 - Eric Grenier May 7th 2012 in the Globe and Mail:** reworked the 2011 election results using a French style run-off. Grenier assumed no vote change the second week so it was essentially like an AV instant run-off. He used second choice polling data from the end of 2011. **In this particular election the Conservative “false majority” would have been corrected down by 24 seats and there would have most likely been a NDP led majority coalition with the Liberals in 2011.**

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/how-would-harper-fare-in-a-french-style-run-off-election/article2424783/>

Party	Conservative	NDP	Liberal	Bloc Quebecois	Green Party
FPTP results	166	103	34	4	1
AV projected	142	118	46	1	1
<b>Difference using AV</b>	<b>-24</b>	<b>+15</b>	<b>+12</b>	<b>-3</b>	<b>No change</b>

**Table 2 - Eric Grenier March 28th 2013 in the Globe and Mail using Abacus AV poll:** this poll tested both a FPTP ballot and an AV ballot separately. The result was Conservative false pluralities of 139 with the FPTP ballot and 147 with the first preference of AV. However when AV counting was applied to the AV ballot, the Conservative numbers were reduced to 117 seats while the NDP seat count increased to 126. **Hence using AV would likely have yielded a NDP minority government.**

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/why-a-change-to-your-ballot-would-give-the-ndp-an-edge-next-election/article10454286/>

Party	NDP	Conservative	Liberal	Bloc Quebecois	Green Party
FPTP standard ballot	115	139	82	1	1
AV first preference	108	147	76	4	3
AV seats won	126	117	93	0	2
<b>Difference using AV</b>	<b>+18</b>	<b>-30</b>	<b>+17</b>	<b>-4</b>	<b>-1</b>

**Table 3 - Eric Grenier on Dec 3 2014 using an EKOS second choice poll:** a Conservative “false” plurality of 136 with FPTP was corrected down to 81. The NDP and Liberals each received 28 more. The Green Party remained the same and the BQ was reduced by one. **The result with AV would have been a Liberal minority.**

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/electoral-reform-which-party-would-benefit-most-1.2857321>

Party	Liberal	Conservative	NDP	Bloc Quebecois	Green Party
FPTP results	132	136	67	1	2
AV projected	160	81	95	0	2
<b>Difference using AV</b>	<b>+28</b>	<b>-55</b>	<b>+28</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>No change</b>

In Tables 4 and 5 the AV counting system was used to rework the Oct 19, 2015 election totals.

**Table 4 - Eric Grenier Nov 26 2015:** Grenier projected the following seat changes in 2015 using AV. **In this particular election AV would have validated the Liberal majority and actually increased it.**

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/grenier-preferential-ballot-1.3332566>

Party	Liberal	Conservative	NDP	Bloc Quebecois	Green Party
FPTP results	184	99	44	10	1
AV projected	224	61	50	2	1
<b>Difference using AV</b>	<b>+40</b>	<b>-38</b>	<b>+6</b>	<b>-8</b>	<b>No change</b>



**Table 5- Abacus Data Dec 2015:** did a survey and projected the following seat changes in 2015 using AV. **Again, AV validated the Liberal majority and actually increased it.**

[http://www.broadbentinstitute.ca/canadian\\_electoral\\_reform](http://www.broadbentinstitute.ca/canadian_electoral_reform)

Party	Liberal	Conservative	NDP	Bloc Quebecois	Green Party
FPTP results	184	99	44	10	1
AV projected	217	66	50	4	1
<b>Difference using AV</b>	<b>+33</b>	<b>-33</b>	<b>+6</b>	<b>-6</b>	<b>No change</b>

## Part 4: The PR Lobby in Canada:

The PR lobby in Canada is well organized, singular minded, and usually very dismissive of any other type of reform. They praise the compromising nature of PR style coalition governments, yet show little compromise towards the benefits of AV. They freely point out the ills of FPTP, yet seem fine with using it for local MMP elections.

Arend Lijphart, from the University of California San Diego, is a world expert on voting systems. He prefers PR. However, he acknowledges that ranked ballots are better than FPTP. "I think you get a more accurate choice with ranked choice balloting and you're really also making it easier and more straight-forward for the voter because the voter doesn't have to calculate how is my vote going to work. They can vote the way they feel." He also said that it would likely be an advantage for smaller parties that tend to get squeezed by strategic voting under FPTP. (<http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/ballot-ranked-electoral-reform-1.3721624>)

The Electoral Reform Society (ERS) in the UK also prefers PR, specifically STV. Yet they supported AV in the 2011 UK referendum on the basis that the system is "an improvement on FPTP." ([The 2015 General Election: A Voting System in Crisis](#) by Jess Garland and Chris Terry Page 26).

**Professor Lijphart and the ERS both put the voters' interests first and their own ideology second. I would hope that the same voter-centric attitude would prevail this time in Canada.**

## Concluding Remarks:

The Ontario and B.C. Citizens' Assemblies and the Commission in P.E.I. all proposed a form of PR. Yet voters have resisted bigger, more complex, PR recommendations that dilute local representation.

Some say that AV simply exacerbates FPTP problems. Or that it is rigged in favour of one party. However, as with the "larger false majority" claim, those claims are unfounded.

AV is usually dismissed in favour of PR options. Its many benefits have never been presented to the voters in a fair, complete, and accurate light. Yet when an August 2016 Forum Research poll briefly described PR, FPTP, and AV (Forum used the term ranked ballots) in more detail, along with their drawbacks, ranked ballots moved from least preferred at 35% to most preferred at 56%.

(<http://poll.forumresearch.com/post/2570/ranked-ballot-preferred-over-pr-fntp/> )

AV is easy to use, easy to count, and greatly increases the legitimacy of election results. The Borda Count method would further increase legitimacy and accuracy. AV also guarantees the local representation Canadians value highly. It is no more than a tweak to FPTP and is probably the easiest and least expensive reform to implement.

Farther down the road, as our electoral system continues to evolve, some form of MMP (that uses ranked ballots, not FPTP, for local candidates) could be considered with perhaps 25% to 33% of seats designated as proportional.

**But for now, I suggest keeping it simple enough that it is within the voters' comfort zone so that we don't lose another chance to at least improve our system. I would hope that the benefits of AV be given serious consideration.**