

ATTEMPT AT DEVELOPING A SIMPLE AND CAUTIOUS FORM
OF A MADE-IN-CANADA, VERY MODERATELY PROPORTIONAL, ELECTORAL SYSTEM

The present situation.

Every witness/expert has told your committee that no system will be perfect, respecting fully all values that are important. Trade-offs and compromises are unavoidable. This means that even a much longer period of research, reflection, consultation and debate can never lead to a solution that will fully satisfy all parties and all citizens. Choices have to be made, and only the concrete experience of a new system will reveal its virtues and deficiencies and may lead to further change.

So what can we hope to achieve in the time until the 2019 election? Just a sufficient consensus in Parliament on a system worthy of a test-drive. Nathan Cullen, followed by many others, proposes that a new electoral system, adopted within such a limited time frame, should be used only during one or two elections. After those, a validating referendum on the chosen alternative (possibly amended on the basis of a new consensus) or a return to FPTP would be appropriate.

This limits the choices: systems like MMP that require a fundamental redrawing of the electoral map and/or a changing of the furniture in the House to accommodate a greater number of MPs are hardly appropriate for a test-drive of one or two elections. They also are not likely to fit within the given time frame.

Most of the electorate want the alternative to FPTP retain as much as possible of its simplicity. Using STV seems really too complicated to them. Many are also wary of a fractioning of Parliament with the rise of several new parties, some of which may be pursuing one issue (pro-life, pro-gun, anti-immigrant, etc.). Most Canadians prefer these issues to be debated within larger based parties, each of which is functioning as a kind of «coalition».

The opposition parties already experience a problem of unity: the Conservatives with its more or much less progressive members; the NDP with members that adhere to the Leap-Manifesto and others that reject it; the Greens with their leader rejecting what a large number of its members had embraced. All are trying to retain their unity. Would separate social conservative and Leap-Manifesto parties be good for Canada?

The NDP, the Greens and the most vocal and organized part of the electorate (the 59 organizations, members of the «Every Voter Counts Alliance»), will not support any alternative that does not include some measure of PR.

After having preferred an instant run-off system based on the mandatory ranking of the two preferred candidates, I have been persuaded that some form of PR has to be part of the alternative to FPTP. Indeed, in no country with PR, a (re)turn to the «winner takes all» of FPTP is being advocated. This is a truly convincing argument.

I have therefore attempted to formulate a new proposal that introduces a very limited form of proportionality in most districts. Only in some, a ranking of the two preferred candidates would be mandatory.

The proposed alternative.

In each of the territories, as well as in other geographically very large ridings, single member ridings are maintained. But voters will be required to rank their two preferred candidates. If no candidate obtains 50% of the first choice votes, all second choice votes are counted. This may result in the one who came in second having more first and second choice votes counted together, than the one with most first choice votes. In this way, the one with the widest support is elected.

In the rest of Canada, ridings will be grouped together into multi-member districts. To keep representation as «local» as possible, only four and three member districts are suggested. Voters have four or three votes and each party can have four or three candidates, each nominated in and by the traditional single member riding associations. As always, independent candidates can present themselves.

In each one-member riding, the traditional all candidates meetings can be held. In the three or four member districts, meetings are possible to hear and question all three or four candidates of the same party. Logistically, meetings of all candidates for the new three or four member districts are more difficult to envisage. Individual candidates will have the opportunity to make themselves known, also outside their traditional riding, through radio and television interviews as well as through the newspapers and social media.

Voters are free, but not required, to distribute their votes over candidates of more than one party. If they wish, they can just vote for all candidates of the party they exclusively prefer.

What will the ballots look like? For each party, candidates are presented together in alphabetical order, with the name of the one-member riding that nominated them. Independents are presented as such, without mention of any riding.

How are the votes counted in a four member district and which candidates are elected? All percentages refer to the total of all votes. And, of course, the actual numbers of votes are the decisive factor.

First, the total of votes obtained by all candidates of each party is established. If a party's total is 25% or more of the total of all votes, this party's candidate who received most votes is elected. An independent with 25% or more is also elected.

In a second round, parties that obtained more than 25% and have one candidate elected, retain, after reduction of their total by the used 25%, a percentage of votes. If, after this reduction, one party still retains 25% or more, a second of its candidates is elected and again the used 25% is reduced. Parties and independents who had less than 25% of the votes retain their percentage.

In a third round, remaining percentages after reduction are counted as well as the number of remaining seats. If only one seat remains to be filled, the party or independent with the highest (remaining) percentage is awarded this seat. In this party, the candidate, among those not yet elected, with the most votes is elected.

If more than one seat remains, two or three candidates, having received the most votes, of the parties with the highest (remaining) percentages are elected.

Some examples:

LPC: 40% reduced by 25% gives 15% remaining votes

CPC: 30% reduced by 25% gives 5% remaining votes

NDP: 20% votes

GPC: 10% votes

The 15% and 20% result in one more seat for LPC and one for the NDP.

The final result is LPC two members, CPC one, and NDP one.

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In three member districts, 33,3% will be required. In Quebec, the BQ is added.

Some principles:

Voters, not party officials, make the deciding choices. Within the same party, it is always the candidates who have obtained the most votes who are elected. It is not the party, but the voters who determine which of the four or three candidates are elected.

In each multi member district, a constituent will have recourse to more than one member, and can choose to approach the one among the «local» members the one who is more congenial and efficient.

The very moderate proportionality proposed here, prevents extreme fractioning of Parliament by the creation of too many, sometimes single interest, parties.

Consequences:

The element of competition within the same party could lead to greater involvement of the electorate.

The chances for smaller parties to have a candidate elected depend on the measure of support voters have given to them, as compared to that for the larger ones. Fringe parties obviously continue to have no chance at all. Will they still present candidates?

Since it does only require a grouping, not a redrawing of the electoral map, nor a change of furniture in the House to accommodate a larger number of MPs, this system can be implemented rapidly and put to the test for one or two elections.

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