Summary of ABC Plus:

On an ABC Plus ballot, voters may make up to three selections: a first, second, and third choice. Each first place choice is worth four points, each second place choice worth two points and each third place choice worth one point. In single member as, the candidate that receives the most points wins. In multiple member ridings the party or candidate that receives the most points wins a seat. The winning party`s total is multiplied by a number less than one and compared to the totals of the other candidates and parties to determine the winner of the proceeding seat. This process can continue until all seats are distributed with a maximum of six seats per-riding. This system offers a simple ballot and calculation method, has a potential to be popular amongst Canadians, and would ensure that more votes play a contributing role in determining election outcomes. It is also similar to the electoral system used to select representatives to the National Parliament of Nauru.

ABC Plus: A Truly Canadian Electoral System

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Intentions

I hope that the following proposal not only bridges divides amongst reform supporters, but also amongst opponents of reform, and Canada's citizenry. This proposed system uses elements of a ranked ballot system known as Borda Count, developed by French mathematician Jean-Charles, Chevalier de Borda, modified elements of a Quota Borda system developed by Michael Dummett, as well as a seat distribution method advocated by Canada's former Chief Electoral Officer, Jean-Pierre Kingsley (1)(2)(3)(4). Together these reforms converge to create a system called Alternative Borda Count Plus (ABC Plus).

Ballot

On an ABC Plus ballot, voters may make up to three selections: a first, second, and third choice. If they wish, voters can choose not to select a third or second choice. Each first place choice is worth 4 points, each second place choice is worth 2 points, and each third place choice is worth 1 point. Once the points are added up, the candidate with the most points wins.

Seat Distribution

Former Chief Electoral Officer, Jean-Pierre Kingsley, suggested that most areas of Canada are too sparsely populated to have multiple member ridings. However, it would be possible to have multiple member ridings in densely populated urban areas (5). This plan would be practical in the Canadian context. First, there is a history of such seat distribution methods being employed for provincial elections in both Manitoba and Alberta (6). Furthermore, while most Canadians living in ridings with populations that are not densely populated tend to spend most of their time in that riding, those living in Canada's biggest cities may spend a great deal of time in four or five ridings on a daily basis. As a result, a densely populated urban riding tends not to reflect a city's true character. By creating multiple member ridings in urban areas, a city's true character would be better reflected in Parliament.

Applying the ballot to Jean-Pierre Kingsley's model

The ABC Plus ballot and calculation method can be applied to single member ridings. However, applying the same ballot and calculation method to multiple member ridings could have detrimental effects on candidates of parties that do not place first or second, on parties that are unable to run a full slate of candidates, or parties that purposely choose to run too many candidates.

 A simple solution to this problem would be to modify the structure of the ballot the calculation process in ridings with multiple seats. As opposed to having each candidate in a separate slot on the ballot, each party would be listed, along with independent candidates. Candidates who had been selected to

represent the party by the riding association (made up of a group of local party supporters) would be listed in order underneath the name of the party.

Instead of letting the riding association select candidates, it would be possible to allow voters to order their preferred candidates from each party on their ballot. However, this may compromise the simplicity of the system, and encourage inter-party conflict.

Once the totals are added up, the party/candidate with the most points wins the first seat. The winning party's total would then be multiplied by a number less than one (an ideal range for the number to be determined would be between 0.5 and 0.8). The winning party's newly calculated result would stand against the other parties' totals to determine the next winning party/candidate. This process would continue until all seats have been decided.

Number of Ridings and Representatives

The number of representatives in each riding would vary depending on the size of the urban area. It might also be practical to have a limit to the number of representatives in each riding.

A good compromise to the maximum number of members for a riding could be to have six members per riding. Six is the medium between Ireland's five member STV system and seven, which is the number that was recommended to be the the maximum number of seats used in BC-STV, by the Citizens Assembly on Electoral Reform in British Columbia (7)(8).

By-Elections

As is the case in our current system, situations would arise whereby a candidate is unable to complete their term in office. In single member ridings the simple solution could be to hold a by-election.

In multi-member ridings this would not be as practical as a resigning MP may have been selected after several other candidates. Thus the resigning candidate's party may not have the same capacity to win first place in an election as do other parties. The solution could be to give the seat to the candidate who was next on the list of the resigning candidate's party during the election.

If an elected independent is being replaced, or consulting a party list is not an option, a by-election could be held for one seat across the entire riding.

Party Division

Under this system there is the potential that parties may attempt to divide to reap the benefits of acquiring multiple ranks on a ballot instead of just one (9). This could mean that a proxy party could form out of another or party elite/faithful may run as independents, only to rejoin their preferred party after the election.

This modified system already has in place some disincentives for this type of division. However, to further guarantee that proxy parties or candidates do not emerge, the following regulations could be enforced.

1. A party or independent candidate cannot share resources with an opposing party or opposing candidate.
2. An independent candidate elected to the legislature cannot join a party until the following election.
3. Independent candidates cannot be a member of any party they are competing against.
4. A party or candidate cannot encourage voters to vote for an opposing party or opposing candidate.
5. To be classified as a political party on the ballot, a clearly established leadership must be in place separate from that of another party.
6. To be classified as a political party on the ballot, a party must be represented by at least 1 nominee in 50% of ridings within a province.

All of these regulations could be subject to harsh fines or even disqualification from running in elections. A private review panel or the position of a private review officer could also be established to ensure that the intention of these regulations is followed.

Advantages to an ABC Plus Electoral System:

Simplicity

In single-member ridings, the calculation method and ballot can easily be explained to voters. The simple nature of the system is diminished to a certain extent in multi-member ridings. However, it could still be suggested that in relation to other reform options, ABC Plus continues to be simple.

Regional Representation

ABC Plus would improve upon our country's current regional representation in ridings where there would only be single members. In order to win in single member ridings, candidates would likely require some level of support from approximately 65 to 80% of the riding's population (depending on the number of viable parties/candidates running and the popularity of each) (10).

In multi-member ridings the totals would be slightly obscured because of the higher numbers of those voting in a riding, the higher number of seats available, and the higher number of parties/candidates vying to be elected. However, for the last candidate selected in a six member riding, where the division of parties and votes are at its greatest, it would still be highly likely that this candidate would receive support from more voters than most winners under a First Past the Post system. Furthermore, the party preferences of voters in each region would be better reflected than under First Past the Post as multiple parties would gain representation.

Improved Representation of Independents and Small Parties

The ABC Plus electoral system would allow independent candidates and smaller parties to have slightly greater success than under the First Past the Post system. In accordance with the preliminary study I conducted, in single member ridings, a party which receives few first place selections but many second and third place selections may still have some opportunity to win (11). This would not necessarily mean

that many small parties and independent candidates would win many single members constituency seats, but it would mean that they have a greater opportunity to win these seats than under our current system.

In multi-member ridings, small parties would have an even greater potential to win seats. The higher the number of seats made available in a riding, the more chance for these small parties to win a seat. The extent to which small parties win seats will also be dependent on the number of large parties that they are competing against.

Independents in multi-member ridings have a different experience because they are given the opportunity to run alongside parties on the ballot. This might seem to be significantly advantageous for independents. However, it could also be argued that independents might have a more difficult time winning in a multi-member seat riding. Each of the parties they are competing against would likely have a much greater access to resources. Furthermore, multiple candidates running for a party would have a much higher capacity to reach out to electors and address a broad range of political issues, than would a single individual.

Thus, while it is likely that under the ABC Plus system, individuals and small parties would still have limited opportunity to win, their likelihood of success would be enhanced when compared to our current system.

Limitation of Strategic Voting

In contrast to our current system, ABC Plus eliminates a concerning element of strategic voting that exists in First Past the Post. With the inclusion of an ordinal/ranked ballot that allows voters to vote for more than one party, voters no longer feel forced to fully abandon a party or candidate that has little opportunity to win. There is still the potential that the order of the voter`s preferences could be affected by strategy, although this would still be a marked improvement over our current system.

Potential for Popularity

ABC Plus is a system that has the capability to be popular amongst Canadians. A preliminary study, which I conducted, has shown very high support (75.6%) for the use of an ABC ballot system in a single member riding (12). It is significant that almost all study participants resided in the riding of Simcoe North, a riding that in 2007 rejected the Ontario Referendum on Electoral Reform (13). While there is a whole host of possible reasons for this discrepancy, it could be suggested that the simplicity of the calculation method and ballot played a role. While these preliminary findings are promising, it is also important to note that the inclusion of a modified calculation method in multi-member ridings may disinterest some because of the added complexity.

Beyond simplicity, there are a lot of aspects of this system that could bridge the divide between different reform advocates. This system offers elements of Proportional Representation as it has multi-member ridings designed to better reflect party preferences in the legislature. For those advocating for a ranked ballot, this system may be of interest as it offers a modified ranked ballot. ABC Plus could also

appeal to those who favour the status quo, as it offers voters the option of selecting only a first place candidate, essentially voting as if they were still using a First Past the Post ballot. Finally, it is attractive to average Canadian citizens as it offers them a greater capacity to have an influence on the results of an election when contrasted to First Past the Post.

Advantages of Jean-Pierre Kingsley's model

Multiple Member Ridings

While there have been some critics of multiple member ridings in the past, the expert witness testimony from sources in Ireland and Scotland suggest that many of these concerns can be exaggerated. In both the Irish Dáil Elections and the Scottish Municipal Elections, voters are satisfied with the extent to which local representatives tend to their needs (14)(15).

Citizens in these jurisdictions also like having the ability to seek assistance from more than one member because it improves their opportunity to succeed in what they may be trying to accomplish (16). Offering multimember ridings means that more citizens will also be able to seek assistance from and be represented by, an individual with whom they share a political ideology.

Although it could be argued that this system creates redundancy and meaningless work for MPs, it is possible for such redundancies to be eliminated (17).

Simplicity of Restructuring Ridings

Through using Jean-Pierre Kingsley's seat distribution model, the implementation of an ABC Plus electoral system could result in only a moderate restructuring of Canada's existing electoral boundaries. As opposed to being required to redraw most federal ridings, it would be possible under ABC Plus to combine most urban ridings to create multi-member ridings. This could save Elections Canada time and resources devoted to fully redrawing Canada's electoral boundaries for other reform systems.

Possible Downfalls:

Not Purely Proportional

ABC Plus will help to limit the discrepancy between the number of votes a party receives to seats it receives in the legislature. This system will also help to reduce the likelihood that a party with strong support in particular regions could go without representation. However, ABC Plus would not accomplishing full proportionality and parties could still be slightly over-represented and under-represented in the legislature.

Potential Risk of the Point System

One critique of standard Borda Count is that voters are capable of hindering the success of their first choice preference through selecting an opposing party as their second or third place preference (18).

However, when contrasted with our current electoral system, ABC Plus offers a much better ballot than does First Past the Post. Under our electoral system, many who vote strategically do not have the capacity to express any support for their preferred party, essentially throwing 100% of their support against their preferred candidate. Furthermore, with ABC plus, voters do not have to select a second or third choice if they do not wish.

Examples of Borda Count

Although ABC Plus is not used in any national parliaments throughout the world, similar Borda Count electoral systems are used for parliamentary elections in Nauru, parts of Slovenia, and for Presidential elections in Kiribati (19)(20). Each of these examples, while different from ABC Plus, suggests that a similar system could thrive in Canada.

A Truly Canadian Electoral System

There is no perfect electoral system for Canada. However, implementing an ABC Plus system would alleviate many of the problems that exist in our current electoral system, while losing few, if any, of its advantages. It is a system that has the capacity to reach out to all Canadians, reformers and non-reformers alike. It is a system designed for the Canadian electorate.

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