

## DEVIL IN THE DETAILS

Canada has a remarkable opportunity right now through electoral reform to fashion itself as a nation at the forefront of observance of human rights. Fair elected inclusion for the currently slighted 52% of Canada's voting population that is female is of paramount importance when choosing which electoral reforms to implement for all Canadians.

And while STV has, as Equal Voice's Electoral Reform Summary states, been shown globally to produce an average of 5% higher levels of female elected representation than do majority systems, this is not enough of a rise to fairly represent 2017 Canadian values nor indeed to reflect the basic human rights of women living within a democratic nation. The Equal Voice Summary Report also does not describe how many of those nations using STV also rely on quotas and closed party lists to obtain those raised numbers, and the compromises to effective power to women that gain seats through closed lists.

MMP fares slightly poorer at 3% higher than majority or preferential systems, and would necessitate nearly a 50% ratio of party top-up vs. individually elected positions, to substantially crack the glass ceiling for women MPs.

This is not to say that STV or MMP would not be vast improvements over the status quo. It is to say that far more needs to accompany change, including easing family life and travel time for MPs.

Canadian elected female politicians need substantive increases to both presence and effective power, and Canadian voters equally need them in The House working to reflect more accurately the values Canada as a whole holds dear. Waiting for gender balance change to evolve from any new electoral system framework alone is just not acceptable, nor would it necessarily rebalance representation over time naturally no matter what Canadians deserve: this conundrum has been empirically demonstrated over and over again around the world (Ireland's backward slide being a good STV sample to learn lessons from). Given the global models we have to choose from, I favour STV with open lists as being most likely to reflect Canadian preferences and sensibilities about fairness.

We have good and effective gender rebalancing options available to us to accompany any change in systems. One: we can refuse all public funding to any Party not able to field 50% female candidates (not apply merely partial penalties). Two: with MMP we can pair ridings or place an MP pair in each riding, one male one female, as did Wales, which would necessitate us adopting far larger ridings. Three: we can impose minimum reserved House of Commons seats at a level of 48% for women and if a Party cannot fill those, voters' choice female independents or appointees of women's advocacy groups may fill them or the seats may sit embarrassingly empty, thus upsetting the balance of power until a Party finds a cure for their original mismanagement of candidacy choices. Any of these measures is absolutely do-able.

What is NOT under any circumstances wanted for Canadians, is ANY continuance of ANY majority or preferential system, be that the status quo or any two (or more) round balloting modification, resulting with principles thus still turning us away from an accurate reflection of voters' wishes to matched results. Wasting votes is simply not democratic and is no longer an acceptable option.

I have not described why it is imperative for the House of Commons to house very close to 50% women MPs because I think having to do so baldly degrades women. However, let me just say as merely one provocative example amongst countless others, that there is no such thing in Canada as child poverty: children do not earn money. Parents do. Women make up the vast majority of single-parent households

## DEVIL IN THE DETAILS

in Canada, and women are underpaid and carry the brunt of unemployment and underemployment. Female-headed families by a wide margin carry the burden of poverty in this country. So it is women's poverty we need to remedy. Women MPs in critical numbers with critical powers to legislate change in all aspects of governing can and will make all the difference to everyone's lives, men and children thus no less than women.

In conclusion, electoral system reform and a move to a highly proportional model is crucial but **must** also be simultaneously accompanied by gender balance stipulations that are enforceable and enforced, not opted into, or out of, voluntarily by any political party or any governing body: gender balance in governments and in opposition parties alike is a basic human right for women, both according to the United Nations and according to Canadian Constitutional principles as well as according to the moral imperative of 52% of Canadians. Wholly withdrawn party funding; reserved House seats; paired gender ridings; or required zippered party lists are the only means to enforce these basic human rights and of these, it is speculation that the last of these is the least palatable to Canadian voters. But to embrace MMP or STV for Canadians without simultaneously ensuring that either new system must also fully embrace women in the House that represents our nation, and do so now, is lost opportunity, a tragedy for women, and inexcusable.

Thank you for hearing and accepting my submission with due respect.

Lisa Dale, retired.

Member, Fair Vote Canada

former:

Co-founder, Fair Vote Canada; Women For Fair Voting, Fair Vote Toronto

Political Officer, NAC

President, Women's Education and Development Foundation

Editor, Women and Environments Magazine