

Name: Ramu Narayanan

City: Richmond Hill, ON

Electoral Reform Proposal: An Action Oriented Constituency Assembly

Summary:

This brief is a proposal for an enhancement to Canada's parliament with a new legislative assembly, known as Action Oriented Constituency Assembly (AOCA) which emphasizes citizen actions and not merely presence in a particular region. The goal of this new assembly is to address certain key problems present in Canada's electoral system as follows: ensuring diversity, representation beyond the existing spatial partitioning, reducing bias in profession of representatives and strengthening voting requirements. The brief discusses these problems, desirable goals, makes recommendations, addresses open questions and describes how the recommendations advance the 5 key principals noted by the Special Committee on Electoral Reform.

Section 1: Problems

The following section describes problems inherent in Canada's electoral setup which need addressing.

Problem 1 (Ensuring Diversity): Canada's diverse populations must be adequately represented in parliament. The current constituency based setup (in the House of Commons) is geography focused and so might adequately represent different regions in Canada but not other appropriate partitions also requiring representation including profession, gender, those with different mental or physical diseases, different sexual orientation groups, different sectors of the economy, non-governmental organizations, etc. The core problem here (which must be emphasized) is a question of representation of those who think differently from others and this is felt to be a much more substantive partitioning criterion in comparison to a geography based representation formula. The notion of thinking differently is based on ones actions (e.g. that those who practice law think differently from those who practice farming) or limitation's to the ability to act (e.g. those with physical or mental diseases). This first problem therefore is a question of ensuring that different specializations are represented (a question of breadth) while at the same time insuring that each representative adequately represents the area of specialization in question (a question of depth)

Problem 2 (No to Spatial Only): A spatially focused approach with constituencies associated with different spatially recognized regions (which is what was adopted from Great Britain) was developed in times of limited connectivity between citizens – a scenario which is no longer present as a result of technological enhancements. So the question arises about why constituencies should only be spatially defined when activities and interactions are not restricted as such. If it is accepted that the existing approach recognizes that spatial representation represents the interests of those who have experienced certain common events or circumstances (e.g. efficiency of public transit in an urban area) as well as those who act in a certain way as a result of what their environment allows (e.g. farming in rural areas) is it correct to feel, in the 21st century and going forward (given connectivity enhancements) that no

other reasonable partition of experience and actions exists. Perhaps this approach of spatial representation sufficed in the old Great Britain electoral system of hundreds of years ago but why maintain this approach now. Put in another way, why is it that spatial based representation should be the only mode of representation when other means of partitioning the electorate exist and could indeed have more meaning for citizens than the existing spatially recognized approach.

Problem 3 (Prior Profession of MPs and Bias): Some individuals prefer working with tools and technologies while others prefer working with people. While this must certainly be a consideration when choosing a profession, it should not be a consideration when considering whether to run for public office. As public office is not meant only for those who practise a certain trade (but for everyone) ones professional inclinations should not inhibit oneself from running for public office. It must easily be an option for persons of different professional inclinations to consider. Many individuals cannot consider this option due to their natural inclination to work not with people but with tools and technologies thus limiting the number and diversity of people that may eventually end up becoming MP's. A quick look at the top 10 occupations of MP's (42nd parliament) on the Government of Canada web site (<http://www.lop.parl.gc.ca> - last accessed October 1, 2016) indicate the following professions in descending order: (#of MPs in brackets)

1. Lawyer (60)
2. Consultant (46)
3. Business Person (41)
4. Business Owner (31)
5. Manager (28)
6. Teacher (28)
7. Professor (26)
8. Journalist (25)
9. Director (25)
10. Political Assistant (22)

Aside from the Consultant entry (which may in some cases but not all be more technical in nature) the problem of bias in selection of MP's can be noted (with MPs being mostly people facing professionals). A goal must be to reduce such a bias since it affects the nature of issues that get raised and the nature of legislation that gets passed.

Problem 4 (Minimum Requirements for Voting): Ideally being able to vote should mean that you have carefully examined the different options and made a decision based on these alternatives. If each voter is verified to this effect then all eligible voters would thus have been noted to have spent enough time,

energy and effort into the process of deciding what/who to vote for. If not performed then the election of members of public office cannot be certified as being truly established with a minimum threshold of review and consideration. The Minimum Requirements for Voting problem is one which must be carefully considered and addressed in the development of any new electoral reform proposals (including the proposal within which discuss Action Oriented Constituencies).

Section 2: Goals

Below is a listing of motivational goals desirable in a new system of electoral reforms for Canada:

Goal 1: Representation which gets at the core of the diversity of Canada

Goal 2: Representation which emphasizes individual actions and not race, religion or gender (it is true that individuals within groups sometimes have a shared world view yet it is in the response to those circumstances which represents the diverse ways of thinking - representation based on how one responds to circumstances and not merely just the circumstances themselves)

Goal 3: Ensuring that it becomes easier to attain public office regardless of different professional inclinations

Goal 4: Ensuring that the voter has a minimum level of knowledge required to elect a representative

Section 3: Recommendations: Construction of Action Oriented Constituencies and a new Legislative Assembly for these Constituencies

This section outlines my proposals to account for the Goals noted in Section 2. No changes to the process of electing MPs to the House of Commons are suggested – a spatial based approach is maintained.

An Action Oriented Constituency (AOC) is one which represents members of an action oriented group such as:

Profession (e.g. journalists, engineers, lawyers, etc.)

Advocacy, Voluntary and Community Groups (e.g. animal welfare groups, refugee support groups, child support groups, patient rights groups, etc.)

Linguistic (i.e. language awareness groups)

Members of an AOC take action on a day to day basis in their area of concern in order to enhance the quality of life for themselves and others in this country and beyond.

AOC's must be certified by the House of Commons (with systematic rules for approval) and recognized for the purpose of establishing representation and debate in different fields of action. Each AOC must have reasonable and publicly approved provisions (approved by the House of Commons) for individual entry into the AOC (as a voting member) as well as membership renewal. For instance, an undergraduate degree from a program certified by the Canadian Engineering Accreditation Board (CAEB)

might be one means of attaining membership into an Engineering group. Another possible means might be working in the Engineering field for 2 or more years.

In order to ensure Action Oriented Constituencies (AOC's) have strength a legislative body will need to be created to hold members from the different AOC groups. This legislative assembly will be referred to herein as the Action Oriented Constituency Assembly (AOCA) whose members will together advocate for quality of life enhancements for Canadians based on the different AOC areas of interest. Each AOC will elect a single member to the AOCA. This will ensure that there is an emphasis for representing diverse action-oriented interests - an objective of the Ensuring Diversity problem. Members of the AOCA should represent the diversity of Canada as much as possible and should have the opportunity to introduce and pass legislation for approval by the House of Commons. Each AOC must represent Canada wide interests relevant to their particular area of concern and membership must not be restricted to a particular region - those interests get acted upon already by MP's in the House of Commons. This approach will account for the No to Spatial Only problem. The Prior Profession of MPs and Bias problem will be addressed by having representation from groups whose members are otherwise less likely to make it into elected public office (see the list of the top 10 professions when describing the Prior Profession of MPs and Bias problem). Finally the Minimum Requirements for Voting problem will be solved by ensuring that AOC membership is sufficiently restricted (via House of Commons approved entry criteria) to individuals who are genuinely engaged in the area work related to the group (and not just living in a particular place).

Section 4: Questions and Their Resolution

This section answers questions about the above recommendations which need to be addressed.

Question 1: Can a voter belong to multiple AOC's

Solution 1: Yes. If a citizen qualifies for AOC membership in different AOC groups then that individual should be allowed to vote for representatives in each of the AOC's to which the citizen belongs. This approach does go against the notion of one person one vote as it is felt that more activity means that you have more of a say (which is naturally the case).

Question 2: What is the relevance of the Senate given the notion of the AOCA

Solution 2: The AOCA approach might be considered to be a model for a future Senate

Question 3: Is a single member for each AOC in the AOCA reasonable given differences in the number of members between each AOC (e.g. a doctors association group versus a patients' rights group)

Solution 3: The AOCA must represent diverse interests. A key criterion might be that a minimum number of members are required in order to create/maintain an AOC. The issue of seat allocation in the AOCA is complicated by the fact that number of members in an AOC might not always be the key criterion for seat allocation. For instance, an economic sector such as the resource sector might have a certain number of members in its AOC body but a different number of shareholders (for publicly traded companies) and also a different number of people impacted by the sector in general. Membership numbers in an AOC body do not always have to correlate with its impact on the general public and this is

an important area of the AOCA proposal which must be studied (an easy to understand formula should suffice).

Question 4: To what degree of granularity must an AOC group serve and how will an AOC be created. For instance, will there be one AOC group for Engineering professionals or separate AOC groups for different types of Engineers such as Chemical, Electrical, Mechanical, etc.

Solution 4: Diversity must be properly represented including groups that are at present underrepresented. A number of criteria can be present to qualify a group as AOC eligible as follows:

- Number of members or employees
- Current or future impact on the public
- Distinct way of thinking or seeing the world
- etc.

Members of the House of Commons will then have to vote and decide whether to approve an AOC group based on the impact of each of these measures. AOC splitting might also occur over time which should also be based on the pre-determined criteria. Given the Engineering example above, the criteria can be used to determine if a single AOC group is appropriate for the Engineering body or whether separate groups are appropriate.

Question 5: What is the legislative function of the AOCA

Solution 5: It is felt that feedback from AOCA members is of worth as these groups play an important role in society. It is an open question whether legislation approved by the House of Commons must be also approved by the AOCA. However it is felt that legislation approved by the AOCA must be approved by the House of Commons (as this is the setup already familiar to Canadians - this approach can change over time)

Question 6: Members of the AOCA will belong to very different groups and so why is a need for them to work together in this new legislative body

Solution 6: The members share the theme of action orientation with a focus of improved quality of life and can collaborate and share ideas useful in their different fields of action-based interest. It is felt that this collaboration between key stakeholders in society would produce meaningful ideas and results.

Question 7: Why should the AOCA have to approve legislation proposals introduced by a particular AOC representative when it is only that AOC group that will be primarily affected

Solution 7: Since the groups are action oriented it is conceivable that the experience that one AOC faces will be faced by other AOC's in a different time or place. The final approval for legislation will still need to be the House of Commons.

Question 8: Who will pay for the AOC's and salaries for members of the AOCA

Solution 8: Each AOC will need to collect funds to pay for different roles within their organization. AOCA representatives must be paid the same amounts from monies collected by every member of every AOC group.

Question 9: It is difficult to setup all conceivable AOC's at the beginning so would this not be perceived as unfair by groups not initially represented

Solution 9: There will need to be an initial push to have adequate representation which can be augmented over time

Section 5: Special Committee on Electoral Reform – Principals

This section outlines how the AOCA approach addresses the 5 principals noted by the committee.

Objective 1: Effectiveness & Legitimacy

The AOCA approach will increase public confidence in the democratic process because voters of AOC representatives will have a high level of comfort knowing that their representative truly represents their action oriented community (is a member of their community and understands their community well). Voters in AOC's should, as a result of their specialization, be fully able to comprehend the technical merits of the proposals put forward by AOC candidate's for representation and as a result reduce misunderstanding in voter intentions.

Objective 2: Engagement

The AOCA approach will encourage voting by making the voting process more focused (e.g. voting will be based on issues raised by candidates in their field of interest and not all areas of public engagement). For instance, an Engineering AOC will only discuss areas in the Engineering profession which are pertinent to an enhanced quality of life in Canada and voting for candidates will be based only on these discussions. The AOCA approach will also enhance participation by opening up a new action based legislative assembly (the AOCA) and encourage public engagement in these focused action oriented activities. Civility in political settings will increase due to the AOC voters' greater understanding of the issues in the action area (so that unacceptable statements or comments will be reduced). Collaboration will increase between action groups as a result of the AOCA as well as between the action groups and members of the House of Commons (e.g. legislation proposals by the AOCA and AOC approval by the House of Commons) - both vertical and horizontal collaboration. Social cohesion problems will be reduced by facilitating interactions within each AOC (including AOC's created to advocate for underrepresented action groups) and between AOC's. Underrepresented groups will have the opportunity to gain representation as a result of new AOC's created to advocate for their interests.

Objective 3: Accessibility and Inclusiveness

Voting for an AOC representative would be restricted to members of the AOC only (to ensure a knowledgeable vote). An important theme for inclusiveness is the need to ensure that new AOC's can be created over time as society changes (based on standard criteria) quickly assuring inclusiveness.

Objective 4: Integrity

Vote integrity for AOC representation can be maintained by ensuring that a paper trail exists for all AOC representation elections. Verification of vote counts can be performed by individuals who are not members of the AOC.

Objective 5: Local Representation

The AOCA approach rejects the Spatial Only approach to representation and emphasizes the need for other partitions of representation. AOC members will have an edge when trying to convince their AOC representative of their concerns since both the member and the representative will typically see the world in a similar way (and if not be able to chart a way into the future based on technical merit).