ONE CITIZEN ONE VOTE

A PROPOSAL FOR ELECTORAL REFORM (BY NICHOLAS MICHAEL ROBINSON)

This brief is a proposal for changes to the electoral system. It is not an argument based on evidence and so it does not draw on external references. It is instead an idea for a different system dynamic. The aim is to keep this as concise as possible whilst attempting to preempt some of the more obvious objections.

The following is a list of potential issues with the current electoral system

- Lack of accountability – if a member makes a promise in order to get elected and then does not keep that promise or otherwise misrepresents their true intentions in order to get elected, there is currently nothing the electorate can do for four years.
- Lack of proportionality in representation – this is a huge topic but the simple fact that there is no consensus would tend to indicate that there is no method which truly addresses all concerns.
- Lack of voter engagement and lack of voter turnout.
- Lack of representation – if my candidate loses then it is reasonable to doubt that the opposing candidate will adequately represent my concerns to parliament.

These concerns could be addressed using the following simple, yet admittedly radical, changes to the electoral system in which everything is kept the same with the exception of the following:

1. **Internet voting - the implementation of a secure, accessible, anonymous, web-based voting system based on open-source software (i.e. auditable code in order to ensure security) perhaps using distributed block-chain technology.**
2. **Citizen-weighted voting - instead of each member of parliament getting a single vote, they each vote with the weight of the number of citizens who have voted for them (see next point)**
3. **Movable votes - citizens get to change/move their vote at any time – this achieves absolute proportionality of representation as well as real-time accountability. It is this last item which is the key and which both necessitates and guards against the dangers of internet voting.**

The suggestion is to keep the advantages of representative democracy and specialist career politicians and to keep the system of four year elections and geographically-based members. However, for those who feel they are not being represented, they can move their vote to another member who may or may not be geographically close to where they live. For instance, all Greens across the country would likely be moving their votes to Saanich—Gulf Islands and Elizabeth May would have a relatively weighty vote compared to her colleagues in other parties but that would be necessary in order to adequately represent the views of Green Party voters across the country. In a less extreme version, citizens could simply move their vote to the nearest successful member of the party that they voted for in order to stay as local as possible whilst still being represented and having their vote count.

This is not direct democracy as the will of the people would still be filtered through their representatives in parliament and through meaningful debate. With less solid numbers to count on, debate might be

expected to become more important and perhaps even more meaningful and productive as members should always want to persuade as many fellow members as possible just to be safe.

The biggest objections to this suggestion when raised on forums have been purely about internet voting and tend to be that:

- "Internet voting can't be anonymous" – this is largely a matter for mathematicians and cryptographers. I can see no reason why, after logging in with valid credentials, some sort of one-way hash could not be created to act as a voting token and which could be used to prevent the same person's vote being counted more than once whilst not allowing anyone else on the system to be able to trace the vote back to that individual. Whether or not you allow the individual themselves to check their own vote or whether you just make them revote each time is a detail.
- "Internet voting can't be anonymous because the government can see your IP address when you login to the system to vote" – it is not a requirement that people not be able to see whether you turned out to vote or not, it is only a requirement that your actual vote is anonymous. After all, anyone can see you walking in to a polling station too.
- "Internet voting can't be guaranteed private and free of outside influence via either vote buying, intimidation or social pressure" – in the current system where we only get to change our vote every four years, this could, in theory, be a problem although such ballot rigging would be incredibly labour-intensive in practice. However, in a system such as the one proposed here, in which people can move their votes at any time, such interference becomes all but worthless. You could buy my vote or threaten me with a gun but as soon as you leave the room I'll switch my vote back to what I want. The same applies to hacking the voting system. In an open-source system such vulnerabilities would decrease over time but even if successful, individual members of the electorate could quickly act to reverse the effects of such a hack so reducing the motivation to hack in the first place.

One other criticism of this suggestion is that not everyone has access to the internet. In order to ensure that no-one is worse off under this proposal, the current system of voting booths could be maintained but providing internet terminals. Libraries could also be used.

One could, and most likely would, combine the modifications proposed here with MMP or some other form of proportional representation. However, even with FPTP it would still achieve its goals to a very large extent, the only real issue being the lack of minority party members to vote for (e.g. if May loses her seat where do the Greens move their votes?).

So far as I am aware this suggestion would not require a constitutional amendment.