

James Herringer: Submission to ERRE

I do not believe our current electoral system is representative. A representative, in the general sense of the term, is someone who stands in for someone else and acts the way that person would act if they were doing the same thing directly. I therefore do not consider someone my representative unless I agree with the decisions they make on my behalf. In our electoral system, a significant number of people in every constituency (in some cases the majority of people in that constituency) are stuck with a “representative” in Ottawa who consistently acts in ways they disagree with, yet still gets to claim to speak on their behalf. This is the most ridiculous assumption our system makes: that simply because you live in the same area as someone else, you can automatically speak on their behalf. I don’t believe where a person lives has any bearing on how well they can represent me. I want to be represented by the person or party that I actually voted for because they are the ones I agree with politically. Proportional representation allows for this because it allows voters of the same party to combine, wherever they happen to live in the country, to elect representatives.

Since a representative is, in my view, supposed to represent political ideas, not locations, I don’t really see any need for constituency-based representatives at all. I would be fine if we just merged the whole country into one multi-member proportional district. However, I know most people are still wedded to this idea that they have to have a local representative (even though I’m willing to bet a lot of people don’t even know who their local representative is). Moreover, there is still the question of how to draw up the party lists in a proportional system. Ideally, the lists should be created democratically by all the party members. However, the party list for a whole-parliament constituency would be very long, and party members aren’t going to be able to get to know that many people very closely when they go to nominate them.

Therefore, I think the best practical solution is **mixed member proportional representation**. In this system, the party list for top-up MPs could be based on the performance of each of a party's losing candidates in each riding. For example, the candidate for a party that lost by the least amount of votes in their riding would become number 1 on that party's list. This would mean we could still nominate candidates at the local level without limiting representation to the local level. I also think MMP is the easiest to explain to people who are put off my explanations that sound "too complicated." Germany and New Zealand, both high-functioning democracies that use MMP, also provide good success stories for this system.