A future preferential ballot voting system should follow the Borda method.

Raymond Labelle

This brief is intended to demonstrate the basic defect of the preferential ballot voting system as a method of voting—or at least the system that is based on the same principle as that used traditionally in the provincial and federal leadership races of the main political parties (i.e. the "classic preferential ballot voting system"). This brief also proposes a solution to correct this defect.

In the classic preferential ballot voting system, each voter ranks the candidates in order of preference. If no candidate obtains more than 50% of the voters' first choices, the candidate who obtained the lowest number of first choices is eliminated, and the second choices of those who voted for the eliminated candidate are distributed to the other candidates, and so on until a candidate obtains more than 50% of the vote.

The basic defect of this system is that the final result may take into account the subsequent choices of some voters, but not those of others. Moreover, there is a greater chance that the choices of voters who voted for a candidate who obtained more first choices may be ignored, while the result is determined by the subsequent choices of voters who voted for candidates who obtained fewer first choices.

To give an example, let us assume that the first choices of the voters in a riding are in the following decreasing order, and that the first candidate failed to obtain 50% of these first choices:

1. Ms. A
2. Ms. B
3. Mr. C
4. Ms. D

Now let us assume that Ms. D is eliminated and the subsequent choices of those voters who had chosen her first are distributed. As a result, Ms. A obtains more than 50% and gets elected. This result is obtained without taking into account the subsequent choices of the voters who had chosen Ms. B or Mr. C as their first choice.

It is absurd for the subsequent choices of the voters who chose Ms. B or Mr. C first to be ignored in the final result simply because Ms. B and Mr. C obtained more first-choice votes than Ms. D. If these subsequent choices had been taken into account, it could have produced a different result. For example, if the subsequent choices of those voters who had indicated Mr. C as their first choice had been taken into consideration, Ms. B may have been elected.

But there is a solution to this problem: the Borda method. With the Borda method, the preferences of all voters are taken into account. Each voter ranks the candidates in order of preference, and the rankings are converted into points, with more points going to candidates who are ranked higher. The number of points for each candidate is added up for each voter, and the winning candidate is the one with the most points.

For example, if there are four candidates, a voter's first choice will be given 4 points, the second choice 3 points, the third choice 2 points, and the fourth choice 1 point. Each ballot is recorded, and the points for each candidate on each ballot are added up. The winning candidate is the one who obtains the most points.

In this way, all voter preferences are considered equally in arriving at the final result, thereby avoiding the major distortions of the classic preferential ballot voting system.

The final objective is to arrive at a fair result, but the secondary advantage of the Borda method is that the count is easier to carry out than with the classic preferential ballot voting system. It is simpler to add up the points than to carry over the second and third choices to subsequent rounds. You need only look at the tally based on these two systems to see this.