

Special Committee on Electoral Reform

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At a time when so few Canadians are voting (yes voting was up significantly in 2015 from the dismal turnouts in the previous 3 elections, but it was still low historically), and when by-elections in Alberta have dismal less than 20% turnouts with a pathetic 13% in Ft. McMurray, you must realize that we have a problem. Your work on Electoral Reform is particularly important. You have a chance to redesign our voting system so more people will feel enfranchised and that their vote actually means something and is heard. Take it seriously and leave out the partisan games.

If you live in rural Western Canada, and are not a Conservative supporter, your chance of having your vote heard is remote. Candidates there are often elected with the support of barely 25% of eligible voters. It does not mean that the population in monolithic politically, but as far as representation in Parliament is concerned, it might as well.

The same could be said for non-Liberal supporters in Quebec during the 60's and 70's, and in the Atlantic Provinces in 2015.

This is plain wrong. Help us fix it by recommending a system that better reflects Canadians choices.

To the Liberals on the Committee, don't come up with a preferential ballot that will overwhelmingly support your party to the detriment of the democracy. That will destroy the validity of the effort and lead to even worse turnouts in future elections, as the process will be seen correctly as rigged.

Counting the votes in some PR systems – A Canadian alternative

I've read a few books on Electoral Reform as well as inquired into different systems while in other countries. For example, Finland, Sweden, New Zealand, Turkey, Germany, and France.

One thing that I have never really understood is why on ranked ballot or AV systems, and with the counting on some PR systems (e.g. d'Hondt), when allocating the second choices, they start with the candidate(s) who received the least public support. Why I ask, should the Communist or Christian Heritage or Libertarian candidate's supporter's second choices have preference over all the other candidates' supporters?

On a cross country VIA train a couple of years ago, I asked the Aussis I met how their ballots were counted in their Senate elections. No one could explain it, and one of them was a math professor!

I've been exploring a system of counting votes that would be much simpler, and treat every voter's choices equally. A Canadian system if you wish.

On preferential ballots, each ballot cast has a weighted value. E.g. 1st Choice 1.0 votes/points, 2nd choice 0.65 vote/points, 3rd choice 0.35 votes/points. Once all ballots choices are recorded (a simple spreadsheet app would work fine) just add each candidates column up and the winner(s) is/are the one(s) with the most points.

If a voter forfeits their 2nd and or 3rd choice, no points are assigned beyond their 1st Choice. Do NOT allow the second and 3rd choice points to be added to the 1st choice as that would be worse than FPTP in exaggerating support and political parties would campaign to thwart the system by urging supporters to stacking all their choices for their candidate.

The weights assigned to the 2nd and 3rd Choices must be high enough for a candidate to win without having received the most 1st choice votes. The goal is to reduce partisanship, force candidates to not tick people off as they would not likely receive as many 2nd or 3rd Choice votes to win. It puts citizens in the driver seat in selecting their representatives. Candidates would have to appeal to a broader spectrum of supporters to win a seat. While a voters 1st Choice may not have won, the voters 2nd or 3rd Choices may have put a candidate over the top to win, and thus they would feel that their vote really did count!

As I see it, this system could be used in large rural and northern constituencies where a single member is elected or in urban multiple seat ridings where more than one person is elected.

It would not guarantee full proportionality, but it would give citizens more of a voice on who is elected in their ridings.

PR

When all is assessed, I believe a Mixed Member Proportional similar to Germany or New Zealand system would probably best reflect the choices of the voters.

Both urban and rural voters would still have the opportunity to vote for the candidate of their choice representing their first choice party as well.

While I prefer an open list where the voter chooses their preferred candidate, I also recognize that the general public puts much less emphasis on the candidate than

they do the party. I've seen several analysis that show Canadian voters vote primarily for a party, before the candidate. I recall an IPSOS poll¹ that notes that 51% of voters intended to vote by party policy, 33% by the leader and only 16% by their local candidate. As a former MLA, this is not something that we candidates like to admit, but sometimes the truth hurts.

I actually recall seeing numbers as high as 70% saying the party determines their vote in other studies (sorry can't recall the reference, but it may have been in *Dominance and Decline*).

When I visited Finland and interviewed people there back in 1983, I understood they had multiple member constituencies where citizens voted for individual candidates. When tallying the votes, the candidate got a vote and the candidate's party also received a vote. Seats were distributed by proportion of the votes won by each party and the candidates elected from each party were the ones with the most individual votes. So if there were 5 people elected, and the Conservative party received 20% of the vote, the Conservative candidate with the most seats was declared elected. If the Social Democrats won 40% of the vote, the 2 Social Democrats with the most votes were declared elected. All rather straightforward, and easy for the population to understand.

Electronic Voting

No. Even though our voting machines would be controlled by Elections Canada and not some private firm like in the USA where many weird things have happened and the software is controlled by the company and not an electoral authority, I do not like the idea of using voting machines other than simple spreadsheet applications developed by Elections Canada for use by electoral officers to assist in the manual recording of votes. I'm also old fashioned enough to think that lining up at a voting booth is a valuable visual exercise of one's civil duty. Poll sizes should be kept small enough so we don't have undue delays, and there are possible ways to speed things up in the processing of voters.

BC uses voting machines for municipal elections but while they can count the votes, they can not tell how many people voted for the various elections held on the same ballot. School Board and Municipal elections are held together but you can not tell how many discrete votes were cast in the Municipal or the School Board election. Therefore, there is no proper audit possible.

I would also go a step back and reinstate the door-to-door enumeration process. It was a great way to let people know that an election is on and that people are properly registered and know they have the right to vote. The numbers of people

¹ <http://globalnews.ca/news/2209685/voters-influenced-by-party-stance-not-leaders-or-candidates-ipsos-poll/>

voting has fallen since the permanent voters registry has been implemented and door-to-door enumeration stopped.

16 Year Old should be Eligible to Vote

Once a person votes, it is very likely they will continue voting for life. Not voting in your first election is a key element in never voting in the future.

Allowing 16 year olds to vote will also increase the conversation about the vote in schools and at home. I'm familiar with kids hearing candidates speak at schools and the kids going home and influencing their parents choices, as the kids know more about the candidate than most parents will, as few will have heard their speak and defend their positions.

Just do it!

Compulsory Voting

I'm not convince that compulsory voting is necessary. Many countries have compulsory voting but I don't think this has any more influence as their voting systems in determining the turnout. Small hard to enforce penalties are not really a deterrent. I've heard that Australia's numbers are inflated in part because those who don't vote don't register.

I'm also not convinced that someone who has no interest, does not have a clue who is running or what they stand for, adds much to the process by going in to cast a ballot, frequently a spoiled ballot.