Laurel L. Russwurm.
Elmira, ON

After more than thirty years of casting votes that have never elected an MP, I am a Canadian who can't wait for our First Past The Post electoral system to be replaced with some form of Proportional Representation.

Summary:
 • First Past The Post is not working
 • Single MP ridings are virtual monopolies that fail to represent too many voters
 • Don't replace it with another winner-take-all system like Alternative Vote
 • I want Proportional Representation for more representative Representative Democracy
 • I want Proportional Representation so we can vote for what we want and maybe get it
 • My preferred type of proportinal system is Single Transferable Vote
 • Any form of Proportional Representation will be an improvement.
 • Lower the voting age to 16
 • Mandatory voting with rewards not punishments
 • Voting Holiday
 • No voting machines
 • No online voting
 • No referendum
 • Permanent constituency offices

Note: In discussion of possible Proportional Electoral Systems I have completely ignored List PR because I have accepted the notions that
(a) it wouldn't work very well within Canadian Geography, and
(b) Canadians tend to value our local representation.

I have completely ignored Fair Vote Canada's Rural-Urban system because
(a) I don't believe it will function as promised,
(b) local representation for rural voters will continue to be an effective monoply, and
(c) I think it would manufacture an unnecessary polarizing divide between rural and urban communities.

The problem is that we are voting in an inherently unfair electoral system, a system that was adopted because it was unfair.

Effectiveness and legitimacy

I have no confidence at all that our First Past The Post system will ever translate my vote intention into representation in Parliament because it never has.

The Alternative Vote system would be even worse, because it would raise the bar and make it even more difficult to elect women and minorities than it is now. Such winner-take-all systems almost always leave a majority of voters under represented in multiparty politics.

How effective can votes be in any winner-take-all system when some votes are worth more than others, but most votes don't count at all?

How legitimate is a system where more voters didn't vote than voted for a "majority" government?

Representative Democracy is supposed to allow voters to secure representation in Parliament. When only 39% of the votes cast elect a "majority" government, far too many voters are left unrepresented.

Systems that produce Proportional Representation seek to represent as many voters as possible. For this reason, only a proportional system will provide voter equality, effectiveness and legitimacy.

Engagement

After decades of voting without electing anyone, I was starting to think the whole thing might be futile, and there was a time not so long ago that I was considering giving it up as a lost cause. The discovery that more than 90 other countries use Proportional Representation systems (some for more than a century!) was a real eye opener. But I know how close I came to disengaging.

My son tells me his friends don't care at all about voting. And I've talked to young people willing to carry signs and demonstrate for issues they are passionate about, but don't vote because they believe it's futile. And I can't say I blame them.

Adopting Proportional Representation would go a long way to remove the feeling of futility so many Canadians have. Proportional Representation will give candidates in small parties a fair chance to get elected. Once running for office stops being an exercise in futility, I have no doubt we will see even more good potential candidates (particularly women) willing to throw their hats in the ring.

Any form of Proportional Representation would certainly foster greater civility and collaboration in politics because cross party co-operation would become necessesary to get things done in the more consensus style of government that will result.

The very best way to increase voter turnout would be to lower the voting age to 16. If our young people establish the habit of voting early, they are more likley to keep it up.

Mandatory Voting

I used to disagree with the idea of mandatory voting because the very idea of compelling people to vote has an undemocratic feel, but lately I've been wondering if it might not be such a bad idea after all.

Many people don't vote because they don't feel qualified, informed or even entitled to vote.   If voting was mandatory, those eligible voters would understand they are expected to vote, and I am inclined to think most would do their best to make an informed choice.

Others don't vote because they don't like the choices. And if voting becomes mandatory, it would be essential to institute a "none of the above" choice with teeth (if a majortity choose it, a new election must ensue.

The part I don't like is the idea of punishing voters who choose not to vote with a fine. I would be happier providing a nominal reward. Just as most Canadians are willing to conform to privacy law without any teeth, it many not even be necessary to have a fine or a reward, simply passing a Parliamentary motion that voting is mandatory would encourage many non-voters to vote.

I also like the idea of making voting day a statutory holiday. Maybe the mandatory voting reward could be a "get out of work free" card that voters get in exchange for voting.

Accessibility and Inclusiveness

People keep telling me that our First Past the Post electoral system is simple.

Mechanics of Voting

If we look at the mechanics of voting from the user perspective, First Past The Post is easy to use because marking a single "x" is simple.

But the same is true in the Dual Member Proportional (DMP) system being offered in the upcoming PEI referendum: it needs only a single "x".

Mixed Member Proportional is only a little more complicated; voters must mark two "x"es.

Single Transferable Vote (STV) and Alternative Vote (AV) are considered the most difficult to use. Instead of a simple "x," voters need to rank their preferences. Now I am inclined to think the way to gauge voting difficulty would be to look at how many ballots are spoiled. And since there are fewer spoiled ballots in Ireland with STV than here in Canada with our "simple" FPTP ballots, I can't imagine it is all that difficult.

All of this suggests the mechanics of how voters will mark ballots are not much of an issue. But how we mark the ballot isn't the only measure of difficulty.

<u>Quality of Representation</u>

In Canada there are an awful lot of people — like me — who know we have a Representative Democracy but couldn't quite understand why we never actually got the representative we asked for. There are also too many voters who feel obliged to work the odds so they can vote strategically in hopes of gaming the system that doesn't otherwise work for them. Perhaps the worst part of this is that "strategic voting" invariably involves being told how to vote.

I've heard people suggest Alternative Vote would do away with strategic voting, but the evidence from Australia, the only country in the world that has used that winner-take-all system for any length of time, is that strategic voting has become institutionalized, with political parties distributing "how to vote" cards.

The best thing about Proportional Representation is that voters can vote for the candidate that will best represent them -- with a reasonable expectation of getting representation they want. When most voters stand a reasonable chance of electing an MP who will represent them in Parliament, our democracy will truly be representative.

Integrity

This is my assessment of the electoral systems elements Any electoral system can be implemented, Integrity: that the proposed measure can be implemented while safeguarding public trust in the election process, by ensuring reliable and verifiable results obtained through an effective and objective process that is secure and preserves vote secrecy for individual Canadians;

This is my assessment of the elements of the potential electoral systems that might be implemented would impact on the public's trust in the election process.

First Past The Post
• What you see is not what you get: % votes ≠ % seats
• Single member ridings result in a monopoly government voice, often leaving a majority of voters without representation in Parliament.

Alternative Vote
• "Majorities" manufactured out of 1st, 2nd, 3rd etc preferences
•.Increased voter inequality: first preference ≠ third preference
• Votes for any but the top parties are futile
• Has been known to install 3rd place plurality candidates in office
• Single member ridings result in a monopoly government voice, often leaving a majority of voters without representation in Parliament.

Single Transferable Vote
• Proportionality is achieved naturally with no fiddly math.
• Most voters secure representation
• Multi-member ridings allow different local opinions to be heard and represented in Parliament

Mixed member Proportional
• Fiddly Math
• Parties have an edge over Independents
• Most voters secure representation
• Local MPs
• Multi-member ridings allow different opinions to be heard and represented in Parliament
• The role of the top-up MPs seem to cause confusion in the Multi-member regional ridings

DMP
• Simple one "x" ballot
• Fiddly Math required to achieve moderate proportionality
• Independents have an edge
• More voters secure representation
• Multi-member ridings allow different opinions to be heard and represented in Parliament

Voting Machines

I'm digitally literate enough to know the only ballots I will trust are paper ballots.

Digital technology might be employed in the process of counting paper ballots; but I would only trust such machines that run on open source (andverifiable) software.

Online Voting

I catagorically oppose online voting. My most important reason is that convenience can possibly counteract the loss of the Secret Ballot.

Even if it was possible to devise a secure system, (so far, not) it would again need to use open source software to be verifiable.

But a very serious integrity issue can arise when votes are cast in private, because there is no way to prevent voter coersion, or sold votes.

Perhaps most interesting is that the young people I've spoken with don't like the idea.

I can't imagine how the ERRE Committee could even consider such a thing without talking to system security experts.

Local Representation

Proportional Representation ensures accountability because votes that count require much more respect than those that don't. I believe local representation is important. What I disagree with is the idea that the only way to achieve this is by keeping electoral districts geographically small.

The first geographic riding I voted in was geographically massive, and over the decades I've been voted, ridings have been subdivided into smaller and smaller chunks. This leads me to believe that the geographic size of the ridings served by Canada's earliest Parliament would have tended to be quite large too.

Today's Members of Parliament could serve enormous ridings much more easily than any could have in 1867. I don't believe there were constituency offices in those day, because the work MPs did was pretty much confined to Ottawa as transportation was by horse or train, and written communication traveled by postal mail. Both transportation and communication technology has improved dramatically since then.

With planes, trains and automobiles, todays MPs can travel far and wide to meet with constituents. They can converse with far flung constituents through emnail and social media to help them understand local conditions. But with only a single MP per riding, it means only one view of local needs can be properly advanced at the national level.

By combining several already large sparsely settled ridings with similar characteristics into really large electoral districts, the same amount of representation would be available, but bring more points of view to the table. People who live in large rural ridings understand the realities of scale. Applying the idea if "local representation" to a larger area would have the net result of providing better local representation for more citizens.

Constituency Offices

Since MP constituency offices are paid for by the Federal Government, wouldn't it be a lovely idea to establish permanent offices for each riding? I think it would be of benefit to new MPs, who wouldn't need to spend the early months of their service scrambling to find a place to rent, and it would offer continuity to riding residents.

THE PROCESS

It has been suggested that there is something democratically wrong with a consultation process that fails to engage the entire population.

The fact is that most Canadians have no idea a consultation is underway. That isn't at all unusual, it's normal. Canadian Consultations always attact a self-selected group of participants who have opinions to express. We tell them what we want, what we think, how we feel, and the Committee puts it all together and presents its findings to Parliament. Isn't that how the Parliamentary consultation process is meant to work?

I must say one of the most surprising things I've learned in my own voyage of discovery is that Canadians have been clamoring for electoral reform since before Confederation, and waves of discontent have followed ever since. Even when championed by Canadians like Sir Sandford Fleming who offered a prize of 1,000 1892 dollars to anyone who devised an antidote to FPTP.

Is it any wonder Canadians as a whole are uninformed about electoral alternatives? It shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone as most of us have little or no experience or exposure to anything but First Past The Post.

Even though serious concerns about democratic deficits inherent in FPTP have been repeatedly raised federally and provincially with increasing frequency in recent decades, not a single change has occurred.

The extraordinary absence of our main stream news media from ERRE proceedings across Canada is not unexpected from an industry that has clearly signalled its attachment to the status quo.

Canadians know something is wrong with our system, even if most of us don't know how to fix it.

Decreasing citizem engagement reflected in low voter turnout was is a sign something wasn't working.

Strategic voting become a reasonable mainstream option for voters, to the point where so many voters find it imperative not to vote for the candidate who will best represent them. In a situation like this, voter intention can hardly be gleaned from how voters vote.

The urgent need to modernize our voting system could not have become any more clear than it did when four of the five parties that won seats in the 2016 election campaigned for some form of electoral reform. That was extraordinary.

It concerns me that some of the expert witnesses have suggested Canada needs more time to learn about electoral reform before we can proceed with actually making change.

Choosing another electoral system is a complex subject, which is why the citizen's assemblies in BC and Ontario had 6 months or a year to study the alternatives before making their recommendations. It isn't surprising most Canadians lack the time or inclination to becoming electoral reform experts, or to even to participate in the Consultation process. But it isn't our job— it's yours as our elected representatives. We elect you to help make policy choices on our behalf.

But you don't have to reinvent the wheel. Study after study has recommended variations of Single Transferable Vote or Mixed Member Proportional Representation.

One of the worst consequences of the winner-take-all electoral system we stuggle with is the four year electoral cycle. As a consequence, anything that can't be accomplished in four years just doesn't get done. Adopting any form of Proportional Representation would help change that with more stable longstanding governance built on a much wider base of support.

Electoral System

The only way to make every vote count is with Proportional Representation.

Ranked ballots are wonderful when used in a Proportional Representation system like Single Transferable Vote. No doubt that's why almost 58% of BC voters voted to adopt BC-STV in their first electoral reform referendum. STV is my own favourite proportional system, in part because big parties don't get an advantage over small parties and independent candidates, and partly because voters needn't worry about the math because the proportionality comes naturally.

But although STV is my personal favourite, I will be pleased to see Canada adopt any form of Proportional Representation. Even those I like least would provide an enormous improvement over the level of representation we have now.

Conclusion

Canadians have been waiting for meaningful electoral reform for 150 years.

Please don't let us down.