

**Proposal for a Regional Proportional Voting System
with a National-Level Compensation Component**

Submitted in an individual capacity

by Frédéric Gourd

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Regional Proportional Voting System with a National-Level Compensation Component

Description

The regional proportional voting system with a national-level compensation component is a voting system that combines the benefits of the first-past-the-post system (current system), which provides strong geographical representation, and those of the proportional voting system, which provides strong ideological representation.

It may be considered a hybrid between the two, and therefore its main advantages are that it ensures that “every vote counts” (the usual objective of advocates of electoral reform), while making it possible for everyone to know who their Member of Parliament is (the usual objective of advocates of the status quo) or rather the Members of Parliament for their region.

So instead of having 308 constituencies, where 308 individual elections are held at the same time on election day, as is the case with the current voting system, or a single national constituency, where non-territory-based electoral lists are used to court voters, as is the case with a pure proportional voting system, the regional voting system proposed here would have constituencies in all of Canada’s provinces that would be equivalent to Quebec’s administrative regions. We can therefore picture about 60 constituencies across Canada.

It is not so much the size of these constituencies that is important, it is their ability to foster a feeling of regional identity. It is necessary for the voters in these regions to recognize themselves in the areas comprising these constituencies (unlike the current constituencies, one might say). So when the equivalent of a review of the electoral map is carried out, it is not the configuration of the constituencies that would be changed, but rather the number of MPs representing them, based on population increase or decrease in the constituency.

In this context, the parties, instead of nominating a single candidate in each constituency, would nominate about three to six candidates, based on the number of voters living in that region. (Let us assume from here on in that our constituency has five MPs).

Instead of voting for a single candidate, the voters would have the choice of either voting for the regional list of a political party (they would cast a vote for each of the five candidates on the list) or voting for five candidates, regardless of the political party they belong to (or do not belong to). For example, voters could (1) vote for an independent candidate because they know and trust the candidate, (2) vote for three preferred candidates on the regional list of political party A, which best represents their values, and (3) vote for a candidate on the regional list of political party B because they respect that candidate for his/her abilities, even though they do not like the ideals championed by the political party to which the candidate belongs.

The five candidates running in the region who garner the most votes “would win the election” and become the MPs for that region.

Compensation at the national level

Although a regional proportional voting system produces fewer distortions between the votes cast and the results than what we see in a first-past-the-post system, it nonetheless still favours the bigger political parties at the expense of the smaller parties. For that reason, compensation at the national level is required in order to correct the distortions in ideological representation and ensure that every vote truly counts.

Let us assume then that small political party D obtained 10% of the votes cast across Canada, but obtained only 7% of the seats. From among all of the candidates of that party across Canada, those candidates (who lost in their respective regional constituencies) who obtained the highest percentage of the vote in their region would be selected to be made MPs until political party D has a number of MPs that corresponds to the percentage of votes that the party received, in this case 10%.

In this way, our regional constituency with five MPs may end up, exceptionally, with six MPs as a result of the compensation formula. This additional MP would be considered equal to the others because he or she belongs to the region and is supported by an equivalent number of voters, although they do not all live in the constituency.

I have just described what might be called “positive” compensation, which is the adding of MPs to the political parties that were disadvantaged by the distortions in the election results. One might also make a “negative” correction in cases where some political parties benefit from the distortions in the election results.

Indeed, if political party A has 38% of the MPs, but only 35% of the votes cast, a decision might be made whereby 3% of the MPs (who “won” in their respective regions, but received the lowest percentage of the votes cast in their region) are not considered to be “winners” in the election.

Advantages

Distortion between the number of votes cast and the number of candidates elected

The national-level compensation component of this regional proportional voting system ensures that all voters believe that when they vote—although they may not always get a candidate from their party elected in their region—they will at least get one of the candidates from that failed candidate’s party elected elsewhere in Canada. This precludes in large part the need to “vote strategically” and should promote higher voter turnout.

Balance between territorial representation and ideological representation

As mentioned in the introduction, the main advantage of this proposed voting system is that it provides the benefits of the first-past-the-post system in terms of geographical representation, as well as the benefits of the proportional voting system in terms of ideological representation, without confusing voters by proposing a voting system that is overly complex or too different from what they are used to.

Social acceptability

The regional proportional voting system with a national-level compensation component should be very socially acceptable because it resembles the current voting system in the way it operates, and therefore does not represent too great a change for voters. It allows voters to continue identifying “their” MP (from among the MPs elected in their region); they are more likely to see an MP from their political party elected in their region (because there are several of them); and lastly, they know that they can have fair ideological representation in the Parliament of Canada: that their vote has a real, direct impact on the election results.

Party line versus regional caucuses

Because voters are represented by several MPs elected in their regional constituency, this may create a competitive dynamic among the MPs to be perceived as the “best” MP for the constituency. This might also create a dynamic of collaboration among the MPs of the same constituency, resulting in a “regional caucus,” the benefit of which would be to reduce the effect of what is commonly known as the “party line.”

Indeed, the current effect of the party line is that MPs sometimes act more like representatives of their party in their relations with the people living in their constituencies than as representatives of the voters within Canada’s democratic institutions. The regional proportional voting system with a national-level compensation component may foster a change in the behaviour of MPs that may result in greater democracy between elections.

This double dynamic of competition and collaboration will promote a healthier, more robust democracy across Canada.

Accessibility of elected officials

By having several MPs in their regional constituency, voters would benefit more in terms of access to their MPs. They can contact the MP with whom they feel most at ease, they can be represented by the MPs of a number of parties (thus precluding the idea of “voting for the right side”), and they can consult another of their MPs when their preferred MP is appointed a Minister, for example, and becomes less available.

Competency of MPs

The voting system proposed here would make it possible more often than is currently the case to vote “for the person” rather than “for the party” because voters can make a number of choices. This would promote an expansion of the skill sets of MPs in the Parliament of Canada. We will therefore have all the best MPs and the best ministers.

Regional assemblies

The caucus of MPs in a region should meet with their voters at least once in every session of Parliament to answer their questions and defend their positions on issues in front of the people they represent, or why they voted for or against a bill. Democracy should be more than just once every four years.

Other recommendations

- Gender parity: All of the political parties should be required to have a gender parity ratio for their candidates between a minimum of 40% men or women and a maximum of 60% men or women.
- Legal age to vote: Because of population aging (generational representation) and changes in Canadian society, the legal voting age should be 16.
- Political party financing: To prevent corruption and undue influence exerted by the economic power of some groups or individuals (as, for example, in the United States), the political parties (and independent MPs) should be funded 100% from public funds based on the number of votes received. It should be illegal for any group, company, union or individual to contribute money to a political party or candidate.

Frédéric Gourd

Resident of Gatineau, Outaouais Region, Quebec