

I am a BC resident who lived through two referendums on BC-STV and who was, it seemed, one of the few people who worked through the way in which, under that system, votes would be counted.

The voting system that replaces Canada's current first-past-the-post should ensure that diverse viewpoints be represented in the House of Commons, promoting collaboration and continuity. Diversity can be increased by apportioning Commons seats according to the proportion of votes cast per party, including small parties, that is, by proportional representation.

At the same time, the system should include voting for one candidate per riding. In addition to the advantages to citizens of knowing and being able to contact one MP, local representation has the benefit of being familiar, making the transition to the replacement system easier.

Diversity and local representation can be achieved with a mixed-member proportional system.

Election of local candidates by majorities—an often-expressed wish--could be gained if ranking were added to the system for the local sections of ballots. Incorporating a preferential system into the mixed-member proportional system could increase support for the system change.

About riding size –

- Large multi-MP ridings do not ensure local representation. All MPs could be distant from some citizens/residents.
- The argument that one of the several MPs would likely share values with and be approachable by a citizen/resident implies that people depend on the like-minded, and that it is acceptable for an MP to support a cause/value/party rather than to represent his/her entire riding. This does not promote wished-for discussion and engagement.
- One of the touted advantages of BC-STV was that it would be unnecessary for a candidate in a multi-candidate riding to appeal to a broad spectrum of voters, and that he/she could aim for niche support sufficient to achieve the needed quota of votes. However, one of the objections to first-past-the-post is that winning an election by a plurality does not provide a mandate.
- The second and greater rejection of BC-STV was attributed by some to voter alarm at the size of multiple-member ridings. The electoral map for BC-STV was available during the second campaign, but not the first.

### About balloting –

- A single ballot divided into parts seems easier to handle than separate ballots.
- Each ballot should be dealt with in the same way as every other ballot. In BC-STV, ballots for candidates who received more votes than the quota required for election were fractionalized and recounted, maybe many times, but ballots marked for candidates who received few votes could have been regarded only for the initial count. This state of affairs is unfair. It discourages participation. The complicated count discourages confidence in election results.
- The count should not favour any party or parties or candidate(s). In BC-STV the count favoured popular and like-minded candidates. This does not promote diversity of viewpoints in the House.
- The ballot and counting should produce confidence that the wishes of voters were accurately reflected in results.
- The balloting results should be verifiable. On-line and machine voting can be manipulated and should be avoided.
- If more than one count is involved, the results of each count should be made public as the votes are counted on election night(s) and in the official count, and should be kept on record.
- Comparisons of results with first-past-the-post should be easy to make.

### About the voting systems –

- Information about each system considered should be well publicized, and should include not only the advantages and disadvantages of systems but, as well, details of systems and how they could/would be applied --types of ballots, counting of ballots, ridings sizes, size of the House of Commons, methods for naming additional pro-rep MPs, provincial and regional ratios . . .
- Consideration should not be limited to existing systems. After the Ontario referendum it was suggested a totally original system could have been devised.

### About election campaigns –

- The influence of money should be cut, cash for access should be prohibited, and contribution limits put in place.  
The panic tone of current political party competitive fundraising almost suggests that accumulating money is central and the casting of votes is an afterthought.
- Freedom of expression should be safeguarded.
- Truth in election ads should be monitored, enforced, and infractions publicized as they occur, and penalized. Conflicting policies of a party should be called to attention. Elections Canada should have the authority needed.
- Could during-campaign and outside-of-campaign advertising rules prevent manipulation of election timing to the incumbent's advantage? What about a fixed voting date and a less flexible campaign length?
- Could an independent agency be set up to provide formal debates about issues and policies among party leaders? Such an agency could make rules and set the tone, and replace, or be a serious formal addition to, the shouting matches currently set up by parties and media representatives.
- Could governments be required to deliver on election promises?
- Should MPs who change parties be required to have their status confirmed or revoked in by-elections?

#### Adoption of a new system –

- Replacing first-past-the-post is a major move. Care must be taken to ensure that the replacing and the system decided on be seen as legitimate. Citizens should have an opportunity to register formally their wishes. The current consultation does not do this. Like so many federal consultations held this year, this consultation was little publicized and the time allowed for responding was short. The ERRE website favoured the use the e-consultation form to file submissions, further limiting responses.
- A citizens' assembly should be avoided.  
Especially at the time of the first BC-STV referendum, the general attitude seemed to be that what the citizens' assembly recommended must be good, and did not need to be examined. In CA flyers, emphasis was placed on the marking of the ballot, overdoing handholding while at the same time ignoring large issues. CA members spoke glowingly of their CA experience (there was a sameness about their presentations), but seemed unprepared explain how BC-STV worked. One commentator asserted that voters didn't need to know how the votes were counted, that Elections BC would do it. This don't-bother-your-little-heads attitude did not promote engagement and informed choice.

- Included in legislation to replace the current electoral system should be a requirement to evaluate within a stated period of time.
- If a referendum is held, a number of options should be presented. Each referendum question should be about one aspect, utterly unambiguous, and capable of being interpreted in only one way.

About voter turnout –

Awareness, a new voting system, representation for small parties, tighter rules for campaigns, serious discussions of issues—these things could make voting seem more worthwhile.