

I would like to start this brief with an excerpt from the Directed Studies paper I wrote to complete my Bachelor of Arts degree in Politics, Philosophy and Economics at UBC-O last year. It follows:

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Generally, the two chambers [the House of Commons and the Senate] take up roles of imposing 'checks and balances' on each other. In all of the modern examples [found throughout the world], lower houses are democratically elected and thus serve as 'the voice of the people'. Upper houses, on the other hand, are often (but not always) meant to serve as a champion of (some) minority interests; though which minority interests are represented, and to what degree, varies widely. For example, federal democracies often opt for regional representation, in order to protect the interests of the smaller (based on population) constituent States or Provinces; unitary states, on the other hand often elect and/or appoint Senators with the protection of ethnic, linguistic, religious or other minorities in mind. Nevertheless, these are just two main variants and, as previously mentioned, bicameral institutions are often tailored directly to the country which they serve.

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That paper goes on to argue for a reform to the Senate's structure that has yet to reach mainstream ears, however, this early passage, I think, explains the point of a bicameral legislature in a federal democracy fairly well. 'The Voice of the People' in Canada is very rarely, at this point, representative of Canadians as a whole.

For example, in elementary and high school, we are taught that Canada is a 'Tapestry' nation whereas the USA is a 'Melting Pot'. If this is true then should 'The Voice of the People' ever be a single-minded and coordinated voice? Perhaps yes, when dealing with certain issues of such base moral importance that all our values align, but on every other occasion the answer must be no. Canadians are as varied as the places they call home and as such, their values vary greatly. In order for Canada to thrive, an exchange of control between one colour of voice and another every four years still leaves the majority of Canadians voiceless.

So, to address this base nature of our nation, we can start by passing electoral reform with regards to the House of Commons. If we stick to these beliefs that the House of Commons is 'The Voice of the People' and that Canada is a 'Tapestry' nation, then surely some kind of electorate-based, proportional-representation voting is in order.

I favour a multi-seat party-list proportional system. To be clear, in this system, constituencies would be combined together (becoming X times larger), with each electing X MP's rather than 1; this is the multi-seat aspect. Political parties would create a listing of members for each constituency they wished to enter. These lists could have a maximum of X names (with no minimum) and must be pre-ranked before the election so that voters understand which members of each party they are likely to be voting for. In this way voters can vote based on their preference for a local member or the party's national platform; this is the party-list aspect.

As with other party-list options, members are elected based on the percentage of votes their list gains during the election. If, for example, there were five-member constituencies, the bar is 20%; meaning that any party-list that earns at least 20% of the vote will have its top member elected. Once those votes

have been removed, any remaining seats will go to the party-list with the closest amount of votes to 20%, and so on until all 5 MPs for that constituency are elected.

The reason that this system would work particularly well in Canada is that it can help to bridge satisfy regionalism in the country while also addressing it's 'Tapestry'-like nature. By having larger constituencies, regional offshoots of the national parties are more likely to gain traction, without overpowering the parties themselves, because of the expanded base they campaign in. Although still ultimately beholden to the national party, these offshoots could more convincingly argue that they would fight for the issues that are of top concern to their own constituents because with numbers come power. Rather than being one MP among over 150 (if they happen to be in the governing party), these offshoot MPs could be two, three or even four-strong (from the same party) and have a local mandate to coordinate towards resolving a local issue. This could help to quell Canada's ever-present regional tensions.

And of course, being a proportional representation system means that Canada's 'Tapestry' would be more accurately reflected in the House of Commons. Though more likely to create minority governments, one would hope that, like the Canadians that are the 'Tapestry', the MPs representing it could compromise and unify often enough as to still be useful.

Moreover, a system like this, one that helps to represent Canada's regions in the national forum will help to dissolve some of the need for regional representation in the Senate. Why is this a good thing? Because if our Senate need not be a vessel solely used for regional representation (like most federal nations), then room can be made for the Senate to have other minority groups represented explicitly within it. These could include, but certainly aren't limited to, Aboriginal groups, the young, the old, immigrants, disabled, etc.; all those who are not otherwise adequately represented by the House of Commons.

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