Directly Proportional yet Representative Electoral System

Under the current system, political parties do not receive the number of seats suggested by the popular vote. In the last election, the Liberal party received 97% of the seats with under 60% of the vote, whereas the Green party received no seats despite attaining over 10% of the popular vote. Conversely, to allocate seats purely based on the popular vote, it would be difficult to choose which candidates represented which ridings. There is, however, an option to combine these ideas without sacrificing either ideal at all.

Parties would still run candidates in ridings, and each riding would elect a representative. However, the parties receiving fewer seats than suggested by the popular vote would be able to "top up" their representation. For example:

Party	% of vote	seats (old system)	seats (new system)	extra seats needed
A	40	60	60	0
B	30	30	45	15
C	20	10	30	20
D	10	0	15	15

For simplicity, I have assumed 100 ridings.

Party A has received the most seats for their vote: 50% more seats than % of the vote. Party B should therefore have 45 seats, party C 30 seats, and party D 15 seats -- each 50% more seats than votes. The 50 extra seats would ensure that each party's seats equalled its popular vote. They would not officially represent any riding, because the 100 ridings are already represented by the original 100 seats.

Thus, there would be 150 MLAs: 100 representing ridings and 50 extra. The number of seats would vary every election depending on the results. A limitation could be put on the total number of seats in extreme cases. Furthermore, this does not mean we must have hundreds of MLAs: we would have the option to reduce the number of ridings. In the above example, having 50 ridings would result in 75 seats.

How would we choose the extra MLAs?

I think the easiest and fairest way would be to award them to the people who did not get elected, but did well in the popular vote in their particular riding. For example, party B elected 30 and needs 15 more. The 15 would be those who had the highest percentage of the popular vote in their riding amonmg the 70 party B losers (in most cases, they would have come second). This guarentees that these 15 MLAs will come from 15 different ridings. It is likely that the 50 extra seats will come from close to 50 different ridings; thus the extra seats will be spread around. The North would be as likely to have an extra seat as Surrey.

In the event that a political party does not run enough candidates, they would forego the extra seats.

The expectation is that the extra MLAs would represent the province as a whole, rather than just their riding. A person might be elected with only 10% of the vote in their riding; the reason they would be elected would be because the province as a whole voted for their party.

But it's unfair to give so much weight to the denser areas.

Good point. Even though the MLAs will be spread around, there are so many voters in Greater Vancouver that they will influence the selection of the government moreso than under the old system. Under the old system, extra voting weight was intentionally given to smaller, rural areas so that they would not get forgotten.

We could either accept the directly proportional system that I have illustrated above, or give each riding equal weight. We would require a computer to do the latter. With 79 ridings, each riding's total popular vote would count toward one-79th of the total provincial vote count. The result would likely be similar either way.

Advantages of the aforementioned system:

• every person's vote counts. No one would have to feel that they must vote for a mainstream party for their vote to be representative.
• every riding still gets a representative
• the seats are based on the popular vote, either of the province as a whole or weighing each riding equally
• the extra seats are chosen at election time, by the people, from a variety of ridings
• the extra seats go to people who were popular enough to come close but not quite get elected
• no run-off election is needed
• no "easy majorities" with only 40% of the vote
• no landslides such as in the 2001 B.C. elections
• coalition governments can provide balance and prevent one party from having too much power
• smaller political parties would elect MLAs

Disadvantages:

• we would have to adapt to having minority governments, and find a way to avoid endless elections
• regions that have close votes are likley to get the extra MLAs. If, for example, rural ridings tended to won by large majorities (as the Canadian Alliance tends to do federally), the extra seats would tend to come from urban areas (and vice versa). This would not affect the seats awarded to each party; but it would influence where the extra MLAs came from.
• we would have to either pay for more politicians or reduce the number of ridings
• dubious special interest parties might get a representative or two. If that were the case, it might be hard to decide who gets to be in the next provincial debate.

Other Comments

• It is possible to only allow parties receiving, say, at least 5% of the vote to have representatives. That would eliminate too many special interest parties. However, I disagree with doing this. It seems fairest to allow these groups to have representatives if some of the people choose them.

• I believe a minority/coalition situation if preferable to majority rule, because it means politicians must negotiate with each other, rather than giving one party too much power. I also believe we should have set 4-year terms. That means that a minority government could not be defeated. Budgets, for example, would have to be negotiated. In the case of an impasse, perhaps the two top parties could each put forward a budget, and the MLAs could vote for one or the either.

• Independents could still be elected by receiving the most votes in their respective ridings, as is currently the case. Only the extra MLAs could not be independents.

• If this or any other system were put to a referendum of the people of British Columbia, I would favour breaking it down into more than one element if possible. For example:

question 1: Do you wish British Columbia to change to a Directly Proportional yet Representative Electoral System, as outlined above?

question 2: If the above system is adopted, do you wish each riding's popular vote to be worth one-79th of the total vote, or to simply use the total provincial popular vote?

question 3: If the above system is adopted, do you wish to exclude political parties receiving less that 5% of the popular vote from extra seats?

Question 3 could be divided further, so that the voters could decide whether to   use 5%, 2% etc.:

a) 5%   b) 2%   c) 1%   d) no exclusion

In this case, the median would be used ("no exclusion" counting as 0%)

My point is that too often, voters are expected to vote on an entire package, even if they dislike some of its elements. It seems more democratic to allow this kind of flexibility.