

I have a bias on this subject, and I'll reveal it up front; I was a canvasser for the 2002 Proportional Representation Initiative.

This was a useful experience for me, because it gave me the opportunity to talk to several hundred people about the subject of proportional representation, and more specifically, the mixed- member proportional system that was advocated in the 2002 initiative. I found (and this applies to other public policy issues as well) that the simpler an idea is, the easier it is to sell it.

The simplest possible proportional representation system would be, “parties get one seat for each one percent of the vote that they get”. However, British Columbians clearly like the idea of having a guarantee of local representation, and both the mixed-member and single-transferable- vote solutions address this. However, I earned a minor in mathematics in university (with an major in political science) many years ago, and I still don't have a very good understanding of how STV works. As interesting as STV might be, it clearly fails the “simplicity” test.

The existing first- past- the- post arrangement is clearly broken, and the people of BC want an improvement. I strongly suggest to the Citizens' Assembly that you factor in “simplicity” and “marketability” in making your recommendations. It's very important that whatever you come up with is ultimately approved by the voters. Otherwise, it might be a long time before we get another shot at this.

I share in the belief held by a lot of people that the steady drop in voter turnout in the past few elections is a result of alienation, and one of the causes of alienation is the idea that “my vote doesn't change anything”. “Alienation” is another word for “opting out of the system”. In the long run, this will have a disastrous impact on social institutions such as schools, hospitals, and law enforcement, because a large segment of the population feels uninvolved.

I lived for a while in a country (Norway) with a mixed- member proportional system. I can state from personal observation that the act of voting is taken more seriously when people believe that they have real choices on the ballot. The work the Citizens' Assembly can be a big step forward in the involvement of British Columbia citizens in their government.

*I made an oral presentation at the public hearing in May in New Westminster.*

Robert Broughton  
New Westminster