

The Citizens Assembly
Province of British Columbia

Ref. Towards true democracy

As we are far too well aware, the present system of First Past the Post system of elections is not only unacceptable for a province that is supposed to be democratic, if not in name but also in deed, it is an outright violation of the democratic process where a political party has a majority of seats in the legislature while it has a minority of actual votes cast in a general election.

With the multiplicity of political parties and candidates, the election process has to be totally reformed to take this into consideration and ensure that smaller parties receive their share of both votes and seats in the election process. There also has to be a minimum (50%) number of votes cast to ensure true majority vote for the winning candidate to be legally if not morally allowed to be elected to the legislature. This is the single transferable vote in which candidates with less than 20% of votes cast drop out and their votes are apportioned to the two candidates in order to get the required minimum 50% votes to be elected. Then there is true political representation in the legislature, which can only be obtained by proportional representation, in which political parties have seats apportioned by their overall share of the total votes cast.

I can only see this taking place by way of a simultaneous two fold process in which a fixed majority portion of seats are set aside for those elected by the Single Transferable vote. For British Columbia, I would set aside 60 seats or ridings with an average population size of 70,000 (+/- 5,000) to be elected by the single transferable vote. The remaining 20 seats would be set aside for those to be elected solely by proportional representation, with seats allotted by electoral regions (10 in all with 2 seats per region). Each electoral region would have 6 ridings and it is these ridings that will generate the total votes for political parties to be allocated 2 PR seats per region. The total number of seats in the legislature would actually be 80, an increase of 1 from the present 79.

For the **direct election by single transferable vote** would require that the present 79 ridings would be reduced to 60 and the ridings enlarged in population size to 70,000 (+/- 5000) each to more truly reflect the equality of votes throughout the province and eliminate the unwarranted voter biases of rural to urban densities! Thus the urban ridings would be fewer (2 rather than 4 as for the North Shore – West and N. Vancouver), while rural ridings could be slightly increased in number. The 70,000 per riding is calculated by dividing the total population of BC (4.12 Million) by 60, with “room” to account for a further 2 million immigrants before the legislature has to be increased in number of seats.

To show how this new electoral process would work is by a hypothetical election. For argument's sake, we have 5 political parties with candidates running in all 60 ridings to elect the first 60 MLAs by single Transferable vote – Liberals, NDP, Green Party, BCUP and Reform Party.

Selecting Kelowna,- the Liberals get 40% of the vote, BCUP 25%, Green 17%, Reform Party 10% and NDP 8%. To achieve the required 50%, the last three parties drop out and their votes are apportioned between the Liberals and BCUP. The Liberals are reassigned 62% of the total votes and the BCUP have 38% - The Liberals win the seat having over 50% of total votes cast.

In another riding (Burnaby), the vote may go differently in which, even with the bottom three parties dropping out, the NDP candidate has the highest number of votes but still does not break through the required 50% ceiling. In that case there is a runoff election to be held some 2 weeks later between the top two candidates, John Smith (NDP) and Joe Bloggs (Liberal) . The election effectively continues for these two candidates as the election is effectively extended by the chief electoral officer. One of the two remaining candidates to win 50% or more of the total votes cast in the runoff election is officially the new MLA for Burnaby. This procedure repeats itself for all of the 60 ridings in which the candidates vie for seats by the single Transferable vote process, requiring a 50% minimum of votes cast.

In this part of the election, the legislature seat allocation comes to:-
Liberals 40, NDP 13, Greens 5, BCUP 1, Reform 1.

This is where the second part of the election process kicks in to apportion the number of seats per political party based on their total share of all votes cast in the 60 ridings among the 20 PR seats allotted.

The percentage portions of overall votes cast per political party are:
Liberals 45%, NDP 30%, Green Party 15%, BCUP 10% and
Reform Party 5%.

So by proportional representation

the Liberals get $45/100 \times 20 = 9$ seats

the NDP get $35/100 \times 20 = 7$ seats

the Green Party gets $10/100 \times 20 = 2$ seats

the BCUP gets $10/100 \times 20 = 1$ seat*

the Reform Party gets $5/100 \times 20 = 1$ seat*

* to maintain the number of seats apportioned for PR to 20, it would be necessary to require that all 10% or not less than 5% of cast votes be allotted only 1 seat each!

To ensure even greater fairness in this dual electoral process, only candidates on both the party lists and those being elected by single transferable vote would take part and all would be required to be “fully involved” in the electoral process. This ensures that those selected from the party lists for PR would have spent the same amount of time, money and effort electioneering as those elected by the single transferable vote.

To this end, those who are elected to the 60 provincial seats by single transferable vote are automatically deleted from the party lists. The remaining “failed” candidates on the party lists are then eligible for selection by PR

In this PR portion of the vote, the parties will now gain seats in the remaining allotted 20 seats in the legislature according to their percentage share of total votes cast in the election overall.

Using the PR vote as shown above:-

the Liberals get $45/100 \times 20 = 9$ seats
the NDP get $35/100 \times 20 = 7$ seats
the Green Party gets $10/100 \times 20 = 2$ seats
the BCUP gets $10/100 \times 20 = 1$ seat*
the Reform Party gets $5/100 \times 20 = 1$ seat*

The seats are allotted to political parties by region – 2 seats in each of the 10 regions, according to their maximum percentage portion of votes cast in each region (6 ridings). Thus the Liberals could have 9 seats spread among 4 – 5 regions having the most votes cast in each of the regions. The Liberals would then select the 9 remaining Liberal candidates (not previously elected) from their PR list to represent the party in those regions.

This process would be the same for all the political parties that gain a seat by Proportional representation. Going by past voter preference, the NDP and Liberal parties would get a high percentage of PR votes in Greater Vancouver and Mid Vancouver Island while the BCUP and Reform would most likely to pick up votes and seats in the Interior and Northern ridings.

The candidate with the highest “party vote” in the region (of 6 ridings) would “expect” to be selected from the Party PR list rather than a candidate selected by “backroom arm twisting”. In fact it would be far better that the chief electoral officer rather than the party make the candidate selection solely on the proportion of votes cast in the region!

In Conclusion,

This is a somewhat more complicated process because there are two electoral systems operating simultaneously. The First process (Transferable vote) ensures that the elected candidate has to receive not less than 50% (true majority) of total votes cast in his/her riding to be elected. The second process ensures that the political parties get a true representation of their share of the remaining 20 seats based on the total votes cast for each party in each of the 10 regions and in the province overall.

The proportion of seats for the Single Transferable vote (STV) and PR selection (60:20) ensures that Political parties are relatively “less important” than true democratic representation by the local elected candidate for his/her constituents. It is quite possible that the Citizens Assembly and the BC Electorate may, after debate and referendum may consider that a straight 40:40 split of seats for STV and PR would be preferable to that of this proposer.

Either way, this new (or any other) electoral reform is by far better and totally more democratic than the corrupt anti-democratic and morally reprehensible “First Past the Post” system of electing the BC Legislature that we have at present!

Yours Sincerely,

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