

As someone with a post graduate degree in Political Science and many years of involvement in politics -- federal, provincial and local (as a city councilor) -- I have developed some definite views.

The first past the post system, which has been our usual method for many years, has its weaknesses, but it does have a unique strength in that it provides a connection between constituents and their local M.L.A. The various proportional representation schemes that have been tried lose that important feature and tend to mean that a citizen relates to government through a party rather than a person. In a large and diverse province such as B.C. it is very desirable to have representatives from all regions and specific constituencies provide for that.

I believe it is possible to retain the advantages of our present system while improving the mix in our legislature by making sure that parties other than the one forming the government have reasonable, if not strictly proportional, representation.

For illustration purposes assume a legislature of 75 seats with 50 members elected as at present from constituencies throughout the province with the remaining 25 seats allocated to the leading runners up in the voting.

One possible process for allocating the 25 seats could be:

1. Determine the percentage of votes cast province wide for each party.
2. Allocate the 25 seats on the basis of each party's percentage.
3. Draw up lists by party of losing candidates in order of the percentage of vote they received in their constituency from highest to lowest
4. Assign seats to individuals on each party's list according to the numbers determined under point three above.

An alternative process for allocating the 25 seats, which might better assure representation is spread throughout the province, would be to create pairs of neighbouring ridings. Each riding would elect its M.L.A. as at present but a third seat, one of the 25, would go to the runner up with the highest percentage of the vote in either of the two constituencies. If one party won both constituencies it would be inevitable that a different party would have a seat from that region thereby providing an alternative voice.

Either of these methods, or some variation on them, would provide assurance that no single party would have overwhelming dominance in the legislature, but there would still be a reasonable chance for a majority government. The aspect of pure proportional representation that disturbs me is the backroom wheeling and dealing that is almost always necessary to create a majority, stable or otherwise. It is desirable to give significant minorities a voice, but not an influence out of all proportion to the segment of society they speak for.

I am not aware of any existing system along the lines of what I suggest, but I believe it is worthy of examination.

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