

September 7, 2004

Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform  
#2288 - 555 West Hastings Street  
PO Box 12118  
Vancouver BC V6B 4N6

Dear Members:

**Re: Supplement to Electoral Reform Submission #1373 ("Vote123")**

This document is to provide a digest version of the analysis and recommendations contained in our original submission #1373 of August 6, which has since been expanded on our website [www.vote123.info](http://www.vote123.info).

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Our need for a new electoral system was succinctly made in the submission #223 by Bruce Hallsor, who recounted his experience as candidate in the 2000 federal election running against incumbent MP David Anderson [emphasis added]:

"Logic dictated that my job was to win over the PC vote, and to help the NDP hold their vote, and that David's was to win over the NDP vote and help the PCs hold their vote. This is what the electoral system forced us to do. ... My campaign message was directed to voters whose preference was the PC party. It was not to convince them that the Canadian Alliance was better than the PCs, only that David Anderson or Jean Chretien were very bad and must be stopped, and that I stood a better chance of doing that than their PC candidate. David Anderson's message was similarly directed at New Democrats. He did not attempt to defend his government's record on issues of concern to those voters. What he did instead was convince New Democrats that their party had no chance, and that they had better vote for him in order to stop Stockwell Day or even me.

"The result of the first past the post system is to force even unwilling participants into negative campaigning. The result of this has been a steady increase in negative campaigning by all parties over the past few decades. I believe that this is the most direct cause of public cynicism in politics, and in lower and lower voter turn out. Our democracy is sick, and it will not become healthy again until we change our electoral system."

In order to properly analyze the alternative electoral systems, we first need to establish a consensus as to the problems to be resolved and appropriate criteria for a superior system. In the real world, there is of course no perfect electoral system—but some can be objectively determined to be superior or inferior to others, as measured against the given criteria. While this is so simple in principle, it may be a more difficult challenge to achieve. But the established criteria would probably be instrumental in determining which alternative is ultimately recommended. So it is important not to rush to the evaluation stage before establishing the most appropriate criteria. A goal of this analysis is to facilitate this process.

The electoral system embodies the set of rules by which the contest of democracy is played out. Specifically, the voting system directly shapes the behaviours and strategies of parties, politicians and voters. Given that the game of politics as it is played today is found to be offensive by many if not most people, it is therefore important that a comparative analysis of alternative voting systems should carefully consider the prospective changes in behaviours and strategies as well as electoral results. These generalizations are a logical extension of Hallor's observations.

Problems with our existing electoral system:

1. **Increasing public alienation and apathy.** Increasing levels of public disgust with politics and distrust of politicians, particularly among younger citizens, are directly attributable to the increasing negativity of political campaigns. Political spin-doctors have proven that negative advertising, personality attacks and divisive issues provide a winning formula under a plurality based electoral system where the winner may only need about 25% of eligible votes. Voter participation is declining here and everywhere because it is increasingly seen as a futile and hollow gesture.
2. **Public frustration with voting options.** Many voters are coerced by the voting system to vote against their true preference, which greatly distorts election results. Three common voting syndromes seriously distort the true will of the people: "strategic voting" for the perceived "lesser of evils"; "vote splitting" between two similar parties; and "wasted votes" for parties with no chance of winning. The single-X "First-Past-the-Post" (**1X-FPP**) voting system is directly responsible for creating the public mind-lock that produces such anti-democratic practices. These are perpetuated in the self-fulfilling prophesy that only one or two parties have any chance of winning. This situation greatly restricts the level of meaningful policy competition, as the smaller parties with challenging ideas and platforms are effectively excluded. Further, the major parties tend to morph into a political "duopoly" with little differentiation on major policies. They predictably choose to divert political discussion away from the hard issues, on which they generally have no answers and few differences, and engage one another instead in contests of political mud-wrestling focused on personalities, scandals, fears and prejudices, cynically calculated to touch the hot-buttons of their core constituencies. Such anti-democratic behaviour by the major parties has become almost standard practice because they know that negative campaigning works when only about 25% of eligible votes are needed to win.
3. **Frustration with electoral results,** primarily by losing parties and their supporters. The existing plurality based electoral system invariably distorts results in favour of the winners and to the detriment of the losers. This characteristic commonly results in majority governments for parties with around 40% of the votes from perhaps 25% of eligible voters. Parties with the potential to form government usually extol the positive features of majority government as their defense of the status quo. Smaller parties and their supporters usually advocate some form of proportional representation. The general public is probably of mixed mind but not all that concerned about it. Their frustration is probably more based on the experience that changing the parties or the people never seems to accomplish much more than replacing one group that failed to serve the people's interests with another that will probably not be much better. The problem here is mainly the lack of an effective capacity to hold government accountable to the people on specific policies and legislation. General elections fail miserably in this regard, especially given that campaigns are often more about personality and scandal than policy, and given the fact that the electable parties share many of the same policies [e.g. neoliberal economics].

Under this analysis, the following criteria are proposed for the evaluation of alternative voting systems:

- **Clean up the game of electoral politics.** Adopt a voting system that reduces anti-democratic behaviour by politicians and parties. Raise the bar by discouraging rather than rewarding negative campaigning and divisive issues. Reward parties for consensus building and broad overall support rather than building the largest partisan faction.
- **Liberate voters to express their true will,** through a voting system that effectively responds to the problems of “strategic voting”, “vote splitting” and “wasted votes”. Provide greater capacity for a more accurate reflection of voter preferences than a single-X.
- **Raise the level of political competition,** through a voting system that facilitates rather than prevents the emergence of new parties with new ideas and policies. Broaden the diversity of debate in political campaigns and elected representatives.
- Retain the better features of the existing electoral system, especially **regional representation.**
- The question of party **proportionality** is in fundamental conflict with the issue of **stronger governments,** where there is a strong case for each. Hence, this analysis will consider both options, and leave the selection to others.

The table which follows provides a qualitative comparison of the major voting system alternatives measured against these criteria. It groups the alternatives into two categories, depending on whether the voting procedure involves the voter in the election of either a single or multiple members.

The analyzed voting systems in which each ballot participates in the election of only one member are:

- **“Single-X, First-Past-the-Post” (1X-FPP),** where the criterion for election is a plurality that commonly falls short of a majority.
- **“Instant Run-off Vote” (IRV),** also referred to as “Alternative Vote” (**AV**). It is based upon a preferential ballot on which voters specify as many selections as desired in rank order. The criterion for election is a majority, achieved if necessary through an iterative procedure in which the lowest ranked candidates are successively eliminated, with those votes reallocated to the voters’ next choices.
- **“Vote123” (V123)** as advocated by this author, which is a simplified derivation of the Borda Count. It is also based upon a preferential ballot, but voters specify only three selections in rank order. It assigns differential values to first, second and third-place selections (proposed to be 3, 2 and 1 points respectively), and the criterion for election is highest acceptability to the overall electorate as the candidate with the highest total score.

From the analysis provided in the full submission on **V123** and its detailed comparison with alternative voting systems, the case is objectively made that: **1X-FPP** is a deeply flawed and totally unacceptable voting system (where there are more than two candidates); that **IRV (AV)** is a major improvement; and **V123** is much simpler and somewhat superior to **IRV**.

The analyzed voting systems in which each ballot participates in the election of more than one member are:

- **“Mixed Member Proportional” (MMP) in combination with 1X-FPP.** This is what is usually referred to as proportional representation (PR), because pure PR is effectively a non-starter as it would discard the fundamental principle of regional representation, and the bond of service and accountability between members and a constituency of electors. Further, as most advocates of PR seem more concerned with achieving their desired result than either understanding or resolving the broad array of fundamental problems caused by a single-X ballot, they’re apparently willing to prop up the dysfunctional **1X-FPP** which

gave rise to the demands for a better alternative. Given that **MMP** typically involves about one-third of members being appointed from party lists while the remaining two-thirds would be elected under **1X-FPP**, this “solution” not surprisingly fails to score well—except in comparison to pure **1X-FPP** or pure PR.

- **“Mixed Member Proportional” (MMP) in combination with V123.** If it is determined that party proportionality is a requirement, understanding that **V123** alone would be an effective remedy to the other problems of **1X-FPP**, then **MMP** should only be applied as a corrective upon the best single-member voting system, i.e. **V123**.
- **“Single Transferable Vote” (STV) in combination with IRV (AV).** This combination has been proposed by Loenen under the designation “Preferential Plus”. **STV** is the extension of the **IRV** concept and methodology to enlarged electoral districts from which typically five members would be elected. It produces nearly proportional results and is a highly commendable alternative. But it entails far more radical changes, and much greater complexity in both the ballot and vote counting procedures. While **STV** may be an acceptable solution for urban constituencies, it is recognized that rural electoral districts should not be enlarged, hence would most logically be retained but upgraded to **IRV**.

While the “democracy deficit” undoubtedly involves many factors beyond the voting system, it is equally true that the health of our democracy, the electoral process and the results it produces can be no more satisfactory than the voting system. Hence, while any of the alternatives analyzed are clearly superior to **1X-FPP**, some are objectively superior to others.

In conclusion, the authors feel strongly that:

1. **1X-FPP must be replaced, as it is clearly inferior to each of the other alternatives**, and is a major contributing factor to the widespread and increasing discontent with the way democracy functions today. It incites many kinds of anti-democratic behaviour by parties, politicians and voters, which must be rectified in an alternative voting system if it is to improve the quality of democracy and public respect for politics and politicians.
2. **V123 would be the simplest and most effective remedy** for the problems with our current democratic system. It is a clear upgrade to **1X-FPP**—raising the criterion for election from mere plurality to highest acceptability to the overall electorate—without changing electoral districts or the bond between elected members and constituents. It retains the feature of strong governments while facilitating the emergence of new parties and policies. It eliminates the problems of “strategic voting” and “vote splitting”, and substantially reduces the problem of “wasted votes”. It does not require a longer ballot or convoluted counting procedure, and has no downside or vulnerability to principled criticism.
3. **V123 with MMP would be the best solution if party proportionality is still deemed to be a requirement** after full consideration of its downside problems and the fact that **V123** alone would eliminate virtually all other defects of **1X-FPP**.
4. **STV with IRV (AV) is a very worthy alternative**, if near proportionality is desired and its radical changes and complexities are not seen to be impediments to its implementation.

Yours truly,

... Diana & Jeff Jewell

[refer to submission #1373, with updated material on website [www.vote123.info](http://www.vote123.info)]

## THE ESSENTIALS OF "VOTE123" (V123)

- **V123** uses a preferential ballot, where voters specify their top three choices. **V123** is not yet used in any country, but it is commonly used in voting for various awards.
- **V123** is a simplified derivative of the Borda Count voting method which embodies the principle of "election by order of merit". Votes are totaled as the point values of all first, second and third-place votes.
- The suggested point values of first, second and third-place votes are 3, 2 and 1 points respectively. While other point values might be chosen, the rationale for these point values is that two ballots that reversed the order of three candidates would offset one another, with all three candidates receiving the same total of 4 points each [i.e. two second-place votes deemed to have equal value as a first plus a third-place vote].
- The powers of **V123** reside in its capacity to change the behaviours of parties, politicians and voters:
  - To win, parties and politicians would be obliged to maximize their second or third-place support from voters who favour other parties and candidates. This would substantially raise the bar for election, and predictably should raise the standards of campaign strategies. Because it would no longer be possible to be elected with the support of only 25% of eligible voters, negative campaigning and divisive issues that are so widely exploited today under **1X-FPP** would become losing strategies under **V123**, because they alienated the supporters of other parties.
  - Voters would be freed from the "strategic voting" syndrome. They can vote for their preferred party or candidate, and still cast a vote for the "lesser of two evils" which may be the leading contenders.
  - Voters and parties would be freed from the "vote splitting" syndrome. Parties with similar platform appealing mostly to the same voter constituency would presumably be ranked first and second by the supporters of each. The stronger of the two would win, and would not be defeated by another party that under **1X-FPP** might be the winner due to vote splitting. [This would have made the merger of the PC and Alliance parties unnecessary. And since the new Conservative party in the recent federal election could not retain the combined vote that the original two parties had, its results fell short of what might have occurred under **V123**—which might well have produced a PC-Alliance coalition government.]
  - The "wasted vote" syndrome would no longer be a serious impediment confronting small parties and their supporters. Most voters would probably select the winning candidate as one of their three choices.
  - Small parties would have vastly more opportunity to gain votes, and the better among them would soon be seen as viable parties rather than fringe parties. This should inject many new ideas and serious political competition that should be capable of fracturing the mind-lock that sustains the political duopoly under the enormous constraints of **1X-FPP**. This would also force the major parties to deal with substantive issues rather than exploiting wedge issues and personality attacks.
- Environmental interests and other long-range issues should receive much better attention and voter support under **V123**. Under **1X-FPP**, the campaign focus is invariably upon the immediate issues of the day. Under **V123**, voters can express themselves on both the short-term and long-term issues.
- **V123**, where all voters have three votes [unlike **1X-FPP**], and where these votes have differential values [unlike **IRV** and **STV**] and all are counted for all voters [unlike **IRV** and **STV**], provides for a much more accurate expression of the will of the people than any alternative voting system.

## Qualitative Comparison of Single-Member Voting Systems

i.e.: each ballot participates in the election of only one member

<u>Criteria of comparison</u>	<u>1X-FPP</u>	<u>V123</u>	<u>IRV (AV)</u>
<b>Cleanup the game of electoral politics</b>	-	<b>best</b>	<b>better</b>
Criterion for election	plurality	highest acceptability	majority
<b>Liberate voters to express their true will</b>	-	yes	yes
"strategic voting"	-	eliminated	eliminated
"vote splitting"	-	eliminated	unresolved
"wasted votes"	-	reduced	reduced
More accurate voter expression than single-X	-	yes	yes
<b>Raise the level of political competition</b>	-	best	better
Facilitates or prevents emergence of new parties	prevents	facilitates	inhibits
<b>Regional representation</b>	yes	yes	yes
<b>Party proportionality or stronger governments</b>	stronger governments	stronger governments	stronger governments
<b>OVERALL COMPARATIVE MERIT</b>	<b>WORST</b>	<b>BEST</b>	<b>GOOD</b>

## Qualitative Comparison of Multi-Member Voting Systems

i.e.: each ballot participates in the election of more than one member

<u>Criteria of comparison</u>	<u>MMP / 1X-FPP</u>	<u>MMP / V123</u>	<u>STV / IRV (AV)</u>
<b>Cleanup the game of electoral politics</b>	not much	best	good
Criterion for election	Party list / plurality	Party list / highest acceptability	quota / majority
<b>Liberate voters to express their true will</b>	partially	yes	yes
"strategic voting"	remains for the 1X-FPP majority	eliminated	eliminated
"vote splitting"	remains for the 1X-FPP majority	eliminated	eliminated
"wasted votes"	remains for the 1X-FPP majority	reduced	eliminated
More accurate voter expression than single-X	yes	yes	yes
<b>Raise the level of political competition</b>	no	yes	yes
Facilitates or prevents emergence of new parties	facilitates	facilitates	facilitates
Regional representation	yes	yes	no
<b>Party proportionality or stronger governments</b>	Party proportionality	Party proportionality	Party proportionality
<b>OVERALL COMPARATIVE MERIT</b>	<b>GOOD</b>	<b>BEST</b>	<b>VERY GOOD</b>