Electoral System Families

The Rockridge Citizens' Assembly
April 21, 2004

Electoral Systems

- ⊃ A means to an end

- ⊃ Only one part of a democratic system

- ⊃ Infinitely varied

- ⊃ About choosing representatives

- ⊃ Need to serve interests of:
  * voters
  * politicians
  * legislatures & governments

5 Families of Electoral Systems

- Plurality

- Majority

- Proportional (list)

- Transferable Vote

- Mixed

- British Columbia
  India

- Australia
  France

- Finland
  Israel

- Ireland
  Tasmania

- New Zealand
  Japan

Plurality Systems

- Voters choose among local <u>candidates</u>
- Candidate with the most votes wins

↳ Seats ≠ votes: rewards large parties
↳ Tends to produce adversarial 2-party competition
↳ Elections are about choosing governments
↳ Majority governments *created*

↳ Accountability clear – not always effective

Majority Systems

- Voters choose among local <u>candidates</u>
- Candidates require majority support for election

⇨ System must establish a process for producing a majority – if one not won:
  - second round of voting
  - use preferential ballots

⇨ More voters see their votes contributing to an election

⇨ Tends to work like a plurality system

⇨ Used in BC in 1952 & 1953 elections

Proportional Representation - List

- Voters indicate preference for a <u>party</u>
- Seats are allocated in proportion to votes received

⇨ Candidates elected from party lists

⇨ Leads to more parties contesting elections

⇨ Produces coalition, not 1-party majority, government

⇨ Elections about indicating preferences

⇨ No identifiable local representative

⇨ Parties can better control composition of parliamentary caucus

Single Transferable Vote (PR)

- Voters rank preferred <u>candidates</u>
- Votes are 'transferred' → proportional outcomes

⇨ Maximum voter choice among candidates & parties

⇨ Politicians represent identifiable constituencies

⇨ Increases public competition within parties

⇨ More likely than plurality to produce coalition governments

⇨ Does not discriminate against independents

Mixed Systems

- Combines (best) features of two other families

  ⇨ Combinations quite varied so it is possible to mix features of ballots forms, counting rules and electoral districting practices

  ⇨ Proportional variations tend to increase numbers of political parties and lead to coalition government

  ⇨ Some produce two different types of legislators

  ⇨ May produce two different kinds of parties operating quite differently

Some Key Questions:

- ☑ Do you want to have an identifiable local representative you choose?   Why?
- ☑ Is proportionality an issue of importance? If so, how proportional does the system need to be?
- ☑ What kind of choice do voters need?

- ☑ Is it better to have elections with 2 parties competing for office OR is it better to have lots of parties to choose from?
- ☑ Is single-party majority or coalition government better?

Remember:

➢ None of those key questions is directly about electoral institutions

➢ Answering questions about what kind of political society we want comes first

➢ Electoral systems are only one kind of institution that helps us get there

❖ There is no perfect electoral system

❖ All involve trade-offs between desirable features

❖ We can't predict how another system may work here in BC – there are always unexpected, unintended consequences of any institutional design