

A REGIONAL SEATS SYSTEM FOR BC [HART0189]

Enclosed is some material on the Regional Seats system of elections. Had the RS system been used in the 2001 BC elections, the legislature would have had a functional size of Official Opposition. For example, say there had been 17 regions with four directly elected Members each, giving a total of 85 seats in the Assembly: 68 single-Member seats plus 17 Regional Members.

The outcome of the 2001 elections would most likely have been 66 Liberals, 17/18 New Democrats and one or two Greens. In this casual Regional seats would have gone to opposition parties. This characteristic feature of a Regional Seats system assures a functional size of Opposition in the face of a lop-sided victory.

Applying the Regional Seats system to the 1991 and 1996 elections demonstrates other useful attributes of this electoral system. Suppose there had been 15 Regional seats in addition to the 75 directly elected Members -For those two general elections. With Regional seats the '91 outcome would have seen greater regional balance in party representation, while the '94 outcome with Regional seats would have better reflected voters' intentions.

The '91 elections gave a comfortable majority government with a sizeable Opposition and a significant third party, the results being 50, 17 and 8 seats respectively. With 15 Regional seats this would have become 52, 28 and 10 seats, still a comfortable governing majority. What is important here is the distribution of those additional seats. Of those 15 Regional seats, 11 would have gone to a party not otherwise represented in the region, while in 3 instances the party getting the Regional seat had but one Member directly elected in the region.

Considering only the directly elected Members, the Government was represented in 13 regions, the Opposition in 7, the third party in 5. Including Regional Members (had they existed), the Government would have been represented in all 15 regions, the Opposition in 14 and the third party in 7. The geographical representation of both Government and of Official Opposition would have been enhanced. (see tables)

This is very typical of an RS election. Having applied the RS system to over fifty elections, I can say that typically both Government and Opposition wind up representing all or nearly all regions once the Regional seats are included. The Opposition's geographical reach especially is often much extended. The 2001 elections in BC would obviously have been an extreme example of this. From representing only one region, the Opposition would have gone to representing almost all regions in the province (except the one or two won by the Greens).

Regional Seats enhances the Opposition's presence province-wide thereby putting it in a better position to gain seats at the next general election. It is likely that under an RB system two consecutive terms in government is all any party could reasonably expect. By the third go round the Opposition should be poised to win (and woe betide the Opposition leader who then fails to). Under an RS system one would expect parties to alternate in power with somewhat greater frequency than under unadorned first past the post voting.

On the whole, such turnover in government is a Good Thing for society. It provides for different personalities, priorities and approaches to governing to have a turn. Not to mention philosophies and predilections peculiar to different political parties.

The 1996 election was tight and would have been tighter under a Regional Seats voting regime. In fact the party leading in popular vote came up second in directly elected Members, infusing them with the unmistakable aura of "we wuz robbed". The two main parties had 39 and 33 seats, but the Regional Seats (had they existed) would have gone 5 and 10 respectively, yielding a legislature with 44 and 43 Members plus 3 Members for two very minor parties. It would have been a minority government situation no matter who governed and either major party could have. Most likely there would have been another general election within two years. Surely an outcome more preferable for everyone than what actually occurred.

To recap, a Regional Seats system of elections always provides a functional size of Opposition, single party government if at times minority government, and in close elections it yields a close result. What it thankfully does not do is unduly foster formation of small narrow interest parties led by intransigent leaders. That is characteristic of any proportional system of representation be it of mixed Member type or otherwise. These may be called "tail wagging the dog" electoral systems because of the extraordinary influence such intransigent leaders of minor parties exert in skewing the shape of governing coalitions. Their practical effect on politics is negative whatever their theoretical appeal might seem.

Coalition governance is often slow to make decisions and the electorate may be mystified as to who was responsible for what. A single party governing cannot hide. It has no partners to blame for unpopular actions. The electorate knows who to praise or vilify for what the government of the day has done or has failed to do. Single party governance is therefore more accountable than coalition government.

If the electoral system is to be changed, single party government should be retained if possible. The Regional Seats system does just that. RS is an improvement on first past the post while keeping its best features. Go for it.

[See below for tables]

REGION:	1991 Election				1996 Election			
	ND	Lb	SC	RS. win	ND	Lb	RS. win	
Okanagan	2	1	2	Lb	0	5	ND	
Southeast BC	4	0	1	Lb*	4	1	Lb	
Kamloops-Cariboo	5	0	0	SC	3	2	Lb	
Northeast BC	2	0	3	Lb*	2	1 2-Rf	Lb	
Coast Range	4	1	0	Lb	4	0 1-FDA	Lb	
Vancouver Isle	5	0	0	Lb	4	1	Lb	
Victoria	5	0	0	Lb	4	1	Lb	
Richmond-Saanich	0	5	0	ND	0	5	ND	
Vancouver West	3	2	0	Lb	1	4	ND	
Vancouver East	5	0	0	Lb	5	0	Lb	
Vancouver North	2	3	0	SC	1	4	ND	
Burnaby	5	0	0	Lb	4	1	Lb	
Surrey	5	0	0	Lb	4	1	Lb	
White Rock-Matsqui	0	4	1	ND	0	5	ND	
Lower Fraser	3	1	1	Lb	3	2	Lb	
FFP seats	50	17	8		39	33	2	1
Regionals	2	11	2		5	10		
Total seats	52	28	10		44	43	2	1

FFP - First Past the Post

Lb* means Liberals would have ~on Regional seat had they fielded a full slate of candidates in the region, which under an RS electoral system they would have.

BC 17 Regions (Proposed)

Vancouver West.	North Isle - Powell River
Vancouver East	South Isle
Burnaby	Victoria
Richmond - Delta	Okanagan
Surrey	Southeast BC
Surrey - Langley	Kamloops - Fraser
Chilliwack - Langley	Pr George - Peace River
Maple Ridge - Coquitlam	Northern BC
North Vancouver	

1991 & 1996 Regions and Seats Therein (15 Regions)

OKANAGAN - OK West, OK East, OK Vernon, OK Penticton, OK Boundary

SOUTHEAST BC - Rossland-Trail, Nelson-Creston, Kootenay, Columbia-Revelstoke, Shuswap

KAMLOOPS-CARIBOO - Cariboo, Cariboo, Kamloops, Kamloops, Yale-Lillooet

NORTHEAST BC - Prince George, Fr George, Pr George, Peace R, Peace R.

COAST RANGE - Bulkley, Skeena, N Coast, N Island, Powell R-Sunshine

VANCOUVER ISLE - Comox, Parksville, Alberni, Cowichan, Malahat

VICTORIA - Esquimalt, Victoria, Victoria, Oak Bay, Saanich S.

RICHMOND-SAANICH Saanich N, Richmond, Richmond, Richmond, Delta S.

VANCOUVER WEST - V. Burrard, V. Little Mountain, V. Langara, V. Quilchena, V. Point Grey

VANCOUVER EAST - V. Fraserview, V. Kensington, V. Kingsway, V. Hastings, V. Mount Pleasant

VANCOUVER NORTH - N Van, N Van, W Van, W Van, Nanaimo

BURNABY - Burnaby, Burnaby, Burnaby, Port Moody, Coquitlam

SURREY - S. Newton, S. Whalley, S. Green Timbers, Delta N, New West.

WHITE ROCK-MATS(~UI - S. White Rock, S. Cloverdale, Langley, Fort Langley-Aldergrove, Matsqui

LOWER FRASER - Chilliwack, Abbots-Ford, Mission-Kent, Maple Ridge, Port Coquitlam