

**Submission to
British Columbia's
Citizen's Assembly on Electoral Reform**

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**Bradley J. Benson
PO Box 1919
Gibsons, BC V0N 1V0**

**604-886-0069
bjbenson@telus.net**

The Direct Negative Vote

I suggest that the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform consider a very simple change in BC's voting procedures that would have an important impact on the voting effectiveness in our representative democracy.

Instead of being empowered to vote only for a candidate of choice, it would better serve democracy to have the option to also vote directly against a candidate of choice. As the current voting model stands, we can only express our dissatisfaction with a particular party or candidate by voting for another candidate.

Incorporating the ability to cast a vote either for or against a candidate would improve each citizen's ability to express his or her political position and would, in some cases, change the distribution of party representation in the British Columbia Legislative Assembly.

For instance, in an election where there are more than two candidates running for office, the power of votes from people wanting to cast negative votes have to be spread among the other candidates, thus reducing their effectiveness. Direct negative votes may affect the vote tally sufficiently to elect a different candidate than the current model would. However, changing the make-up of the political distribution in the legislature is not the most important benefit of the direct negative vote.

A revised voting model allowing for direct negative votes would improve feedback for candidates and parties, allowing them the chance to learn more from the voting process than they do now.

A winning party needs to know just how popular their policies are in order to understand the level of the mandate the people have given them. For instance, was it true that all the people who voted Liberal in BC's last provincial election were strongly in agreement with the platform and policies of the Liberal Party? Or did the Liberal's overwhelming victory only happen because the people of BC were overwhelmingly fed up with the NDP? Did the Liberals really have the mandate they have assumed they had to drastically change the way government operates in British Columbia? Or, was it possible that many of the people who voted Liberal were not really endorsing their policies, but simply getting rid of the NDP? If this were the case, the NDP may have received a large number of negative votes, which would have substantially changed the complexion of the Liberal success.

It is entirely possible that the understanding of the Liberal mandate may have substantially changed with fewer positive votes for them combined with a significant number of negative votes for the NDP. This could have resulted in their taking a much different approach to their method of governance and with the changes they have made since taking office. Whatever the actual truth was in this case, the point here is that the way government operates could be substantially affected by information imparted through direct negative voting. A just, responsive and effective government requires good communication between voters and the political parties.

Another important benefit of a direct negative vote could be that BC's voter turnout might increase. Though some people do not vote simply because they just do not care, others may not vote because they do not like the policies offered by the parties or have no confidence in their choice of candidates. Whatever their reasons, these people may feel that the ability to cast a negative vote would finally give them the chance to publicly express their opinions and possibly prompt them to go to the polls.

Any fear that a direct negative vote would create havoc with the voting system is unfounded. There would always still be a winner, which would be the one with the largest total of combined votes.

Large numbers of negative votes would send important messages of voter dissatisfaction. Conversely, large numbers of positive votes in relation to negative votes would indicate a high degree of voter satisfaction.

If our form of representative democracy is to ever evolve further, expanding our voting options to include direct negative voting is a step we should take.

Why not try it in BC?