

Voting system proposal

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System proposed: Mixed Member Proportional system.

Characteristics:

- Approximately half the members elected on a constituency basis and half the members elected from party lists.
- Fixed election dates.
- Simplicity, using familiar processes.
- Constituency members elected for four-year terms during a general election.
- Party list members elected two years later for a four-year term.

This proposed system would provide the strength of the constituency system with an accountable link between the voters and the elected MLA for the constituency members. It would also provide a larger measure of proportional representation.

By adjusting the make-up of the legislature every two years there would be a smoother transition of balance and the “Yo-Yo” policies that often accompany changes of administration would be reduced.

Details: For convenience, the constituencies would follow the same boundaries as the federal ridings. At present this would be approximately 36 members elected on a constituency basis. The number of ridings would increase in accordance with federal law that requires resetting boundaries after each census. Over time the number of constituencies would increase to the point where they would represent exactly half of the Legislature.

The federal ridings are generally accepted by the public and are in the process of complying with the rulings of the Supreme Court of Canada regarding the equality of constituency size.

The party list members would be elected two years after the constituency members and would hold office for four years. This would result in an election every two years for approximately half of the assembly.

The party list proportional election could be conducted by a mail-in ballot similar to the recent referendum on Aboriginal Treaty negotiations. That referendum cost approximately one quarter of the cost of the last provincial election.

Benefits: No electoral system is perfect but this system would give voters the chance to “adjust” the legislature rather than trying to have a “perfect” system that would try to meet all the demands of voters. By giving electors a “second chance” every two years they can reward parties that are accomplishing what the voters want and penalize parties that have slipped from favor.

Transition: Changing to the new system requires a long-term commitment from both voters and legislators.

Initially voters would have two ballots on election day. They would vote for their local representative as they do now. In addition, they would be given a second ballot listing only the political parties. This ballot would be used to select proportional representatives who would serve for a two year period.

After two years a second vote would be taken to select proportional representatives for a four year term.

Since the ballot for the proportional election would be identical throughout the province subsequent elections could be conducted by mail. This would reduce the cost of the election substantially.

Since B.C. has more than 40 registered parties it would be useful to reduce the number of parties appearing on the proportional ballot to a number that could effectively govern.

For a party to qualify to be on the proportional ballot it must run candidates in the constituency election and receive a province-wide share of the vote of at least 1.26 per cent of the popular vote ($1/79$) of the total vote. This would indicate that the party has a chance of electing at least one member.

Those parties that achieved this threshold could then choose to be included on the proportional ballot two years later.

Conclusion: In this mixed-member proportional system any changes in political direction would be more gradual and reflect the diversity of voters' views.

By holding elections every two years the voters have the opportunity to address any imbalances they perceive.

The retention of constituency members gives accountability and an identifiable local MLA.

The proportional party-list members provide a balance for identifiable political views and would give smaller parties at least some voice in the Legislature.

The governing party would have to develop new alliances every two years, making the compromises that are necessary to reflect the views of a larger portion of the electorate.