

Submission to Yukon Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform

Thank you to the members of the Yukon Citizens' Assembly for your time and energy addressing a vital part of our democracy, thus also a vital part of our social fabric.

I feel strongly that some alternate system of choosing our government representatives be tried. Some people obviously feel that the current plurality system (first past the post) serves us well, but I beg to differ. The plurality system essentially locks out views from other citizens, and creates an "us vs them" dynamic that we see in North America. Since the 1970s when I started voting, I was proud of our democratic system but still felt that improvement was possible. I feel much more strongly now that, to protect our democratic system, we absolutely need to improve it. The FPTP system worked in 1867 when there were two political parties; it simply does not work any more.

If evidence-based decision-making is important, then we should be paying close attention to the evidence. "Proportional" systems have been shown, via social science research, to outperform winner-take-all systems on a wide range of measures, including:

- higher quality of democratic life itself
- prudent fiscal management
- higher economic growth
- better environmental management
- reduced income inequality
- higher levels of human development
- greater tolerance of diversity
- a less punitive approach to law enforcement
- greater respect for privacy
- lower levels of conflict and militarism.

The higher quality of democratic life is largely manifested by collaborative decision-making processes, as opposed to the combative "us vs them" jousting for immediate political points. I can forward the references for the above statements; you probably have them already via Fair Vote Canada or other submissions.

Some may claim that proportional representation hasn't worked elsewhere, and never will work, or that Canadians would find proportional systems too much of a challenge to navigate. There are over 100 countries which use either PR or a mixed system to elect their primary chamber across the world. Among these are Algeria, Angola, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Cambodia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Czechia, Denmark, Fiji, Finland, Greece, Iceland, Israel, Morocco, Netherlands, Norway, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Sweden, Switzerland, Türkiye, Germany, Mexico, New Zealand, Republic of Korea and Uruguay. Are Canadians not smart enough to figure out how to vote under these systems, when Moroccans and Kiwis can figure it out just fine?

I will note that countries like Italy and Israel are often brought up as countries where proportional representation has led to unstable coalitions, or unfair influence by "fringe"

parties. The simple answer to this potential problem lies in setting threshold limits to parliamentary seats, eg 2.5% or 5% of popular vote needed to gain seats in government. As far as “fringe” parties go, I would posit that even plurality-chosen governments are subject to undue influence by fringe parties.

I understand that the CA will recommend to either keep our current voting system or adopt a different one. I urge the CA, and Yukoners, to adopt a different one. We have many models to follow, yet we can come up with something made in the Yukon! Open-list PR, Mixed Member, or STV voting systems all out-perform FPTP systems, according to the social science. Concurrent to this CA’s work, the work by the commission on Electoral Boundaries is relevant. We don’t need double the number of MLAs to fairly represent Yukoners, but surely it’s no big deal to add a couple of MLAs to ensure that Vuntut Gwitchin interests, and those of other rural ridings are fairly represented, should we need to ensure this. I favour some form of mixed-member representation, but others could work in the Yukon. Dave Brekke has designed a voting system that could work as well.

I’m not sure if the Special Committee on Electoral Reform, or another party recommended that a referendum be conducted. However, I caution the CA to approach referenda with caution. Although referenda on the surface seem democratic (the will of the masses), previous referendum campaigns have been shown to include disproportionate advertising monies by “no” campaigns, and downright lies in advertising. A far better idea would be to enact a form of proportional representation, use it for two election cycles, and then vote on the choice between that system and FPTP, once citizens are familiar with the differences in outcomes. This actually happened in New Zealand, and it could happen here. Just two election cycles to get it right! That’s a pittance of time to spend to ensure fair and sustainable governance.

As for voting age, I support lowering the voting age to 16 years. A 16-year-old is just as capable of making intelligent voting decisions as a typical “19+-year-old,” given adequate education opportunities by Elections Yukon.

Thanks,
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