

CITIZENS ASSEMBLY ON ELECTORAL REFORM
ANSWERS TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS SUBMITTED TO
BRUCE HALLSOR

September 11, 2004

From Wendy Bergerud

Would you agree that MMP mixes two of the worst systems together: constituency seats selected by plurality votes and closed-list PR where the party leadership chooses who is at the top and their list? Would you agree that this is a "fix" of the FPTP system instead of an overhaul of our electoral system?

Answer:

This question implies that MMP has closed lists, which is only one approach. But MMP can also have open lists so that voters can express their preference for individual candidates.

Whether you favour open lists or closed lists, I think that MMP is an improvement over FPTP and Pure PR. Both of these systems embrace one of the four values exclusively, at the expense of all others. MMP, like STV, attempts to embrace and balance all the values that British Columbians demand.

From John Zall

Given that the four objectives in the Fair Vote Statement of Purpose are to some degree inconsistent, how would you rank the relative importance of these objectives?

Answer:

I found this the most challenging question, and I can answer it in several ways. While I, as an urban dweller, might favour proportionality over geographic representation, others would for good reasons favour geographic representation over proportionality. I think it is possible to strike a good balance, and recognize that these two values, and voter choice and stable government are all important.

At the end of the day, however, I believe the whole issue comes down to making every vote count. If people believe there is utility to their participation in the system, then we can have a healthy democracy. If people know that their vote doesn't matter, as is the case for many voters presently, then we have a problem.

As you compare the alternatives, I ask that you deliberately stop before making the final decision and ask yourselves - how close are we to making every vote count? Are we 95% there? If so, that's obviously great. If we are only 80% there, meaning that one in five voters is still being ignored, are there compelling reasons to accept that loss of democracy for those voters? Or are there ways to tweak the system to do better?

From Anna Rankin

What do you say to critics who claim proportional systems such as MMP and STV will create coalition governments that are inherently unstable?

Answer:

International experience shows MMP and STV produce stable, effective and responsive government. For example, Germany has had stable governments since 1949. So have its states, which also use PR.

Postwar Germany has had 14 elections since 1949: 11 after four years, three after three years. That is pretty similar to the record in British Columbia and Canada over the same period under first past the post.

Ireland has had 14 elections since 1948, most every three or four years, with only three shorter terms. New Zealand has had three elections since changing to its current PR system: all three Parliaments have run their full term, one with a coalition led by the National Party, two with coalitions led by the Labour party.

Let's not forget that coalitions happen under first past the post also. We have a coalition government now called the BC Liberals. We had a coalition government called Social Credit for most of 40 years. Those coalitions are formed before the election in back rooms. Minority government coalitions are formed in public view. Personally, I think that if we value transparency in our political process, we should favour systems that require formal coalitions rather than back room ones. But the evidence is that either system can have equal degrees of stability.

From Anna Rankin

Do you believe that voters in BC would rather have more choice to select their own candidates from a party (e.g., STV) or do you believe they would rather leave the issue of choosing representatives in the hands of the party, e.g., list systems like MMP?

Answer:

The best way to find the answer for this is to look at the Australian Senate elections, which are conducted by STV, but which voters have the option of marking their preferences by party slate, rather than by individual candidates. In this case, more than 90% of voters elect to stick to the party line. Similarly, when British Columbia had double member ridings, most voters would select two members from the same party, and only about 15% would split their vote between different parties.

Although most voters usually vote by party preference, I personally think that they also want retain the option to vote for the candidate where circumstances warrant.

From Anna Rankin

Which system, STV or MMP, would result in more women getting elected in B.C.?

Answer:

Many people have studied and debated this issue. Opinions differ. Within either system, design details such as district size or nomination procedures may perhaps make them better or worse for women. FVC has taken no position on this, and I do not believe there is imperial evidence to support one over the other. Both systems have shown

improved results for women over first past the post. Both systems operate in some conditions where representation for women is still too low.

From Sally de Luna

On behalf of the Citizens' Assembly, we thank you for your trust and confidence in us. Your four objectives will be part of our studies in our deliberation phase. While the FVC does not advocate any particular model, do you mean that the electoral system must identify with your four objectives?

Answer:

FVC indeed recommends that the system you design should meet all four objectives, which we believe you can do.