

**CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON ELECTORAL REFORM**  
**ANSWERS TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS SUBMITTED TO**  
**NICK LOENEN**

**September 11, 2004**

**From Wendy Bergerud:**

Could the preferential-plus system be successful if the preferential ballots were counted in a different way than the proposed STV? Such as approval voting?

*Answer:*

Yes, it could be done. But, Wendy, please don't do that.

You would lose what is best about STV. The beauty, the genius of STV is that each MLA has a personal constituency. Unlike FPRP, with STV people vote for their MLA not only to support a party, or a leader -- that they can do through several candidates -- people vote for the person.

Suppose I want to seek election in the seven-member riding of Surrey. What does it take to win? Unlike Approval and Cumulative voting, each voter in Surrey has just one ballot. I don't need all of them, just one-eighths. In the last election it would have been 16,000. I don't need more than 16,000 b/c surplus votes will be taken from me. How do I find 16,000 persons?

There are two ways. First, I can find them in one neighborhood. Suppose I live in Surrey-Cloverdale. I know the people and issues, and the people know me. I join the Liberal party and contest their nomination on the basis that I can win in Surrey-Cloverdale.

Now I am into the election. Do I place signs throughout Surrey, do I door-knock throughout Surrey? No. I market myself as the voice for Surrey-Cloverdale in that neighbourhood. I win. I know exactly who my voters are.

There is another way, not based on neighborhood, but on an issue. Suppose my issue is clean air. In this case support is sprinkled throughout Surrey. But I market myself as the voice of clean air. I win. I know who my voters are. They have organizations and networks, they contact me, and I relate to them.

Under STV MLAs have voters that are exclusively one's own. Under Approval and Cumulative voting the support I get I share with any number of other MLAs. Under those systems I must market myself to all of Surrey.

Under STV each MLA has a personal constituency. That personal constituency can also vote against their MLA in the next election **without voting against that MLA's party**. That is why the link between an MLA and the voters is stronger under STV than any other system, including FPTP. This is the genius of STV, and it is unique to STV.

Berger got this all wrong. Plse. get this right. Don't muck it up with Approval or Cumulative voting.

**From John Zall:**

You state that we do not want an Italian pizza parliament full of splinter parties. Why shouldn't the thousands of people who vote for smaller parties have their representatives in the Legislature to speak for them?

*Answer:*

John, I agree that every person should have someone speaking for them in Victoria. You suggest that maximizing proportionality is the way to do that. But maximizing proportionality empowers political parties. Empowering political parties does not translate into empowering persons. The two are very different undertakings. What you propose will not deliver what you wish for.

If you wish to empower persons, there is no better system than STV. If you wish to empower parties go for MMP. The obstacle to MMP is: it doesn't fit. Too much geography, not enough seats. We are three times the size of NZ, they have 120 seats we have 79. It would take 360 seats to be like NZ. MMP always sounds good in the abstract, when you actually try to apply it to BC by drawing lines on a map it fails.

**From Wendy Bergerud:**

What is the potential for perverse results in AV and STV?

*Answer:*

Very, very small. It is there, but much less than under FPTP.

**From David Wills:**

- (a) I am concerned that the relative ease with which the single member district seats can be won will result in strong competition for these seats at the expense of the interests of the rest of the province. I believe that the nine single member districts in your proposal are in a very real sense "cheap seats" in that these seats can be won with relatively fewer votes than the seats in multi member districts.

*Answer:*

No. There are no cheap seats. The level of competition remains the same. The lowering of the bar applies equally to all parties. If it is easier for one, it is also easier for the others. Competition remains the same.

But suppose you are right. Parties will now pay more attention to those few, remote Northern ridings. What an improvement that would be!

- (b) In your opinion how many names on an STV ballot are too many?

*Answer:*

It is not the number that matters. How they are listed makes all the difference. They must be grouped by party affiliation. That simplifies everything. Switzerland has 12 member-districts.

Also, remember voters can rank as many or as few as they wish. Ranking just one name is a perfectly valid ballot.

**From Shoni Field and Anna Rankin:**

If STV works so well at providing local representation why are you so adamant that it would not be saleable in the north thus requiring the need for an STV/AV mix?

*Answer:*

Logically you are correct. But the referendum, as so much in politics, will not be decided by logic. In the North, there is such a long history of being excluded. That, combined with the fear of the unknown spells disaster.

This is what could happen. After 3 or 4 Preferential-Plus elections, and people see how it works there will be voices from the North itself asking for STV.

**From Anna Rankin:**

Is there a risk that politics could become regionalized in this system and that local issues would take precedence over the good of the province as a whole?

*Answer:*

This is the most difficult question of all. History will prove whatever I say to be wrong. We can only speculate. It may well be that 20 years out the system needs a tune-up. We should not be afraid of that.

The task of protecting the province-wide public interest falls on the Premier and Cabinet, not on the MLAs. Their task is to protect local interests and to provide an oversight function of premier and cabinet. The latter, requires a measure of independence from party control, which they currently lack, but could acquire under STV. There is potential that the legislature will come to work as it is supposed to, in which case the province-wide interests will be protected. But it may not, b/c there are so many factors. I just don't know what the legislature will look like 20 years from now. No one does.

It is relatively certain that the legislature will be more lively, it will have more clout, no one party can stack committees and make them chronically compliant to cabinet as is done now. Also, the legislature will become more civil and cooperative.

Beyond that predictions cannot be made. Whether local issues will have undue influence to the detriment of province-wide concerns remains to be seen. No one knows.

**From Anna Rankin:**

Should the Citizens' Assembly recommend the best system for B.C. or the system that the province will agree to in referendum?

*Answer:*

This is the dilemma politicians face daily. My view is: get as much improvement as possible today and go back for more tomorrow. I also believe there is wisdom in incrementalism.

Finally, you cannot give leadership unless you are willing to follow. If this Assembly takes no account of where the people are at, your leadership will fail.

**From Sally de Luna:**

How could we produce a capable, stable government without party discipline? What would be the candidate nomination process if we had no parties?

*Answer:*

We need less party discipline, not no party discipline. We need to improve parties as instruments of political engagement, not abolish them. STV has the potential to diminish party discipline and give MLAs a measure of independence, but it is very difficult to attain. Ireland, during the period of Ken Carty's study showed no lessening of party discipline. But what happened there may not happen here. We can only speculate.

Your task does not reach that far. Your task is to create the conditions under which other, additional democratic reforms can take hold. You cannot shape or implement those reforms, they are beyond your mandate and depend on initiatives other than changing the voting system.

**From Shoni Field**

In choosing your nine single seat ridings you deviated slightly from using size of riding and/or density in your choices. Can you explain what your criteria were? While I understand why you excluded Prince George itself, why did you exclude the significant rural areas that are components of the three Prince George ridings? Why did you exclude Powell River/Sunshine Coast which is geographically larger and has less density than both Yale-Lillooet and Skeena (11th and 13th on the list of ridings by size and density respectively). Why did you include Yale-Lillooet and Skeena instead?

*Answer:*

Here is how I went about making my groupings. I looked at which existing ridings could most conveniently be fitted into multi-seat ridings. What was left over I declared candidates for single-seat ridings. That sounds most unscientific, but I was guided by my knowledge of the history of Boundary Commissions and the problems they struggled with over the years. For example, Yale – Lillooet is a very awkward configuration, made up of left over pieces that don't readily fit in anywhere else, nor do they fit comfortably together. I also know from personal experience that if you went into Lillooet and suggested they be part of Kamloops, all hell will break loose.

In contrast, Powell River-Sunshine Coast would object less strenuously about being part of West Vancouver. Why, b/c they can see that the existing riding would under STV be a natural for one seat. The same does not hold for Yale-Lillooet since it has no cohesion to start with.

Skeena, North Coast, Bulkley Valley-Stikine could be grouped into one 3-seat STV riding but it is too big a jump all at once. We must give that time.

As for the 3 Prince George ridings I reasoned that their large rural areas have become accustomed to being part of the City. At the time that was very controversial, but now it is much more acceptable to the people there.

Before Preferential-Plus could be implemented a Boundaries commission would need to finalize the suggested groupings and their precise boundaries based on the most recent population census. Should the Assembly make a recommendation similar to my proposal it be essential to stipulate that the number of multi-seat ridings be not greater than 14 and the number of single-seat ridings be not greater than 9. That would safeguard the integrity of the system in terms of proportionality. Also, that the single-seat ridings be reserved for the most rural areas and areas most difficult to include in multi-member ridings.

I don't think the Assembly can stipulate much beyond that since separate legislation and the requirements of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms cover Boundaries Commissions.

As you probably know few people are more knowledgeable about Boundary problems and challenges than Ken Carty. I have not discussed my proposed groupings with him but you may want to seek his advice.

*Two additional comments*

*Someone suggested it should be compulsory to rank more than one name, perhaps the same number as the DM.*

I don't agree. Perhaps there is just one candidate I wish to support why should I be made to support candidates against my wishes? And what good does this requirement do?

Most voters will want to rank more than one lest their vote exhausts itself. I don't understand the concern behind this suggestion. Is this a solution to a problem that does not exist.

Also, since STV creates a personal constituency for each MLA I do not support Circuits. It, too, is a solution to nothing.