Plurality-Majority Electoral Systems: A Review

John C. Courtney
Department of Political Studies
University of Saskatchewan

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1. Plurality-majority electoral systems include the First Past the Post (FPTP), Alternative Vote (AV), Block Vote (BV), Limited Vote (LV), and Two-Round (TR) systems. This brief review explores the implications (advantages and disadvantages) of these systems for Canada, specifically what their adoption and implementation might mean for Canada on such matters as the allocation of seats, regionalism, and the representation of women and Aboriginals. The bulk of the review is devoted to an analysis of FPTP. Many of the advantages and disadvantages of FPTP are common to the other plurality-majority electoral systems as well and need not be repeated *seriatim* when each of these systems is examined.

2. Two considerations should be borne in mind in any review of electoral systems, the first relating to parties and the second to voters. Both stem from the fact that every electoral system contains its own distinctive elements.

3. First, political parties find it "rational" to pursue strategic alternatives that best maximize their chances of converting votes into seats. As the incentives contained in any method of casting and aggregating votes will differ from one electoral system to another, party electoral strategies will also differ according to the perceived incentives present. As mindful as Canada is of its regional, bilingual, and multiracial character, the principal incentive for any party seriously intent on winning sufficient seats in a federal election to enable it to form a government is to bridge the regional, linguistic, and racial gaps with policies, leaders, and candidates that appeal to as wide a cross-section of voters as possible.

4. With few exceptions since Confederation, the hallmark of Canada's major "brokerage" parties has been to seek to accommodate social differences through the FPTP system. For the better part of Canadian history, coalitions have been built within Canadian parties rather than between, reflecting an incentive contained in the FPTP system for centrist, mainstream parties dedicated to minimizing inter-regional and inter-linguistic conflicts. It cannot be assumed that the same incentives for parties to broker social cleavages would be present in other electoral systems. It is conceivable that under a different electoral system parties and leaders would actually pursue *less* accommodative strategies and policies in an attempt to maximize their support from different, possibly less transnational, coalitions of regional and social interests than would be the case under FPTP. By virtue of the structural components of each and the way in which electoral preferences can be expressed, the non-FPTP plurality-majority systems (AV, BV, LV and TR) would be less likely than a more proportional scheme (proportional representation [PR], single transferable vote [STV] and mixed-member plurality [MMP]) to alter the coalition-building strategies that parties pursue at election time.

5. Second, if different electoral systems provide alternative incentives to parties and thereby enable them to pursue electoral strategies they would not otherwise adopt, so too with voters. Their strategic choices are influenced by the number of votes they have been allocated, the way preferences may (or may not) be ordered, and by the manner of distributing (or redistributing) votes among the candidates. It follows logically that different electoral systems can prompt different voting behaviour. Any claim that "Y" number of seats would have been won by a party in a hypothetical election under different rules given that it won "Z" share of the votes in an actual election under an alternative set of rules must be treated with considerable caution. It does not follow that, because parties "A," "B," and "C" received, for example, 40 percent, 35 percent and 25 percent respectively of the total popular vote under an FPTP system, they

would have received that level of support under, let us say, AV. Preference ranking among candidates presents the individual voter with choices that simply are not available when a single "X" is all that can be placed on the ballot. Institutions, of which electoral systems are among the more visible, do affect outcomes.

Five Plurality-Majority Systems

Allocation of Seats

6. Before considering the five plurality-majority systems, it should be understood that the number of House of Commons seats assigned to each of the provinces and territories is a matter separate from the electoral system used to elect MPs. Under s. 51 of the *Constitution Act, 1867* Parliament was granted the exclusive power to determine the number of seats to which each province or territory would be entitled. No reference to an electoral system is contained in s. 51 or in any other part of the *Constitution Act*. A case launched in British Columbia in 1987 seeking to overturn the formula for allocating seats that was contained in the *Representation Act* (1985) was unsuccessful at both the trial and appeal levels. The formula adopted in 1985 remains in force to this day.

7. According to the 1985 Act the number of seats assigned to a province or territory will not be reduced from what it had been in 1976 or during the 33rd parliament (1984–88), whichever is fewer. As well, a constitutional amendment approved in 1915 assured the provinces that they will never have fewer seats in the House of Commons than they have in the Senate. This guarantee was later included in the *Constitution Act* (1982) as one of the five subjects requiring approval by Parliament and all provincial legislative assemblies before it could be amended. The combination of the 1985 "grandfather clause" and the "senatorial floor" translates into an additional twenty seats in the Commons at the present time. All provinces except for Ontario, British Columbia, and Alberta currently benefit from those guarantees.

8. Should there be any move to adopt a new formula for allocating Commons seats, as a minimum that would entail debate of and eventual amendment to the 1985 statute. If the guarantees contained in the senatorial floor were to be changed or, for that matter, if the Senate were to be abolished or if there were changes to the number of senators to which the provinces were entitled, a constitutional amendment governed by the unanimity rules contained in s. 41 would be required.

9. The number of seats allocated to the provinces and territories may be independent of the electoral system, but the way in which those seats are distributed within the provinces is a function of the type of system used to elect members to the House. The single-member districts needed to serve as the constituency base for FPTP, AV, and TR systems could continue to be established under the terms of the existing legislation governing decennial redistributions in Canada, the *Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act* (1985) (EBRA [1985]). For elections under BV and LV, multi-member districts would need to be created, the EBRA (1985) would have to be altered to reflect the constituency requirements of the new electoral system, and the boundaries of the new and larger districts would have to be drawn.

10. As an illustration of the differences that might be entailed, Prince Edward Island could be taken as an example. A strict allocation of seats according to population would see P.E.I. awarded one federal constituency at the present time. Because of the senatorial floor guarantee, however, the province is currently entitled to four seats in the Commons. To comply with the requirements of the FPTP system, the province therefore has four single-member districts. Assuming that the senatorial floor guarantee remains in place and the FPTP system were to be replaced by multi-member districts because of the adoption of either BV or LV, the whole island could be declared a single district electing four MPs or, alternatively, divided into two districts each electing two members.

First Past the Post (FPTP)

11. FPTP is the most widely used electoral system in the world. In 1997, 68 out of 211 countries comprising 45 percent of the world's population relied on FPTP to elect members to their national legislatures. Canada was one of them, having adopted the system from Britain in pre-Confederation times. Sometimes known as the "single-member-district, simple-plurality-vote" method of election, FPTP is actually as much a misnomer, it being much preferable to use the term "plurality vote" system, as it is misleading. There is technically no "post" or hurdle for a candidate to get by, for very simply put the person with the most votes becomes the winner. In a two-member contest, a candidate would naturally have to gain a clear majority, or at least "50 percent + 1," of the valid votes cast in order to win. When three or more candidates contest an election there is a reduced likelihood, though no certainty, that none of them would gain a clear majority. With at least three candidates, a plurality (which is to say less than a majority but nonetheless the largest share of the votes) is all that would be needed to win the district. Thus, to win a seat under FPTP a candidate needs as a minimum share of the valid votes cast:

    50 percent + 1 in a two-person race,
    33 1/3 percent + 1 in a three-person race,
    25 percent + 1 in a four-person race, and so on.

Advantages

12. FPTP is undoubtedly the easiest electoral system for the voter to use and to understand. Nothing could be much simpler than casting one "X" for a single candidate and having all the "Xs" counted at the end of election day to determine the winner.

13. FPTP is unquestionably the most familiar of all electoral systems to the voters of Canada. With the exception of the Alternative Vote and/or Single Transferable Vote tried in three provinces (Manitoba, Alberta, and British Columbia) for varying lengths of time between the early 1920s and the late 1950s, FPTP has been used in all federal and provincial elections since 1867.

14. Vote counting is simple and speedy under FPTP. Usually within a few hours of the close of polls Canadians know who their new government and opposition will be.

15. In general, Canada's FPTP system has tended to produce single-party majority governments. In the 36 Canadian general elections since 1867, all but eight have brought one party to power with a majority of the Commons seats. This is seen as one of the advantages of FPTP as it implies a greater likelihood of government stability than would be found in a coalition government formed of two or more parties.

16. FPTP in Canada has favoured broadly-based, accommodative, centrist parties. By winning office with a majority of the seats a "catch-all" or "broad church" party, as it is called, has generally succeeded in creating a coalition of supporters and MPs drawn from different regions, linguistic groups, ethnocultural groups, and religions. The government draws part of its strength from the fact that it is an *intra-party* coalition. As such, it is not so likely to fall apart over controversial or divisive issues as an *inter-party* governing coalition formed of parties whose caucuses were less socially and regionally diverse.

17. Narrowly ideological, possibly even extremist, parties have not fared well under FPTP in Canada. Compared with Israel, whose proportional representation electoral system enables any party with as little as 1.5 percent of the total vote to gain a seat in the Knesset, Canada's FPTP electoral system makes it all but impossible for fringe or extremist parties to elect members to the Commons. The rare exceptions occur when support is sufficiently concentrated to elect a fringe candidate, as was the case with Labour-Progressive (Communist) candidate Fred Rose who was twice elected to the Commons in the 1940s from a Montréal seat.

18. FPTP is based on geographically-bounded constituencies each electing a single member, an advantage that is also claimed on behalf of AV and TR. This establishes an obvious, easily understood link between the constituents of a district and "their" MP and stands in contrast to the more complex representational relationships that result from proportional electoral schemes in multi-member districts. Proportionate systems are faulted for blurring, or even removing entirely, as in the case of Israel, the direct lines of representation that flow naturally from geographically-defined identities.

19. Voters in an FPTP constituency are afforded the opportunity of ignoring the candidates running on a party label and voting for an independent candidate. It is rare in Canada for an independent to be elected, but not without precedent as John Nunziata's win in 1997 demonstrated. In party list proportional systems there is virtually no chance for an independent candidate to win.

20. A government's responsibility and accountability to the voters at election time is directly established under FPTP. The system guarantees that each voter gets to cast only one "X" in a single-member district – either for or against the government. When the government has been composed (as has almost always been the case in Canada) of one party, it is relatively easy for electors to give credit or to assign blame when they do not have to weigh the competing claims of a number of parties making up a governing coalition. The familiar opposition parties' cry at election time of "Throw the rascals out" is easier to accomplish when there is only one set of rascals and the electorate readily understands who they are.

Disadvantages

21. In Canada, the principal and most telling criticism levelled against FPTP is its demonstrated tendency to convert the popular vote into parliamentary seats in a seemingly arbitrary and often unfair manner. From the beginning of the movement away from the classic two-party system at the end of the First World War to the present, Canadian history contains many examples to support that criticism. Charges of "unfairness" in converting votes into seats have been levelled at Canada's FPTP system for at least three reasons.

22. First, a party forming a majority government has rarely been elected with the support of a majority of the popular vote. In only three of the 23 elections since 1921 (1940, 1958, and 1984) has a party won a majority of the seats and been supported by a majority of the voters. The lowest level of popular support to translate into a majority government came in 1997 when the Liberals won 51.5 percent of the seats with 38.5 percent of the vote.

23. Second, a party forming a government may have received a smaller share of the popular vote but nonetheless have won more seats than its principal competing party. This has happened three times since Confederation: 1957, 1962, and 1979. An added twist to this criticism came in 1925 when the Liberal government continued in office in spite of having won both fewer seats and fewer votes than the Progressive Conservatives in the election that year.

24. Third, a party winning at least as much if not more of the popular vote than another party may well end up with fewer seats in the Commons. Again, the 1997 election serves to illustrate the point. The Reform Party of Canada and the Progressive Conservatives were less than one percentage point apart in their total vote (19.4 percent to 18.8 percent respectively), but Reform elected 40 more MPs than the Progressive Conservatives. The Bloc Québécois elected twice as many members as the New Democratic Party (N.D.P.), but with fewer votes (10.7 percent to 11.0 percent). Of the five parties electing MPs, the Progressive Conservatives won the smallest number of seats in the House in spite of the fact that they gained a larger share of the total popular vote than either the Bloc Québécois or the N.D.P.

25. Judged from the perspective of majoritarian democratic theory these three points illustrate a perverse tendency of the FPTP system as it has worked in Canada. In converting votes into seats, FPTP can reward regionally strong parties, penalize nationally weak ones, and discriminate against some but not all parties by denying them their "fair" share of seats. Major national and strong regional parties tend to be the principal beneficiaries of the system. All other parties pay an electoral cost by having either too diffuse a support base nationally or too little in the way of regionally concentrated support.

26. Electors who supported an unsuccessful candidate in an FPTP constituency may sense after the election that because they backed a loser they are somehow "unrepresented." Magnified many times, that representational frustration on the part of large numbers of voters in a region could contribute to cynicism about or loss of interest in the political system generally. In turn this could contribute to lessened participation in political affairs and to lower voter turnout.

27. The picture painted of a party's support by the number and location of seats it has won is often a misleading and inaccurate portrayal of the actual level of electoral support that it received.

The results from the 1997 election would suggest that because Reform elected no members from Ontario it had gained little support there, whereas the fact is that almost one of every five Ontario voters supported the party. The Liberals were supported by one-quarter of Saskatchewan's voters, but elected only one of its 14 members. Once in the Commons, a party with few or no MPs from a region may find it difficult to support or to understand policies or initiatives that are deemed to be of critical importance to that area of the country from which they have no members. The unrepresentativeness of party caucuses is seen as a contributor to inter-regional frictions in Canada.

28. Changes in party support from one election to the next are often magnified by FPTP as the seat results present a distorted picture of the degree to which electoral support has changed. The Progressive Conservatives' drop in seats from 169 in 1988 to two in 1993 was far greater than their loss of popular vote, which fell from 43 percent in the first election to 16 percent in the second.

29. The FPTP's tendency to produce single-party majority governments may be seen by some to be an advantage. To others that is a drawback of the system. Favouring a coalition government that includes representatives from two or more parties, they argue that a multi-party government represents a larger cross-section of society and forces compromise among more regionally, linguistically, or culturally uniform parties.

30. FPTP does not take a voter's preference orderings into account. In the extreme, the limitation imposed on the voter of casting a single "X" can lead to perverse results. It can be demonstrated, for example, that a constituency's least preferred candidate may be elected because the preference ordering of voters is not taken into account and the voter is limited to a single choice. Assume 13 voters and three candidates:

    5 voters have the preference ordering A B C
    4 voters have the preference ordering B C A
    4 voters have the preference ordering C B A

    FPTP elects A even though 8 of the 13 voters prefer B to A and 8 of the 13 prefer C to A.

31. Women and Aboriginals have never gained seats in the House of Commons commensurate with their share of the total Canadian population. Although the 1997 election saw the election of a record 62 women MPs, and although at 20.6 percent of the total membership this figure represented the highest percentage of women elected in any country using FPTP, it nonetheless falls far short of equal gender representation in the House. The same is true of Aboriginal Canadians. Their share of the total population is approximately three percent but in the 1997 election, in which they elected a record five members, they captured only 1.7 percent of the seats in the House.

32. The explanation for the numerically poor showing of women and Aboriginals is a complex mixture of social, cultural, and political factors. Both groups were late in getting the franchise and the right to run for public office: 1920 in the case of women, 1950 for the Inuit, and 1960 for status Indians. Although changes have been made in recent years, party structures at the federal, provincial, and local levels have in the past remained overwhelmingly the preserve of white males. This, in turn, has affected negatively the party's capacity and/or willingness to recruit female and native candidates for public office. Women and Aboriginals have fared far

less well in gaining party nominations than non-Aboriginal males and, accordingly, have been under-represented on the ballots. When they have been nominated, members of both groups, but particularly women, often had to run in seats that are from their party's standpoint more difficult, if not impossible, to win.

33. FPTP has contributed to the problem by limiting the entry point for women and Aboriginals (or anyone else who wishes to run for office) to a single nomination per party per constituency. Without that nomination and party endorsement women and Aboriginals cannot be elected. Their only alternative under FPTP would be to run as candidates of newly created, possibly special interest, parties or as independents. As very few new parties or independent candidates make it to Parliament that can hardly be considered a realistic choice. The weakness of FPTP on this point is apparent when its record is compared with that of proportional electoral schemes in other parts of the world. Proportional systems based on party lists are generally considered to offer incentives for parties to construct socially diverse lists in order to maximize the likelihood of gaining the electoral support of a wide cross-section of the electorate. Women and minority candidates are typically placed well up on a party's list in a proportionate scheme. In such systems they stand a better chance of being elected than under FPTP where, if nominated at all, they would be more likely to run in an "unwinnable" seat.

34. Some comparative references bear out the argument about the differences between FPTP and more proportionate schemes, although it must be borne in mind that not all of the differences between Canada's FPTP and other countries' proportional schemes can be attributed to the electoral institutions themselves. Again cultural norms play a significant part in explaining differences. These would include affirmative action programs (either state-mandated or in a party's constitution) to ensure the nomination of women or racial minorities as well as guaranteed seats for native representatives. In the most recent elections in Germany and the Scandinavian countries, all of which use either party-list or mixed-member proportional schemes, female candidates won an average of 36.5 percent of the parliamentary seats, or almost 75 percent more than they did under FPTP in Canada in 1997. New Zealand, which in the last decade has switched from FPTP to a mixed-member proportional system and has continued to set aside four seats specifically for its Maori population, has seen both its female and its native representation increase under the new system. In the New Zealand election of 1996, 35 (a record) of the 120 MPs chosen were women and 15 (also a record, and roughly representative of their share of New Zealand's population) were Maori.

Alternative Vote (AV)

35. The alternative vote (or "preferential vote" as it is sometimes called) is a rarely used electoral system. As of 1997 only two countries elected their parliamentarians through AV – Australia (House of Representatives) and, in a somewhat different form, Nauru. In this system voters are required to rank their preferences numerically on the ballot paper. The person elected is the candidate gaining a majority of the valid votes cast. If no one receives a clear majority based on the first preferences, the candidate with the fewest first preferences is dropped and that candidate's second preferences are distributed among the remaining candidates on the ballot.

The process continues until one candidate eventually receives a majority of the original+transferred votes.

Advantages

36. AV ensures a "majority" winner. This may not come on the initial count of ballots, but, with the gradual transfer of preferences, a "manufactured majority" is eventually created. A majority winner is seen as having won that position through a greater measure of electoral consent. The electoral system is less likely to be faulted than FPTP for having "unfairly" converted votes into seats.

37. The system allows for the full expression of a voter's preference ranking among the candidates nominated and does not restrict the voter to a single choice.

38. With the gradual elimination of candidates from a ballot, the votes of several aligned candidates could eventually accumulate to the point of enabling one of them to win. This strategy might enable, for example, the Progressive Conservative and Reform parties to work out an arrangement for sequential ordering of votes from their supporters in various ridings, thereby enhancing the likelihood of one or the other winning in seats that neither could expect to win on its own under FPTP. Prior to the election, this sort of arrangement could lead to what the Australians call "preference swapping" between parties.

39. AV is based on single-member, territorially bounded districts. As with FPTP this makes for clear lines of representation, responsibility, and accountability.

40. Based on the experience of Australia, reasonably centrist and moderate parties can expect to form a majority government (either singly or in close alliance with a long-time coalition partner) under AV. Extremist or narrowly sectarian parties or candidates could expect to fare no better under AV than under FPTP.

Disadvantages

41. For some voters a rank-ordered selection may not be as easy to make as one requiring a single "X." As a preference ordering of possibly as many as 10 candidates or so must be completed on the ballot for it to be considered valid, some voters may be deterred from exercising their franchise. In Australia approximately 3.8 percent of the ballots were rejected in the 1998 election. This compared with 1.4 percent in Canada the year before. But voter turnout was nearly 30 percent higher in Australia than in Canada, 95 percent compared with 67 percent. This marked difference in turnout primarily reflects the fact that, unlike Canada, Australia has a compulsory vote. At least a portion of the rejected ballots can safely be assumed to have been cast by disgruntled voters forced to perform a civic duty they would rather ignore.

42. AV may be superior to FPTP in ensuring a majority winner, but it can also eliminate the most preferred choice. Assume 21 voters and 3 candidates:

    8 voters have the preference ordering A C B

8 voters have the preference ordering B C A
5 voters have the preference ordering C A B

AV eliminates C and elects A even though C is the most preferred candidate, having being chosen over both A and B by 13 votes to 21.

43. Although AV operates in single-member districts, it can still produce regional and national results with high levels of disproportionality. As with FPTP, large national parties stand to do well. So do strong regional ones with concentrated pockets of support.

44. It is difficult to see how women, Aboriginals, or members of ethnocultural minorities that have traditionally not fared well under FPTP would do any better under an AV system. The same basic difficulty would remain, that is of relying on a nominating process which is itself reflective of a larger problem of the political culture. It is conceivable that voters in sufficient numbers would consciously rank their preferences so that more women or Aboriginals or minorities got elected under AV than under FPTP. If that were the case, a change at the social and cultural level would have taken place which could as easily have happened under FPTP as under AV.

45. A comparison of Australia's and Canada's recent elections points to very little difference in the share of female candidates elected under AV and the share elected under FPTP. In fact the data suggest that FPTP may not, as is commonly asserted, be the most discriminatory electoral system against female candidates. In Australia in 1998, females accounted for 27.0 percent of all candidates and 22.3 percent of the 148 members elected, for a ratio of females elected to nominated of 82.6. In Canada in 1997, females accounted for 24.4 percent of all candidates and 20.6 percent of the 301 members elected, for a ratio of females elected to nominated of 84.4. The difference between these two figures is so slight that it is difficult to generalize a firm conclusion, except to note that if in Australia females had been nominated to exactly the same share of parliamentary candidatures as in Canada (24.4 percent) they could have expected to fare less well in the election than they in fact did. Their ratio would have been 79.8, or 2.8 less than was actually achieved. In other words, for the share of women elected in Australia under AV to at least equal that of Canada under FPTP, the portion of the total candidate pool made up of women would have had to be larger in Australia than in Canada.

46. Moreover, it should also be noted that in Australia in 1998 AV actually *reduced* the number of females elected from what it would have been under FPTP. More women who led with a plurality on the first ballot (and who, with FPTP, would have been elected) were defeated after the preferences had been distributed than were eventually chosen through the transfer of preference orderings.

Block Vote (BV)

47. The block vote is often described as a variant of the FPTP electoral system in multi-member districts. In 1997, 13 countries, the majority being in Asia and the Middle East, used BV. Electors are given as many votes as there are seats to be filled, and in most systems the elector is entitled to vote for individual candidates regardless of their party affiliation. Electors are free to use as many or as few votes as they wish. A variation of BV, called the *Party Block*

Vote (PBV), permits the elector to cast only one vote for a party list of candidates in a multi-member district, with the party receiving the largest number of votes (a clear majority is not a requirement) electing all the members from that district.

Advantages

48. BV permits electors to choose among individual candidates and to cast up to an assigned maximum number an "X" for those candidates of their choosing.

49. BV is simple to use and requires no preferential ordering of candidates. It would be familiar to Canadians who live in cities in which multi-member municipal councils and school boards are elected on an "at large" rather than a ward system, as well as to members of volunteer and professional associations or corporations whose boards are chosen by allowing the members or shareholders to cast "up to" a certain number of votes in an election.

50. In the PBV variant, voters are usually given one vote to cast for party lists of candidates to be elected in the multi-member district. The parties, in turn, may try to "balance" their lists to include individuals from important social or ethnic groups that might otherwise go unrepresented. In Canada, such party lists could be constructed to include women, Aboriginals, and members of ethnocultural minority groups.

51. The number of electoral districts would be smaller than at present and, in theory, the work and cost of periodic electoral boundary readjustments would be reduced.

Disadvantages

52. Whatever advantages might have been achieved with fewer and larger districts would be more than offset by the fact that the physical size of the districts would be bigger than they now are and the direct links between constituents and "their" MP less apparent than under FPTP. The lines of government responsibility and accountability would also be less easy to determine.

53. Experience in some countries using the BV demonstrates that it can produce "super-majoritarian" results where one party can win virtually all the seats in a parliament without having won much more (possibly even less) than a simple majority of the votes cast. This leaves the parliament with little or nothing in the way of an effective opposition, and is familiar to Canadians as one of the perversities of FPTP in some provincial legislative elections in recent years.

54. In its own way, BV can be as "unfair" as FPTP. When electors cast all their votes for members of a single party, BV simply repeats the disproportionality feature of FPTP in converting votes into seats. A party's electoral success in different regions of Canada and the electoral success of women, Aboriginals, and members of ethnocultural minority groups could not be assured of being different under BV from what they are under FPTP.

55. Just as “FPTP” is a misnomer as there is no “post” for candidates to surpass, so BV technically should not be labeled a variant of the FPTP system. At best, it is “nPTP,” where “n” stands for the number of candidates being elected. In a three-member district using BV, for example, the person coming third, not “first” is elected. There is no guarantee of proportionality (converting votes into seats) in BV, nor is there any guarantee that the most preferred candidate(s) would get elected.

Limited Vote (LV)

56. The limited vote is a rarely used electoral system. The majority of senators elected to the upper house in Spain are chosen through the LV system. That is the only current example of LV. As an electoral system, LV can be placed somewhere between the block vote and the single non-transferable vote, the latter having been used in Japan between 1948 and 1993. Constructed on the basis of multi-member districts, LV enables the candidates winning the largest number of seats to be elected. The voters are given more than one vote but fewer than the number of members to be elected in the district.

Advantages

57. As a variant of the block vote, the LV has properties similar to those of the BV. Its principal difference derives from its potential to enable a greater measure of minority representation to take place though the strategic deployment of votes.

58. LV is also credited with producing relatively more proportional results, i.e., the number of seats won by a party is closer to its share of the popular vote than it would have been under FPTP.

Disadvantages

59. LV does not guarantee proportionality of results or the election of minorities. Small parties may not win any seats unless they enjoy highly concentrated pockets of support, and then they may win disproportionally more than a more popular national party whose support has been widely dispersed.

60. LV encourages parties to appeal to their core vote in order to win seats rather than to make broader, more accommodative appeals to a broad mix of voters.

61. Party strategy for election campaigning needs to be carefully decided and deployed under LV, particularly with respect to determining the number of candidates to run in each district and instructing voters on how to allocate their votes in such a way as to maximize a party’s seat-winning potential. LV can disadvantage larger parties that misjudge electoral strategy. They must be careful to nominate no more candidates than an equal distribution of their electoral support can manage to elect within each district. Ideally a party should calculate the threshold

it needs to elect a member. It cannot afford to misjudge and nominate more candidates than its level of support would elect or too few candidates so that their "surplus" and non-transferable votes become wasted.

62. LV would offer no guarantee of better electoral success for women, Aboriginals, or ethnocultural minorities unless parties were to make a concerted effort to pick the right number and socio-demographic mix of candidates per seat and to instruct their supporters on the most strategic deployment of their votes. As with other plurality-majority systems, that is as much a function of the political culture as the electoral system. Spain's limited success in getting women elected to its Senate (women were elected to 13.2 percent of the 257 upper house seats in 1996) under LV suggests an inability or an unwillingness on the part of its parties to employ broadly inclusive representational strategies.

Two-Round (TR)

63. The two-round (TR) electoral system is also known as a "run-off" or "double-ballot" system. Any candidate gaining at least a clear majority of the valid votes cast on the first ballot wins. If no one receives a majority on the first round of voting, all but the leading candidates are eliminated and a second round of voting takes place. The most common form of the second ballot system requires a majority run-off on the second ballot between the top two candidates from the first round of voting. In some variants of TR, all candidates receiving at least a certain percentage of the votes on the first round are entitled to run on the second ballot. When more than two candidates compete on the second ballot, a simple plurality of the vote is all that is needed to win. Details vary from one TR system to another, but for elections to France's National Assembly candidates receiving 12.5 percent of the first ballot vote can run in the second round. As several candidates may compete on the second ballot and as a simple plurality of the vote is all that is needed to win, France's system can best be described as a plurality-vote variant of a majority system. After FPTP and List PR, two-round elections are the third most commonly used system in the world.

Advantages

64. If the run-off election is between two candidates, TR produces majority winners. This increases the perceived legitimacy of the eventual winner and ensures that the members elected have received the backing of an electoral majority in their respective districts.

65. The single-member-district relationship between constituent and elected member is retained, as is the greater sense of government responsibility and accountability that comes from a clearly established representational link.

66. TR encourages the creation of coalitions (either personal or party) among candidates between the two rounds of voting. This can be seen in a favourable light in that it encourages a measure of inter-party or inter-candidate bargaining and trade-offs. These can be healthy in socially and ethnically diverse communities, can encourage a measure of openness to public scrutiny of inter-elite bargaining, and can help to accommodate inter-regional tensions or rivalries.

67. Majoritarian run-off elections tend to discriminate against extremist ("anti-system") parties and in favour of parties that are more willing to accommodate differences in their search to construct winning coalitions.

68. TR opens up more strategic possibilities than FPTP for both voters and parties. It permits electors to express their true preference on the first ballot, change their minds (if need be) between ballots, or to cast (should they so wish) strategic votes on both ballots. A two- or three-week interval between two votes enables parties to pursue mutually beneficial coalition-building strategies through policy and organizational trade-offs.

69. TR would not be entirely foreign to Canadians. In a somewhat different form, TR has become familiar to Canadians who have watched or taken part in national or provincial party leadership conventions. The gradual elimination or withdrawal of candidates from successive consecutive ballots ensures that a party eventually ends up with a leader backed on the final ballot by a majority of the delegates.

Disadvantages

70. TR voting places burdens on the political system that are not present in any single vote electoral system. The cost of operating two rounds of voting increases significantly for party organizations and electoral administrations. The additional burden placed on the electorate, in such respects as becoming informed of inter-ballot developments, considering further (possibly unexpected) alternatives, and generally getting interested enough to cast a second vote, helps to explain the often sizable drop-off in turnout that can occur between the two elections.

71. Depending upon the outcome of the first round and the varieties of strategies parties employ in their respective searches for coalition partners, the political and economic systems could go through a period of uncertainty and instability.

72. Depending upon the variety of TR used, the system does not ensure the distribution of votes into seats in any more proportionate ratio than other plurality-majority systems. TR in France has been faulted with producing the most disproportional results of any Western democratic system.

73. TR may produce a majority winner, but there is no certainty that the most preferred candidate on the first ballot will even make it onto the ballot for the second round. A repeat of the hypothetical situation explained under AV could as well take place under TR, with the elimination of "C" on that ballot even though "C" was strictly speaking the most preferred candidate.

74. Party coalitions that form for the purpose of winning the second ballot in a TR electoral system are not necessarily going to last once elected to the parliament. Electoral coalitions may turn out to be politically unstable governing coalitions, their collapse necessitating more frequent elections than would normally be expected to take place under FPTP.

75. TR, like other plurality-majority systems, allows as much or as little social diversity as parties wish to encourage or establish at the level of district nominations. There is nothing specific in TR as an electoral system that suggests that in Canada a party would attempt to construct a more representative socio-demographic corpus of candidates than it would under FPTP. Under TR, women in France have not fared as well in getting elected as have women in Canada under FPTP. In the French election of 1997 women were elected to 10.9 percent of the seats in the National Assembly, whereas in the Canadian federal election that year women won nearly twice that share of seats, 20.6 percent.

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76. This examination of five plurality-majority electoral systems makes it clear that none of them is perfect. Each has its own properties, its own strengths, and its own weaknesses. Because each establishes the framework within which periodic elections are contested, there is an established linkage between the electoral system and the party system that operates within it. In a regionally and linguistically diverse country such as Canada, with more than two political parties competing for office nationally and a strong sense of regional identification on the part of many voters, the major parties have generally aimed at accommodating rather than exacerbating regional and linguistic differences. Changing cultural norms have now added women, Aboriginals, and ethnocultural minorities to the list of those who expect to be fully included in the representational system. It is within that context that consideration of any alternative electoral system to the present one takes place, weighing in the balance the respective capacities of the various electoral systems to ensure continued inter-regional and inter-linguistic accommodation and to enable those who have previously been outsiders in the electoral system to become full participants.