

September 2007

Welcome back to another hectic school year! The Interim Plus enters its 7th year of helping educators with learning resources on life issues.

The formation of citizens is an important goal of education. This inevitably touches on the future citizens' understanding of and appreciation of their own democratic practices and traditions, so vital to a free society.

Part 1 deals with the nature and purpose of government and the implications of proportional representation as an electoral reform measure. The second part concentrates on the October 10 Ontario provincial election: issues of the campaign, coverage by the media, and activities for involving students in the political process.

Part 1

Proportional Representation

There is general agreement that the end of government is to provide peace, order and justice, and to promote the common good. To what ends and with what effect a government's power is used depends on those who exercise the power. Usually the governed want to have a direct say about who should do the governing. In a democracy, the people express their will through an electoral system. An important goal of any electoral system is to confer legitimacy on those exercising the power of government.

Political observers have noted declining voter interest, judging from the continued erosion of the number and percentage of participating voters. Most of the smaller parties complain that the electoral system is stacked against them and is not truly democratic in practice. There is a perception that the real intentions of the voters somehow are not being respected and this results in a political malaise.

Does our existing electoral system permit or even encourage responsible voting? There are many pundits and political operatives who would answer in the negative because the two aspects of responsible voting, namely, selecting a platform for governance of the country, and holding governments accountable are poorly addressed. Critics believe that there is room for improvement in our electoral system.

One current proposal for electoral reform is proportional representation. Since it has been placed on a separate ballot in the upcoming Ontario provincial election, it is opportune to consider the arguments for and against proportional representation. Is it a reform instrument or does it constitute a dangerous and unwarranted experiment to fix what does not need fixing?

Canada's system of Government

Canada is a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary representative system of government. There is one Parliament for the whole country, composed of 308 electoral constituencies known as ridings. To some extent the ridings are based on geography and population; for example, the province of Ontario with a population of just over 12 million has 106 ridings or seats apportioned to it, while Saskatchewan with a population of little more than one million has 14 seats in the House of Commons, the elected lower chamber of Parliament. Some argue that even at this stage there is an element of inequality in representation and in the relative weight of the individual vote. It takes an average of 113, 207 voters to elect one MP in an Ontario riding, while only 71,428 on the average is needed for the same purpose in Saskatchewan.

The Prime Minister is the leader of the political party that obtains the majority of the parliamentary seats or ridings as a result of a national election. The leader of that winning party is invited to form a "government", that is, to choose a Cabinet to run the affairs of state and to be held responsible by the House of Commons, all of whose members must stand for election in order to serve in that chamber.



In Canada people have the right to organize themselves for political purposes. The formal organizations are referred to as political parties, composed of like-minded people working to promote their vision of society by implementing their policies. Political parties compete for

the privilege of governing (both at the federal and provincial levels). The party that wins the greatest number of seats gets to form the government.

On the appointed day each of the 308 ridings conducts its own mini election to decide who will represent the riding in the national Parliament. There may be multiple candidates running for that privilege, each representing a political party or even running as an independent. The candidate that receives a simple plurality of the votes in the riding is declared the winner, even if the plurality is not necessarily a majority. This type of result could occur in every one of the 308 ridings. In theory, a political party could receive but 37% of the popular votes cast and still form a majority government. In fact, this has happened on numerous occasions in both federal and provincial elections. Conversely, a political party could receive 27% of the total votes cast and not have even one elected representative in parliament.

Is there a problem with the current system?

The answer depends on one's view as to the purpose of elections. Here are two distinct points of view:

View A

An election should give representation to the range of opinions in the electorate. Give them a forum to debate and refine policies for the common good.

This view emphasizes the integrating purpose of elections. According to this view elections are conducted for the exchange of opinions and the results should reflect the complete range of opinions that were expressed by all voters. If it means that several parties have to cooperate to get things done so much the better.

View B

The goal of an election is to give one group the power to rule, give them a clear mandate to resolve necessary choices. We could call this the dominance purpose of

an election. According to this view the election is held in order to resolve the claims of two or more competing views of the nation or of the world itself. People are asked to make a choice between competing philosophies, ideologies, policies and platforms. There are winners and losers among the parties and the candidates.

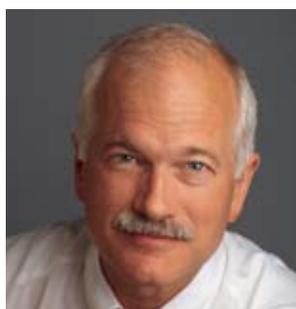
Many observers subscribe to the approach expressed in **View A** and they conclude that our **First Past the Post** system is unfair, demoralizing, wasteful, and ineffective. They lament the declining voter turnout and the skewed results. They assign blame to the First Past the Post electoral system that permits a candidate to win a riding without not necessarily obtaining a majority of the votes cast. The following examples from the January 2006 federal election clearly illustrate this point:

Riding	NDP	CONS	LIB	GREEN	BLOC OTHER	% Popular Vote
Parry Sound-Muskoka	5472	18513	18485		3701	40%
Winnipeg South	5743	17328	17217	1289	259	41%
West Nova	8511	17223	17734	1049	681	39%
Thunder Bay-Superior North	13575	8575	13983	2241	487	36%
St. Catharines	11849	21668	21424	2306	599	37%
Louis Hebert	5351	20332	8852	2517	21813	34%

In each of these selected ridings the winning candidate received a winning plurality but not a majority, for example 41% in Winnipeg South and only 34% in Louis Hebert riding, the winner only received 34% of the votes cast.

Moreover, this kind of result can be repeated regionally or provincially. The chart on page 3 shows that the

Conservatives got 65% of the popular vote in Alberta, but 100% of the seats; the Liberals received 40% of the popular vote in Ontario but got 51% of the seats; the Bloc Quebecois got 42% of the popular vote in Quebec but 68% of the seats in that province; the NDP received 24% of the popular vote in Saskatchewan but got no seats whatsoever. The value of votes is not weighted the same across the country.



Party name		BC	AB	SK	MB	ON	QC	NB	NS	PE	NL	NU	NT	YT	Total
 Conservative	Seats:	17	28	12	8	40	10	3	3	-	3	-	-	-	124
	Vote:	37.3	65.0	48.9	42.8	35.1	24.6	35.7	29.69	33.4	42.67	29.6	19.8	23.67	36.25
 Liberal	Seats:	9	-	2	3	54	13	6	6	4	4	1	-	1	103
	Vote:	27.6	15.3	22.4	26.0	39.9	20.7	39.2	37.15	52.5	42.82	39.1	34.9	48.52	30.2
 Bloc Québécois	Seats:						51								51
	Vote:						42.1								10.5
 New Democrat	Seats:	10	-	-	3	12	-	1	2	-	-	-	1	-	29
	Vote:	28.6	11.6	24.0	25.4	19.4	7.5	21.9	29.84	9.6	13.58	17.6	42.1	23.85	17.5
 Independent / No affiliation	Seats:						1								1
	Vote:						0.9								0.1
 Green	Vote:	5.3	6.5	3.2	3.9	4.7	4.0	2.4	2.6	3.9	0.9	5.9	2.1	4.0	4.5
Total seats:		36	28	14	14	106	75	10	11	4	7	1	1	1	308

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_federal_election,_2006#10_closest_ridings

<http://www.canada.com/montrealgazette/news/story.html?id=c9998b1a-e226-4c34-a477-678078129153>

(Jan Ravensbergen, *The Gazette*, Monday, April 02, 2007)

<http://www.canada.com/nationalpost/news/issuesideas/story.html?id=7851d0f0-ba41-4b6e-9fa6-9d1cc94e0a66>

Gerald Owen, *National Post*, Friday, April 20, 2007

Questions

1. What should be the main purposes of government?
2. Why is there increasing interest in Proportional Representation as a reform measure?
3. How important is it that the number of seats reflects closely the percentage of the popular vote gained respectively by the political parties?
4. Which view of elections makes more sense to you and why?
5. How does VIEW A support the case for PR?
6. How does VIEW B support the present system in operation?
7. Assess the results of the 2006 election vis a vis the number of seats gained versus the popular vote received.
8. Which party seems to have fared the best on this basis?
9. Which party did the worst on this basis?
10. How would PR have impacted the results?
11. What factors determine the voter turnout in elections? Weather? Issues? Leaders? Policies?

How Does PR Work?

Some argue that the above situation could be improved upon by introducing a practice known as proportional representation (PR). What is PR and how does it work? In its simplest form, if a party receives 40% of the popular vote in a nation or province, that party receives approximately 40% of the seats (not 50% or 60%). If another party wins 20% of the vote, that party gains 20% of the seats (not 10% or 0%). The number of seats in parliament or legislature would reflect that party's "proportion" of the popular vote in the electoral district.

Most nations today have some system of proportional representation. Some nations are divided into large electoral districts or ridings that have more than one representative elected. For example, Ireland uses districts typically with just 3 to 5 representatives. In Belgium, districts vary in size from 5 to 48 representatives. The Netherlands, of similar size as Belgium, treats the entire nation as one big district with 150 MPs.

Under PR when elections are held, each party publishes a list of candidates. Based on the percentage of votes received by a party in a particular region, a certain percentage of candidates from each party's list win seats.

Germany is an example of the mixed system. On election day, the German voter casts two votes. Each vote determines how half the seats are filled. One vote is for a riding MP, who is elected the same way we fill seats in Canada (whichever riding candidate wins the most votes wins the local seat). The second vote is cast for a party. Based on the percentage of support for each party, the remaining seats in parliament are "topped up" by party list candidates to ensure that the overall composition of Parliament reflects the preferences of all voters.

In Ontario the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform has recommended a Mixed Member Proportional electoral reform along the lines of the German model. This would mean that there would be an increase in the number of

legislature seats, going from the present 106 up to 129. Of this total, 90 seats would be decided according to the old system of First Past the Post (FPP), and the other 39 seats would be province-wide seats to be apportioned to the parties according to their proportion of the province-wide popular vote. The parties would have created the list from which their particular representatives would be drawn. The party list would reflect an order of preference. **So if a party is allowed 15 seats then the first 15 candidates on its list assume those seats in the parliament.**

Fair Vote Canada, pushing for PR in Canada, believes that fair voting means governments will usually be formed by coalitions of parties, rather than by a single party. With PR, big parties and smaller parties would have to negotiate, compromise and cooperate.



Questions

1. Have students consider election results in nations that have some form of PR.
2. Briefly describe the Israeli, Scottish, and Swedish systems of proportional representation and assess their relative merits, paying particular attention to the political consequences for those nations.
3. If Ontario had used PR in the last election what would the current Ontario legislative assembly look like going into this October election?
4. Who make up FairVote Canada? What is their main goal? How are they financed?

The Perceived Benefits of PR

According to its supporters **Proportional Representation is fairer than First Past the Post** because the latter system all too often results in a party without majority support being able to dominate parliament. Minority parties, e.g. Greens, which win 6% or so of the vote all over the country can fail to win a single seat. But, in PR it is claimed, **every vote will count**, therefore, **more people will vote** because everyone is being represented. In addition, there is **greater representation of women and minority racial groups** in political office through the manipulation of the party lists.

Coalition government is deemed to be a good and rational thing. After all, social interaction is characterized by cooperation and compromise, and politics should be no exception. Governments which are forced to acknowledge a wide range of public opinion are less likely to introduce policies which victimize minorities or ride roughshod over public opinion for ideological reasons. Such government would tend to be more tolerant and inclusive.

The status quo does not respect honest platforms of smaller groups. If the so-called big-tent major parties had

room for all these “minor” or “special” constituencies there would be no need for lots of smaller parties. Perhaps **the current system is corrupt, too wedded to the mere acquisition and retention of political power** without any deep philosophy or abiding principles to guide its policies other than that of getting re-elected.

It is also claimed that **PR results in more engagement in politics by the general public** as every vote counts. In a constituency system many seats are dominated by one party and many people see no point in voting as their ballot will make no significant difference to the local or national result. For example, in a traditionally strong Liberal riding of Toronto votes for other parties are largely wasted, and ditto for strong Conservative ridings in Alberta. PR obviates the waste and results in higher voter turnout, as well as a more politically astute electorate.

The proponents of reform also claim that **PR would result in more respect for parliament**, with every citizen feeling that their vote had counted and that their national assembly truly reflected the nation or province.

Ostensibly, **PR would also attract top-notch candidates for political office**, the kind of experts who are reluctant to engage in the rougher aspects of political contests. **Each party could field a sort of “dream team” reflecting ethnic, gender, regional, economic, cultural considerations as well as professional expertise and competence.** Under proportional representation there is a much wider selection of parties and views. Canada (or Ontario) is so diverse that there is no way that two major political parties can represent the diversity of opinion that exists in Canada (or a big province like Ontario).

Supporters of PR claim that **PR limits the anti-democratic effects of unequal campaign funds as well.** In riding or at-large plurality elections, one party can win each seat if they catch the interest of the swing voters, and **costly TV ads** help to attract these voters. PR is supposed to minimize that. No matter how much money a party spends, it can't win all the votes and all the PR seats. So PR candidates might feel less pressure to raise campaign funds and to serve the donors. Some voting rules such as run-off elections or preferential ballots make candidates seek second as well as first choice votes -- which probably increases the backlash from negative ads because voters committed to the target of the negative ads will decide not to give a high rank to the thrower of the negative mud.

In the Ontario context it is claimed that the **PR double vote gives the best result**, since the voters can opt to support a local candidate as well as the party with whose ideology or platform they agree. For example, a pro-life voter could vote for a pro-life Liberal candidate and for the Family Coalition Party whose platform and policies are clearly pro-life as opposed to the Liberal, or Conservative, or NDP parties that do not have pro-life platforms. The FCP would benefit to the extent that it might win 3-6 seats under the Mixed Member Proportion and thus gain an actual voice in the provincial parliament. The situation may be such that **the 6 seats of the FCP could be the difference in the bal-**

ance of power and thus they could negotiate conditions for their support. That in turn may be an incremental step in raising awareness of the pro-life and pro-family issues, and eventually gaining a practical result like the de-funding of abortion as a start. Even more importantly, once the party got real media exposure through the legislative debates it would have the **potential for more growth in subsequent elections.** There could be a snowballing effect over time.

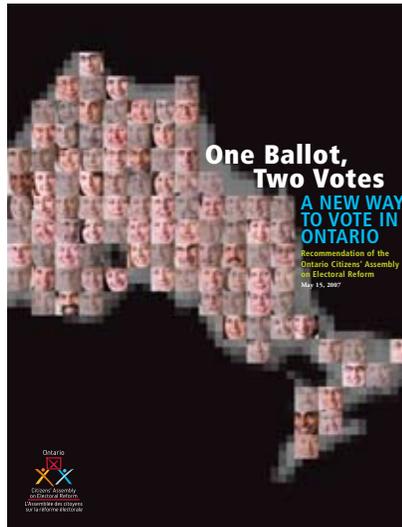
As proof that PR could result in substantial gains and influence for small parties, the proponents of PR point to examples where this has happened recently. In **Norway**, the small Christian People's Party was able to double its popular vote and actually head the government in coalition for two mandates (1997, 2001). Similarly, in the **Netherlands** the Christian Union Party is meeting with some success in introducing pro-family legislation to close down brothels, reduce marijuana shops and getting more socially conservative policies and philosophies debated by the general public. It is felt that comparable opportunities would open up for social conservative parties in Canada and In Ontario.

So all in all **PR would result in cleaner politics, fairer results, better representation of women and minorities, leveling of financial means, more voter turnout, more stability, a pro-life parliamentary voice, and a more effective and rational government.**

Andrew Coyne, among leading journalists, and FairVote Canada, a political reform group, argue that Canada and its provinces would definitely benefit from some form of PR. They see it as a promising reform and that it would more closely mirror the political will of the people. (PR is not just for geeks, Andrew Coyne, *National Post*, Wednesday, April 11, 2007 and also

<http://andrewcoyne.com/columns/2007/04/post-is-wrong-on-pr.php>

for another article plus many comments from readers in response.



Questions

1. Which of the perceived strengths of PR are most important to you?
2. Which of the arguments in favour of PR are most persuasive?
3. Would PR eventually deteriorate into rule by a professional elite all sharing the same “party outlook”?
4. Is political stability more of a probable outcome under PR or under our present system?
5. How would PR affect the amount and type of campaign spending?
6. How would PR help the pro-life movement?
7. Does the evidence in various countries support these claims?
8. Is Canada too large and too complex for PR?
9. Have students debate the relative merits of PR versus the traditional “first past the post” system.

http://accuratedemocracy.com/d_quotes.htm

http://www.phatnav.com/wiki/wiki.phtml?title=Condorcet's_method&printable=yes

http://accuratedemocracy.com/voting_rules.htm

<http://www.aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/es/esd/esd02/esd02d/esd02d01>

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/06/22/AR2007062202015.html>

The Case Against PR

PR's actual performance according to many skeptical opponents does not measure up to the claims outlined above. These critics think that **PR is a bad idea** because contrary to its promise to "mirror the political will of the people", experience shows instead that it **intensifies the dominance of party machines and professional politicians** over the interests and preferences/needs of local constituencies.

PR tends to reduce or **eliminate direct power on the part of the grassroots to influence the nomination and electoral processes**. Presently, when one joins a political party one has certain privileges, chief among them being that of participating in a nomination process for selection of a candidate to represent the party in a specific riding at election time. Furthermore, the party member has the opportunity to help choose a party leader and the opportunity to give input into the party platform through policy conventions. Under PR what would motivate an ordinary person to become involved in politics by joining a political party? Why become embroiled in a process in which one could not play a meaningful role? So rather than increasing voter participation **PR would lead to greater apathy**.

Traditionally, candidates seeking the nomination of a party encourage friends and others to sign up with the local party association. The candidates wage a mini campaign to convince the majority of party members in a riding that they would make the best candidate to represent the party, win the riding and thus help to form a national government. The candidates vying for the party nomination have to present their credentials, their experiences, their personal qualities, competencies, and electoral appeal. They subject themselves to the scrutiny of their peers. In PR this vetting process does not take place by the electorate but rather by party apparatchiks. Under PR the Party List is created by a small group of people who decide who is to go forward to represent the party.

How is this democratic? **PR would constitute a radical change to our political system**, and not for the better. A national slate of **candidates having no direct connection to individual ridings or groups of voters** is almost a perversion of democracy. The national slate of candidates would not be accountable to anyone except the party hierarchy and the "nation" at large. It is tantamount to abdicating responsibility and letting an anonymous group of bureaucrats and pre-selected elites rule. The individual voter would no longer have an M.P. whom he actually knew,

or could call with a problem, or who understood the specific problems of a community. Would there be a need or genuine function for a constituency office with a PR system of Party Lists?

And what of the case of an individual voter who wants to vote according to their conscience on some important issue? That voter wants the M.P. to likewise take into account these moral concerns. The voter, let's say, is pro-life. She wants to vote for a particular candidate whose party however supports a policy of unrestricted abortion. The pro-life candidate sympathizes but quips that he cannot go against the party. So **what choice does this voter really have?**

Proportional representation is dangerous because it would strike at the very heart of democracy by undermining the right of the people to freely participate in the political process at the most basic level. Citizens would lose their right to choose candidates for political office based on personal knowledge and support. For supporters of important over-arching causes like pro-life it would eliminate their capacity to influence that political process at its most sensitive stage – at the grassroots – where all great movements have their source and strength. Ironically, PR would abort political views that the powerful consider too troubling and problematic.

As well, PR is not essential to coalition and or/minority governments. The current system shows how minority government can work to the advantage of the common good. The Canadian experience (including the current Parliament) shows how the traditional FPP system is fully adequate to enable a genuinely ambivalent or uncertain electorate to wait and see, not willing to trust any party with a majority.

A real change of government becomes highly unlikely with PR. Critics are quick to point out that PR produces a game of musical chairs with repeated re-combinations of much the same group of consensus politicians. This seems to be borne out by the Italian, Israeli and Belgian examples among others.

Does PR offer better prospects for a more moral society? Does PR offer pro-life breakthroughs? Has PR actually worked to bring about social peace and harmony where it has been introduced? Strangely, those **nations that have adopted proportional representation make up the vanguard for promoting the most socially permissive and morally bankrupt legislation on the planet, harmful to family and to society in the long run.** Or at the very least such PR nations have done no better than Canada in resisting left-wing progressives of every political stripe. It is feared from a pro-life point of view that PR would actually hurt the pro-life cause because the major parties could ban pro-life candidates from appearing on their party lists.

The website arguing against PR for Ontario lists a number of serious drawbacks based on extra costs, less efficiency, lack of transparency, less accountability at the local level, and perpetual coalition governments in which insignificant minor parties would play a crucial and perhaps decisive role. They ask on their site do you want:



"The inherent problem with proportional representation is that no one's willing to admit they don't know what it is."

17 fewer local ridings, covering more territory, with less contact with your local representative?

39 politicians chosen by other politicians ... not you?

Closed door party deal-making for weeks after elections, to decide who governs the Province?

Tax dollars paying for 22 more politicians and their staff at Queens Park?

A confusing ballot and vote counting system?

A weaker, indecisive Ontario?

Fringe parties holding the balance of power with 2 or 3 seats?

To summarize, according to its critics we ought not to adopt proportional representation because it would shift accountability and responsibility to parties instead of individual representatives; it would virtually eliminate local grassroots influence over the nomination of candidates and actual electoral processes. **Ultimately PR constitutes a power grab by elites at the expense of ordinary people.** Besides, some of the most objectionable aspects of FPP can be addressed through less radical reform measures like:

- Introducing an Australian type of **run-off election** for those ridings where the winning candidate failed to win at least 50% of the votes cast in the riding. The benefits of this practice is that at least it would ensure that each riding had an elected representative who earned the preferential approval of a majority of the voters. This would also permit voters to vote a second time in light of what change they want to see. It might eliminate more of the negative campaigning that occurs now.
- Making voting a **compulsory duty**. This may not ensure a majority win by the winning candidate in a riding, but it would ensure a vaster level of participation on the part of the citizenry. If a citizen enjoys the benefits of good government, then they ought to take at least one active step - vote in all elections - federal, provincial, and municipal.
- **Restricting campaign financing** by individual candidates and by the political parties. This would level the playing field on the part of all parties and candidates. This would permit the rise of new

parties and would at least not discourage people of modest means from presenting themselves for election.

- **Using modern electronic technology** to encourage people to learn about candidates and party policies and to vote electronically. This would make it easier to vote and the number of people actually voting should increase.

On balance, PR does not truly provide remedies for the perceived problems of Canadian democracy judging from the results in those nations that have adopted one or other of the PR approaches. Whereas our system of government has allowed for the organic evolution of government and society. It has helped to produce stability, continuity, productivity and a high standard of living. It has served the needs of Canada very well, if not perfectly.

Questions

1. In what important ways is the “first past the post” system superior to PR?
2. Which parties in Canada might be very reluctant to embrace PR?
3. According to some observers PR would be a “radical” change to our political system. How drastic would it be? Is that kind of change necessary?
4. Defenders of the traditional system cite PR as being dangerous. Why do they conclude that? Are they justified regarding their concerns? Why or why not?
5. Offer a critique of PR based on its perceived denial of the individual voter’s ability to influence elections at the grassroots. Is this a legitimate drawback?

<http://www.dvmen.org/dv-45.htm>

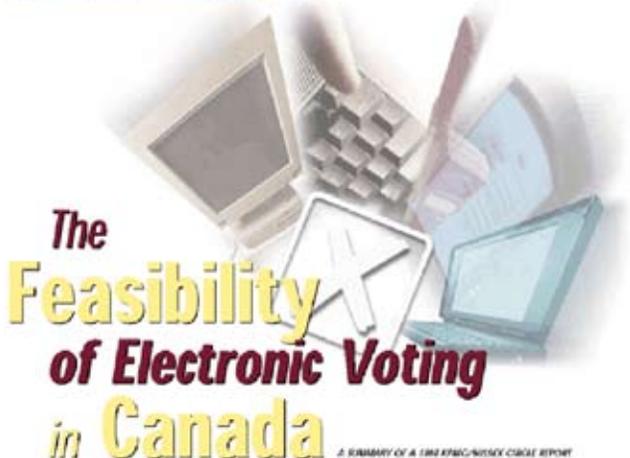
<http://www.nommp.ca/>

Other Comments on PR, For and Against

These comments appeared in various publications and in online blogs in April 2007 (<http://andrewcoyne.com/columns/2007/04/post-is-wrong-on-pr.php>) when the Citizens’ Assembly on Electoral Reform released its recommendations to the people of Ontario regarding the merits of Proportional Representation.

1. *On both counts, PR is rather bad. I can’t vote on the issues, because the actual platforms of the parties are largely determined through a deal-making process that I cannot influence. Secondly, it is difficult to reward success/punish failure when you are dealing with coalitions. Do you punish the leading partner in the coalition? Or pass off failures as a result of the constraints of minority government? With PR you get the party that you want, but not the platform that you want. But isn’t the platform the main reason you vote for a party?*
2. *Why is there need for changing the electoral system? Is the current system failing in participation? failing in outcomes or results?*
3. *Isn’t the iron-fisted party discipline the real culprit or obstacle in the way of fair representative government?*
4. *Why the heck would we want to put party backs in the*

TECHNOLOGY IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS



legislature just because somebody identifies with the leader?

5. That is why the closed list system is objectionable. I would like to see each party put forth 3 candidates nominated in each riding. You vote for the party of your choice and rank the candidates in a preferential ballot. It would encourage MP's to do a good (better) job of representing you because they could lose their seat even as the party wins in a landslide.
6. It is not so much the method of constituting parliament that produces change, but rather, the issues that are courageously put before it. Why can we not make real headway in getting pro-life minded MPs elected in sufficient numbers to end the practice of abortion?
7. Why can we not get a Parliament where party loyalty count less than true moral principles and where party whips are able to cross party lines on issues of principles? Do we have enough Wilburforces who can speak consistently in favour of ridding the nation of abortion?
8. If most people vote on the basis of party why have ridings at all? Why do we need a riding-by-riding legislature? Why not just elect a 9 person executive by popular vote- and dispense with everything else for the sake of efficiency?
9. I can accept that I am in the minority, and if I cared more, it would be my job to bring more people around to my way of thinking – not cry that my vote must always be represented. Even if I didn't vote for the MP, they still have to represent the whole riding – which isn't the case for Parties.
10. PR is a way of distributing representation. FPP is a way of choosing representatives. Solving a perceived problem with the counting of votes by changing the distribution of representation is like replacing the doors of your house because you don't like the windows.
11. If FPP is so bad, why not do what many countries do and simply have run offs amongst the final two candidates in each riding? That way, people who vote for smaller parties won't have "wasted" their vote as they get a second chance to choose what may end up being their least worst option.
12. The run-off puts political brokerage in the hands of the voters, rather than in the hands of a small number of fringe MPs who are directly accountable to no one.
13. The central defect of our political system is that most of our provincial members and MPs in Ottawa perform like sheep, occasionally altering their behaviour to that of chickens. (Richard Gwyn, Toronto Star)
14. Our political system is the least representative in the industrialized world. Our members and MPs don't represent their electors; they represent their parties. They do and say just about whatever their party tells them to... Our political parties aren't really political institutions. They are bureaucratic institutions. They impose discipline and conformity, and what's always called "loyalty," exactly as do bureaucracies. (Richard Gwyn, Toronto Star)



Columnist Andrew Coyne

15. As for the contention by PR advocates that their system encourages voter turnout, there is no proof of this. In the U.K., where the system has been experimented with in some jurisdictions, the Independent Commission to Review Britain's Experience of PR Voting Systems reported earlier this year that "low turnout in all the PR elections held so far contradicts the claims of advocates that PR helps to increase turnout." Portugal, a PR country, has seen its voter turnout drop to 62 per cent from 90 per cent since 1980. Switzerland hasn't seen more than a 50 per cent turnout in 30 years. Just 45 per cent of the electorate voted in the last European Union election. Only in the PR countries with compulsory voting – or those that had compulsory voting that put citizens in the habit of voting – are the turnouts higher. But even there they have been steadily declining in recent years.

16. Perhaps we should simply award the cup to the team that scores the most goals in the series. Calgary, with 14 goals to Tampa Bay's 13 in the last Stanley Cup finals, would, under proportional goal representation, now be the owners of the mug. As it was, that horribly antiquated FPP system delivered the cup to Tampa Bay. How fair is that?

Questions

1. What are some concerns expressed about the political system in general?
2. What are some of the concerns expressed about the shortcomings of PR?
3. What are some alternative reforms mentioned besides PR?
4. Which arguments do you find most appealing and why?

<http://www.canada.com/ottawacitizen/news/city/story.html?id=db75eeb2-5860-4f51-bb59-2cf5b5f80a9b>

(Lee Greenberg, Monday, April 16, 2007 *Ottawa Citizen*)

http://www.westernstandard.ca/website/index.cfm?page=article&article_id=532

(Ric Dolphin, The Whalesong of BC's Electoral Reform, Monday January 3, 2005, *Western Standard*)

<http://www.canada.com/nationalpost/story.html?id=a46316a9-9116-47f8-9c7b-a2f198fd84ff>

(PR is a bad idea, Tuesday, April 17, 2007, *National Post*)

http://www.westernstandard.ca/website/index.cfm?page=article&article_id=2569

(Proportional Confusion, Matthew Stuart, June 4, 2007, *Western Standard*)

<http://www.canada.com/montrealgazette/news/story.html?id=c9998b1a-e226-4c34-a477-678078129153>

Overhaul elections: petition, Jan Ravensbergen, *The Gazette*, Monday, April 02, 2007

<http://www.canada.com/nationalpost/news/issuesideas/story.html?id=7851d0f0-ba41-4b6e-9fa6-9d1cc94e0a66>

In complex nations, PR doesn't work, Gerald Owen, April 20, 2007, *National Post*.

<http://www.canada.com/ottawacitizen/news/city/story.html?id=db75eeb2-5860-4f51-bb59-2cf5b5f80a9b>

Group opens drive for 'real democracy', Ontario votes Oct. 10 on adopting new way to elect MPPs, Tobin Dalrymple, May 25, 2007, *The Ottawa Citizen*

www.nommp.ca website

for a group that opposes Mixed Member Proportional representation for Ontario as currently proposed.

Summary and Review of Questions and Issues Associated with Proportional Representation

1. What is driving the PR reform train?
2. Is PR a panacea for what ails Canadian democracy, a method of making all votes count, a way to empower people?
3. Is it a pragmatic method for renewing general interest in the political process? Would it guarantee diversity of gender/ethnic/regional representation and respect for different views? Is it a way of protecting minority rights? Does PR ensure that everyone's views are expressed and respected?
4. How would PR affect minority parties? How would it affect groups with a special focus or concern like pro-life, environmentalism, cultural /linguistic issues, regional economic disparity, globalization, flat-tax promoters? Would it help the special cause by permitting a specific party (devoted to pro-life principles) to gain seats in parliament or would it spell the death-knell for "narrowly" focused movements?
5. Does PR lead to political paralysis or does it break log-jams? Does it offer a sure recipe for compromise or does it give minority, special interest parties undue influence over the government?
6. Does PR reduce the necessity of big, expensive campaigns or does it exacerbate the problem of campaign financing?
7. Does the constituent lose important influence in the selection of the local candidate when a "party selected list" is the basis of the party's assignation of winning candidates? Is there any control left to the local people to impact the nomination of party nominees? Does the system further concentrate power in un-elected, unaccountable party leaders?



8. Who decides on what the platform of the party is to be? What, if any, input does the general citizenry have in the process at the local level?
9. Would it be an effective and proper way to get more women representatives in Parliament? Should this consideration be a key concern in trying to make the system more reflective of the whole of society?
10. Would PR eventually deteriorate into an oligarchy, rule by a professional elite all sharing the same "party outlook"?
11. In the Ontario proposal the voter would get two votes, one for an individual candidate and another for the party that they prefer which does not have to be that of the candidate receiving their vote.
 - A) Would PR complicate the election results with the double vote system?
 - B) On the other hand, does the double vote constitute a more refined system of voting, if so, how?

12. How does one make a particular representative accountable under PR?
13. How can the ordinary citizen influence the political process at the local level?
14. What factors work against people becoming involved actively in any political process?
15. Do any of these proposals offer real improvement? How? Why?
16. Is the advice of "letting sleeping dogs lie" the best advice when it comes to the Canadian political system after all?

Part II

The Ontario Provincial Election

Voting is an important right and freedom. The ordinary citizens have the opportunity to change governments, sustain policies, or give new direction to their society. That is the conventional wisdom. But are our elections an effective way for people to express their policy options? Who decides the options? Who wages the campaign? What role does the media play? What does it cost to run a campaign? Do "minority parties have a chance to get their platform known? Who decides what the issues ought to be? Who or what decides the issues that get the attention of the electorate? Students can learn much about their society by considering these and related questions.

Activity for Election Studies 1

1. Have each student volunteer to work in the election campaign in some way for the candidate of their choice.
2. They can phone the party headquarters to get the information on the local campaign office.

3. They can take on simple tasks: stuff envelopes; answer the phone; make outgoing calls; put up lawn signs; drive voters to poll booths on election day.
4. Keep a journal on their experiences during the campaign.
5. Interview the local campaign manager about certain aspects of the campaign.
6. Produce a final report on their experience. It might include personal insights. What they found most rewarding. What was most disappointing, if anything. What they found surprising. What new knowledge they gained about the political process. The place of elections within the democratic way of life.

Activity for election studies 2

1. Maintain a journal for the last two weeks of the election campaign
2. Include a summary of the issues as they appear in at least two of the local papers.
3. Watch any of the public debates that involve the party leaders.
4. Attend one public meeting at the local riding level, perhaps an all-candidates meeting.
5. Compare and contrast the major parties and at least two other minor parties' platforms.
6. Listen to at least two hours of talk radio programs to determine how the media treats the issues and whether they take sides.



Election Issues and Strategies

ISSUE	PARTY A	PARTY B	PARTY C	PARTY D	PARTY E	OTHER
Education						
Health Care						
Taxation						
Economy						
Environment						
Cities/Municipalities						
Agriculture						
Life & Family Issues (Abortion, euthanasia, marriage, pornography, etc.)						
Ethics/trust						
Crime/justice						
Roads/Transportation						
Electoral Reform						
Other						

Activity for election studies 3

Some publications take a clear stand on political issues and what is truly in the public interest. A case in point is *Catholic Insight* magazine. In its July-August 2007 edition in anticipation of the October 10 election it took the viewpoint that the traditional parties in Ontario offer no change worthy of support because their policies are morally bankrupt and do not address the fundamental needs of the province. It goes on to endorse a minority party called the Family Coalition Party of Ontario.

http://catholicinsight.com/online/political/article_734.shtml.

Questions and Recommended Activities for Students

1. On what grounds does the magazine advise voters to vote for the FCP?
2. According to the magazine why does Premier Dalton McGuinty and PC leader John Tory not deserve the voters' support?
3. What set of issues does the magazine consider the most important and why?
4. Why do newspaper editorials endorse either a political

- party or a local candidate?
5. Research the editorial policy of the four major Toronto dailies.
 6. Research the editorial stance of your community newspaper regarding the election.
 7. Research the editorial content, if any, of the major Canadian television and radio outlets in your area.
 8. Research political blogs on the internet and assess their relative importance to election coverage.
 9. Do such blogs influence the conduct or result of the election?
 10. Collect and analyse at least five political cartoons that appear during the election campaign:
 - a) What idea, personage, policy is being depicted in the cartoon?
 - b) How has the cartoonist tried to make a point?
 - c) Does the cartoonist succeed in his/her intent?
 - d) Do you agree or disagree with the cartoonist's point of view? Why or why not?

Yahoo Forum for Teachers

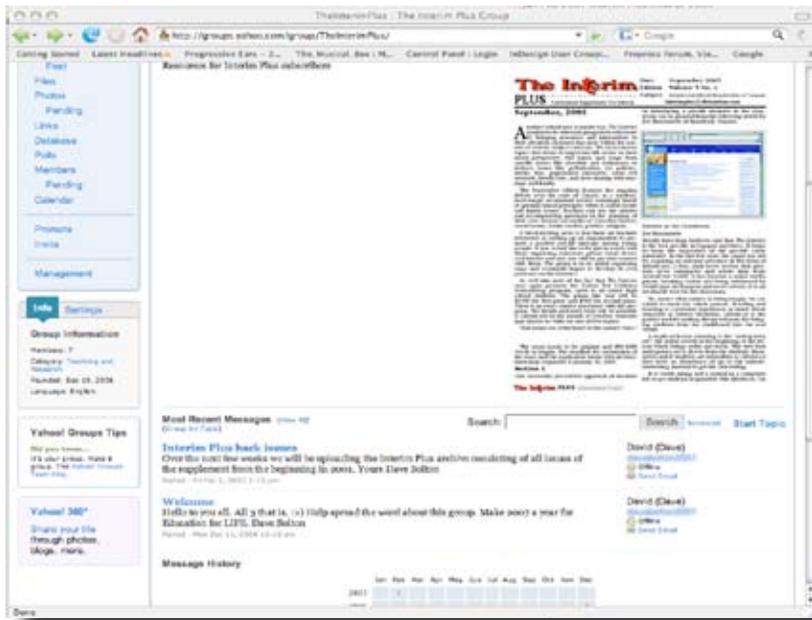
Lastly, we bring to teachers' attention the formation of a yahoo group to serve as a forum for pro-life educators to exchange ideas, views, and communicate their thoughts and teaching strategies on key life issues of the day. You are encouraged to join the group and make your own contributions. This is one simple way to expand the culture of life.

The address is:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/TheInterimPlus/>

Please tell friends and colleagues about this new link for communicating with like minded educators. There is so much to be done and so few to do it, especially when the few do not realize how numerous they actually are because they are not in contact with one another. Nominate friends and fellow teachers. Send this call out to them.

Also, if you have a resource to share we will gladly post it for others to access.



How to join The Interim Plus via the group page:

1. Locate the group (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/TheInterimPlus/>).
2. Click on the Join This Group button on front (home) page, as seen above.
3. If you are not signed in, you will be asked to enter your Yahoo! ID. If you do not have a Yahoo! ID, you can register by clicking on the Sign Up link.
4. Set your membership preferences. When you join, you can choose a profile you would like to display to the group, select the email address at which you would like to receive group messages, choose how you receive group messages, and more.