

Mixed member proportional system

To start off the electoral reform discussion I will look at the Mixed Member Proportional system, or MMP. In this system each voter receives two ballots. One is used to select the local candidate of their choice, while the other is used to select the party of their choice. The ballots selecting the local candidate are tallied up in each riding, and the candidate with the most votes wins. This is the same in our current system, except for the fact that the ridings are bigger. Instead of Hastings-Lennox and Addington, we would probably have the riding of Hastings-Lennox-Addington and Bay of Quinte.

Once the local seats are decided, the ballots which indicate party preference are tallied and the popular support of each party is determined by adding up to a total percentage out of 100. In order to ensure that each party has a number of seats reflective of the popular support they received, there are a designated number of seats distributed in accordance with the percentage of each party. In our Parliament it would probably be about 100 seats.

To give you an idea, let us pretend that instead of 338 seats in the House of Commons, there were 200. Of those, 100 would be designated for ridings and the remaining 100 would be designated to ensure that the popular vote is reflected in the Legislature. Let us say that the Liberals won every single riding, yet only amassed 50 per cent of the popular support. Additionally, the NDP and Conservatives were unable to win a single riding seat, but each amassed 25 per cent of the popular support. This would mean that the remaining 100 seats would be divided evenly between the NDP and Conservatives. Thus, the legislature would be reflective of the popular vote because the liberals would have 50 per cent of the seats, leaving the other two parties with 25 per cent each. Regularly there are more seats and parties to make it so that the equation is more complicated, but in essence the way that the seats are distributed is the same.

This explanation begs the question; who will be selected to sit as members in these non-riding seats? One way is to allow voters to choose their favourite representatives of the party for which they voted. The candidates from each party that receive the highest approval ratings would then be selected to fill these seats.

This concept of "list" seats is probably one of the most controversial aspects of this system. Some support it as voters can elect qualified candidates who would otherwise fail in local ridings. Furthermore, voters of all political stripes throughout the country will most likely have a member that will represent their political interests. On the other hand, critics argue that extended ridings and lack of local affiliation will make it so that MPs will not be as accountable to the electorate.

There is also the issue of conflicting jurisdiction for each elected official. Initially in the Scottish Parliament, the MMP system led to disputes over which Member of Parliament had jurisdiction to handle particular issues thus creating two classes of MP. However, many of these problems could be resolved either through a change in political culture or through modified legislation.

Although MMP is not perfect, its most profound advantage is that it ensures that all voters who support different party stripes are adequately represented in the legislature. In this system, almost all votes cast are taken into consideration leaving all parties accurately represented.

As it stands, it seems difficult to perceive that MMP would be introduced without a hitch. It is not the system endorsed by our current Prime Minister, and there is much opposition over certain aspects, especially the presence of the list selection process.

Nevertheless, implementing MMP would certainly produce a Parliament that better represents Canadian voters and be a marked improvement on our current system.

Jay Fallis