



Electoral Reform - How We Vote

Recommendations from the Broadbent Institute on the 2018 Referendum

Introduction

The Broadbent Institute is Canada's leading progressive, independent organization championing change through the promotion of democracy, equality, and sustainability and the training of a new generation of leaders.

Democratic renewal is a key focus of the Institute. The upcoming referendum on proportional representation (PR) provides a historic opportunity to strengthen our democracy, improve representation, combat the growing alienation people feel from the political process, and renew public faith in our political institutions.

Here are our recommendations as to how to structure the referendum process, to successfully deliver a new voting system to British Columbians in which the composition of elected officials accurately reflects the will of the voters.

Summary of Recommendations

- **The Question:** voters should be offered a simple, clear choice, single question asking whether they would like to move to a proportional representation system
- **The Process:** following a successful vote, an Elections BC led, citizen-driven process should determine specific system for BC
- **The Timeline:** the voting date should occur no later than end of June 2018, so as not to interfere with the municipal elections in October 2018, and to allow sufficient time for Elections BC to determine and implement the new voting system in advance of the next provincial election
- **The Money:** big money should be banned from the referendum; official proponent and opponent groups should be recognized and provided funding



The Question

The referendum should offer voters a clear and simple single question. The question should ask whether or not BC citizens would like to modernize our voting system to a proportional one in which the number of votes cast are reflected in the composition of the Legislature. The question should not reference a specific system, but rather the principle of proportionality. Several fundamental aspects should be outlined and affirmed as binding, to provide assurance and clarity to voters: the majority of MLAs should continue to be constituency-based and rural representation needs to be preserved; citizens should have input into the selection of all MLAs elected; ballot design should be simple and clear; and the transition to and adoption of a new proportional voting system should maintain continuity for citizens whenever possible.

If the referendum yields a positive outcome, a citizen-driven process must follow to determine the specific system that best meets these criteria.

Should the government decide to pursue a two-part question, the second part should affirm and/or prioritize a set of principles, rather than point to specific systems. The social consensus that needs to be built to ensure legitimacy, both of the process and of the new voting system, would be challenging to achieve within the limited framework of a referendum question, as would the ability to design a system that takes into account the geographic and demographic particularities of BC. Thus, we recommend that the specific system is determined after a successful referendum outcome, should the government be given a mandate to adopt a system of proportional representation.

The Process

Following the vote, if the outcome is positive, Elections BC, as an independent and non-partisan Office of the Legislature, should be given the resources and capacity to facilitate a robust process to determine the specific parameters of a PR system for our province, taking into account BC's demographics and geography, and the specific principles outlined in the initial question. This process needs to be citizen-driven, to build the social consensus required

Electoral Reform – How we vote

Recommendations from the Broadbent Institute on the 2018 Referendum



for legitimacy of the eventual electoral system selected. We recommend that the government's stated commitment to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People and to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations should be considered in both the design and unfolding of the process.

After a PR system is determined, we recommend it be put to an all-party vote in the Legislature. Following two electoral cycles, the voting system should be reviewed and refined by Elections BC, and then an additional referendum should be considered so that citizens, having now experienced PR, can vote on whether to continue under the new system.

The Timeline

We recommend that the referendum voting date should occur no later than June 2018. Citizens need to be involved in determining the particulars of the PR system that is adopted, and there is insufficient time in advance of the voting date, within the November 2018 deadline that the government has set, to undertake the comprehensive citizen-driven process that we believe is critical. Proceeding with a simple, clear choice question, to determine if there is a mandate from citizens to modernize our voting system, should be undertaken within a reasonably short timeline, and the broader work required to determine the specific system should happen after the vote.

An earlier voting date also avoids conflicting with the October 20, 2018 municipal elections and any confusion among voters that might occur as a result.

If the electorate chooses to move forward with a proportional voting system, Elections BC should be given the resources required to ensure implementation of the new system is in place in a timely manner, so that the next provincial election is conducted under a PR system, even if the election is called in advance of 2021.

The Money

The financing and funding regulations for the referendum should be aligned with the new campaign finance legislation, and every effort should be made to ensure big money is not able



to unduly influence the democratic process. As with previous referenda in BC, the government should recognize one official proponent group and one official opponent group for the purposes of mounting campaigns during the campaign period, should provide \$500,000 to each group to initiate their campaigns, and should cap their spending limits to no more than \$0.50 per voter. The proponent and opponent groups should be subject to the same rules as parties during a provincial elections, as should third party advertisers.

The "campaign period" should be considered to begin when the legislature adopts the referendum question, and campaign finance and third party advertising regulations should take effect that day.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute our recommendations.