

The Basis for Democracy (Electoral Reform)

Bill Howell, 09May06

1. Brief Historical

From ancient Greece to the Magna Carta, from Cromwell to the American and French revolutions, and to the current concerns over democracy throughout the world, Democracy has had a fascinating evolution, Furthermore, Electoral Reform has often been key to the changes in Democratic concepts.

Simple words like communism/ capitalism to describe a fairly loose association of ideas with tremendous variability - settles down with time, but not to a unique state (arbitrary and stylistic)

- Democracy – is "what we want" as a loose definition, but this changes radically with time
- There is no precise will of the people – opinions differ radically and from day to day - look at the polls
- Is MORE Democracy really what we want? - Democracy isn't the same as freedom, although in our minds they are tightly linked. But do you really want a majority to dictate every detail of how you live? This was an early concern over democratic trends, that and the level of education and abilities of people of different classes.

When you make changes to to components of a concept like Democracy, this can have impacts on the cluster of concepts as a whole that are impossible to predict.

2. Canadian government priorities

Summary

- Proportional representation
- Fixed election dates
- Referenda

I'm strongly in favor of all of the above, with a caveat on how referenda are implemented and applied.

Single Transferable Vote - This is new to me, and I don't have a full understanding of its implications.

Basically, you vote for a pool of representatives (1, 2, and 3 prioritized choices), and excess votes for a candidate "roll over" to the other candidates. This could have an important impact, but its hard to predict.

3. Missing Concepts (from proposed Canadian reforms)

Post-Democratic politics – what does it look like?

- Analysis of concepts on the basis of Evolutionary Theory (some game theory has been used)
- Maximum # of terms of the Prime Minister etc.
- Serious Democracy – put your money where your mouth is
- Excessive emphasis on the process of voting rather than on other bigger issues
- "Cognitive dissonance between how people think and vote

Conclusion

I am comfortable with most of the proposed Electoral Reform, but am not knowledgeable enough about the Single Transferable Vote concept.

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