

Taking back our democracy!

Stopping Vote-splits, Phony Majorities AND giving Back-Benchers a Spine

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Beginning with as few as two or three, there is a simple, yet very powerful two-step process by which citizens in any electoral constituency can organize, first to reduce, then eliminate the effect of vote splitting, as well as phony government majorities.

Simultaneously, these citizen initiated steps will also give their elected representative an unmistakably clear signal that it would be in their own best interest to be loyal to their constituents first, ahead of the representative's loyalty to the party leader.

For those who believe our present system works well, please skip to [BACKGROUND](#) for an analysis about how it fails. For those who already feel that the results of our provincial and federal elections do not properly reflect the 'will of the people' and that system can and must be improved, read on.

[Back to top](#)

How Citizens can seize the initiative

This outline will employ the basic mechanics of a publicly transparent and fair pre-election process similar to Elections Canada's procedures but reduced to the minimum required to get a fair and accurate result using the least resources of time and money possible. Communities with more resources could build in further user friendly options.

[Back to top](#)

The Mail-IN Ballot

The secret ballot employed would be a 'preferential ballot' where the voters may mark their ballot by ranking (1, 2, 3...) as many of the candidates in their electoral district as the voter wishes to rank, from one of them, to all of them.

A pre-election poll would be conducted by way of a mail-in ballot. To avoid cost, there is no need to have pre-printed official ballots. Voters could get their ballot from a dedicated internet site or even write up their own ballot on a piece of paper.

To avoid costs to the voter, and to increase citizen participation rates, voters at their option could use a one, two or three envelope method.

The three envelope method consists of the ballot placed into envelope number one.

Envelope number one is placed into envelope number two. On this envelope the voter would self-identify with name, address, their district voting number as provided by Elections Canada or their provincial counterpart. I would also highly recommend the voter be required to place their signature on the envelope, better still make a simple statutory declaration that he/she is who he/she says they are, and then sign the declaration. This envelope is then placed into envelope number three, which with proper postage, is then readied for mailing.

Depending on the degree of anonymity desired, envelopes two and/or three may be optional, provided all the necessary information is still contained on the outer envelope. When the envelope containing the ballot also serves to identify the voter, for the purpose of maintaining ballot secrecy standards, the voter additionally should be allowed to identify the envelope as "envelope #1".

To avoid further costs to the voters and increase participation rates, several members of a family or any small group of people ought to be allowed to accumulate the various distinct individually prepared envelopes and mail or deliver them within one common outer envelope or secured community election drop-off box. In no case ought a ballot be considered valid unless it is enclosed in its own distinct number one or number two envelope.

[Back to top](#)

Counting the ballot

For brevity, this outline omits all of the necessary rules and procedures required from the point of receiving and validating the ballot envelopes, to actually counting the ballots in the presence of the candidates' scrutineers, should they decide to participate.

While more robust counting methods exist (to be web-posted later at [this location](#)), this outline will focus on the physical redistribution method. Ties may preclude more robust counting methods.

All ballots are segregated into piles based on the number one choice. The ballots of the weakest candidate are then redistributed on the bases of their second choice, and this is repeated until only two candidates are left standing.

While the counts after each distribution ought to be recorded and made public, the focus here is that the two left standing are the people's choice of who are the two most preferable.

The count should likely be completed at least 24 hours before the official polling day in order to get the preferential ballot information out in time for voters to make use of this information on polling day.

The author is investigating a list-serve server service, which for the cost of about \$150 per poll, would allow each district to have their own in-house public forum, where voters could discuss matters of common interest or even pose questions and receive answers from the candidates. Such a list-serve, where people sign-up on their own through a fully automated menu, could in addition to a website be a very fast and low cost method to get the results out to anyone who wanted them, in time for the election.

This entire process is predicated on the citizens reasserting and reclaiming the democratic 'critical path'! Elections are really about citizens making choices and this method ensures that neither the politicians nor the media is on the critical path. They are however invited to participate as servants to the democratic process!

[Back to top](#)

HOW USEFUL IS SUCH A CITIZEN CONDUCTED PRE-ELECTION POLL?

The validity of this poll, like any poll, including "official" elections, is dependent on the participation rate. In some organizations, where the official election attracts as little as 10% of the eligible voters, the elected still control taxes and levies from the other 90% worth over \$1 million to the organization annually, yet those elections are considered valid.

As the single mark ballot, through vote-splitting, undermines the value of a citizen's vote, many citizens now already try to vote strategically, including gathering in two's, three's or more and decide how to vote, so as not to cancel ('waste') each other's vote.

However, the added power and safety delivered by the preferential secret ballot method, this allows total strangers to collaborate, for common cause and purpose. At low participation rates, this method will more accurately reduce vote-splitting than any similar sized strategic voting plan can accomplish. The preferential secret ballot method not only affords greater accuracy, but allows diverse groups to democratically join forces to attain the best possible indication of which two candidates really are the two most preferred.

In a few very tight ridings, a participation rate of only a 100 people could realistically contribute to a more satisfying democratic, will of the people, result. To see how close your or any of the 308 federal riding 2006 election outcomes was, please see the spreadsheet links provided at the bottom of [this page](#).

Except for human error and those that prefer voting on party-partisan ideological lines, irrespective of their local candidate, as this method's voluntary participation rate increases, votes-splits will be reduced to zero!

From this it follows with *democratic certainty*, that as participation rates increase, democratically united citizens will have the final say as to which local candidate was elected, regardless of their party status.

In other words, this system has the power to put democracy back into the hands of the citizens, with the elected, seeking favour of the electorate. The elected serving as servants of the citizens rather than the state, or other interests.

[Back to top](#)

How big a group is required to pull this off?

Within one electoral district the group could start with as few as two people serving as the poll officials. As the participatory democracy levels increase, more people would be self-identified and willing to step up to the plate, either with their time, money or other resources to help make this happen, including increased numbers who would help count the larger number of ballots efficiently.

As this method is an organic citizen based system, growth can be self-perpetuating and self-expanding. Armed with enlightened self-interest, every participant can become an active advocate to draw in even more participants!

Lastly, and also of significant importance, this method is based on sound, democratic principles that invite participation and collaboration, even among polar opposites, so long as they adhere to the principles of democracy: a rule based society where 'one person one vote' is 'one person one vote' regardless of wealth or political stature of any kind.

That is, this system invites collaboration for the common cause at the local level, and is a self-correcting method, more powerful than the adage given to two children when they fight over an orange and can then be resolved by the rule, one cuts, the other chooses.

Here, should the partisans of one group attempt to distort the outcome of the poll, unless they are a true majority, they can not distort the outcome, for if they do, they do so at their own peril as they would have some hard explaining to do, why in an open public process their candidate did poorly.

[Back to top](#)

BACKGROUND

First, some specific examples of vote-splitting in Canada. Then a brief note on why it is necessary for citizens to seize the initiative for change themselves, rather than to hope that those in government will propose any meaningful democratic reform. Lastly, a sketch of the structural limitations as to why 'strategic voting', is hit and miss.

[Back to top](#)

Vote-Splitting! Root Cause!

Canada's federal and provincial elections, use a 'single-mark ballot' system. Those who speak for the party hierarchies that profit from this phony-majority vote-splitting system prefer the term 'first past the post' and shine up the system's counting method further, by pointing to the half-truth that those candidates who were 'elected' 'received more votes than any other'!

Applying the rule 'received more votes than any other' makes Canada's single-mark ballot extremely vulnerable to vote-splitting. This practice also makes a sham of the universal gold standard applied routinely in almost all other decision making settings, when a decision is being measured, that at a minimum, will be accepted as democratic.

Except for a very short list of certain election types, wherever else a vote is taken, the universal gold standard for democratic rule is applied and is expressed in the principle of 'majority rule'! Oddly, even Canada's party-partisans, of every political stripe, from Harper, to Dion, Layton, May... and all of their provincial counterparts, when squaring off against each other within their own strongly contested nomination meeting or leadership race, the rule 'received more votes than any other' will be summarily rejected and some form of majority rule will be used.

Hypocritically, when it comes to civic elections, who has not heard a media election pundit, often an anti-democratic party-partisan, claim that the first past the post system makes for 'strong government'? There, the key question not asked, is strong for whom, the people, or those gaining unfair privilege from this anti-democratic measure?

In quick review, the single-mark ballot is extremely vulnerable to vote-splitting, because the phony majority rule 'more than any other' is applied, instead of the much more common 'majority rule'.

Thus when two candidates A and B, support a popular point of view, together they may represent as much as 65% of the vote, but since the majority position is divided by two candidates, C a third candidate advancing a minority view can 'slip up the middle'. Vote-splitting, 'slipping up the middle' is impossible when a preferential ballot is used and counted properly. When there are four or more candidates, anti-democratic outcomes of even under 33% are possible.

For details of the Federal election or Ontario's, please see the papers and spreadsheets of the electoral outcomes candidate by candidate in each of the electoral districts available on the [page found here](#).

[Back to top](#)

Vote-Splitting & phony local majorities, Canadian examples

As an example of the anti-democratic effects of vote-splitting, consider Canada's general election of 2006.

Of the 308 candidates elected to Parliament, 185, (60%), were elected in constituencies where more people voted for a candidate other than the one elected! Turning the number around, a mere 40% of the elected were endorsed by a majority of those that even bothered to vote!

In Ontario, in the so-called "landslide" election victory of the government of Dalton McGuinty, the number of candidates elected by a minority of the citizens who voted rises to a staggering 69%.

That is, in 74 out of 107 Ontarian constituencies, a clear majority of citizens did not vote for those who 'won'. Each one of these vote-splits resulted in a phony majority at the local level. As a result, the majority in each of these constituencies may be denied a representative who will speak on their behalf and the majority can expect to be subjected to policies that they did not vote for.

Even worse, the local phony majority elected candidates, with but very few exceptions tend to end up having more loyalty to the party-hierarchy that supports them during the election period (conditional to their toying the party line), than to the electorate whom they theoretically represent. This is made demonstrably clear by the fact that in parliament, elected 'representatives' will vie for positions as 'committee members' to do their party's bidding, and by the fact that those who show any tendency to speak on behalf of their constituents and against their party's position, are relegated to the insignificant roles allowed to 'back-benchers' for the entire time that exists between elections.

One further consideration of vote-splits and phony majorities at the local level is the accumulative effect on all of parliament. Returning to McGuinty's so-called landslide, at the global level, one sees direct evidence of this in that even though his party garnered only 42.2% of the popular vote, his party received 66% of the seats in the provincial Parliament.

That is, the single-mark ballot, so vulnerable to vote-splits, gave Dalton McGuinty a so-called 'majority government' and whether one applies rather elementary math or the straight forward democratic rule of 'majority rule', indisputably this amounts to what some have described as a phony majority government. We can not change what we refuse to acknowledge. Truly, how can an election that leads to a phony majority be called a healthy democratic process. How far must the citizens be pushed before they see these elections are but an illusion of democracy?

These results are far from uncommon in the first past the post system that more properly ought to be called a single-mark ballot system which, to anti-democratic effect, restricts voters to a single mark, even when there are more than two choices.

With electoral outcomes like these becoming the norm, and with governments of all stripes imposing their partisan policies ahead of the interests of their constituents, it is easy to understand why only 53% of Ontarians decided that it was worth their while to show up at the polls.

Refocusing on Steven Harper's 'minority government', even when one considers all 308 of the candidates who were elected as our MPs, the Harper government is an even more phony government than McGuinty's, in that less than half the people who voted, did not even vote for one of the 308 elected! This does not even take into account that only 65% of eligible Canadians voted!

Summarizing, while vote-split outcomes are not uncommon in Canadian elections, virtually all other institutions, including elections internal to the parties, with almost no exception, do apply the 'majority rule' universal gold standard when a decision is being measured, that at a minimum, will be accepted as democratic.

Why is it that in Canada's system of governance and electoral politics, this tried, tested and true measure is not applied? Who wins? Who loses?

There is no doubt that among those who seek the power associated with high political office go to great lengths to cloak their actions and their motives with 'regal' or 'statesman-like' language, and with neutral-sounding administrative language such as 'in the interest of the people' and 'the will of the majority'.

Nonetheless, the reality is that the offices of government are progressively becoming less oriented to serving the people or even to responding to the democratic will as expressed by the grass-roots of their party. Instead they are being seen as high offices from which one can impose top-down rules on the members of the state, and use the powers of the state in an almost dictatorial way to ensure that those partisan rules are enforced.

Instead of acting as trustees of the people, those who hold the highest government offices are increasingly acting in the fashion of corporate kingpins, who are empowered to pursuing the goals that they set for their organizations with little need to recognize the wishes or needs of those who work for the corporation.

Viewed in that way, positions of 'trust' in government have no meaning, nor does the democratic concept of 'one person one vote', as our democracy, in reality, before our very eyes, without a vote, is being transformed into the corporate model of 'one dollar one vote'.

Given today's view within parties that they compete to win power, no matter what the cost, and to use that power to impose their policies, no matter whose rights, interests or the environment that they may harm, party rule, as practiced and endorsed by party leaders and the party establishments are more closely in keeping with the jungle rule of 'might makes right' paradigm that dominates today's corporate board rooms.

If one gives pause for a moment, other than one term being more palatable than another, what is the functional difference between the competitive jungle rule of 'might makes right' versus the corporate board rooms rule of 'one dollar one vote'?

When our democracy, without a vote on the matter, through the backdoor of the accumulated effect of vote-splits year in and year out is being transformed from 'one person one vote' to a one of 'might makes right', citizens are seen less as persons to be protected, supported and served, than as masses to be manipulated so that they can give the veneer of legitimacy to an 'elected' government.

The existing voting system suits their end, for the vote splitting that occurs within the existing system means that they can gain control of both the government and the parliament with the support of far less than 50% of the voters. As a result it is highly unlikely to expect that any meaningful reform will be proposed by those who are within and who profit from the current system that gives governments far more seats in parliament than are warranted by the popular vote.

[Back to top](#)

Ought we to wait until our Party Partisans will fix the single-mark ballot

While a Stephen Harper, Paul Martin, Brian Mulroney or a Dalton McGuinty or any number of other political leaders have intoned with all the solemn sobriety and seriousness of a real statesman about the need to deal with the 'democratic deficit' or to act so as to bring about a 'democratic renewal', not one of them, as a government leader, has taken any real steps to ensure that citizens can exercise real democratic control over the election of politicians, let alone exercise real control over what governments and politicians do in between elections.

As a final nail to the coffin that party-partisans will lead the way forward towards genuine electoral reform and meaningful democratic renewal, review for a moment how BC, Ontario and PEI addressed this very question. Each of these provinces actually went so far as to 'give' their citizens a say in the matter by conducting a province wide referendum on electoral reform.

All pretence aside, by dictating the terms of reference, the party-partisans in control of government had control of the process and if you control the process, you control the outcome. The most recent of these, in name only, Ontario's process was officially named "Ontario's Citizen Assembly on Electoral Reform"! In the end, the citizens of Ontario were straight jacketed into choosing between the status quo and one option which on the basis of a sound rational analyses was the equivalent of asking Ontarians to jump from the pot into the fire.

For further details, please see the paper called "[FPTP bad! MMP worse!! "Vote 1, 2, 3..." better!!! Stops vote-splits, overruns & phony majorities](#)" also available here.

[Back to top](#)

Is Strategic Voting a Democratically Sound Alternative

I have reviewed a number of electoral outcomes and in electoral district after electoral district, I have found between about 62% and 94% of the voters, will in effect have collapsed their single-mark ballot choice and voted for either one or the other of the two most popular candidates.

The problem with strategic voting, is that at some point, all strategic voting plans, must rely on guesstimates as to which two candidates will be the most popular and then, within the confines of the official single-mark ballot, collapse ones best remaining choices to which may be described as voting for 'the lesser of two evils', which some have pointed out, is still evil.

Other than the secret ballot box, all polls, without exception, even good quality polls, tend to have many weaknesses. For starters, they invariably involve small samples made across many constituencies and that the picture so obtained may hide, even distort and be contradictory to local realities.

For example, the poll may be correct that party A and B will be the overall favorite. If you then vote for one of those two, but in reality, in your constituency party A and C end up being the two most preferred, then in the event you voted B, your vote contributed to a vote-split and thereby essentially was not only a wasted vote, in effect, ended up being an indirect vote for the very one who was your 'most evil' option.

Furthermore, relying on polls made public by various agencies and parties become even more problematic, when the pollster, either in error or deliberately tries to lead the voters, instead of simply revealing the voters' preferences.

The fact that voters must expose their choice to a total stranger, is a further factor that reduces the reliability of a poll in contrast to the accuracy of a secret ballot poll.

Using a preferential ballot, organized at the community level, is a first step to taking back our democracy.