PR redux: "CITIZEN'S VOTE EMPOWERMENT"!

Everyone knows our First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) voting system produces results that are an injustice to voters, candidates and political parties. Everyone sees that FPTP produces an unjust balance of power in the Legislature—disproportionate to party vote-shares. Everyone understands that voting systems based on Proportional Representation (PR) are designed to replace FPTP because of such distortions and other flaws.

Many people know that most democratic countries use some form of PR. Many Canadians who see that FPTP violates basic democratic principles have long called for it to be replaced by some form of PR. Most of them overlook the defects of the various forms of PR, and under-estimate their resultant vulnerability to being defeated by a NO campaign in a referendum on PR.

Fortunately, there is now a much simpler and better way to free ourselves from the injustices of FPTP—while also avoiding a flawed PR alternative. The solution is to **fix FPTP—by eliminating its flaws—***through* "**Citizen's Vote Empowerment**"!

<u>*The profound consequences of*</u> "**Citizen's Vote Empowerment**" *are:*

1. It's no longer justified or acceptable to use FPTP without "**Citizen's Vote Empowerment**".
2. All seat-based PR alternatives are rendered obsolete by "**Citizen's Vote Empowerment**".

It has long been recognized that the *'Will of the People'*—as expressed through their votes—is seriously distorted by the systemic defects of FPTP. Centuries ago, in the *'horse-and-buggy'* era, mathematicians invented various forms of PR to replace FPTP. Such standard forms of PR are all based on some clever *'electoral engineering'* to manufacture results where the number of seats for each party is roughly proportional to their total numbers of votes. Unfortunately, all standard PR alternatives come with their own imperfections and complications—defects that impede their adoption. This has led to an endless pursuit seeking some better form of PR.

We're now living in the *Digital Age*—yet our Democracy remains hobbled by the defects of our *medieval* FPTP voting system—while electoral reform advocates urge us to boldly take a *'leap of faith'* and accept the lesser defects of their *'horse and buggy'* era PR alternatives?!? Surely we can do better!

"**Citizen's Vote Empowerment**" is a true solution that **makes FPTP perfectly fair to all** voters, candidates and political parties—hence, **worthy of Democracy in the 21st century!**

Rather than replacing FPTP with some flawed PR alternative, "**Citizen's Vote Empowerment**" takes advantage of digital technology to eliminate the core problem of FPTP: *'wasted votes'*. As a result, "**Citizen's Vote Empowerment**" also removes all subsidiary problems (*'strategic voting'*, *'vote-splitting'*, *'wrong winners'*, etc.)—elevating our Democracy to a higher level. It ensures that the balance of voting power in the Legislature is directly based on the expressed *'Will of the People'* (fulfilling PR's ultimate goal), by **making the Citizen's vote <u>really</u> count, where it matters most—in the Legislature!**

<u>Every federal or provincial election must fulfill two quite different and separate objectives</u>:
- first, **to elect local Representatives**—to represent Citizens of each riding in the Legislature;
- second, **to elect a Government**—to govern over the people of the nation or province.

The expectation is that a voting system should fulfill both of these objectives while being **fair to all voters, candidates and parties**. As practiced for centuries, **FPTP is almost fair in the election of Representatives** (apart from the fact that about one-third of voters are coerced by the *'wasted vote'* problem into so-called *'strategic voting'* for someone other than their true preference).

But **FPTP is abysmally unfair in the election of Governments** (because of its *'wasted vote'* problem, along with its *'vote-splitting'* problem etc.). Further, FPTP distortions, due to these factors as well as vote concentration or distribution, can also produce many undemocratic outcomes: *'false-majority'* governments (the usual result); *'wrong winners'*; *'blow-out'* elections; *'fragile'* governments.

Most citizens may be shocked to learn that, under FPTP, *'We the People'* do NOT actually elect *'our'* Government!?! Instead, the Government is elected by the Assembly of Representatives. Alas, under FPTP, the elected Assembly is always **a substantial distortion of the *'Will of the People'***.

So the crux of FPTP's problem is this: the Citizen's vote is NOT used to elect the Government—and **typically about half of the Citizen's votes are *'wasted'***, having no representation in the Legislature— hence, FPTP has been depriving those voters of their democratic right to participate in the election of *'their'* Government.

The solution to this core problem of FPTP is "**Citizen's Vote Empowerment**", by **doing Democracy *'right'*—by making the Citizen's vote _really_ count, where it matters most—in the Legislature!**

Many Citizens are unaware of the extent and severity of FPTP's long list of defects—all of which are linked to its *'wasted votes'* problem:

- o *'Wasted votes'*: all votes for losing local candidates (typically about half of all Citizen's votes) have zero electoral value—and are essentially *'thrown away'*; they are unrepresented in the legislature, and hence have no impact in electing the Government. This is FPTP's core problem.
  Even worse, this means that laws passed by the legislature usually don't have the support of a majority (i.e. more than half) of voters—hence, they lack *'democratic legitimacy',* and cannot truly be claimed to reflect and serve the *'Will of the People'*.
  Is this fair? NO. Would this problem be corrected by "**Citizen's Vote Empowerment**"? YES!

- o *'Strategic voting'*: to avoid wasting their vote, many citizens (typically about one-third) are coerced by FPTP to *'hold their nose'* and vote for the *'lesser of evils'*—trying to block some other party from becoming Government.
  Is this fair? NO. Would this problem be corrected by "**Citizen's Vote Empowerment**"? YES!

- o *'Vote-splitting'*: where two similar parties competing for the same voter segment usually result in their mutual defeat which is unfair to both the parties and voters.
  Is this fair? NO. Would this problem be corrected by "**Citizen's Vote Empowerment**"? YES!

- o *'Safe seats'*: typically about two-thirds of seats have only one party with a realistic chance to win, hence reducing voter turnout, as no vote in such ridings can make any difference.
  Is this fair? NO. Would this problem be corrected by "**Citizen's Vote Empowerment**"? YES!

- o *'False majority'*: most FPTP elections produce a majority government with more than half the seats (and 100% of the power) often with much less than half of the votes (typically 40%).
  Is this fair? NO. Would this problem be corrected by "**Citizen's Vote Empowerment**"? YES!

- o *'Wrong winners'*: e.g. BC1996 produced an NDP *'false majority'* Government with just 39% of the votes, while the losing Liberals won 41% of the votes (i.e. '*false'* democracy).
  Is this fair? NO. Would this problem be corrected by "**Citizen's Vote Empowerment**"? YES!

- o *'Blow-out elections'*: e.g. BC2001 produced a Liberal landslide; even though 42% voted for other parties, there were only two opposition members elected (i.e. '*broken'* democracy).
  Is this fair? NO. Would this problem be corrected by "**Citizen's Vote Empowerment**"? YES!
- o *'Fragile minority Government'*: e.g. BC2017, where the two main parties were almost tied in both seats and votes; the Greens won the balance of power with only three seats—despite winning almost 17% vote-share (i.e. equivalent 15 seats under PR). The close margin makes the Government much more vulnerable than it would be under PR, with the temptation under FPTP being much stronger to force an early election.
  Is this fair? NO. Would this problem be corrected by "**Citizen's Vote Empowerment**"? YES!

Since all of the above problems with FPTP are consequences of its *'wasted votes'* problem, by truly eliminating that problem "**Citizen's Vote Empowerment**" also removes those subsidiary problems!

<u>What's required to implement "**Citizen's Vote Empowerment**" and fix FPTP's problems</u>?

- o Make the Citizen's vote the unit of voting power in the Legislature!
- o Each party would have exactly as many votes in the legislature as won by all of their candidates (i.e. elected and defeated).
- o Each party's votes should be equitably assigned among their Representatives, according to established rules, with the Leaders holding any unassigned votes that may remain.
- o As each Representative casts their single vote in the Legislature, this would automatically be converted by computer into their assigned number of Citizen's votes (i.e. *'proxy voting'*).

  [Computers can instantly convert the Representative's votes into Citizen's votes—and instantly count millions of Citizen's votes with absolute accuracy and full transparency to all Representatives. Clearly, in the digital age, this is the right way to count votes in the Legislature!
  This is by far the simplest and most fair way to do Democracy. It would likely have been invented by the pioneers of PR—if computers or cell phones had existed in the 'horse-and-buggy' era!]

Given that FPTP always cheats a large majority of voters in so many ways (about half of all Citizen's votes being *'wasted'*, about two-thirds of the votes being in *'safe seats'* where no vote really makes any difference, and about a third of the voters being coerced into *'strategic voting'* against their true preference) maybe it's surprising that about two-thirds of our Citizens still vote (although voting seems to decline with each generation). By eliminating these and other problems of FPTP, and making all votes equal, "**Citizen's Vote Empowerment**" gives everyone a very good reason to vote.

<u>As "**Citizen's Vote Empowerment**" works with FPTP, no voting system changes are required</u>!

- o No changes to riding boundaries.
- o No changes to voting procedures.
- o No changes to how votes are counted and Representatives are elected.
- o No changes to the relationship and accountability of Representatives to Citizens.
- o No costs or complexities to implement "**Citizen's Vote Empowerment**".
- o No costs or complexities to revoke "**Citizen's Vote Empowerment**" and revert to flawed FPTP (perish the thought).

<u>Unparalleled benefits of "**Citizen's Vote Empowerment**"!</u>

- o **Perfect proportionality** is automatic!

- o **No need to ever change ridings** (even as population changes)—a major future savings!

- o Since all Citizen's votes will be equal (even for losing candidates, even in *'safe seats'*) and counted in the Legislature (for all parties that win a seat), **voters are liberated from the coerced practice of *'strategic voting'.*** Everyone is empowered to vote for their true preference (knowing that their vote will not be *'wasted'*), rather than being forced to *'hold their nose'* and vote for a *'lesser of evils'* in a desperate attempt to block some other party from becoming the Government.

- o **No possibility of rural-urban or regional bias**—because all votes count equally.

- o **Eliminates the risk of tie votes** in the Legislature, and problems selecting a Speaker.

- o Facilitates future enhancements—e.g. **elimination of regional polarization** (ensuring both the Government and Official Opposition are represented in all regions), and **'balanced representation'** (reducing under-representation of *'third'* parties)—by the creation of **regional seats**, similar to MMP. But unlike MMP, such seats could even be decided after an election, on an *as-needed* basis (and targeted *where-needed*—to remedy representational deficiencies), as they would have no impact on the balance of power between the parties (they'd simply draw down the reservoir of unrepresented votes for defeated candidates—aka *'wasted votes'*). Also, <u>only about one-third the number of *'top-up'* seats would be needed</u> (because perfect proportionality is automatic), and they could be filled by best runners-up with consideration of demographic factors (e.g. gender balance, age, etc.).

- o **No need to wait for an election** to implement "**Citizen's Vote Empowerment**"—since the only changes in voting procedures are not at the ballot box—but in the Legislature (i.e. to reflect the expressed *'Will of the People'*)!

- o **No need to waste public funds on a referendum** for "**Citizen's Vote Empowerment**". With appropriate media analysis and coverage, **this should be a non-partisan campaign based on democratic principles and voter's rights**—rather than a divisive political battle.

"**Citizen's Vote Empowerment**" is the **true fulfillment of the goals of PR**—and has rendered seat-based PR alternatives into a pointless pursuit of a *'horse-and-buggy'* era concept. Moreover, whereas **opponents of PR can make a plausible case against any standard PR** alternative (based on costs, complexity, confusion, larger ridings or multi-riding electoral districts, more seats, party lists, reduced accountability, rural-urban bias etc.), by contrast **there's no good reason for not fixing the problems of our existing system**—especially with a *cost-free* and *trouble-free* solution available!

"**Citizen's Vote Empowerment**" is a *'made-in-BC'* perfect fix for FPTP's undemocratic and unjust flaws—which have plagued Democracy for centuries, everywhere FPTP has been used.

Adoption of "**Citizen's Vote Empowerment**" would become a lasting legacy of this Premier and this Government, and a truly historic gift of BC to Democracy across Canada—and around the world.

See "[Citizen's Vote Empowerment](#)" for further analysis of voting systems and issues.

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*N.B.: Electoral Justice Now acknowledges that our vision of "***Citizen's Vote Empowerment***" was inspired by [submissions to the BC Citizens' Assembly in 2004 by Mr. John R Kennedy](#) of Burnaby BC.*
*We believe "***Citizen's Vote Empowerment***" would clearly be the best choice—with the best chance to become the BC2018 PR Referendum winner! However, we've also developed a comprehensive and flexible set of electoral reform options called "Citizen's Vote Empowerment +" which merit consideration as possible future refinements.*