

Preparing for the Task Ahead

Choosing the Design Objectives that Matter Most to an Electoral System

Objectives of this presentation

- to explain the task for the afternoon
- to begin a discussion about how objectives are tied to systems
- to show how thinking about design decisions is a natural extension of thinking about principles

What will you do in the groups that follow?

- Discuss which objectives in an electoral system are most important
- Discuss the degree to which our present system embodies these objectives
- Prepare for plenary discussion

Why is this important to do?

- To create a common understanding for
 - selecting a system to design
 - choosing elements of that system
 - making final decisions about whether to keep the current system or adopt a new one

What are these design objectives?

Design objectives are related to two broad perspectives

- representation and voters
- government and legislature

Design objectives are related to two broad perspectives

1. representation and voters

- how diverse the legislature should be (in terms of demographic and ideological representation)
- whether candidates should have to win a majority to win a seat
- whether each MPP should represent a geographic area of the province
- how closely votes translate into seats
- the degree of choice for candidate/parties
- how choices are made on a ballot

Objectives on representation and voters

- Our legislature should have more women and under-represented groups.

Mechanisms to achieve demographic representation

- You would be interested in some proportional system (list PR, mixed systems)
- You would want a large DM
- You may want stronger measures to achieve this (e.g., quotas, zippered lists)

Objectives on representation and voters

- Each MPP should be elected by a majority.

Mechanisms to achieve majority representation

- You would be interested in an electoral system that ensures successful candidates have a majority of voters' support (AV and TRS)

Objectives on representation and voters

- The number of seats a party wins should closely reflect its vote share.

Mechanisms to achieve proportionality

- You would be interested in proportional systems (list PR, mixed systems, STV)
- You would want a large DM (at least 5 per district to achieve proportionality)
- You may want to increase the size of legislature to achieve this

Objectives on representation and voters

- Each MPP should represent a geographic area of the province.

Mechanisms to achieve local representation

- You would want small geographic districts
- You would want one representative per district in non-proportional systems (majority, plurality)
- You may want to increase the size of legislature to allow for smaller districts

Objectives on representation and voters

- Voters should be able to indicate their preferred party and candidate.
- Voters should be able to rank their preferences.

Mechanisms to achieve greater voter choice

- ordinal (preferential) ballot where multiple choices can be made
- ballot that allows for choice of candidate and/or party
- ballot that combines some of the above (AV, STV, MMP, or parallel)

Design objectives are related to two broad perspectives

2. government and legislature

- type of government: majority, minority, coalition or single party
- should there be few large parties in the legislature
- should there be more smaller parties in the legislature

Why would you pick one or other of these objectives?

- Because you believe one type of government or legislature is more effective than the other and
- Because you believe that the kind of government and legislature an electoral system produces is more important than issues of representation

Objectives on government and legislatures

- Our electoral system should produce majority governments.
- Our electoral systems should produce coalition governments.

Mechanisms to achieve single party government or coalitions

- You would be interested in fewer parties in the legislature (strong majority)
 - *i.e.*, plurality or majority systems
- You would be interested in more parties in the legislature and are comfortable with a coalition
 - *i.e.*, List PR, STV or MMP

Objectives on government and legislatures

- Ontario's legislature should be made up of fewer large parties.
- More small parties should win seats in Ontario's legislature.

Mechanisms to encourage larger or smaller parties

- Degree of proportionality within a system
 - High proportionality = more parties
 - Low proportionality = fewer parties
- Existence of a threshold

What happened to a discussion of “principles”?

- principles are broad ideas
 - this is still a principles-driven exercise
- design objectives are the concrete tools that implement our principles
- objectives flow from principles

Objectives = principles in action

- Not a change of approach but of focus
- The outcome of any system is affected by design objectives
- There needs to be a fit between the principles you value and the design elements you choose

Principles that underlie all design decisions

- Legitimacy
- Simplicity & Practicality
- Representation by Population

Where we go from here

- In small groups individually indicate which objectives are most important in an electoral system
- Discuss them collectively
- Discuss how our current system meets or does not meet these objectives
- Report back in plenary what your group thought

Some things to keep in mind

- Any electoral system “shall be described clearly and in detail”
- It “shall be consistent with the Constitution”
 - therefore must be consistent with parliamentary democracy (e.g., cannot have direct election of premier)

Placing our task in context: What we know

- may change how parties work together in the legislature
- some changes may take time (how parties behave); others may be immediate (how votes are translated into seats)

But there are limits...

- electoral system is only one part of the political system
- electoral systems do not transform political culture
 - adversarial politics, role of media, voter turnout will not likely change significantly
- we can't accurately predict all consequences of a new system

The goal is simple.

What objectives matter to you in an electoral system?