

The British Columbia Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform





A Citizens' Assembly for B.C.

- A new idea
in context of a government's general reform agenda
- Members participating as *citizens*, not *representatives*
- Clear, specific and limited mandate



The BC Assembly's Mandate

1. Analyze BC's Electoral & Parliamentary Politics
2. Consider Alternative Electoral Systems
3. Consult Widely
4. Deliberate
5. Recommend maintenance of *status quo* or an *alternative*
6. Submit their recommendation to decision by the public in a referendum



British Columbians Respond

- 160 individuals drawn *at random* from the voters' list
(politicians excluded)
- Gender and age balanced;
representative of the diverse population
(occupation, education, origin, ethnicity)
- Few knew much about the subject of electoral systems



Meeting the Mandate's Challenge

Learning

a new technical subject

Listening

hearing from the public

Deliberating

openness to others' arguments

Deciding

accepting the need to make trade-offs

No instructions (no problem to 'fix')
threw members back on basic values

Assembly members embraced randomness as their
continuing and fundamental organizational principle

Thinking about Electoral Systems

- ↪ What sort of electoral system does BC need?
- ↪ What kind of politics do British Columbians want?
- ↪ What kind of British Columbia do its citizens want?
- ↪ What *shared* values should define the future?
- ↪ What values should govern its *collective* activity?

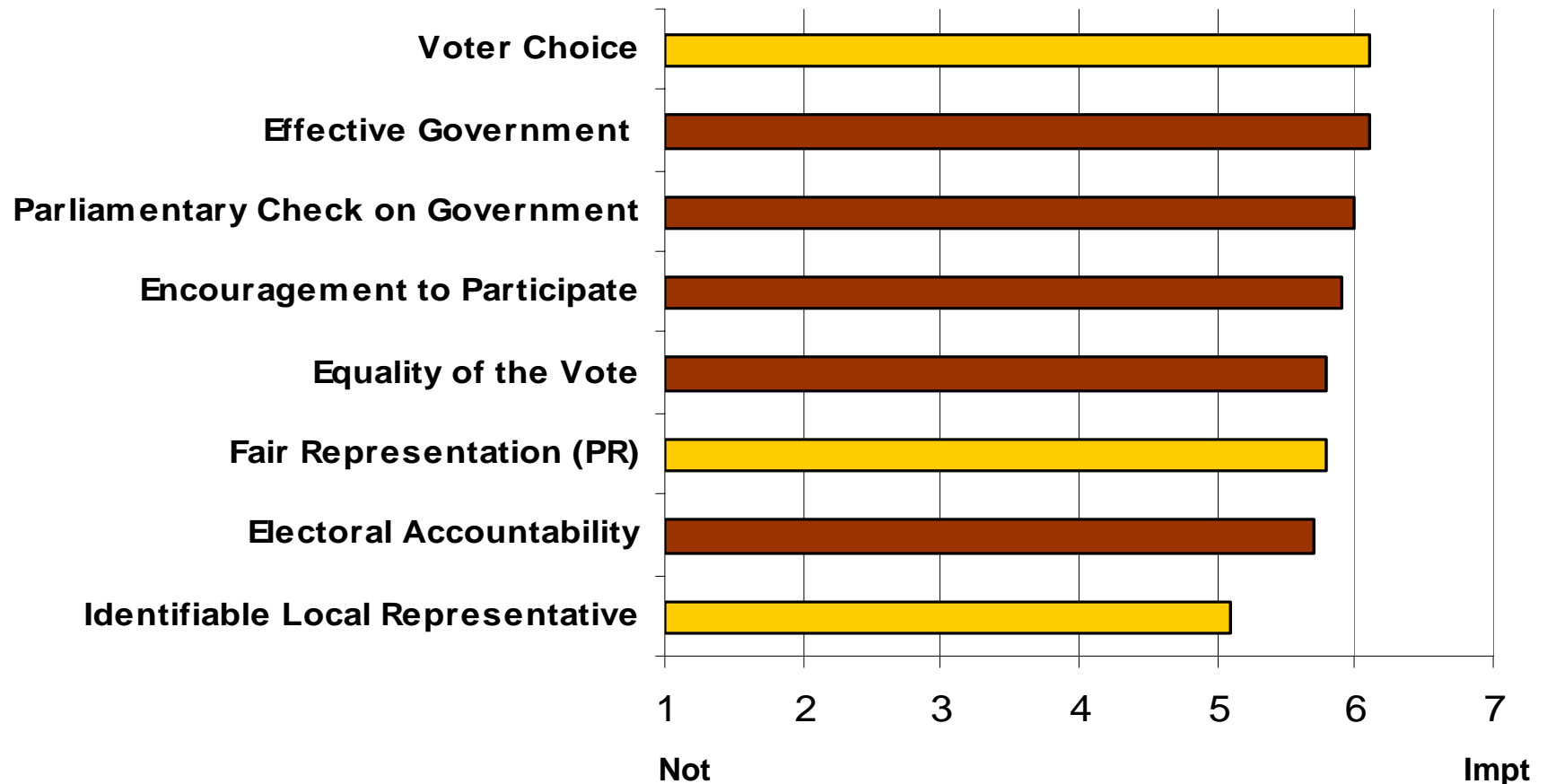
What electoral system might institutionalize those values?



Values that shape the decision

- Little difference in relative importance of values associated with the working of electoral systems
- Members understood –
 - 1) Some valued features are:
*definable **characteristics***, others are
*probable **consequences***
of electoral system operation
 - 2) Trade-offs would be necessary

Assembly Members' Values



- Relatively little variation amongst them
- High levels of individual consistency over time
- Congruent with fellow citizens

Intense Discussions



Choosing Core Electoral System Values

- Small group discussions produced consensus on centrality of 3 key values to any alternative electoral system:

voter choice *proportional representation* *local representation*

- All 3 were definable features of an electoral system

voter choice	–	<i>ballot structure</i>
proportional representation	–	<i>electoral formula</i>
local representation	–	<i>district structure</i>

- Other important values effectively took second place in the members' minds as they worked to actually design a specific system for British Columbia



Trading off Values in Decision-making

- **Voter Choice, Proportional Representation** and **Local Representation** are competing values
- Members had to decide how to balance them when they individually gave different priorities to each
- They wanted to find a consensus acceptable to others
(and so the province)
rather than simply support the particular combination they personally favoured



3 Values Structuring System Choice

- **Voter choice was most valued**

consensus on it meant it was not the subject of much debate

Proportional Representation was critical

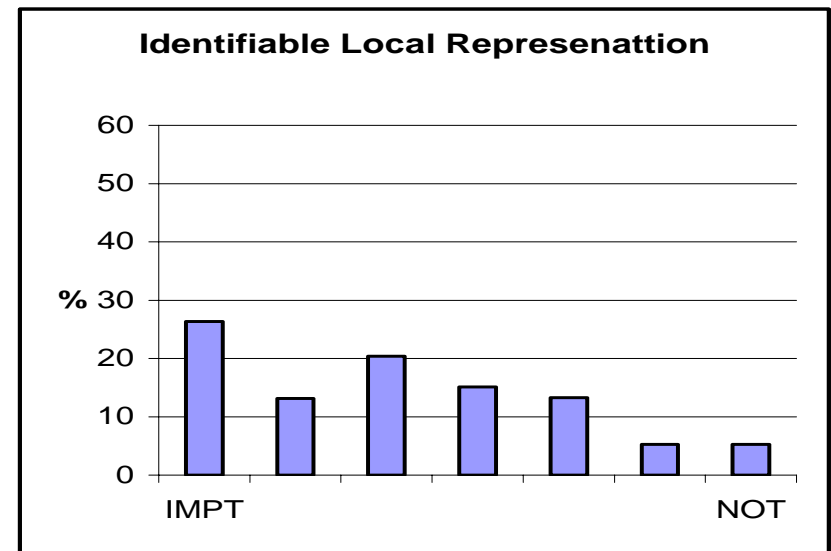
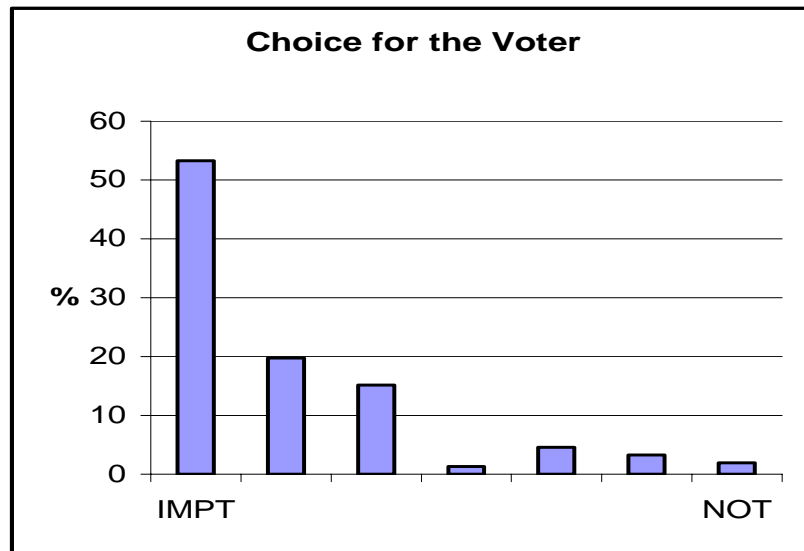
between alternatives with similar proportionality it was not decisive

- **Local representation**

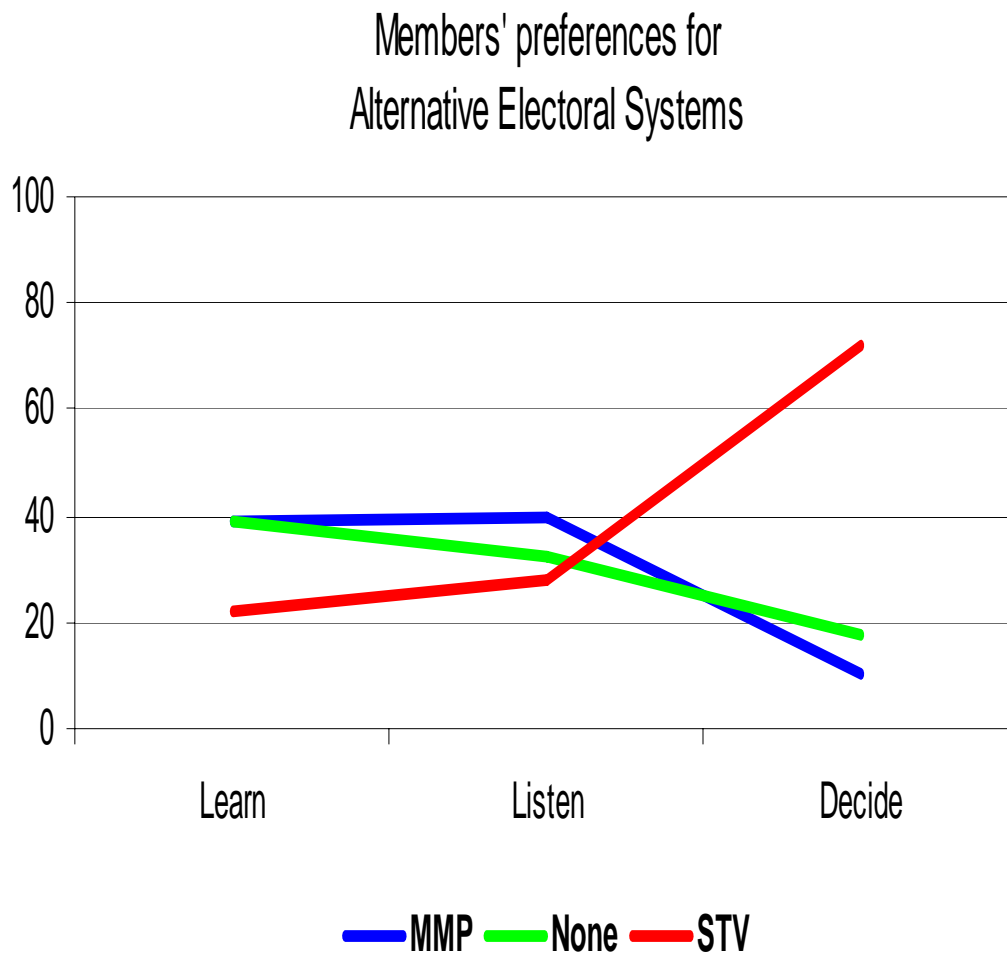
became critical precisely because there was least agreement on it

The Final Debate

- Debate ultimately revolved around the importance of a value which was most unevenly distributed (i.e. *Local Representation*)
- This took time as members engaged in a long and complex conversation with each other



Deliberation ► Accommodation ► Shifting Electoral System Preferences



- Dramatic changes over time as members learned about systems but then also considered views of others
- Compared 2 specific alternatives
- Final result reflects acceptance of need to accommodate a minority of members' concerns for local representation

One Member's Account at:

Randomocracy

A Citizen's Guide
to Electoral Reform in British Columbia



Why the B.C. Citizens Assembly recommends
the single transferable-vote system

Jack MacDonald

www.bcelectoralreform.ca

The Burgerforum

- Dutch government constitutes a Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform
- Assembly deciding (Nov 10) and it appears they will opt for maintaining key features of the existing system
 - nationwide PR
 - no local electoral districts
- Members have given much thought to finding ways to constrain coalition-making

Likely outcome will be a recommendation to not substantially alter the current system.

www.burgerforumkiesstelsel.nl

