

**CITIZENS' CHOICE OF AN ELECTORAL SYSTEM:
THE DECISION OF THE BC CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY**

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the decision of the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly to recommend that STV be adopted for future elections to be held in that province. The study is based on the responses to multiple questionnaires that the members filled over the course of the one year long experiment in deliberative democracy. We analyze how the various electoral systems were ascertained over the course of the assembly and the criteria that were used for making these judgments. We show that the existing SMP system was rejected from the start and that the choice between MMP and STV (the two most serious reform options) hinged on the relative importance attached to voter choice and local representation.

Electoral reform has suddenly appeared on the political agenda of several Canadian provinces (Carty 2004; Cross 2005). For most of its history the country has been seemingly content to use single-member plurality (SMP) electoral systems. Although there have been modest experiments with other systems the claims of representation by identifiable local members and single-party government promised by SMP has generally triumphed. The result has been that when the issue of electoral system change finally got on the agenda there was little precedent as to how one might legitimately proceed and who would have the final say. While there was no doubt that constitutional authority rested with the individual legislatures, recent experience with attempts to engage in constitutional change suggested that some form of public participation might be required for a subject that is essentially constitutional in its nature.

While other provinces have adopted a variety of consultative processes to gauge popular opinion, the Premier of the British Columbia government took the position that this was a question of fundamental importance to the working of democracy and that it therefore belonged to the people of the province. The result was the establishment of the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform (CA) which was given a mandate to review the working of the electoral system (defined narrowly as the "manner voters' ballots are translated into seats") and to recommend either that the province maintain its existing SMP system or that it adopt an alternative system that the CA would "describe clearly and in detail". Any recommended change was to be put directly to the people at the time to the next provincial election whose date had been set (another government reform – the first fixed election date in Canadian parliamentary history) for May 17, 2005.

Given its importance to the operation of political competition and its impact on the outcomes by which politicians live, decisions on electoral systems are of primary concern to party politicians and they have typically been concerned to control them. To

our knowledge this was the first time in modern history that the political class had ever entrusted this fundamental decision to the citizenry. In this case the Assembly made a recommendation for change that surprised most observers. In this paper we are concerned to provide a preliminary analysis of their decision. In particular we wish to identify how these citizens compared and ranked alternative families of electoral systems and then explore their ranking of the criteria normally suggested as relevant to electoral system choice. That will then allow us to sort out how the members' assessment of these criteria finally shaped their views about which electoral system to recommend.

The BC Citizens' Assembly

Having decided to entrust the decision about electoral system choice to a citizens' assembly the government made several key decisions as to its make up and operation. The first, and perhaps most important, was that it would be completely independent of government. A chairman was appointed by a unanimous all-party vote of the legislature, given a budget and then left alone to manage it. The Assembly's membership was made up of 160 British Columbians, drawn at random from the voters' list (current politicians being disqualified from membership), with one man and one woman from each of the province's existing single-member districts. Assembly members came to their task not as designated local representatives but as a random representation of the provincial electorate. Most knew nothing about electoral systems and many did not realize that there was a world of options about to confront them. Members quickly became deeply engaged and worked extremely hard – many devoting more than 30 days of their year to this project; only one person dropped out and attendance at Assembly meetings was typically over 95%.

The Assembly proceeded in three phases. The first was a 'learning phase', a kind of political science boot camp focused on electoral systems conducted over six residential weekends in the province's largest city. It was managed by political scientists – both local and international experts – and members were given David Farrell's (2001) textbook as a basic reference. At the end of this phase the members produced a brief preliminary report identifying issues they believed needed public discussion.

The second phase consisted of a series of 'public hearings' (50 in all) all across the province. Members went to those in their local area and at least one in another part of the province. Several hundred presentations were made at these meetings that were supplemented by another 1600 submissions that came in over the CA's website (www.citizensassembly.bc.ca).

After a summer recess the Assembly returned for its third phase – another series of six residential weekends to 'deliberate and decide' about what they would recommend.

On Saturday October 23 and Sunday October 24 2004, the BC Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform took two crucial votes that led to the ultimate recommendation about the best electoral system for British Columbia. By Saturday, the Assembly had identified what it believed to be the two best alternatives to the FPTP and developed detailed versions of them for British Columbia. Their options were a Single Transferable Vote (STV) and a mixed "corrective" (MMP) system. After a comprehensive debate they voted overwhelmingly for the STV model by 123 – 31. On Sunday, the Assembly turned to comparing their preferred alternative to the existing

single-member plurality system (SMP). After another full debate they voted 145 – 7 to recommend STV be adopted for future elections, thus ensuring it would be put to referendum on May 17, 2005.

During the referendum campaign, there was relatively little public discussion as neither of the major political parties took a position on the issue and it seemed to get lost in the clamour of the general election debate. Ultimately, the recommendation was supported by 58% of the voters, just short of the 60% threshold the legislature had set for the referendum to pass.

The recommendation that the province switches from SMP to STV was a surprise. Given recent provincial electoral outcomes – a ‘wrong winner’ in 1996 and an eviscerated opposition in 2001 – many anticipated that such an Assembly would recommend a change, but few anticipated STV. On the one hand there was the reality that STV is not a widely used or known system; on the other there was the well-known example of New Zealand, a place not so unlike British Columbia in many ways, that had recently and apparently successfully switched from SMP to MMP. Our task in this preliminary analysis is to analyze this surprising recommendation. To do so we focus on the choice among the three systems that CA members contemplated and debated (SMP, STV and MMP), but we also provide some findings about other options the Assembly might have considered.

Because the CA was made of “ordinary” citizens who knew almost nothing about electoral systems when the Assembly started in January 2004, we pay particular attention to the dynamics of opinion formation. In particular, we examine how ratings of various electoral systems, the importance attached to various criteria by which they might be assessed, and the link between ratings and criteria, evolved over the course of the year. Because developing a knowledge base was essential for members (they had only a short period to learn about the potential options and their consequences for the conduct of politics, the legislative process and governments), we explore the role of information in the process. More specifically, we ask whether the better informed within the Assembly had different criteria and preferences, and whether their preferences were more tightly related to their ‘principles’. We also examine whether the better informed were quicker to form stable opinions on the issue.

Our analyses are based on a series of surveys conducted among the 160 CA members. There were three large self-administered questionnaires, each containing more than 100 questions, many of them repeated, conducted first, before the Assembly first met (December 2003), then second, after the learning and consultation phases but before the deliberation phase (July 2004), and third after the Assembly had completed its work (December 2004) but before the referendum campaign started. At the close of most weekend sessions a short questionnaire was added to the regular weekend evaluation forms. The Assembly timeline provided in Appendix A summarizes the distinctive periods of the Assembly’s work and identifies the particular surveys used in this paper.

Using information from the pre-Assembly survey as a benchmark, the analyses in this paper are mostly based on data collected in March (near the end of the learning phase), July, and then in December (after the final report was completed and the Assembly dissolved). Each of these surveys (# 5, 7, and 12) contained identical questions about the ratings of distinctive types of electoral system families and key criteria used to assess their impact on political and governing processes. Survey 5 was a short

questionnaire that CA members answered on Sunday March 7. They had been exposed the previous weekend to PR, STV and mixed systems and, in the meeting before that, to plurality and majority systems. By this weekend all members had ‘learned’ about the major electoral system families and this was the first opportunity to collect comparative information on their initial assessments of them. The July survey (# 7) was done after members had the opportunity to think more about the issues involved and to test their understanding and interpretations against the written submissions from the public and engage with citizens in the hearings, but before they had started the deliberation phase. The final December survey was done after the members had cast their vote for their preferred option and reported their views on the final decision.

The members’ judgments: an overview

Figure 1 provides a simple graphic illustration of members’ response to the question “How satisfied are you with the way the electoral system works in British Columbia?” at seven different points in the Assembly process. It is clear that there was never a very high level of support for it. Before the Assembly even started its work 64% of the members reported that they were dissatisfied with the system.¹ By the end of the second weekend, before the members had explored the details of how SMP works, but after they had had some opportunity to read and talk about some of the democratic governance and electoral organization and competition issues involved, dissatisfaction rose to over 80% and stayed there throughout the entire year. The great majority of CA members were looking for a better electoral system than SMP from the start of the process.

Table 1 presents CA members’ mean ratings of nine electoral systems, on a 1 to 7 scale, at the March, July and December points in the process (see Appendix B for question wordings). From the very beginning only four of these systems were rated better than 4, the mid-point in the scale: the two mixed systems, STV, and open list PR. The non-compensatory version of a mixed system was only slightly above 4 and its rating quickly declined; apparently it was never a serious contender. Open list PR had high scores initially but it then declined significantly in both the subsequent periods.

Table 1 also demonstrates that, from the beginning, members gave their lowest rating to the existing SMP system, an evaluation that remained relatively stable from March through to the end of the process in December. What is especially obvious is that at each point in the process an overwhelming majority of members preferred MMP and STV over SMP.

Ultimately the key decision made by the Assembly involved a choice between STV and MMP. MMP had a small edge in March and July but in the final phase the positions were sharply reversed producing the final decision in favour of STV. This evolution in the preferences between these two systems can be seen in Table 2, which reports the percentage of individuals rating one of these systems system higher than the other (equal scores are coded as no preference). When members first rated the systems (in March) almost 40% gave MMP a higher score, almost 40% were ambivalent or indifferent, and slightly over 20% preferred STV. Little appears to have changed by the end of the public hearing phase, save perhaps a small increase in the proportion

supporting STV (with fewer now ambivalent or indifferent). A spectacular turnaround occurred during the deliberative phase so that by the time the Assembly concluded 72% of its members rated STV higher than MMP, leaving only 10% still giving MMP a higher rating than STV. A crucial aspect of our analysis will be to specify what produced this huge shift in members' judgments.

The shift appears to have occurred early in the deliberation phase. The second and third weekend sessions were given over to elaborating the details of the two types of electoral systems that had been identified as the principal alternative options, first STV and then MMP.² At the end of the weekend in which the details of an STV system were worked out, the participants were asked to preferentially rank five systems – SMP, STV, MMP, the Alternative Vote and a mixed non-compensatory system – from first to last preference. At that point, 74% of the members indicated STV ranked first in their mind, while only 25% picked MMP, and just 1% SMP. After the following session in which members articulated the components of an MMP model they thought appropriate for BC they were invited to rank order the three systems still being seriously considered: SMP, STV, and MMP. 72% identified STV, 25% MMP, and 3% SMP as their first preference. It seems clear then that a significant majority preference for STV over MMP crystallized at about the time the Assembly developed its STV model and there was little change when it worked on the mechanics of a MMP system.

Table 3 shifts attention to a number of criteria, some complementary, others in tension, that are commonly invoked in arguments about the impacts and appropriateness of different electoral systems. It reports the mean scores (on a 1-7 scale labelled not important to extremely important) given to these criteria by individual Assembly members. Several interesting patterns appear in the data:

- Mean ratings are high (most well above the mid-point 4 score), an indication that CA members were reluctant to dismiss any specific dimension.
- The average ratings tended to be quite stable over time, the distance between the March and the December evaluations being minimal.
- The criterion consistently rated highest was 'voter choice'. This is not a value that typically gets much attention in political scientists' or politicians' assessments of a desirable electoral system. Apparently when ordinary voters think about electoral systems they give it considerable importance.
- Both local representation and simplicity got comparatively low mean scores.
- The criterion whose importance rating increased the most at the end was local representation – and this would prove to be part of the final decision story.

These summary measures suggest there was a substantial level of stability in the overall ratings of the systems and criteria over the life of the Assembly. Can we infer that most CA members provided similar responses over time? Table 4 shows the proportion of participants who gave similar ratings at two different points in time (March and July; July and December; and March and December). Ratings are considered similar or stable if the respondent's scores (on the 1 to 7 scale) in the two waves are equal or differ by only one point.

Table 4 reveals several features of the evaluative process. Judgments were relatively stable over time. Typically three-quarters of the members provided similar ratings in two successive waves.³ Still, a substantial minority did change its views. And the magnitude of change that took place between July and December was quite comparable to that observed between March and July. It would seem that CA members were progressively revisiting their evaluations over the course of the year. Among the systems, MMP was the most consistently rated while the most substantial change concerned evaluations of STV, MMM, and PR. Among the criteria, effective government and voter choice were the most stable while views about local representation changed the most.

Members of the Assembly were inclined to provide relatively high ratings to most of the standard criteria that they were invited to evaluate, as they were struggling to find a system that could accommodate many goals. That being said, the criterion that got the top mark from the very beginning was voter choice and the two that came out clearly less important were simplicity and local representation, though ratings of the latter did improve at the very end. As for electoral systems, it was clear from the beginning that the members did not like SMP and by July MMP and STV had come to be the top two alternatives. It was only in the deliberation phase that a clear preference for STV emerged.

Linking preferences to criteria

Our objective here is to discover which values or criteria, if any, drove members' judgments about the best electoral system and hence governed their final decision. To do so we focus on the three options that the CA ultimately chose among: SMP, STV, and MMP. The first task is to examine members' relative assessments of these systems by constructing variables that are based on the comparative scores given to each system in the three pairs: the value is simply the score given to one minus the score given to the other.⁴ These values are then treated as dependent variables. In preliminary analyses we regressed these preferences against the nine criteria listed in Table 3. These preliminary analyses indicated that three criteria seemed to matter most to members' decisions: fair representation, voters' choice and local representation. It might be noted that these criteria correspond to the key issues raised by the Assembly in its *Preliminary Statement* issued at the end of the learning phase and the features members agreed (at the beginning of the deliberation phase) ought to be essential features of any BC electoral system.⁵

Table 5 shows the effect of the three criteria on relative preferences among the three systems, at three different points in time. Not surprisingly, evaluations of SMP versus both STV and MMP hinged on the importance attached to fair representation versus local representation. Those who were more concerned with local representation were more likely to prefer SMP; those who gave priority to fair representation were prone to dislike it. We saw above that fairness had higher rankings in general than local representation; this finding indicates that concerns with fairness were more strongly correlated with judgments about electoral systems than concerns with local representation. All in all, fairness was (together with voter choice) the participants' most crucial value, and from that standpoint, SMP (and for that matter all majority and plurality systems) was unacceptable.

Things are somewhat more complicated with respect to preferences between STV and MMP. In March, as members' were still absorbing information about these two systems few had any previous knowledge or experience of, relative evaluations of the two systems appeared to be unstructured by these evaluative criteria. By July, those who were more concerned with increasing voter choice were prone to prefer STV (the coefficient does not quite reach statistical significance because of the small number) while those more concerned with fairness and/or local identity rated MMP more highly. All in all, MMP had a slight edge over STV but it was a very small edge because the most highly ranked criterion, voter choice, benefited STV.

By the final decision point in the fall those patterns changed dramatically. What did not change was the role of voters' choice – those who gave priority to choice continued to prefer STV. But MMP lost ground on the two criteria that had worked in its favour in the initial perceptions of the comparative merits of the two systems. Fairness lost the leverage it had in July, suggesting that MMP was no longer seen to be fairer than STV. Perhaps more importantly was the transformed influence of local representation. In July it had been negatively correlated with a preference for STV over MMP – now it was positively related with higher STV ratings. It seems clear that STV ultimately became more popular than MMP partly because the latter ceased to be perceived as a fairer system and partly because STV came to be preferred by those concerned with local representation. The latter point emerges when we relate preferences expressed in December to ratings of criteria but controlling for prior preferences revealed in July, which allows us to identify what account for changes in members' judgments between July and December. Those results indicate that it was those who attached greater importance to local representation who became more positive at the end towards STV.

These data show that SMP was rejected by most CA members because it was perceived to be an unfair system. As for the choice between STV and MMP, the former was more often preferred because it was perceived to better foster voter choice and local representation. And the shift from a small edge in favour of MMP in July to a widespread preference for MMP in the fall seems to stem largely from an increased concern for local representation linked to a new perception that STV was “better” than MMP on that score.

Was there an information cleavage?

The Citizens' Assembly was composed of ordinary citizens, drawn at random from the voters list, and it was inevitable that they came to the process with very different levels of political knowledge and interest. Though all went through the same learning phase, it may be that where they started from had an impact on where they ended. A concern for the ultimate consequences of members' initial levels of political awareness leads us to ask: Did it matter that some were more politically sophisticated than others at the beginning? Did the most informed have different views about electoral systems? Did they form their views earlier on? Were their views more consistent than those of the least sophisticated? At the base of these questions is an attempt to discover whether a basic information cleavage structured members' preferences.

The extent of members' initial political awareness was tapped in our benchmark questionnaire administered before the assembly met for the first time. Awareness was measured in two different ways – objectively and subjectively. The questionnaire included a number of factual questions about major provincial and national political actors and about the use of differing electoral systems in other countries. The questionnaire had nine such questions which provided for a (0 to 1) scale that indicates the proportion of correct answers that each participant provided (the scale's alpha is .61; its mean = 0.5).⁶

This was a self-administered (mail) questionnaire and it was theoretically possible (even though they were invited not to do so) for respondents to look for the correct answers. To balance this possibility, we also developed a subjective measure of each member's relative degree of political awareness and interest from three questions that rated their level of political interest, their overall degree of political information and knowledge of electoral systems. This subjective political sophistication (0 to 1) scale (alpha is .81, its mean = 0.6) and was correlated with its objective counterpart ($r=.39$).⁷

In our analyses we have used both the objective and the subjective measures to test the robustness of the findings, but here we report those based on the objective scale. The tests are rather simple: the members are divided into two groups, those with more information and those with less, and we explore the extent to which there were systematic differences between them.

The first question is whether the most knowledgeable rated the various electoral systems and criteria differently from their less well informed colleagues. Table 6 reports the results and demonstrates that there was very little overall gap in the evaluations of the more and less politically informed. There are few instances where the mean ratings of the two groups depart substantially. However, these differences were marginal and our general conclusion must be that there was no systematic difference in the views of the most and least informed.

A second possibility is that the most informed had more stable views than the least informed. The data do not support that hypothesis. We compared the proportion of stable ratings between two waves among the most and the least sophisticated (Table 7). The most sophisticated segment had slightly more similar ratings but the gap is quite small. Both groups were struggling to make up their mind on these issues and both groups were slightly modifying their views.

We checked whether the most informed made more consistent choices, that is, whether their evaluations of electoral systems were more strongly related to their priorities. We found some difference. In the December survey, only local representation seems to have influenced the relative evaluations of the least informed (again the coefficient does not quite reach statistical significance because of the small number of cases) whereas the most informed appear to have attached greater importance to voter choice (see Table 8).

Finally, the least informed were slightly more likely to rally to STV in the fall. The proportion of switchers, that is, people who did not prefer STV over MMP in July but who did so in December, was 45% among the least informed and 36% among both the most informed. But again this is a small difference. There was substantial shift towards STV in both groups.

These results reveal little systematic cleavage within the assembly between the most and the least sophisticated. There were people who knew quite a lot about politics when the CA started and there were others who knew very little. Yet there is no evidence that the most informed had different preferences or that they made up their mind differently. Nor is there evidence that the most informed led the group and that the least informed followed their lead.

Conclusion

The Citizens' Assembly experiment constituted a bold political experiment. The idea was to let ordinary citizens decide which electoral system was best for their province. The assumption is that politicians usually choose the system that best fits their own particular interests (Boix 1999; Benoit 2004).

So why not invite a sample of ordinary citizens to determine what are the main goals that an electoral system should achieve and select the system that is most likely to produce the desired outcomes? The problem with ordinary citizens is that they are poorly informed about electoral systems (and possibly about politics more generally) and that they are thus ill equipped to make a "rational" choice. The solution, it seems, is to inform ordinary citizens about both the options (the various electoral systems) and the criteria (goals) through which these options can be ascertained, to give them the opportunity to think through these choices and deliberate about them, and then have them decide. Theoretically the decision would correspond to the decision that would be reached by the entire electorate, if that electorate were well informed. The composition of the assembly assures that it reflects the general values and concerns of the population (contrary to politicians, who have personal stakes to defend), and the information and deliberation process assures that the decision is a wise one.

In this paper, we have focused on the second question, which is the "rationality" of the decision that was made by the CA members. It is appropriate, however, to say a word about the "representativeness" of the assembly. We should note that the assembly was not very representative of the larger public in at least one regard. As was shown in Figure 1, CA members were widely dissatisfied with BC's current electoral system from the very start, while surveys of the public indicate it to be relatively satisfied (see note 1). This difference may reflect the fact that those who were dissatisfied with the status

quo were more willing to participate in a citizen assembly while the satisfied were less interested in getting involved in a time-consuming exercise if they saw no pressing problem. The implication is that citizens' assemblies may be systematically biased against the status quo, exactly the opposite of what politicians, who often benefit from existing electoral arrangements, are often accused of.

Our main preoccupation has been to determine whether the choice that was made by the Assembly was a reasonable one, given the values and goals that the members had. We are not in a position to render a definitive verdict on this question, as much more data need to be analyzed, on other aspects of the decision.

Still, the evidence presented here suggests that the members did make a reasonable choice. As was shown in Table 5, both MMP and STV were clearly preferred over SMP because fairness was considered more important than local representation. This seems to make sense.

The choice between STV and MMP was a more difficult one and took more time. Yet it can be argued that voter choice, which was the top consideration, is maximized with STV, particularly the choice to select candidates from within a party. It can be also argued that STV is more likely to foster local representation than MMP, as it entices local candidates to do a lot of constituency work (Katz 1980; Carty 1981; Marsh 2000). The fact that we find a positive association between concern with voter choice and local representation and a relative preference for STV (Table 5) is consistent with the view that the members' decision was reasonable

It could be argued, however, that MMP can better guarantee fair representation than STV, especially because the latter entails small district magnitude but concern for fairness does not seem to have benefited MMP, for reasons that remain to be explained.⁸

Our data also lead us to reject the possibility that only the most sophisticated segment of the assembly was informed enough to make a reasonable decision. There were little systematic differences in the views of the most and least politically sophisticated, and there is no evidence that the less informed simply followed the advice of the avant-garde.

Figure 1. Satisfaction with BC's current electoral system (%)

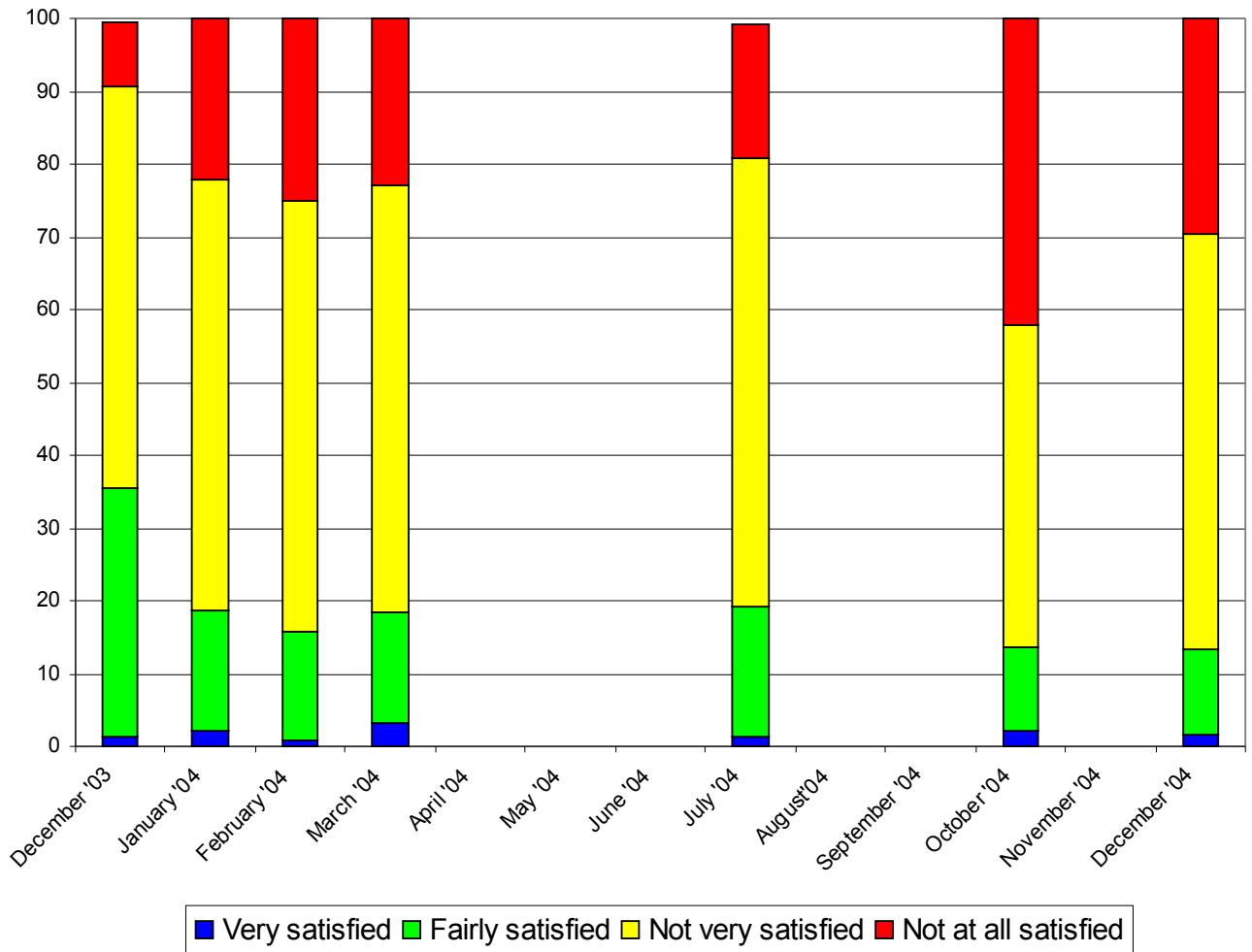


Table 1. Mean Evaluations of Electoral Systems (1-7, very bad to very good)

	March	July	December
Majority, two ballots	3.0	2.7	2.7
Majority, preferential ballot	3.3	3.7	3.4
Plurality, single-member	2.8	3.1	2.9
Plurality, multi-member	3.2	3.3	3
Open list PR	5.3	4.9	4.5
Closed list PR	3.7	3.4	3.1
STV	5.1	5.1	6.3
MMP	5.4	5.3	5.2
MMM	4.1	3.5	3.6

Table 2. Evolution of Preferences Between MMP and STV (%)

	March	July	December
Prefer MMP	39	40	10
No Preference	39	32	18
Prefer STV	22	28	72
N	119	131	117

Table 3. Mean Evaluations of Criteria (1-7, not important to extremely important)

	March	July	December
a) Effective government	6.1	5.8	6.1
b) Electoral accountability	5.8	5.9	6.0
c) Parliamentary check on government	6.0	5.9	6.0
d) Fair representation of parties/groups	5.9	5.4	5.8
e) Democratic political parties	5.6	5.2	5.4
f) Choice for the voter	6.2	6.0	6.2
g) Identifiable local representation	5.1	4.9	5.4
h) Encouragement to participate	6.0	5.6	5.8
i) Equality of the vote	5.8	5.5	5.9
j) Simplicity	-	-	4.2
k)			

Table 4. Proportion of CA Members with Stable Ratings (%)

	March to July	July to December	March to December
Systems			
Majority/two ballots	70.4	69.3	71.0
majority/preferential ballot	66.0	72.1	69.3
Plurality/single-member	75.2	81.1	68.5
Plurality/multi-member	68.2	77.7	71.4
PR (open)	63.3	69.8	63.4
PR (closed)	63.1	72.0	64.2
STV	72.3	65.1	63.3
MMP	83.8	83.2	84.7
MMM	63.6	64.1	63.7
Criteria			
Effective government	75.4	80.4	80.8
Electoral accountability	77.1	81.7	74.0
Parliamentary check on government	77.1	82.0	75.0
Fair representation of parties/groups	77.5	74.1	77.5
Democratic political parties	69.2	66.1	77.9
Choice for the voter	83.3	80.0	79.0
Identifiable local representation	59.5	61.1	58.1
Encouragement to participate	83.9	75.0	73.3
Equality of the vote	83.0	75.3	76.0

Table 5. The Determinants of Relative Evaluations of SMP, STV, and MMP (OLS regressions)

	March	July	December
SMP versus STV			
Fair representation	-.52***	-.34*	-.62***
Choice	-.25	.15	-.06
Local representation	.26***	.31***	.13
N	114	133	113
R2	.24	.13	.19
SMP versus MMP			
Fair representation	-.52***	-.72***	-.68***
Choice	-.19	.37*	.19
Local representation	.29***	.13	.36***
N	115	132	113
R2	.22	.23	.23
STV versus MMP			
Fair representation	-.01	-.38**	-.06
Choice	.07	.22	.25
Local representation	.02	-.18*	.23**
N	118	131	116
R2	.00	.07	.16
STV versus MMP			
Fair representation	-	-	.09
Choice	-	-	.08
Local representation	-	-	.33***
Stvmmp (July)	-	-	.33***
N	-	-	105
R2	-	-	.30

Table 6. Mean System and Criteria Evaluations by Information Level

	March		July		December	
	High Info	Low Info	High Info	Low Info	High Info	Low Info
Systems						
Majority, two ballots	2.7	3.1	2.6	2.9	2.5	2.8
Majority, alternative vote	3.2	3.3	3.4	3.7	3.1	3.5
Plurality, single-member	2.5	3.1	2.9	3.2	2.9	2.9
Plurality, multi-member	3	3.4	3.1	3.4	3	3.2
Open list PR	5.3	5.3	4.7	5	4.6	4.4
Closed list PR	4.1	3.5	3.5	3.3	2.8	3.2
STV	5.3	5.1	5.4	5	6.5	6.3
MMP	5.6	5.3	5.4	5.4	5.3	5.2
MMM	4	4	3.4	3.6	3.1	4
Criteria						
l) Effective government	5.9	6.6	5.7	5.8	6.2	6.1
m) Electoral accountability	5.6	5.9	5.8	5.9	6.4	6
n) Parliamentary check on govern.	5.9	6	5.8	5.8	6.3	6
o) Fair represent. of parties/groups	5.8	5.8	5.4	5.5	6	5.8
p) Democratic political parties	5.6	5.6	5.1	5.2	5.7	5.3
q) Choice for the voter	6	6.2	6	6	6.4	6.2
r) Identifiable local representation	4.8	5.1	4.7	4.9	5.4	5.4
s) Encouragement to particip.	6	5.8	5.7	5.5	6.2	5.7
t) Equality of the vote	5.8	5.6	5.5	5.5	6.4	5.8
u) Simplicity	-	-	-	-	4.1	4.2
v)						

Table 7. Proportion of CA Members with Consistent Judgments (%) by Information Level

	March to July		July to December	
	High Info	Low Info	High Info	Low Info
Systems				
Majority/two ballots	77.8	66.1	64.1	75.0
majority/preferential ballot	79.4	70.1	71.4	72.9
Plurality/single-member	62.5	69.5	81.4	72.0
Plurality/multi-member	65.8	72.4	81.0	72.9
PP (open)	62.5	65.5	71.4	62.0
PP (closed)	69.2	59.3	73.8	68.6
STV	73.7	70.5	74.4	59.6
MMP	84.2	82.0	92.9	78.8
MMM	69.2	61.4	76.7	74.5
Criteria				
Effective government	80.0	71.4	77.2	83.0
Electoral accountability	77.5	74.6	86.0	75.0
Parliamentary check on government	82.5	69.8	83.7	84.9
Fair representation of parties/groups	85.4	76.6	72.7	75.5
Democratic political parties	80.5	64.0	84.1	67.9
Choice for the voter	85.4	76.6	82.2	77.4
Identifiable local representation	68.3	70.8	62.2	62.3
Encouragement to participate	73.2	74.2	73.3	75.0
Equality of the vote	75.0	80.6	67.4	84.3

Table 8. The Determinants of Relative Evaluations of STV and MMP by Information Level (OLS regressions)

	December	
	High Info	Low Info
STV versus MMP		
Fair representation	-.10	.02
Choice	.66***	-.02
Local representation	.22	.27
N	44	56
R2	0.22	0.14

APPENDIX A: British Columbia Citizens' Assembly Timeline

Date	Event	Survey #	Relevant data*
2003			
Spring	Assembly established		
Fall	Members selected		
December	Benchmark (mailback) survey	1 (101 items)	<i>Initial info</i>
2004			
Jan. - March	<i>Learning Phase</i> weekends short weekly questionnaires	2 - 6	
March 6 - 7	1 st Qs comparing electoral systems and system criteria	5 (20 items)	<i>March wave</i>
May - June	50 <i>Public Hearings</i>		
June	Assembly meeting in North		
July	Second major (mailback) survey	7 (147 items)	<i>July wave</i>
Sept. - Nov.	<i>Deliberation Phase</i> weekends 4 short weekly questionnaires	8 - 11	
October 23 - 24	Decision weekend		
December	Final report issued		
December	Completion (mailback) survey	12 (200 items)	<i>December wave</i>
2005			
May 17	Public Referendum		
May	Telephone survey on referendum participation	13 (23 items)	

* This indicates data used in the analysis in this paper

APPENDIX B: Question Wordings

Systems Evaluation

(Question no 1 survey # 5, no 2 section M survey # 7 and no 1 section L survey # 12).
Listed below are a number of electoral systems. Please rate each system on a scale from 1 to 7 in terms of how good you personally think each system would be for B.C. (Please circle your answer for each question – 1=very bad and 7=very good)

- a) Majority, two ballots
- b) Majority, alternative (preferential) vote
- c) Plurality, single-member
- d) Plurality, multi-member
- e) Proportional representation, open list
- f) Proportional representation, closed list
- g) Single transferable vote
- h) Mixed, proportional (MMP)
- i) Mixed, additional (MMM)

(Question no E survey # 8)

At this point in your work, how do you rank the following electoral systems (rank from 1st to 5th, where 1 is the best for BC and 5 is worst for BC)

- Plurality single member (FPTP)
- Majority (AV)
- Mixed member proportional (MMP)
- Single transferable vote (STV)
- Mixed member majority (MMP)

(Question no D survey # 9)

At this point in your work, how do you rank the following electoral systems (rank from 1st to 3rd, where 1 is the best for BC and 3 is worst for BC)

- Plurality single member (FPTP)
- Single transferable vote (STV)
- Mixed member majority (MMP)

Criteria Evaluation

(Question no 2 survey # 5, no 3 section M survey # 7 and no 2 section L survey # 12).
Listed below are some criteria for assessing electoral systems. Please rate each criterion on a scale from 1 to 7 in terms of how important you personally think each criterion is. (Please circle your answer for each question – 1=very bad and 7=very good)

- a) Effective government
- b) Electoral accountability
- c) Parliament check on government
- d) Fair representation of parties/groups
- e) Democratic political parties
- f) Choice for the voter

- g) Identifiable local representation
- h) Encouragement to participate
- i) Equality of the vote

Satisfaction with BC's current electoral system

(Question no 2 section E survey # 1,7 and 12, no1 survey #2, no 3 survey #5, no 1 survey # 6, no g survey # 9)

How satisfied are you with the way the electoral system works in British Columbia ?

1. Very satisfied
2. Fairly satisfied
3. Not very satisfied
4. Not satisfied at all

Information

(Question no 1 section I survey # 1)

Do you recall the name of the first woman to be prime minister of Canada? (name)

(Question no 2 section I survey # 1)

Do you recall the name of the first member of a visible minority to become a premier in British Columbia? (name)

(Question no 3 section I survey # 1)

Do you recall the name of the Canadian Prime Minister who signed the free trade agreement with the United States? (name)

(Question no 4 section I survey # 1)

Do you recall the name of your present provincial MLA? (name)

(Question no 5 section I survey # 1)

Do you recall which level of government has the PRIMARY responsibility for health, education and social welfare? (name)

(Question no 6 section I survey # 1)

Do you know a country which has the same voting system as in Canada, that is, the candidate with the most votes wins? (name)

(Question no 7 section I survey # 1)

Do you know a country where people have two votes, one for the party they prefer and one for the local candidate they prefer? (name)

(Question no 8 section I survey # 1)

Do you know a country where voters get to rank the candidates in the order of preference? (name)

(Question no 9 section I survey # 1)

Do you know a country where they have proportional representation, that is, the percentage of seats a party gets is about the same as the percentage of the votes it got?
(name)

(Question no 1 section C survey # 1, 7, 12)

How interested in politics do you usually feel? (0=not interested and 1=very interested)

(Question no 1 section C survey # 1, 7, 12)

How informed about politics do you usually feel? (0=not interested and 1=very interested)

(Question no 1 section C survey # 1, 7, 12)

How informed about electoral systems do you feel? (0=not interested and 1=very interested)

The vote

(Question no a survey # 10)

On Saturday afternoon, which option did you vote for ? ____MMP ____STV

(Question no 2 section Q survey # 12)

On the first vote on Saturday October 23 between MMP and STV, how did you vote?

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NOTES

¹ By comparison, a rolling cross-section survey of the public done between January and May 2005 found 62% reporting some degree of satisfaction.

² The first week-end had been devoted to hearing nine presentations (chosen from all the presentations given in individual public hearings) that covered the principal options facing the Assembly. The members then turned to identifying main values that they wanted to see incorporated in an electoral system. These values – fair electoral results (defined as more or less proportional outcomes), effective local representation, and greater voter choice – were confirmed on the first day of the second weekend and the decision was made to focus on constructing STV and MMP models.

³ And on average 72% gave stable ratings in March and December.

⁴ We use these relative evaluation variables rather than actual vote choice because they provide finer measures of members' judgments, incorporating the intensity of preferences. There was of course a strong correlation between relative evaluations and vote choice; 89 of the 94 respondents who gave a higher rating to STV over MMP or the reverse voted for their preferred option (15 of the 21 individuals who gave the same rating supported STV).

⁵ The statement at the end of the learning phase referred to four aspects : the vote-seat relationship (which is fairness), local representation, the range and nature of choice offered to voters, and governance (Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform 2004, 155). The latter could be linked to effective government and/or parliamentary check on government but neither appears to be related to CA members' preferences. At the beginning of the deliberation phase, the members determined that fair electoral results, effective local representation, and greater voter choice were their main concerns.

⁶ This approach, which is based on the capacity to give correct answers to factual questions, is the standard methodology utilized in studies about the role of information in opinion formation. See: Luskin 1987; Zaller 1992; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Althaus 2003.

⁷ The correlations between subjective information in January and July, July and December, and January and December are: .66, .80, and .66.

⁸ See Taagepera and Shugart 1989. One possibility is that members were keenly concerned that there be a minimum level of fairness (and for that reason SMP was judged to be unacceptable) but they were not aiming for maximum fairness.