

Presentation to the Yukon Special Committee on Electoral Reform

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Four topics

- Electoral reform and voter turnout
- The New Brunswick experience with electoral reform
- The Canadian experience with electoral reform, focussing on process issues.
- Suggestions re: process issues.

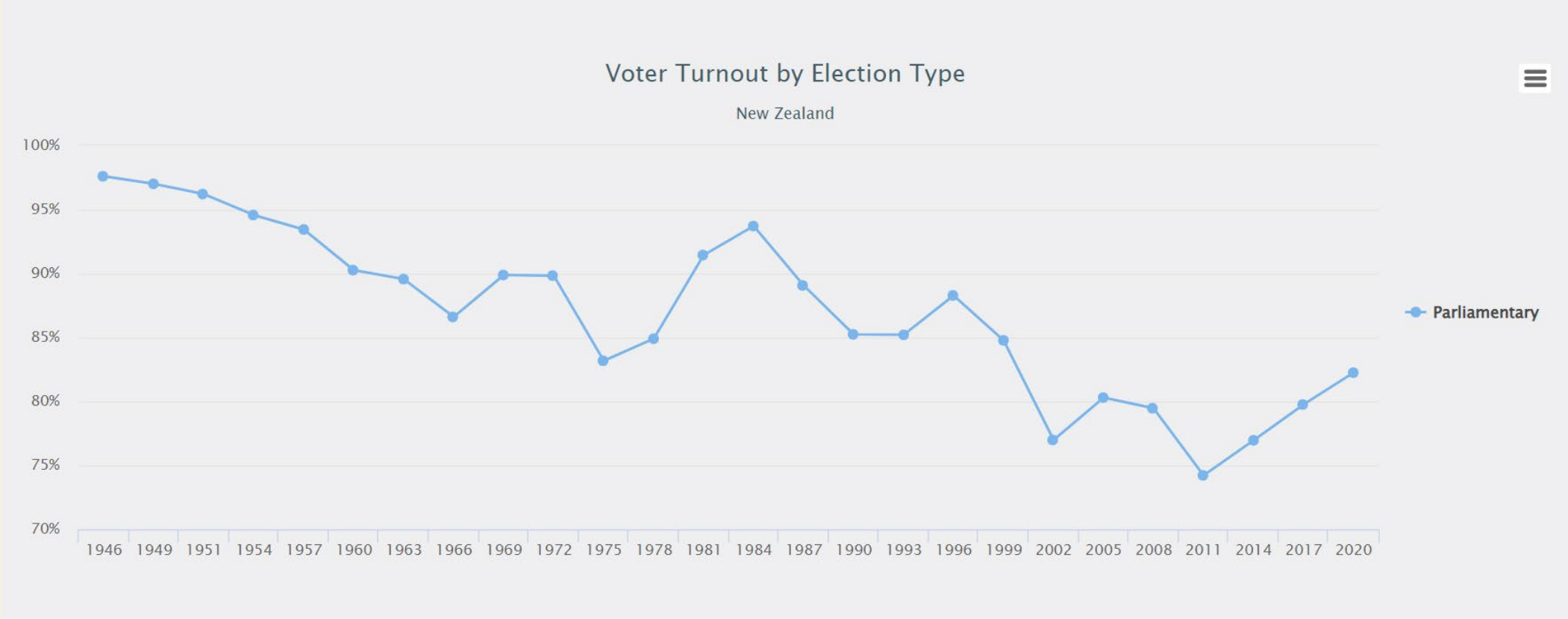
Voter turnout tends to be higher in PR countries

Voter turnout is higher in countries with proportional representation

- Multiple researchers have found voter turnout is higher in countries with proportional systems:- Lijphart (2012) looking at 36 democracies over 55 years found turnout to be 7% higher.
 - Blais and Carty (1990) – 8% higher
 - Norris (1997) – 6-10% higher
 - International Democracy and Electoral Assistance (1999) – 12% higher among youth

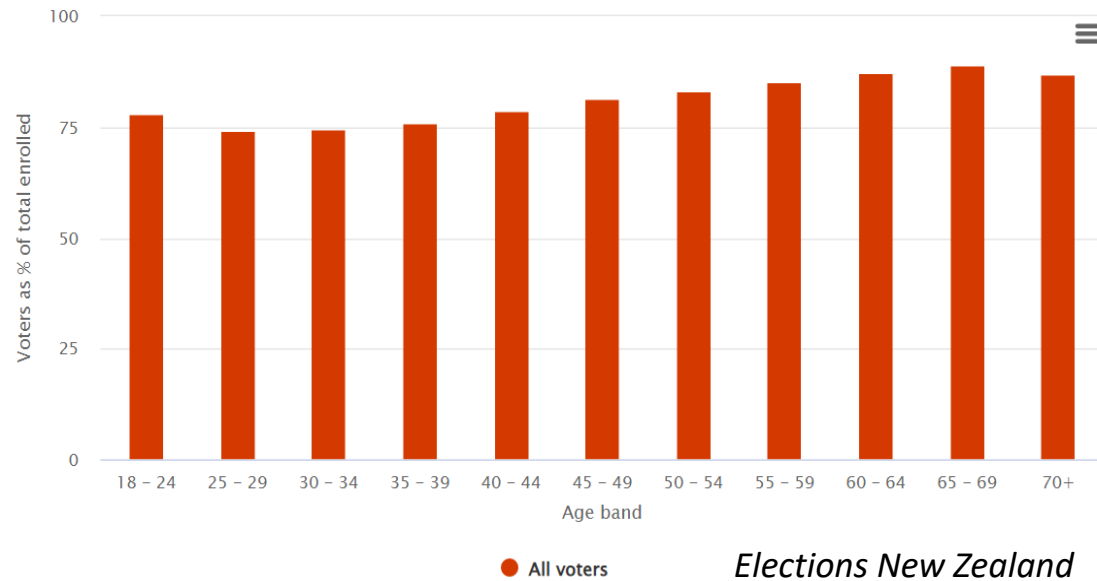
- *Fair Vote Canada website*

The switch to MMP did not boost voter turnout in New Zealand



Intriguing difference: Voter turnout by age

New Zealand voter turnout by age, 2020 election



Yukon voter turnout by age, 2015 and 2019 federal election

YT	Both sexes	18 to 24 years	3,009	1,730	57.5	53.2	61.7	2,751	1,259	45.8
		25 to 34 years	4,836	3,510	72.6	48.8	96.3	5,477	3,790	69.2
		35 to 44 years	4,760	3,101	65.1	55.4	74.9	5,659	3,976	70.3
		45 to 54 years	5,141	3,837	74.6	54.9	94.4	5,086	3,563	70.1
		55 to 64 years	5,535	4,737	85.6	45.9	100.0	5,973	4,362	73.0
		65 to 74 years	2,917	2,399	82.2	76.1	88.3	3,750	2,964	79.1
		75 years and over	1,273	1,072	84.2	74.5	93.9	1,741	1,236	71.0
		All ages	27,473	20,385	74.2	74.2	74.2	30,437	21,150	69.5

Elections Canada

Electoral Reform in New Brunswick, Phase One

- NB Commission on Legislative Democracy formed by Bernard Lord in 2004.
- Commission did its work for a year and recommended MMP model for New Brunswick. Thirty-six local MLAs, and 20 list MLAs (5 from each of 4 regions).
- Lord government announced a plan to hold a referendum in conjunction with municipal elections in 2008. When Conservatives lost power, this did not happen.

Electoral Reform in New Brunswick, Phase Two

- Issue was revived in 2016 when Gallant government formed the NB Commission on Electoral Reform.
- Significant shortcomings with the process this time around:
 - Method of selecting the Commission was an odd mix: in theory open to anyone; in reality, it was a hand-picked set of commissioners. It was not, as it claimed, a “mini-citizens assembly.”
 - Gov’t. tried to limit options by specifically citing preferential balloting as something the Commission should investigate.
 - Time frame was very limited; therefore limited time for education of Commission members and public consultation.
 - Final report was relatively brief without much detailed analysis.
 - Commission recommended that NB switch to preferential balloting and that PR could be further considered down the road - despite the fact that members of public who provided their views overwhelmingly favoured PR.
 - Ironically, it did not suggest the idea of a ranked ballot referendum with more than two options for voters.
- Gallant government announced referendum on preferential balloting to take place during 2020 municipal elections. When Liberals lost power, this did not happen.
- So two promised referendums did not take place when government switched hands.

Electoral Reform in Canada: Process Issues

- Early on, the perceived “gold standard” approach to considering a change to the electoral system: a citizens assembly followed by a referendum.
- Used in both British Columbia and Ontario in mid-2000s.
- Both methods of engaging/consulting citizens are good ideas in theory, but in practice they face significant challenges.

Citizen Assemblies

- CAs are meant to be a random selection of the population but in practice they likely suffer from significant self-selection bias as people elect whether to participate.
- CAs do not seem to leave much impression on the general population.
- CAs can be a useful mechanism for proposing a new electoral system, but may be less helpful in guiding the population in their thinking – even though many in the population do not know much about electoral systems and could use some guidance!

Referendums

- Civic literacy:
 - Major challenge: most Canadians do not know much about electoral systems; part of larger problem of poor “civic literacy” in Canada.
 - Difficult to reach such people in order to educate them about FPTP and alternative systems.
- Referendum turnout:
 - Turnout in stand-alone referendums on electoral reform has been very low.
 - Low turnout diminishes the democratic legitimacy of the referendum process. Most seem to feel 50% turnout is the minimum requirement – not yet achieved in any of three stand-alone referendums (PEI 2005, PEI 2016, BC 2018).
 - Turnout in referendums held in conjunction with elections has been better (BC 2005 and 2009, Ontario 2007, PEI 2019). But presumably more are participating who know relatively little about electoral systems.
- Referendum voting:
 - When people do not know much about an issue in a referendum, they are more likely to support the status quo.
- So the referendum mechanism for this issue is tricky.

Time to consider new processes?

- All-party support for a new electoral system is a reasonable way to proceed. This is a method commonly advocated and used to make changes to various features of electoral democracy.
- A referendum could then be held after a new system has been in place for two or three elections.
- This would mean that voters would be much more familiar with a new model and could cast informed ballots.
- In this case, holding a referendum in conjunction with an election would also be more reasonable. Most voters would have a well-formed opinion by this time.