

How to Understand Voting System Reform and Act On It

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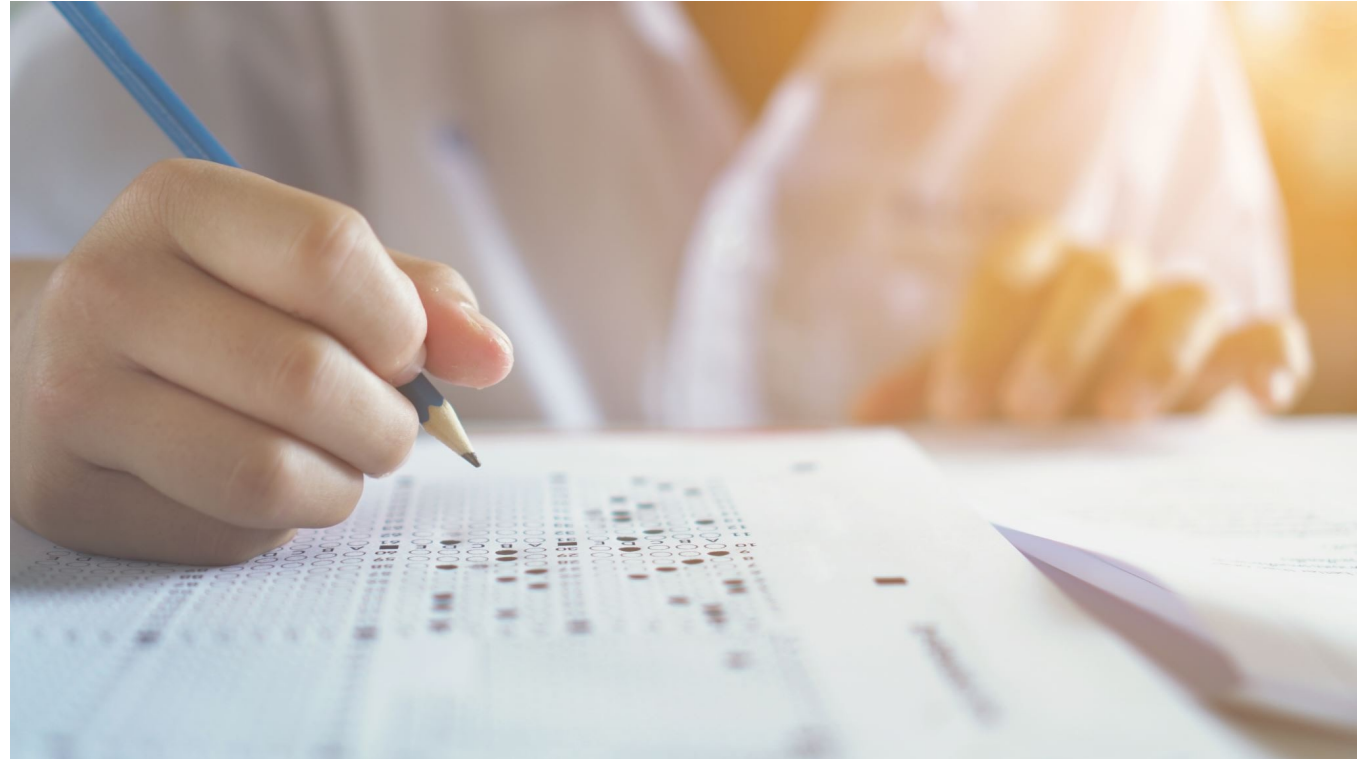
Presentation themes

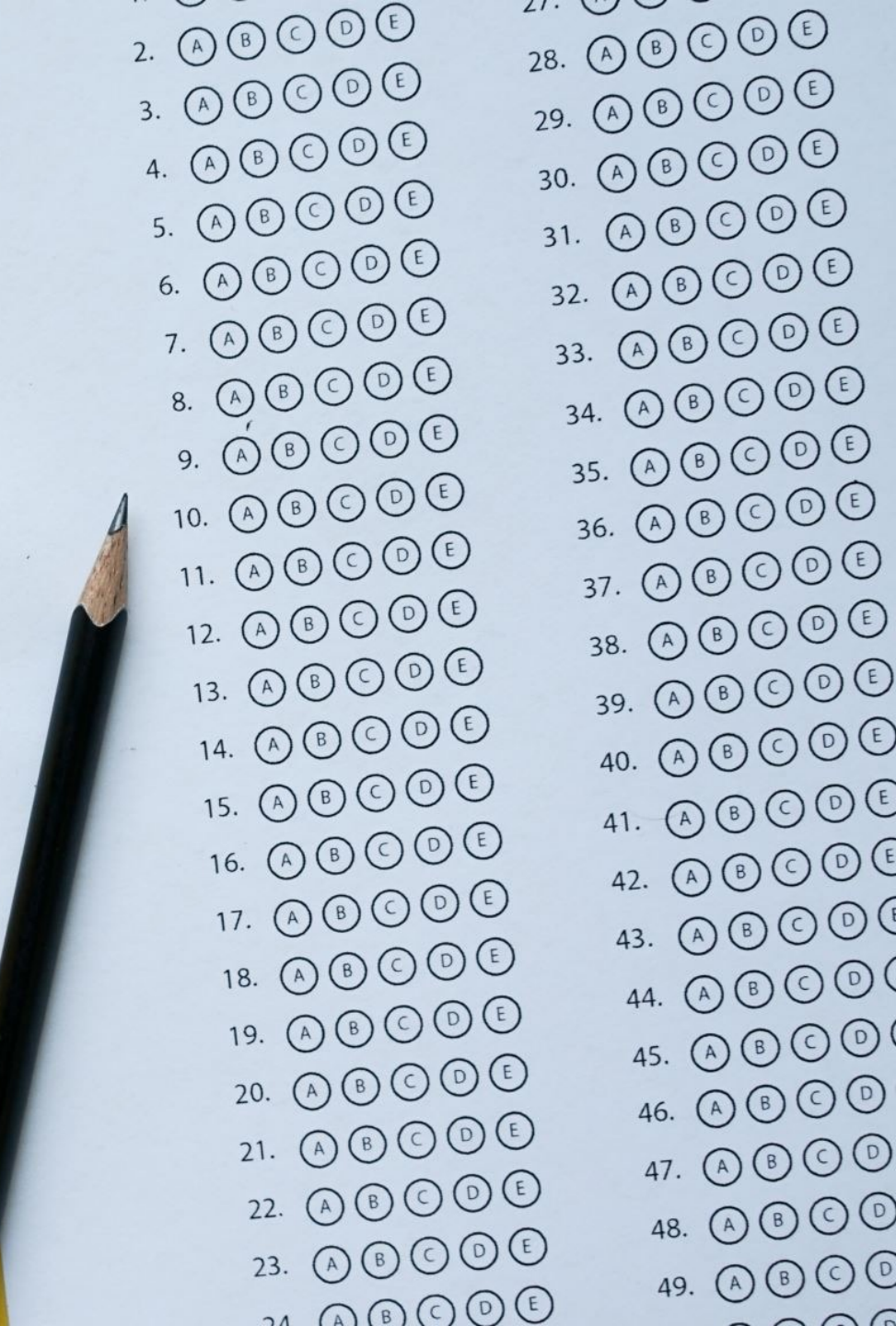
Framing the debate

Limits of the preference approach

What are voters trying to do?

Critically assessing referenda





Framing the debate

- Preference approach
 - Assessing competing values that different voting system allegedly represent, derived from the results they typically produce
 - Decide on voting system based on preferred values
- Democratization approach
 - Determine what voters are trying to do when voting
 - Assess what institutional choices would help them
- How to decide on approach? Evidence

Limits of the preference approach

- Simplicity
- Stability
- Representation
- Accountability



Simplicity

- Claim: SMP simple, PR complex
- Evidence?
- PR not complicated to use
- Ballot spoilage rates comparable
- SMP counting simple, understanding results not simple
- E.g. understanding 'majority' government

Stability

- Claim: SMP stable, PR not
- Evidence?
- Coalition and minority governments in comparable western countries using PR not unstable
- No more elections in PR countries than SMP countries

Representation

- Claim: Local representation key to SMP; small party influence a concern with PR
- Evidence?
- Local representatives are party representatives under SMP
- Claims of inflated small party influence under PR are speculative, uninformed by actual practice in PR using countries

Accountability

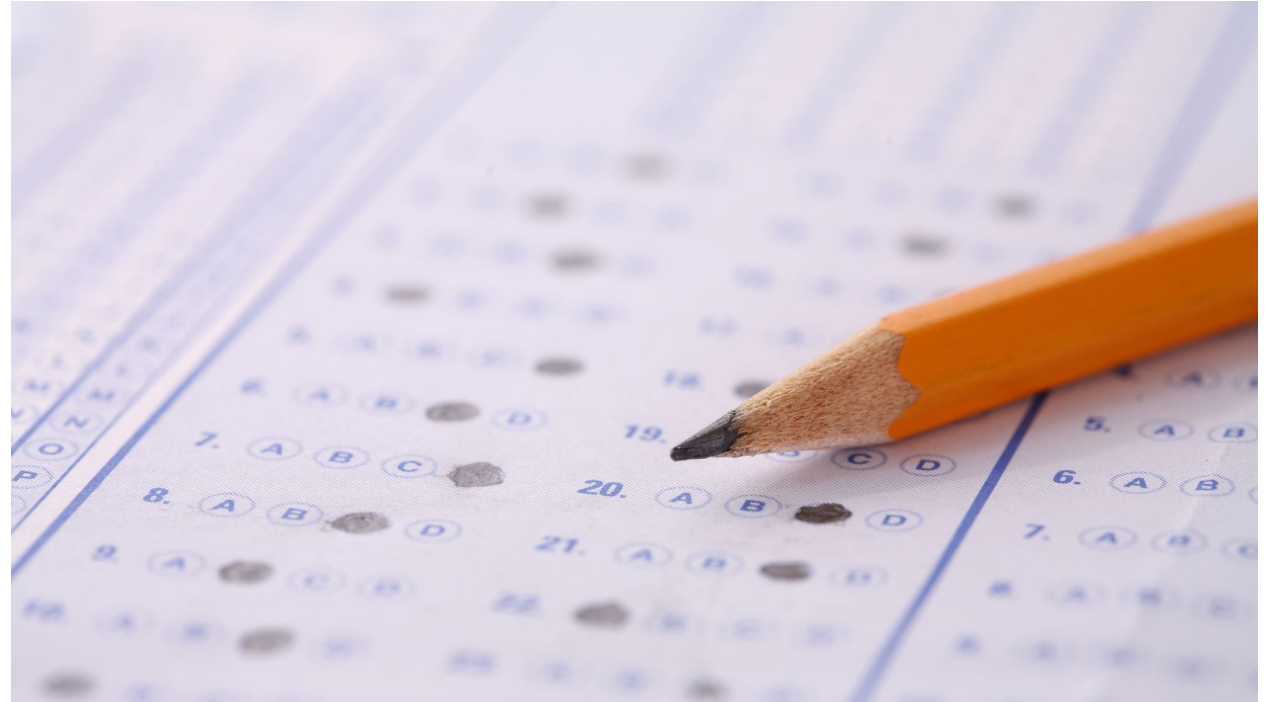
- Claim: SMP single party majority governments create clear lines of accountability for voters, PR allows governing parties to 'pass the buck'
- SMP leaves government formation up to voters, not negotiations, as under PR
- Evidence?
- Notion of 'accountability' ill defined and poorly applied to SMP
- Voters have less ability to make 'their' party accountable under SMP than PR
- Government formation is indirect effect in SMP
- Buck passing possible in all systems – no evidence from practice that PR is worse

What are voters trying to do by voting?

What voters say

What voters do

Why voters choose parties



Voters vote party

- Much rhetorical focus on local representation under SMP
- Evidence?
- Both long-term patterns of voting in elections and a common sense reading of election results demonstrate voters vote party
- They vote party as a form of collective action
- They choose parties by linking values, beliefs and goals to party closest to theirs and then use party as information shortcut to navigate issue complexity



Critically assessing referenda

- Majoritarian decision-rules and representation
- Voting system reform and referenda
- Normative versus partisan interests and referenda
- Voters, issue complexity and referenda
- Values and voting system choice
- The problem of 'choosing' unfairness



Critically assessing referenda

- Majoritarian decision-rules and representation
 - Potential conflict when issues of inclusion at stake
- Voting system reform and referenda
 - Referenda not how most voting systems introduced past or present
- Normative versus partisan interests and referenda
 - Defended as normative choice but enacted by partisans e.g. BC/NZ
- Voters, issue complexity and referenda
 - Voting system referenda typically just reflected party positions
- Values and voting system choice
 - Past and present voting system choices self interest, not values
- The problem of 'choosing' unfairness
 - Given preference 'values' empirically false, is choosing 'unfairness' democratic?



Conclusion

- Preference approach discredited
- Evidence from strong patterns of elections results over time and place give us a pretty good idea what voters are trying to do when voting
- Voting system reform is about matching institutions to needs, not subjecting needs to partisan-motivated majority decision rule
- Committee should establish what Yukon voters need and recommend change to address it