



Interim Report
of the
Special Committee on
Electoral Reform

35th Yukon Legislative Assembly

November 24, 2022

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Yukon Legislative Assembly

Special Committee on Electoral Reform

35th Yukon Legislative Assembly

November 24, 2022

Hon. Jeremy Harper, MLA
Speaker
Yukon Legislative Assembly

Dear Speaker:

The Special Committee on Electoral Reform has the honour to present to the Legislative Assembly an interim report on the committee's work to date.

Sincerely,

Kate White
Chair

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Introduction

This interim report summarises the work of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform to date.

On May 26, 2021, the Yukon Legislative Assembly adopted Motion No. 61, thereby establishing the Special Committee on Electoral Reform. The committee's reporting deadline was amended by the Legislative Assembly on October 25, 2021, with the adoption of Motion No. 167, and again on November 15, 2022, with the adoption of Motion No. 530.

The committee's purpose, as set out in the motion establishing the committee, is to examine electoral reform and report to the Legislative Assembly its findings and recommendations. Motion No. 61 also empowered the committee "to conduct public hearings" and "to call for persons, papers, and records".

The committee decided upon a multi-phased approach to fulfilling its mandate. Firstly, the committee endeavoured to gain an understanding of different voting systems and how they might apply to the particular demographic and geographic situation of the Yukon. To this end, the committee hired a researcher to prepare a report on options for the territory and sought input from several subject matter experts.

Secondly, the committee undertook to facilitate an informed public dialogue on electoral reform. A communications campaign, including advertisements, a website and the distribution of pamphlets, was developed to educate Yukoners on different voting systems. The committee also endeavored to make its work readily accessible to the public by publishing its minutes, recordings and transcripts of hearings, and the reports and submissions received online.

The final stage of the committee's work was gathering feedback from the Yukon public. All Yukoners 16 years old and older were invited to participate in a survey on electoral reform. The committee also collected written submissions and held public hearings in communities across the territory to hear the opinions of citizens and stakeholders.

Having completed this work, the committee determined that it required further input from Yukoners before finalizing its findings and recommendations. Before presenting its final report to the Legislative Assembly during the 2023 Spring Sitting, the committee will review information collected from a survey specifically on citizens assemblies.

More information on the committee, including meeting minutes, submissions, and transcripts of public hearings, is available on the committee's webpage <http://yukonassembly.ca/SCER>

The Committee's Process

Gaining an Understanding of Electoral Reform

From its first meeting, the members of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform observed that the committee's orders of reference to examine electoral reform could encompass studying potential voting systems as well as the rules governing various elements of elections.

Research Report

Following a request for proposals, a contract was awarded to Dr. Keith Archer, to study options for Yukon's electoral systems and submit a final report to the Special Committee on Electoral Reform. Dr. Archer, a former professor of political science, was Chief Electoral Officer of British Columbia from 2011 to 2018 and also served on the Electoral Boundaries Commission of Alberta and the Electoral Boundaries Commission of British Columbia.

Dr. Archer submitted his report to the committee on October 31, 2021. The 75-page report includes a summary of the major electoral system options and their characteristics, as well as analysis of election results in the Yukon under the current first-past-the-post system.

On January 10, 2022, Dr. Archer provided an executive summary of the options for Yukon's electoral system. Dr. Archer's report and the executive summary are available on the committee's webpage. The executive summary identifies which of the available electoral systems might be suitable for Yukon and elaborates on how those systems could be applied in the territory. The executive summary also compares the likely impacts of three types of electoral systems: first-past-the-post, single transferable vote, and mixed member proportional.

First-past-the-post is the current electoral system. The other two, single transferable vote and mixed member proportional, were selected by Dr. Archer as options to be more thoroughly considered for the Yukon as they could be applied to the territory in a manner in which each the system's advantages could potentially outweigh its disadvantages.

Expert Witnesses

In its study of potential changes to the voting system, the committee sought input from additional subject matter experts. Given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the timeline for the committee to complete its work, the Special Committee on Electoral Reform conducted public hearings with expert witnesses by videoconference. Between January 21 and April 22, 2022, the committee held 14 videoconference hearings with subject matter experts. Transcripts and recordings of each hearing are available on the committee's webpage.

Keith Archer, Committee Researcher

Dr. Archer appeared as a witness by videoconference on January 21 and 31 2022, to provide an overview of his report on options for Yukon's electoral system and answer questions from committee members.

R. Kenneth Carty, Professor Emeritus of Political Science, University of British Columbia

Dr. Carty also appeared twice before the committee, on January 24, and March 25, 2022, to discuss electoral reform in British Columbia and his experience with citizens' assemblies.

Maxwell Harvey, Chief Electoral Officer, Elections Yukon

On January 25, 2022, Yukon's Chief Electoral Officer spoke to the committee regarding elections in Yukon. Mr. Harvey outlined various electoral reform considerations from the perspective of Elections Yukon.

Joanna Everitt, Professor of Political Science, University of New Brunswick

The topic of Dr. Everitt's presentation on January 25, 2022, was the challenges that governments face when attempting to change voting systems and alternative options for electoral reform.

Donald Desserud, Professor of Political Science, University of Prince Edward Island

Dr. Desserud appeared as a witness on January 26, 2022, to discuss electoral reform in Prince Edward Island.

Peter Loewen, Director, Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy, University of Toronto

The current voting system, the first-past-the-post system, and the merits and demerits of electoral reform was the subject of Dr. Loewen's presentation to the committee on January 27, 2022.

Therese Arseneau, Senior Fellow in Political Science, University of Canterbury

On January 27, 2022, Dr. Arseneau appeared by videoconference from New Zealand to speak with the committee about that country's experience with electoral reform.

Paul Howe, Professor of Political Science, University of New Brunswick

Electoral reform in New Brunswick was the focus of Dr. Howe's January 28, 2022, appearance before the committee.

Dennis Pilon, Associate Professor, Department of Politics, York University

Dr. Pilon titled his submission to the committee "How to Understand Voting System Reform and Act on It". His presentation on March 25, 2022, addressed referenda and how the debate on electoral reform is framed.

***Graham White, Professor Emeritus of Political Science,
University of Toronto***

Dr. White addressed the challenges to electoral reform faced by the North, and specifically Yukon, in his testimony on March 25, 2022.

Fair Vote Canada and Fair Vote Yukon

Fair Vote Canada is a non-profit organization that advocates for proportional representation. Fair Vote Canada's Executive Director, Anita Nickerson, appeared with Gisela Ruckert, a Fair Vote Canada Board Member, on January 26, 2022. Ms. Nickerson and Ms. Ruckert presented their organization's perspective on referenda and citizens' assemblies. On April 22, 2022, Linda Leon and Sally Wright addressed the committee as representatives of the Yukon branch of Fair Vote Canada. The presentation from Fair Vote Yukon recommended the creation of a Yukon citizens' assembly on electoral reform.

Facilitating an Informed Public Dialogue

Committee members identified communications as an important committee consideration.

Transparency

The committee took steps to make its work accessible to the public. Minutes of in camera committee meetings, recordings and transcripts of public hearings, and the reports and submissions received by the committee were published online. The committee also put out frequent news releases regarding its activities.

How Yukon Votes Campaign

A communications campaign, including digital, print and radio advertisements, a website, and the distribution of pamphlets to all Yukon households, was developed to inform Yukoners on the different voting systems identified in Dr. Archer's report.

The descriptions of each voting system created for the How Yukon Votes campaign are included in this interim report.

Public Input

It was important to committee members that public opinion be part of the committee's study of electoral reform.

Survey

The Yukon Bureau of Statistics (YBS) conducted a survey on electoral reform on behalf of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform from February 15 to April 10, 2022. YBS's report to the committee is available on the committee's webpage. All Yukon residents aged 16 years and over were

invited to participate in the survey. 6,129 Yukoners (17.1% of eligible Yukoners) completed the survey.

Written Submissions

The committee welcomed written submissions from the public over the course of its examination of electoral reform.

Between July 2, 2021 and September 30, 2022, the committee received 60 unique written submissions. The committee also received 2 different form letters advocating for the establishment of a citizens' assembly, submitted by 49 individuals.

The written submissions the committee received are available on the committee's webpage.

Public Hearings in Yukon Communities

The committee held 8 in-person public hearings to hear from Yukoners in 7 different communities: Whitehorse, Haines Junction, Teslin, Watson Lake, Dawson City, Mayo and Carmacks. Public participation by videoconference was also possible at each of the hearings.

The committee wrote to all municipal councils, local advisory councils and First Nation governments in the Yukon to advise them of the hearings and offer opportunities to share the perspectives of their communities.

In total, there were 53 individual presentations to the committee during the community hearings. Transcripts and recordings of the public hearings are available on the committee's webpage.

Voting Systems

The following section contains short explanations of the various options for voting systems that were presented to the Yukon public. This information was initially presented on howyukonvotes.ca and is also available on the committee's webpage.

Plurality Systems

Candidates win seats by having the highest number(s) of votes in their district.

First Past the Post

This is the system we currently use.

You vote for your preferred candidate in your district.

The candidate with the highest number of votes wins.

How It Works:

There are 19 electoral districts, each of which elect only one candidate.

How You Vote:

You vote for a single candidate in your district.

The candidate with the highest number of votes wins that district.

What Should I Consider:

Electoral districts have direct, local representation - the candidates they vote for live in their district.

Candidates can win with a minority of votes from their constituency, meaning parties may be disproportionately represented compared to the popular vote.



Block Vote

You vote for a number of candidates within a larger district.

The candidates with the highest number of votes win.

How It Works:

There are fewer, or possibly only one, electoral districts, within which multiple candidates are elected.



How You Vote:

You vote for multiple candidates, up to the number of designated seats in your district.

The candidates with the highest number of votes win the district and fill that designated number of seats.

This system is similar to Yukon municipal elections, except that territorial candidates are associated with political parties.

What Should I Consider:

As there may be as few as one electoral district, the elected candidates may not accurately represent the variety of communities and populations of the Yukon.

Candidates run “at large”, meaning they are not only in competition with candidates from other parties, but also their own party. This can result in disproportionate representation of parties compared to the popular vote.

- Example: In an electoral district, Candidate A (Party A) receives 20 000 votes, the most of any candidate.
- Candidates B through G (Party A) split the vote, each receiving less than 400 votes.
- This means that if Party B and C’s candidates each receive 401 votes, Party A would end up with only one seat, despite having a plurality or majority of the popular vote.

Majority Systems

Candidates win seats by having a majority of votes in their district.

Alternative Vote

You rank your preferred candidates in your district.

The candidate with a majority of votes wins.

If necessary, the lowest candidate is eliminated and secondary rankings are allocated.

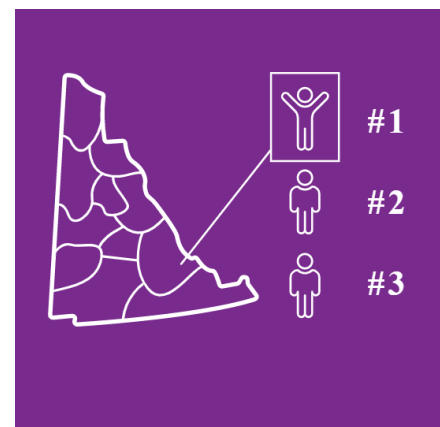
How It Works:

There are 19 electoral districts, each of which elect only one candidate.

How You Vote:

You rank the candidates in your district by preference.

The candidate with a majority of votes wins.



What If There Is No Majority Winner:

If no candidate receives a majority of first-rank votes after the first round of voting, the candidate with the lowest number of first-rank votes is eliminated.

The second-rank votes from the eliminated candidate are allocated to the remaining candidates.

This continues until a candidate receives a majority of votes.

What Should I Consider:

Electoral districts have direct, local representation - the candidates they vote for live in their district.

Candidates ultimately win a majority of votes, however, a candidate could win without the highest number of 1st-choice votes, meaning that candidates and parties may disproportionately represent the desires of their constituency.

- Example: After the first round of voting, Candidate A has 250 votes, Candidate B has 400 votes, and Candidate C has 350 votes.
- Candidate A is eliminated and the 2nd-choice votes are allocated to candidates B and C.
- After the second round, Candidate B has 450 votes and Candidate C has 550 votes.
- Candidate C wins with a majority of votes, but not a majority of first-choice votes.

Two-Round System

You vote for your preferred candidate in your district.

The candidate with a majority of votes wins.

If necessary, the top two candidates participate in a run-off election.

How It Works:

There are 19 electoral districts, each of which elect only one candidate.

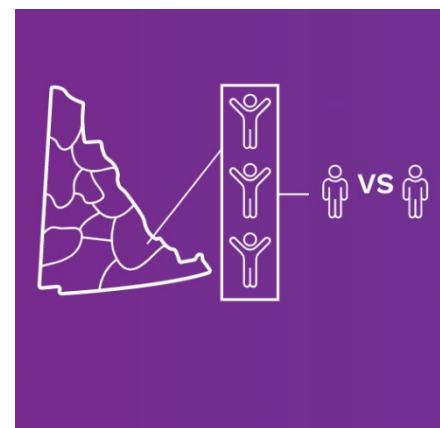
How You Vote:

You vote for a single candidate in your district.

The candidate with a majority of votes wins.

What If There is No Majority Winner:

If no candidate receives a majority of votes after the first round of voting, the top two candidates participate in a run-off election where the winner receives the majority of votes.



What Should I Consider:

Electoral districts have direct, local representation - the candidates they vote for live in their district.

Candidates ultimately win a majority of votes, and even though a candidate may be a voter's second choice, having a run-off election (as opposed to a ranked ballot) means that a candidate cannot win without directly receiving a majority of votes.

Proportional Representation

Candidates win seats as a function of the proportion of votes won by their party in their district.

List Proportional Representation

You vote for your preferred party or candidate.

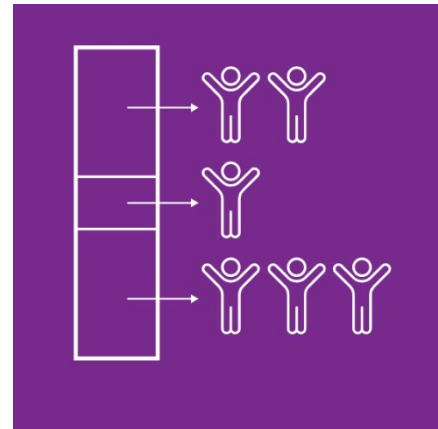
Seats are allocated by the proportion of votes received by each party.

How It Works:

There are fewer, or possibly only one, electoral districts, within which multiple candidates are elected.

How You Vote:

You cast a single vote for your preferred party, or in some cases your preferred candidate.



Political parties are awarded a proportion of seats based on the proportion of votes they received.

- Example: Party A receives 30% of the vote. They are awarded 30% of the seats in the legislature. Of Yukon's current 19 seats, Party A would receive 6 seats.

Who Decides Which Individual Candidates Win Seats:

There are two types of List Proportional Representation systems: Closed and Open.

- Closed: Each party ranks their potential candidates internally. Those ranked lists are not available to the public. As each party is awarded seats, they are allocated to candidates according to that party's rank order.
- Open: The parties' ranked lists are available to the public.

Alternatively, voters may vote for a single candidate. The party affiliation of that candidate contributes to the proportional vote, while the individual candidate's total votes determines their ranking within their party's list.

- Example: Candidate A (Party A) receives 10% of the vote, Yukon-wide, more than any other members of Party A.
- Their 10% contributes to Party A's total proportion of the vote.
- Having the highest individual vote count within Party A ranks them first and secures them one of Party A's proportional seats.

What Should I Consider:

As there may be as few as one electoral district, the elected candidates may not accurately represent the variety of communities and populations of the Yukon.

This system increases the likelihood of minority or coalition governments, as parties in a multi-party system are less likely to receive a majority of votes.

Single Transferable Vote

You rank a number of candidates within a larger district.

Candidates are elected when they cross a designated threshold of votes.

If necessary, the lowest candidate is eliminated and secondary rankings are allocated.

How It Works:

There are fewer, or possibly only one, electoral districts, within which multiple candidates are elected.

How You Vote:

You rank the candidates in your district by preference.

Candidates are elected when they cross a designated threshold of votes.

What Happens When A Candidate Passes the Electoral Threshold:

When a candidate crosses the electoral threshold after a round of voting, their surplus votes are reallocated to the other candidates based on the next-highest rankings.

This process continues each time a candidate crosses the threshold.

What If Candidates Do Not Pass the Electoral Threshold:

If no candidate receives enough votes to cross the electoral threshold after the first round of voting, the candidate with the lowest number of first-rank votes is eliminated.

The second-rank votes from the eliminated candidate are allocated to the remaining candidates.

This continues until the requisite number of candidates receive enough votes to cross the electoral threshold.



What Should I Consider:

As there may be as few as one electoral district, the elected candidates may not accurately represent the variety of communities and populations of the Yukon.

Candidates run “at large”, meaning they are not only in competition with candidates from other parties, but also their own party. Parties may opt to field fewer candidates in order to better ensure the likelihood of crossing the electoral threshold.

The vote counting system is incredibly complex, not only in terms of determining the electoral threshold, but also in determining how “surplus” votes are identified and reallocated. Which of a candidate’s votes are “surplus” and which are part of their threshold total - this question also determines which second-rank votes are reallocated.

Single Non-Transferable Vote

You vote for a single candidate out of many within a larger district.

The candidates with the highest number of votes win.

How It Works:

There are fewer, or possibly only one, electoral districts, within which multiple candidates are elected.

How You Vote:

You vote for a single candidate in your district.

The candidates with the highest number of votes win the district and fill that district’s designated number of seats.

What Should I Consider:

As there may be as few as one electoral district, the elected candidates may not accurately represent the variety of communities and populations of the Yukon.

It is possible that a single candidate from one party may receive a large number of votes, but multiple candidates from another party split fewer votes. If all three are elected, their parties would be disproportionately represented.

- Example: Candidate A (Party A) receives 500 votes, while other Party A candidates receive under 100.
- Candidates B and C (Party B) each receive 100 votes.



- Candidates A, B, and C are elected. Party A receives only one seat to Party B's two, despite having more than double Party B's number of votes.

Mixed Electoral Systems

A portion of seats are awarded according to one electoral system (ie. plurality / majority), while another portion are awarded according to another (ie. proportional).

Parallel Vote

You cast one vote in a First Past The Post-style election and another in a List Proportional Representation-style election.

Only the List Proportional voting results determine the allocation of popular vote seats.

How It Works:

There are 19 electoral districts, each of which elect only one candidate.

There is an additional electoral district in which multiple additional candidates are elected.

How You Vote:

You vote for a single candidate in your district. You cast a second vote for your preferred party, or in some cases an additional candidate.

The candidate with the highest number (or possibly a majority) of votes wins their specific district.

Political parties are awarded a proportion of additional seats based on the proportion of votes they received in the secondary ballot.

What Should I Consider:

In order to accommodate a blend of local constituency and proportional representation, this system would likely require the addition of seats to the legislature.

Example: The current 19 seats would remain to be filled by a plurality/majority system, and an additional 11 seats would be added to accommodate seats assigned by proportional representation.



Mixed Member Proportional

You vote in a First Past The Post-style election.

Additional seats are allocated to parties based on proportions of the popular vote.

How It Works:

There are 19 electoral districts, each of which elect only one candidate.

There is an additional electoral district in which multiple additional candidates are elected.

How You Vote:

You vote for a single candidate in your district.

The candidate with the highest number (or possibly a majority) of votes wins their specific district.

Political parties are awarded a proportion of additional seats based on the proportion of votes they received.

What Should I Consider:

As the proportional representation seats are determined by the same votes as the plurality/majority seats, this system inherently compensates for any over- or under-representation of parties compared to their share of the vote.

In order to accommodate a blend of local constituency and proportional representation, this system would likely require the addition of seats to the legislature.

- Example: The current 19 seats would remain to be filled by a plurality/majority system, and an additional 11 seats would be added to accommodate seats assigned by proportional representation.

