

To: The Special Committee of Electoral Reform

From: Dave Volek

Date: September 18, 2016

Re: Tiered Democratic Governance

Thank you for the opportunity for average citizens to present such briefs on electoral reform in Canada.

I will start with my credentials. In my late 20s, I decided that my civic duty was to take a role within a political party, and hopefully my presence would somehow create better governance. So I joined both a provincial and a federal party and got involved. I helped the two parties in general elections and leadership contests; I become board members of constituency associations; I worked for candidates to secure the party nominations.

As time went on, I encountered situations that made me question our democratic processes. I was slowly becoming cynical.

In my sixth and last year, I supported a friend who was a candidate for nomination for the party in our constituency. While I had great faith that my friend would have made a great politician, I came to the astounding conclusion that the average party member in our constituency really knew very little about my friend or the other candidates. And this led me to the general electorate also know very little about the candidates the parties have proffered. In my mind, going through the party nomination process was no test of good character and competence for governance. All these elections were based on rather specious information provided by the parties, media, or coffee-shop discussion. Very few of us really know much about the people who aspire for political office.

My friend lost the party nomination by a very small margin. In our winner-take-all-approach, he and his workers were sidelined from the inside workings of the party. So I had lots of time to think about how I spent my spare time in the past six years. I took my cynicism to devise a rudimentary form of Tiered Democratic Governance (TDG) in that time. After this “discovery,” I decided that I would never be involved with a political party again. When I again found myself with a little too much spare time, and I wrote the first version of the TDG in 2000. You can find the third version on my website at <http://davevolek.org/TDG/TDGindex.html>.

I will just outline the principles of the TDG in the eight points in the next two pages.

1. Limitations of Western Democracy

Regardless of whether a western democracy has a Westminster or proportional representative electoral system of elections, there are some inherent flaws. I have listed the 12 Limitations—which many average citizens will agree with. These limitations cannot be fixed within the confines of western democracy.

2. No Political Parties

The instinctual nature of political parties will want to keep these limitations in place. To put this simply, the political parties are vehicles for those ambitious citizens aspiring for public office to “reduce the competition.”

The TDG casts aside political parties. Representatives are elected solely on their own merit and history.

3. No Election Campaigns

The usual campaigns involving slogans, banners, door knocking, newspaper ads, TV commercials, etc. are gone with the TDG. Any citizen who embraces these techniques to rise up the TDG should be a good sign of someone not to vote for. Electioneering is not a tool to determine who has the better character and capacity for governance.

4. Neighborhoods

Electoral districts will be very small, about 200 citizens. Once a year, these citizens would choose, with a plurality election, the neighbor who is going to represent them in government. The culture of these elections would be to consider carefully the person who has good character and capacity for governance. The position of a neighborhood representative would be mostly voluntary and consume about 10 hours per month of the representative's time.

5. Districts

Neighborhoods would be banded together to form a district. The neighborhood representatives would meet, maybe once a month, to discuss various affairs within the district. This level of governance may be given some autonomy and resources from higher tiers to make district decisions.

While the neighborhood representatives are working together, they are learning about the character and capacity for governance of each other. Six months after the neighborhood elections, the neighborhood representatives will elect, from amongst themselves, a district representative. This representative will be sent up to the next higher level of the TDG. This position will likely require a bigger time commitment.

6. More Tiers

Each political jurisdiction is going to design its own version of the TDG. Consider two similar jurisdictions: one may find two levels may work well; another may evolve to have six levels. It is important to understand that a providing a TDG structure for Burnaby and for Hamilton is not going to happen at this stage of the development of the TDG. The citizens of these two cities will be designing their own TDG, and they could be very different.

7. Consultative Decision Making

The TDG will develop a culture of consultation. Part of the good character and capacity for governance that elected representatives should be known and voted for is their ability to approach issues with a consultative mindset.

In my book, I differentiate between power, democratic, and consultative decision processes. We need to move towards more consultation.

8. Advisory Board

Even gathering the best of minds into a decision making body can get into a negative way of thinking. In these cases, an advisor will be appointed all elected bodies. The advisor will meet the elected body to help them through to a consultative decision.

Advisors will most likely be citizens who have served on the elected side for several years. If they accept an advisory position, they can no longer serve as an elected representative. While advisor might influence a certain decision, they have no vote on that decision.

If citizens are not getting a favorable response from their neighborhood or district representative, they can turn to the advisor appointed to their area to present their case. In this manner, the advisory board becomes an important check and balance.

And advisors from the same geographical area will be meeting to discuss how the TDG is working in their region and how to improve it.

Conclusion

That's the TDG in a brief nutshell. If anyone is more interested in this concept, please go to <http://davevolek.org/TDG/TDGindex.html>.

I will be making some changes to the website this fall to give a better visual appearance. One of those changes will be an ebook soon for a more comfortable read.

All the best in your deliberations. It's great this process is being opened up.

Dave Volek

Inventor