

Getting to PR.

The Trudeau majority and seven potential paths forward

Justin Trudeau has committed to two things:

- 1) 2015 will be the last election using First Past the Post. (So he's under pressure to deliver *something*.)
- 2) He plans to create an all-party committee to look at options, including PR.

We also know that:

- Trudeau does not seem to currently be a fan of PR, nor do his advisors.
- The Liberal Party historically has not supported PR.
- Preferential ballots, on their own, do not create proportional results.
- Many senior Liberals do support PR, and could potentially influence Trudeau.

In order to win PR, three things need to be achieved:

- 1) The Liberal strategists, and Trudeau himself, need to be convinced that PR is not only the right thing to do, but that it's also in the interest of the Liberal Party, electorally (it is).
- 2) The Liberals would need to see a path that allows them to implement PR, without looking anti-democratic (ie: it HAS been rejected in three provinces, by a majority vote)
- 3) The Liberals would also probably prefer a path forward, that creates a distance between the reform itself, and Trudeau. This would inoculate him, politically, from those who don't support PR (both in the party and in the media).

On page 2, I've used four icons to simplify my predictions:



Nothing happens at all.
Status quo.



Possible route to PR
implementation.



Disaster. A step backwards
and loss of momentum.



Most feasible route to
PR implementation.

WARNING: The two constructive paths forward are risky, and in many ways unlikely to happen. But they may be the only options we have, under the circumstances, and perhaps the only way to avoid dangerous outcomes that could set back the movement, delaying reform.

All Party Committee

APC Recommends Preferential Ballot

We know this is Trudeau's preferred system, right now. He could easily stack the APC with a majority of Liberals, ensuring that they recommend a ranked ballot used in single-member districts

No Referendum

The optics do not work in Trudeau's favour on this. The other members of the APC will speak out against it, as will all the other party leaders, and groups like FairVote Canada, LeadNow, Unlock Democracy, Council of Canadians, etc..

It will be easy for those groups to accuse Trudeau of being opportunistic, by adopting a system that can be seen to benefit moderate parties.



Referendum

A referendum would be complicated. The reform movement would likely split into two camps, since many advocates see preferential ballots as an improvement over FPTP, even though it's not as good as PR.

Some will advocate YES, some will advocate NO.

Regardless, with all the other parties firmly in the NO camp, the referendum would likely fail - as it did in the UK.



APC Recommends PR

This is unlikely. Conservatives are opposed, and Liberals are mixed.

No Referendum

Highly unlikely. The optics are terrible. Most media outlets are opposed to PR, and it's been rejected by a majority of voters in BC, Ontario and PEI.

Bringing it in, unilaterally, is unlikely to be something the Liberals will be comfortable doing.



Referendum

Because the Liberals are so split on the issue, Trudeau would likely remain neutral (as McGuinty did in Ontario). Without his support, the referendum would likely fail, terribly.



APC Recommends Citizens' Assembly

This would be a great option for the Liberals, as it is the only recommendation that all (or most) parties will be able to agree on. It fits well with Trudeau's messaging about being bold, innovative and putting faith in ordinary people.

No Referendum

This would be difficult for the Liberals, for the same reasons listed before. There are a LOT of Liberals and journalists who are strongly anti-PR. Trudeau risks burning some bridges, and losing some support internally, if he brings in PR.

The only way Trudeau could get away with this, is if he announces BEFORE the Assembly makes the recommendation, that he will implement WHATEVER they recommend. That way, he doesn't wear the reform personally. He's simply following through on a commitment.



Recommends PR

(most likely outcome)

Referendum

No support from Trudeau

If Trudeau remains neutral, or opposes PR, the referendum will fail, as it has in four provinces. In each case, the major parties were opposed or neutral (or very quietly supportive).



Support from Trudeau

If a Citizen's Assembly recommended PR (rather than the APC), and if Mulcair, May AND Trudeau campaigned for the YES side, it could win.

Trudeau and his team would need to be convinced that PR is good for the Liberal party (it is). And just like the 'no referendum' option, he would need to declare BEFORE the Assembly makes their recommendation, that he will campaign in favour of WHATEVER they recommend. This gives Trudeau two distancing factors: the CA and the referendum.



Conclusion:

Advocates need to bring Trudeau and his advisors on board with PR. This is a tough task, but may be achievable. There are many senior Liberals who support PR, and in the long-term PR would prevent Conservative majorities and all but guarantee that the

Liberals would always be part of a stable, coalition government. But to make this politically viable for Trudeau, advocates should consider a campaign that pushes for a Citizens' Assembly process and urges Trudeau to commit - in advance - to supporting the CA recommendation, regardless of the outcome.