

Submission to the Law Amendments Committee; April 5, 2018.

The Chronicle Herald newspaper informs me (28 March 2018) that the Nova Scotia Legislature is amending the regulations regarding the formation of electoral riding boundaries (Bill No. 99) so as to make it easier for Acadian and black candidates to get elected in specially designed ridings. The proposed regulations do not strike an appropriate balance between voter parity and minority representation but unduly weight minority representation. The underlying principle guiding electoral boundary decisions should be population equality.

I support attempts to encourage minority representation in the House of Assembly but disagree with the disproportionate power in the legislature that will ensue to minority groups under the proposed amendments. The principle of one person-one vote is upheld within ridings but the potential influence of the elected candidate does not permit each citizen to have equal political weight within government when ridings are created with unusually large or small numbers of constituency citizens. The political power of representatives from unusually small ridings is unfairly equal to that of representatives from much larger ridings.

Current provincial and federal regulations permit a plus or minus 25% deviance from the average riding population size when designing ridings. I find this degree of variation (potentially 50% difference between smallest and largest riding populations) excessive and the newly proposed regulations would make this disparity even larger. Electoral district variances must not exceed $\pm 10\%$ in Australia, $\pm 5\%$ in New Zealand, $\pm 5\%$ in Great Britain, and $\pm 10\%$ in the United States. The United States and Australia are large countries with low populations in some geographic areas, as is Canada. If the United States and Australia can create electoral districts with variances much smaller than existing in Canada and Nova Scotia, there is no fundamental reason why lower variances cannot be created here. This would better support the principle of population equality.

The desire in Nova Scotia to create electoral positions for representatives of minority groups such as Acadians and African-Canadians runs counter to the principle of population equality. I believe that the appropriate solution to this problem is to weight the votes of elected representatives to the House of Assembly by their riding population size. This process is easily accomplished with computerization.

Population weighting achieves the principle of giving each citizen equal weight when their representative votes in the House. Weighted voting is used by the U.S. Electoral College, where the number of state representatives is proportional to state population, by the European Council, where state votes are weighted proportional to state population, and by publicly-owned businesses where voting is weighted by the number of common shares owned by an individual. Weighted voting by political representatives based on the population that they represent (whether total population or eligible electors) is the only method that gives each citizen equal weight in government decision making, something that I believe is important in a democracy. Creating an electoral system to accomplish the otherwise laudable goals of minority representation that is unfair to the majority is undesirable and undemocratic. I urge that the government reconsider the means by which it seeks to improve minority representation in the House of Assembly and to consider the merits of weighting the votes of elected representatives by constituency population size.

Sincerely yours,
Brian Jessop,
Halifax, N.S.