



Briefs & Updates

Referendum results for proportional representation show narrow loss in Canadian province

Voters in British Columbia, on Canada's Pacific coast, came within a whisker of changing their electoral system. The referendum, held May 17, 2005, was to change the existing first-past-the-post electoral system to a type of proportional representation known as the Single Transferable Vote or STV.

The proposal, drafted by a Citizen's Assembly with one member from each of the electoral districts of the province, gained 57.4 per cent of the initial count of votes, just short of the required 60 per cent required for the proposal to become law. Ironically, the initial referendum results show the proposal overwhelmingly passed the other criteria, which was to gain majority support in 48 of the province's 79 electoral districts (the referendum won a simple majority in 77 districts). The results were close enough to trigger a final count, which was to begin on May 30, after *Federations* went to press. For final results, see the British Columbia electoral commission website at www.elections.bc.ca.

The "Single Transferable Vote" system allows voters to rank their candidates on the ballot and creates multi-member electoral districts. The voters second choices are also counted in a complex system of redistributing the votes of candidates eliminated in a number of ballot counts. The Citizen's Assembly considered other options, including keeping the present system, or adopting "Mixed Member Proportional Representation", a system used in Germany, New Zealand, Scotland and Wales, in which half of the members are elected in single-member districts by a first-past-the-post system and half are elected from party lists. In that system, each voter gets two votes: one for the local

representative, and one for the list of the party of his or her choice. The number apportioned to each party from the list vote is then adjusted to bring the percentage of seats close to the percentage of votes for each party provincewide.

However, the British Columbia Citizen's Assembly rejected the Mixed Member Proportional Representation system in large part because the Assembly members did not want the political parties to have any say in which candidate would sit in the legislature.

In three other Canadian provinces, proposals for some form of proportional representation are being considered. In New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, there are proposals for a form of Mixed Member Proportional Representation. In Quebec, there is a proposal for multi-member districts.

A commission has been appointed by Prince Edward Island (in Canada's Atlantic region in the east) to educate voters about different electoral systems, draft a referendum question, and set a date for a referendum to choose between the existing first-past-the-post system and Mixed Member Proportional Representation. The commission will hold public meetings in autumn 2005 and then recommend a referendum date, widely expected to be held before the next provincial election in 2008.

In the province of New Brunswick, across the Northumberland Straits from Prince Edward Island, a legislative commission has recommended a Mixed Member Proportional Representation system with 36 directly elected members and 20 members chosen from party lists. The commission recommended a referendum on the proposal in time for a new system, which, if chosen, could be ready for the 2011 provincial election.

In Quebec, a system has been proposed for Mixed Member Proportional Representation that would have 77 members elected in single-member districts and 50 members elected from party lists in multi-member districts. On this part of the proposal there is general agreement among those favouring proportional representation. A split emerges on the way those 50 members from party lists are to be elected. The Quebec Ministry for the Reform of Democratic Institutions recommends that those 50 members be elected in between 24 and 27 districts. Opponents of this system charge that this large number of districts biases the elections toward a two-party system.



B.C. Citizens' Assembly members' names were drawn by random, one from each electoral district.

Pakistan's provinces demand larger share of revenues

As of May 20, Pakistan's federal and provincial governments were negotiating down to the wire over allocations to the provinces before Pakistan's budget was approved.

On May 19, Pakistan's Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz said he was working to come to a consensus agreement with the provinces before the budget was approved.

At stake was the size of the provincial share of the so-called "NFC award" that the National Finance Commission allocates. The government was proposing that 47 per cent of the NFC resources should go to the provinces, but provincial governments were demanding 50 per cent.

In addition, several particular provinces claimed they had been short-changed in the way the NFC resources were awarded to them. Balochistan claimed that they had not received their fair share of the gas revenues, and the North-West Frontier Province claimed that it had not received its fair share of the hydro-electric power generation profits.

As of 2000, according to the IMF, Pakistan's provinces raised or collected only 21 per cent of their budgets – the remainder came from their share of the NFC resources and other federal grants.

South Africa aims for free compulsory education

The government of South Africa will strive to provide free, compulsory education, Education Minister Naledi Pandor said at an event to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Freedom Charter on May 6.

The Charter, adopted in 1955, united the opponents of the white minority government of the day. It brought together the African National Congress, the South African Indian Congress, the South African Coloured People's Congress, the South African Congress of Democrats and the South African Congress of Trade Union into a non-racial united front known as the Congress Alliance.

But the charter as a list of demands changed when apartheid was overthrown and a new non-racial constitution written. It has now become a list of promises that South Africans are holding their government to.

"There are many objectives that continue to require rigorous attention. We do not as yet have free compulsory education," Pandor said.

"In this regard we have not managed to live up to the spirit and intention of the Freedom charter, but it is an issue that we are addressing."

However, the minister said that the country had made great strides in transforming education.

"Access statistics at all levels point to widening of education opportunities for all South Africans," she added.

There were 11, 638,356 learners in all primary, secondary, consolidated and middle schools according to a report from Statistics South Africa for the year 2003. And UNESCO

reported South Africa as having surpassed a primary school enrolment rate of 90 per cent in 2000.

Germany says yes to EU constitution, French voters say no

Germany's lower house of parliament, the Bundestag, approved the European Union constitution by more than 95 per cent, with 568 in favour only 23 members opposed. Of those 23, there were 20 members of the Christian Democrats.



French emotions ran strong during the referendum on the EU Constitution

The near-consensus in Germany contrasts starkly with the situation in France, where a referendum was defeated on May 29. Many voters on the left opposed the new constitution as too "pro-business" while voters on the far right feared an EU with Turkey as a member. The difference between the two countries was illustrated by the scene of dozens of students from Berlin carrying blue-and-yellow EU flags and lobbying French citizens in Paris to vote yes in the last weeks of the campaign.

Opposition to President wins Comoros elections

National parties from the three autonomous islands in Grand Comoros won 9 of 12 seats in the Comoros legislature, it was announced on April 28. The results were a blow for President Azali Assoumani, who had seized power in a coup in 1999. In 2002, Assoumani won election for President with 75 per cent of the vote.

The parliamentary elections were a result of the South African-guided peace and reconciliation pact reached earlier this year. The agreement was aimed at ending the conflict between President Assoumani and the Presidents of the three autonomous islands, Grande Comore, Anjouan and Moheli.

Bulgaria and Romania set to enter EU

The European Union approved the entry of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007. The European Parliament also said that both countries will be expected to make reforms before their entry. The EU officials want both countries to take measures to reduce corruption and organized crime.

Both sides claim victory in Ethiopian election

Ethiopia's electoral board has started investigating claims of irregularities in the presidential vote on May 15, with rival parties claiming victory.

"Some political parties have submitted complaints on the election process. The board has commenced its first hearing of the complaints," said the deputy head of the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia, Tesfaye Mengesha.

The ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front was claiming it was "on the path to victory", according to Information Minister Berekat Simon. But the opposition Coalition for Unity and Democracy was also claiming victory.

Austria ratifies EU constitution

Austria's parliament ratified the European Union's constitution by a vote of 181 to 1 on May 11, 2005. One member of the legislature, Barbara Rosenkranz, an EU opponent from the Freedom Party, voted against ratification. Only one deputy was absent from the vote.

The vote in favour easily surpassed the two-thirds majority required. In the debate before the vote, during which 30 deputies spoke, Chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel said the constitution was a well-balanced solution for an expanded European Union. "It makes for a Europe that is stronger," he said. His colleague Wilhelm Molterer, of the ruling People's Party, told the legislators that the constitution gave Austria "more possibilities to influence" the EU. "There's no difference between big and small in this constitution." On May 25, the Bundesrat, the second house of the Austrian Parliament, was scheduled to ratify the constitution.

Danger of fighting if Nagaland peace talks fail

After four months of peace talks with Delhi, the leader of an insurgent group in Nagaland in northeast India warned that there could be fresh violence unless the talks succeeded.

The warning came from Thuingaleng Muivah, the leader of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland after Prime

Minister Manmohan Singh warned that it would take more time to find a solution to the revolt by Naga people in the northeast.

About 20,000 people have died in the rebellion in Christian-dominated Nagaland since it began more than five decades ago.

Mexico City mayor to run for President



Threat of jail lifted for Mexico City Mayor López Obrador.

Popular Mexico City Mayor Andres Manuel López Obrador will be running for President of Mexico after all. Obrador, who belongs to the left-leaning Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD), who was threatened with prison and therefore could not have run for President, won a reprieve in early May. López Obrador was threatened with a prison term because someone in his city government disregarded a court order to stop construction of a short access road leading to a hospital, over land that was

acquired by Lopez Obrador's predecessor but whose ownership was still in dispute. But after a meeting with President Fox of the right-leaning Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), the threat of prison was removed from Obrador.

Belgian federal government approves EU constitution

On May 18, the Belgian parliament approved the European Union constitution by a vote of 118 for and 18 against, with one abstention. The Belgian senate had already given its approval. Complete Belgian approval now awaits the votes of the five regional legislatures. (6)

ERRATA

Gay rights in the USA

The author's biography in the *Federations* Vol. 4 No. 3, 'Will gay rights be a state-by-state battle in the USA?' on page 8 was in error. It should have read "Jeremy D. Mayer is an Assistant Professor at the School of Public Policy of George Mason University, Alexandria, VA, USA."

Gays, lesbians and the law in federal countries

In Briefs & Updates, Vol. 4 No. 3, the date in the sidebar saying when "Brazil amended its immigration policy to recognize relationships between binational same-sex couples." should have read "December 2004", not December 2005.