

# But Is It for Real? The British Columbia Citizens' Assembly as a Model of State-Sponsored Citizen Empowerment

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*Emerging forms of empowered participatory governance have generated considerable scholarly excitement, but critics continue to ask if such initiatives are "for real": Are participatory governance processes sufficiently independent? Do citizen participants make good policy choices? An in-depth look at the case of the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform suggests that real citizen empowerment depends on both the institutional constraints of the participatory setting and how citizen interests and arguments for policy outcomes crystallize over the course of a participatory process.*

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Recent innovations in participatory governance have academics, policy makers, and citizens looking closely at new ways to involve citizens in policy making. While in some quarters there is considerable excitement about participatory

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budgeting and other participatory governance practices, wary critics continue to ask whether these new citizen involvement schemes are actually “for real.” The question comes in many forms but generally focuses on two themes. First, in asking “is it for real?” many are asking about the *independence* of such exercises, fearing that government actors will manipulate and co-opt public discussions of policy issues and consultation efforts, particularly when the policy issue carries high stakes for organized political groups.<sup>1</sup> Is it possible to set up participatory governance schemes to be independent from external political pressures and with internal procedures that really enable citizen participants to craft their own, authentic proposals? A second critique is often “is this *an improvement*?”<sup>2</sup> Even if a citizen participation process is sufficiently independent, does citizen consultation structured around unorganized or randomly selected citizens provide a better outcome than processes designed around expert panels? Are randomly selected citizens better at representing and synthesizing a broad array of interests than stakeholder groups? Do these processes produce decision outcomes that are consistent with principles of social justice, including protection of minority interests?

This article uses data from an extraordinary case of citizen participation in policy making to explore these questions. In 2003–2004, the Government of British Columbia established a Citizens’ Assembly on Electoral Reform. Made up of 160 randomly selected citizens drawn from the provincial voters’ list, the BC Citizens’ Assembly was given a mandate to study different electoral models, to decide whether British Columbia needed a new system, and if so, to put a proposal for change to a public referendum. They met over the course of a year to learn about electoral systems, to conduct widespread public hearings, and finally, to deliberate on what system would be best for British Columbia. In the end, 160 strangers from all walks of life, with formal education levels ranging from six years to an Oxford doctorate, managed to come to a remarkable degree of consensus on what electoral system would be best for BC—a Single Transferable Vote system similar to the one used in Ireland.<sup>3</sup>

On May 17, 2005, British Columbia narrowly missed becoming the first political jurisdiction in the world to change its electoral system by citizen-deliberative means. On that day, the BC electorate was called to vote on the referendum question: “Should British Columbia change to the BC-STV electoral system as recommended by the Citizens’ Assembly on Electoral Reform? Yes/No.” With advance polls indicating that only one-third of the population had heard of the Citizens’ Assembly or the referendum on electoral reform, one can imagine the surprise of many voters arriving at the ballot booth expecting to vote in a provincial election and being asked to approve or reject the voting system itself! Despite the lack of public knowledge of BC-STV or the Citizens’ Assembly on Electoral Reform, 57.3 percent of the referendum ballots were marked “Yes,” just missing the 60 percent support threshold that would have led to the automatic implementation of the new system.<sup>4</sup>

Although the proposal narrowly lost the referendum, the Citizens' Assembly process is being hailed by many observers as a remarkable success. In early 2006, the Netherlands launched a *Burgerforum* on electoral reform, closely modeled on the BC Citizens' Assembly process. The Ontario provincial government has announced plans to conduct its own Citizens' Assembly on electoral reform starting in September 2006. Two California Assemblymen have sponsored a bill that would launch a Citizens' Assembly process in California. In British Columbia, another referendum on the Citizens' Assembly proposal has been scheduled for 2009, due to flaws in the initial referendum process.

The case is particularly noteworthy because the choice made by the BC Citizens' Assembly defied the expectations of Canadian political observers. Several expert panels have advocated a Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) system as the natural choice for electoral reform at the federal and provincial levels in Canada.<sup>5</sup> MMP combines single-member districts with seats allocated from a party list. Party list seats are used to compensate for distortions arising from the winner-take-all contests within single-member districts. MMP thus preserves geographic representation (considered essential given the vast size of many jurisdictions in Canada), the central role of political parties in organizing electoral competition, and can provide a proportional distribution of seats in the legislature. By contrast, Single Transferable Vote (STV) is organized around multimember districts and uses a preferential ballot to rank-order candidates in each district. This tends to lead to proportional outcomes, if the districts are large enough: in large multimember districts, it takes a relatively small fraction of the vote to elect any given candidate, allowing smaller parties to field candidates and win. In practice, large parties field several candidates in one multimember district, hoping that public support will translate into winning several seats. Candidates from the same party compete against one another for voters' preferences, as in a primary system, giving voters more choice about who will be their representative. But this also slightly weakens a party's ability to control the candidate from that district: if a candidate has enough public support but not party support, she may more easily run as an Independent. Consequently, the Citizens' Assembly's choice of STV was an unpleasant surprise for many federal and provincial politicians who viewed it as a system designed to undermine the power of political parties.<sup>6</sup>

The purpose of this article is to address the question "is it for real?" in the case of the BC Citizens' Assembly. I will argue that, while not perfect, the BC Citizens' Assembly process was sufficiently independent to make an authentic decision and was a potential improvement over traditional means of citizen consultation. Authentic citizen empowerment lay in two key features of the Assembly process. First, the Assembly process allowed participants freedom from external pressures and created time and space for the extended interaction of participants. Second, this independence and extensive interaction enabled the crystallization of specific

criteria and interests that guided the Assembly members' decision making. The Assembly members were able to engage in a process of *creative deliberation* that involved reframing the issues, refocusing the terms of debate, and developing new criteria based on their lived experiences as voters.

To develop this argument, the article is structured as follows: First, I describe the general contours of the Citizens' Assembly process: its origins, the selection of participants, the execution of each of the Assembly's Learning, Public Hearing, and Deliberation phases, and the period leading up to the public referendum on their proposal. I conclude this section with a discussion of how the institutional features of the Assembly created space for participants to make their own decision. Next, I discuss in detail how the participants came to develop the criteria they used to choose a new electoral system. This was a complex process that involved participants' evaluating academic research on electoral systems, their own experiences as voters, and their beliefs about who should be privileged in the course of electoral competition. In the final section, I discuss the prospects and limitations of the Citizens' Assembly model and the implications of random selection for democratic politics.

The account is based on eighteen months of field research devoted to observing the entire Citizens' Assembly process. I attended all but one of the weekend meetings of the Assembly members, went to about one-fifth of the fifty public hearings associated with the process, and interviewed about a third of the 160 participants in the Assembly as well as the Assembly's staff. I took extensive field notes during the participant observation period and recorded interviews with a digital recorder. I was even present at the Assembly members' Referendum Night Party, a bittersweet culmination of their efforts.

#### THE CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY PROCESS

##### *Origins*

The origins of this experiment lie in a decade of electoral instability in British Columbia. The 1996 provincial election produced a "wrong-winner" scenario in which the British Columbia Liberals (a center-right party) gained a majority of the popular vote while the center-left New Democratic Party (NDP) won the majority of seats. This defeat was bitterly felt by the Liberals, and they subsequently promised to re-examine the electoral system using a "Citizens' Assembly" should they become the governing party. In the 2001 provincial election, the Liberals' fortunes were reversed with a landslide victory: they won seventy-seven of seventy-nine seats with 58 percent of the vote. They proceeded to enact some democratic reforms in their first year in office, but electoral reform remained in question.

Early in 2002, there was an initiative campaign to secure a province-wide referendum on electoral reform. Largely led by members of the British

Columbia Green Party, the “Free Your Vote” initiative failed to obtain the required number of voters’ signatures to get their proposal on a ballot. However, they succeeded in keeping the issue of electoral reform on the public agenda. Later in the year, the provincial government named Gordon Gibson, a former politician and fellow at the conservative Fraser Institute think tank in Vancouver, to draw up a proposal for a Citizens’ Assembly on Electoral Reform. After several months of widespread consultation, Gibson’s recommendations for the Assembly were that it be randomly selected from the provincial voters’ list, with one representative from each of the seventy-nine ridings in the province. Gibson argued that random selection would ensure adequate representation of the diversity of BC while maintaining a nonpartisan dynamic within the Citizens’ Assembly. The government accepted most of his recommendations with some modifications: it doubled the number of participants, stating that selection would include one man and one woman from each district, and allowed the Chair of the Assembly some discretion in adding extra seats to balance out the Assembly’s demographics.

The Assembly plan had citizen participants meeting over the course of a year, between January and November 2004. Their official mandate was to learn about electoral systems, specifically how votes are translated into seats, and to decide whether to recommend an alternative to the current Single Member Plurality system used in the province. They would meet in three phases: a Learning Phase, a Public Hearing Phase, and a Deliberation Phase. If they decided to recommend a change, their recommendation automatically would go to a legally binding provincial referendum in May 2005.

A paid staff guided the work of the Assembly participants. These included a Chair, Dr. Jack Blaney, who led the planning and facilitation of the Assembly’s meetings. A former president of Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Dr. Blaney was a highly qualified candidate for the job as Chair. He was the progenitor of Simon Fraser University’s Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue and chaired the work of the Fraser Basin Council, an organization pursuing stakeholder-led sustainable development in the Fraser Valley (where much of BC’s population resides). Two research officers, Dr. Ken Carty and Dr. Campbell Sharman, were hired out from the department of political science at the University of British Columbia to write and teach a curriculum on electoral systems. Two veteran communications officers were responsible for generating media coverage of the Assembly’s work and for managing internal communications. Other administrative staff oversaw logistics and budgeting, and graduate students in political science at the University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University were hired as small-group discussion facilitators. For the participants, travel to and from the meetings, accommodations at a nearby hotel, meals, and day care services were included in the Assembly’s budget. In addition, Assembly members were paid a \$150 honorarium for each meeting day. The total budget of the Assembly was Can\$5.5 million.

The Citizens' Assembly staff was charged with running the Assembly as an independent secretariat. However, the senior staff appointments—the Chair, Senior Research Officer, Chief of Operations, and Chief of Communications—had to be approved by an all-party committee of the legislature, which was led by a member of the governing Liberal party. The chosen Chair of the Assembly reportedly had connections to the federal Liberal Party but was also highly experienced in organizing and promoting citizen dialogue. In assessing the neutrality of the Chair, one of the Citizens' Assembly participants astutely commented that it was important for the Chair to be someone that the government would trust to handle the organization and execution of the deliberation process. He suggested that this might have contributed to the fact that the government was willing to be so hands-off.<sup>7</sup> Another observer of the process suggested that the staff's practice of actively keeping Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) and other stakeholder groups informed about what was going on with the process was also a good way to assuage anxieties and to keep people from trying to interfere.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, there were reportedly strict instructions by the Premier to his party caucus to stay away from the Citizens' Assembly proceedings. Apart from the Citizens' Assembly's opening and closing ceremonies, no member of the government or opposition showed up at the Citizens' Assembly Learning or Deliberation weekends. In some cases, elected provincial representatives attended the Public Hearings. At the Hearings I observed, remarks of the local MLA were restricted to welcoming the Citizens' Assembly members and the public and congratulating the Citizens' Assembly members on their work. These remarks were made in the general question-and-answer period after the official hearing part of the meeting was over. In summary, the evidence suggests that the Citizens' Assembly staff and participants were subject to very little interference from members of the legislature over the course of their process.

### *Selection Phase*

Participants were selected in the fall of 2003. In cooperation with Elections BC, the nonpartisan elections oversight body, the Citizens' Assembly staff mailed out letters to 200 randomly selected voters from each electoral district, outlining the project and inviting the recipient to respond if interested. Each district's sample was stratified by age and gender to match the 2001 census data for that district. About 7.5 percent of letter recipients responded saying they were interested, and twenty randomly selected respondents from each district (again stratified by age and gender) were invited to selection meetings held around the province.<sup>9</sup> At selection meetings, citizens found out what kind of commitment the project would entail. If eligible—those holding elected office or paid positions for political parties were not allowed to participate—they were invited to

throw their names into a hat. A man and a woman from each district were drawn to participate in the Assembly. In total, 160 participants were chosen—a man and a woman from each of the seventy-nine electoral districts and two additional randomly selected participants of Aboriginal descent.<sup>10</sup>

The series of selection meetings produced a body that was broadly representative of the province as a whole. Young people were slightly underrepresented, but the Assembly produced a better showing of youth than what was then on the BC voters' list. Although the range of education levels was wide, the average—some years of college—was somewhat higher than for the rest of British Columbia.<sup>11</sup> The group counted teachers, students, homemakers, clerks, couriers, retired people, businesspeople, public servants, and farmers among their numbers. Visible minorities were somewhat underrepresented in the group, composing 11 percent of CA members and 22 percent of the province.<sup>12</sup> And although several Aboriginal candidates attended selection meetings, none was chosen from the hat. Feeling that some form of Aboriginal representation was important in this body, the Chair created two extra spots and randomly chose a man and a woman of Aboriginal ancestry to join the Citizens' Assembly from the leftover names.

Participant self-selection into the process introduced two important dynamics to the Assembly. First, the people who self-selected liked to learn. In interviews, many participants mentioned the desire to learn something new. This was not limited to people who called themselves “political junkies” or to people who had high levels of education. Even those with little knowledge of politics or low levels of formal education emphasized learning as a primary attraction of the Citizens' Assembly. Second, when asked about what kept them motivated to keep going back, many members reported simply that they were the kind of people who stuck with something once they were committed. The Assembly participants had experience participating in their communities—they were on average more likely than members of the general population to participate in church groups or other community activities.<sup>13</sup> In short, the participants were both interested in the work that had to be done and already knew how to participate in a group. This is likely to have contributed to the excellent working dynamic within the Assembly.

A final important feature of the selection meetings was the Assembly staff's manner toward newly chosen participants. In their presentation of the project, Assembly staff emphasized the historic nature of the project and the important role of Citizens' Assembly members as participants. In an interview, one staff member argued that from the very beginning, “[staff] treated our members as very special people . . . I think for some of the members it was the first time in their lives they had been treated as VIPs.”<sup>14</sup> “VIP” treatment by the staff communicated that it was the members' rightful place to be involved. As one Assembly member commented, “We really felt we were part of some historical

very important process . . . I was always sort of amazed that we would go and they would call you by name and seemed to remember where you were from and everything. They made it very personal. They made everybody feel that they were as important as anybody else.”<sup>15</sup> For the Assembly participants, the process of empowerment was not only being granted the legal authority to make a decision. The Assembly participants were empowered as they developed a sense of their moral authority to participate in political decision making.

### *Learning Phase*

The members of the Citizens’ Assembly met in three phases. First, from January to March 2004, Assembly members met every other weekend to learn about different electoral systems in use around the world. During this Learning Phase, members met in the Wosk Centre for Dialogue in downtown Vancouver. Located in a heritage building in downtown Vancouver, the Wosk Centre provided an extremely luxurious setting in which to learn and deliberate. The main room, Asia Pacific Hall, is structured around a series of concentric circles of chairs and desks. The room has high ceilings, tall windows looking out onto the street, and soft, warm lighting. The chairs are eminently comfortable, and the room is equipped with voting buttons, microphones, and screens for presentations. Observers from the public sat in makeshift galleries of chairs on either side of the main circle. Above the room, graduate-student discussion facilitators hung out in glassed-in translators’ booths, watching the discussions unfold. Many Assembly members reported that the room itself made them feel important, although a few were daunted by its grandeur.

The opening weekend of the Citizens’ Assembly—January 10, 2004—began with ritual and ceremony to further emphasize the historic and important nature of its work. Dr. Blaney, clad in his trademark navy blue jacket, stood at a podium at the edge of the group and introduced each one of the 160 Assembly members, staff, and facilitators. Following this, Dr. Blaney outlined the mandate, the policies and procedures of the Assembly, and the procedures recommended by the chair. This short list of fifteen procedures included rules for the final decision, including primarily the dictum that they were to work informally with one another—he didn’t want to use Robert’s Rules of Order because “you can be a slave to them, and to those who know them well.” This state of operations left much of the everyday operational decisions and the interpretation of what was reasonable and what was consensus up to the chair. Fortunately, he was a particularly skilled listener and managed to read the crowd pretty well. Over the course of the Assembly, most Assembly members interviewed felt generally comfortable with his procedural decisions.

A second item for that first day was the development of a set of “shared values” that would guide Assembly members as they worked with one another. These

were to become behavioral guidelines; a set of shared expectations for what was appropriate within the context of working with one another. Assembly members broke off into small, randomly assigned discussion groups that they would stay with for the entire weekend. Each group was led off by a graduate student facilitator into small rooms scattered around the Centre for Dialogue to discuss the issue of shared values in a more informal manner. After an hour of discussion, the groups returned to the main hall plenary session to find there was much agreement on what made for a good working atmosphere: respect, listening, and having fun. The exercise went smoothly, and Assembly members were well pleased with themselves at having been able to come to a consensus so quickly.

After lunch, Assembly members returned to Asia Pacific Hall to hear Dr. Carty's inaugural lecture on BC politics. As the presentation title, "Our Adversarial Political System," flashed up on the screens in the room, some Assembly members were jarred out of the sense of consensus they had developed that morning. The lecture introduced a basic description of the political system and the nine criteria that the Law Commission of Canada had identified in its exhaustive report on electoral reform in Canada. It finished by posing a series of questions that Assembly members were to discuss in small groups the next day. When the Assembly members met on Sunday to discuss the previous day's lecture, there was some dissent among the members about dealing with the questions laid out for them. Assembly members that I talked to felt that they didn't like the idea of having discussion questions imposed. They felt that they could express this to staff and were not "forced" to deal with anything in the future. Assembly members also spent the first couple of small-group discussions venting about politics in British Columbia, including various administrations, policy choices, and scandals. Both staff members and Citizens' Assembly participants observed that the complaints at this early stage were good in the sense that they allowed everyone to get these out of their systems. The staff and group facilitators nonetheless continually emphasized that nonpartisan dialogue was to be the rule for Assembly meetings. By the end of the second learning weekend, members adhered. When asked why they toned down their comments, members report that they realized that they would accomplish more if they didn't spend all their time on issues that were "outside of the mandate." For the remainder of the process, the character of the participants' public dialogue and deliberation remained remarkably free of reference to political ideologies and positions.<sup>16</sup>

The first weekend set out the pattern for the subsequent Learning Phase weekends. The Assembly met every two weeks throughout the winter, a total of six meetings. The weekends were divided up between plenary lectures and small-group discussions. The plenary lectures would be accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation, usually lasted about one hour, and were given by Dr. Carty or Dr. Sharman. Dr. Carty was an engaging speaker, walking up and

down the aisles of Asia Pacific Hall waving his arms about and speaking animatedly. Dr. Sharman, possessed of a very dry wit but quieter demeanor, stood behind a podium to deliver his lectures. Assembly members would ask questions of clarification after these lectures. The small-group discussions, always randomly assigned and led by graduate student facilitators, would be given questions to debate from the preceding lecture. Some of these directly reviewed the material in the lecture—"what are the positive and negative arguments in favor of X system?"—and some were more open-ended—"what kind of representation do you want?" Most Assembly members interviewed preferred the small groups to the plenary sessions because they felt that there was more opportunity to speak and get into the issues. However, there was a problem in reporting back to the larger group: the small-group reports were lengthy, repetitive, and at times, hijacked by the person reporting, who wanted to get across some particular point. In addition, because the group activities were structured around coming to a consensus (groups would be asked to report back on the group's top three preferences on a particular question), minority viewpoints were neglected in the reports to plenary.

Much of the agenda for the Learning Phase weekends was guided by the series of lectures laid out by Professors Carty and Sharman. The agenda was developed in consultation with an academic advisory board—a group of political scientists from the University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University, both located in the Vancouver area. However, Professors Carty and Sharman were responsible for putting together and delivering the lectures on the topics. The second weekend started off with a basic review of parliamentary government, representation, and BC's political history. The next two weekends dealt with five different "families" of electoral systems—Plurality systems, Majoritarian, Proportional Representation, Single Transferable Vote, and Mixed systems. During the fifth weekend, two guest lecturers were invited to discuss the impact of changing electoral systems. One was David Farrell, the author of the textbook the Assembly members used and an expert on electoral systems and recent change in Europe. The second was Elizabeth McLeay, a political scientist who has been tracking New Zealand's transition from a single-member plurality to a mixed-member proportional system. Assembly members also requested information on the province's demographics and on declining voter turnout, and the staff brought in two experts to talk about these questions. The final weekend was taken up with producing a preliminary report to be issued to the people of BC in advance of the public hearings in May and June.

### *Public Hearing Phase*

In May and June 2004, the Citizens' Assembly went on the road for a Public Hearing Phase. The Assembly staff organized fifty public hearings around the

province, inviting members of the public to make submissions to the Assembly. These meetings, held in local conference facilities in towns large and small, were hosted by an Assembly member from the local area and were attended by two to ten other Assembly members from the area who were flown in from elsewhere in the province. The meetings varied in format, but most were formally structured around the presentations, with time at the end of the evening for a “town hall” type discussion. In total, the Assembly members heard more than 350 presentations at these hearings, with 2,850 people attending the meetings. At the end of June, Assembly members met for a weekend in the Northern city of Prince George, BC, to summarize what they had learned from the public hearings and to discuss their decision tree for the fall. The Internet also became an important public consultation tool for the Assembly at this time. Through the summer, the Assembly’s online submission portal became quite busy, with a total of 1,604 submissions made to the Assembly by early September. The Assembly members also began using a private online discussion forum frequently to consult with each other and debate the finer points of different electoral systems.<sup>17</sup>

Although Assembly members expressed some anxiety about participating in the public hearings, in practice, the hearings ran smoothly and were even a little repetitive. There were many thoughtful and articulate presentations, but they were weighted to arguments that had been heard before by Assembly members. Members of the public also presented creative and unlikely scenarios—proposals for “none of the above” on the ballot or the abolition of all political parties. Some presenters got up and spoke for youth representation, women’s representation, and the general principles that they thought should guide the Assembly members as they made their decision. They spoke on behalf of unions, political parties, think tanks, and other community organizations. Some people sang their presentations; others ranted about “off mandate” issues such as getting rid of the Queen as Canada’s head of state. Many presenters expressed general dissatisfaction with the current state of BC politics and seemed to focus in on the behavior of political parties in particular.

In this context, few Assembly members interviewed reported that the public hearings gave them new arguments for particular electoral systems. What they did take away were the emotions present—the passion that people showed for change and for the democratic process. Some Assembly members heard the public express values—the value of local representation or of being able to have their vote count toward electing someone, instead of always voting for someone who lost the election. But when it came down to deciding which tradeoffs to make, Assembly members got little help from their audiences, who frequently responded to Assembly members’ questions with “that’s your job” to decide. Several Assembly members were also annoyed at the organized efforts of different groups—the British Columbia Nurses’ Union and the Green Party/Free

Your Vote campaign, who attended multiple public hearings with the same presentation and made many electronic submissions that were extremely similar in content. These presentations were uniformly in favor of the Mixed Member Proportional system, similar to the one advocated by the Free Your Vote campaign organized in 2002. What annoyed some Assembly members was the inability of the presenters from these groups to answer detailed questions about the system they were promoting. They thought that this showed a lack of informed deliberation and felt inclined to discount these presentations.

### *Deliberation Phase and After*

The final Deliberation Phase of the Assembly was held on six weekends from September to November 2004. Meeting at the Wosk Centre in Vancouver, the Deliberation Phase opened with a day of presentations that had been culled as especially good representatives from the public hearings. Assembly members had initially recommended these presentations in a debriefing session after each public hearing. A randomly selected committee was formed to meet for one day in July to hash out which of the recommended presentations would be reiterated in front of the whole group. With the assistance of staff, the group selected presentations in a carefully balanced manner to represent a variety of different views on electoral systems: two presentations each for Mixed Member Proportional and Single Transferable Vote systems, which were informally considered to be the main contenders for a new system. The presentations also included an argument for First Past the Post, one for Alternative Vote, and two thematic presentations on the consequences of choosing a new system and on the needs of the North. In the end, although there was considerable pomp and ceremony on the day of the presentations, Assembly members reported that these presenters had little impact on their feelings: they had heard most of the arguments before. If anything, the presenter advocating Single Member Plurality added another nail to the coffin of the current system by asserting brashly that the winner *should* take all in politics. This didn't sit well with Assembly members, who already prized working in a more consensual manner. Many had already decided what system they preferred. They were open to hearing arguments, but it would take a serious exchange rather than a one-way conversation to persuade them to change their minds.

On the Sunday of the first weekend, the Assembly members gathered in small groups to decide what were their top values in picking an electoral system and what were their least important considerations. Some thought this was a throw-away exercise for Sunday morning, but it turned out to have important consequences for the Assembly. This activity formally set a frame of reference around which the Assembly members would have to craft their arguments in favor of one system or another. The structure of the activity also helped to exclude some

values that had taken up a fair amount of discussion time but around which there was no supermajority agreement. Each small-group discussion was asked to pick its “top three values” and the least important value and report back to the larger group. Together in the plenary session, the Assembly members affirmed local representation, proportionality, and voter choice as their three main criteria. Every single small group listed “Strong majority government” as the least important value. To some observers who were familiar with BC politics, this rejection of majority government was shocking: the Assembly members had roundly rejected the strongest argument for the current system.

The following weekend was taken up with the difficult task of choosing which systems the Assembly would build in more detail. In principle, more than one system fit the three values that they had chosen as features of a new system. Staff and members decided to sketch out the details of all the systems that fit the principles or values they had selected as a means to make a more informed choice. After some discussion, they decided that only two systems fit the criteria that they had established: Single Transferable Vote (STV) and Mixed Member Proportional (MMP). Both maintained local representation and increased proportionality and voter choice compared to the current system, albeit in different ways. In the STV system, district sizes would increase to become multimember districts, but because voters could rank order their preferred candidates from each party, representatives would have to compete with each other to service the district. Using large multimember districts could produce a more proportional distribution of seats in the legislature. In the MMP system the Assembly was considering, voters got to mark two choices: one for a local representative and one for the party they want to govern. The party list seats would be used to compensate for distortions produced in the district contests, thus increasing the overall proportionality of the legislature.

The research staff elaborated a series of decisions Assembly members would have to address for each system, including decisions about the structure of the ballot, the size of districts, and vote counting rules. The list for STV was short—only about five decisions were needed to customize that system for British Columbia. In contrast, the series of decisions for MMP was long—fifteen or sixteen decisions were needed about different parts of the system for it to be complete. The Assembly staff recommended that the Assembly members try to craft STV first, figuring it would be easier to feel successful. That Saturday, the Assembly members broke off into small-group discussions to hash out arguments for different components of STV.

On Sunday morning, the members met back in plenary. Dr. Carty, his voice tentative, opened up the session with the observation, “I think you’re about to try to do something that has never before been attempted—to have 160 people try to build an electoral system.” The discussion was a little cautious at first, but as the Assembly members got going, they confidently argued the fine points of

various possible features of their Single Transferable Vote system. By lunchtime, the Assembly members had accomplished a major goal: they had collectively designed an STV electoral system. They left that weekend feeling really good about their work.

The next weekend did not run as smoothly, however. As Assembly members gathered in small groups on Saturday to discuss the possibilities for MMP, it soon became apparent that this system would be a lot harder to build than STV. The problem was that with so many “moving parts,” making a decision about one aspect of an MMP system would impact the decisions about other components. As their discussions wore on, Assembly members struggled to come to agreement on one part of the system—any part. Part of the problem appeared to stem from Assembly members’ discomfort with some basic components of this system: there was tension around the type of local representation an MMP system could provide, how much proportionality was appropriate, and what kind of work party-list candidates would actually do. When Assembly members met in plenary session, the discussion got bogged down in questions clarifying the basic principles of the system.

That Saturday night, Assembly members met informally to discuss how to move forward. One of the greatest sticking points was the issue of local representation. One member from the far Northeast corner of the province had been a vocal advocate for local representation throughout the process. Other members were concerned about who party list representatives would actually represent—their party, their region, or the whole province? After much discussion, one member finally suggested that “open regional party lists” might be one thing they could agree on and to start building in other components from there. Open party lists allowed voters to control what candidates from a party list would actually sit in the legislature, and tying the lists to regions maintained a kind of geographic representation among the list candidates. The informal group assented, as did the entire Assembly in plenary the next day. That Sunday, Assembly members managed to build a skeletal MMP system, leaving several key discussions unfinished. The staff suggested that if the Assembly members picked MMP in their final debate, they could finish up these decisions at that time.

Deliberation weekend four was the culmination of the Assembly’s work. It was decision weekend. Assembly members met up and spent their first morning together in small groups, preparing for that afternoon’s debate between STV and MMP. Officially, this debate was the penultimate moment where the Assembly would decide which system would be presented as a challenger to SMP in the next day’s final deliberation. Unofficially, Saturday was the important decision: Assembly members knew that they were going to recommend a change the next day, and some even anticipated the success of STV, but going into that weekend, they had little secure knowledge of what that change would be.

The debate opened with the Chair of the Assembly's inviting members to volunteer to make cases for each system and to rebut the cases for each system. After that, Assembly members were free to add whatever arguments they chose, with the Chair's alternating arguments for each side. Some Assembly members read from prepared texts, others spoke more freely to their fellow members. The debates were impressive: the Assembly members who participated showed a detailed knowledge of the different arguments for each system. Because the speakers alternated between STV and MMP, it was hard to tell which way the majority of the Assembly was leaning. After about three hours, the Chair asked the members if they were ready to vote. They assented. Paper ballots were distributed, collected, and counted by staff, with two Assembly members acting as scrutineers. After about fifteen minutes, the results were posted: 123 in favor of STV, 31 in favor of MMP. When the numbers were revealed, a gasp emerged from the Assembly members, who hadn't been expecting such a large disparity between the two systems. STV supporters were jubilant, and some MMP supporters were visibly sad. Dr. Blaney, with a catch in his voice, congratulated the group on an elegant, eloquent debate. Assembly members slowly dispersed out of Asia Pacific Hall off to celebrate, or alternately, to accept their loss.

The next day's debate between First Past the Post and STV was lackluster by comparison to Saturday's performance. In the preparatory discussion section I observed, both the facilitator and the Assembly members showed little enthusiasm for supporting the current, FPTP system. Assembly members dutifully went over the arguments in support of the current system, but it seemed as though they were repeating something they had learned, not something they felt passionately about. Back in the plenary room, the debate was similarly uneven. There were arguments for the current system, but they were repeated without much conviction. It was only partway through the debate that the real supporters of the current system spoke up—they did so articulately but defensively, as if they felt they would be attacked. The Assembly wound up voting 97 percent in favor of recommending that their new system be forwarded to the public of British Columbia for consideration.

The last two weekends were spent fine-tuning further details about their Single Transferable Vote system, writing the referendum question, and preparing a report on the recommendation that would be issued to the public. Although the Assembly's work formally finished at the end of November 2004, many Assembly members continued to be active in an Alumni group, aiming to inform the public about their recommendation before the May 2005 referendum. The government had put aside relatively little money to inform people about the referendum, and Assembly members were reluctant to see their hard work fall by the wayside. From December onward, Assembly members voluntarily attended community presentations and met with media to explain the reasons for their choice. The provincial government set up a referendum office

charged with the task of providing information. The referendum office organized print advertising and operated a 1-800 information line and a Web site. Elections BC also organized print advertising announcing the upcoming referendum and provincial election. A few provincial political activists organized both Yes and No campaigns, but these operated with very little funding (in the tens of thousands of dollars).<sup>18</sup>

Public awareness of the referendum was relatively low throughout the campaign. In two polls, one taken three weeks before referendum day and one three days beforehand, two-thirds of respondents knew little or nothing about the referendum.<sup>19</sup> Despite this, the Citizens' Assembly's proposal did remarkably well at the polls. To pass, the proposal had to meet a double threshold: it had to obtain 60 percent of the vote province-wide and more than half the vote in 60 percent of all electoral districts. The proposal surpassed the second threshold: a majority of voters favored the proposal in seventy-seven of seventy-nine districts. But the total provincial support for the proposal was only 57.3 percent. Survey research conducted during the referendum campaign found that those who knew something about the Citizens' Assembly's work were more likely to vote in favor of STV, suggesting that a citizen-focused process did indeed serve to legitimize the electoral reform proposal for many in the general public.<sup>20</sup>

Given the high level of voter support for STV and the failure to adequately educate the public about the referendum, British Columbia's provincial Liberal government announced in September 2005 that it would hold another referendum on the Citizens' Assembly's proposal, scheduled for May 2009. It has promised public funding for yes and no campaigns. The government is also in the process of convening an independent Boundary Commission to propose a map of electoral districts under STV, so that voters will have a clear idea of the potential changes.

### *Key Institutional Features of the Citizens' Assembly*

In the introduction, I identified two criticisms of policy making structured around citizen deliberation: a fear that participants would not be able to act independently to make a decision and a fear that the deliberations of ordinary citizens would produce suboptimal decisions. It should be clear from the description above that in its setup and day-to-day operations, the Citizens' Assembly worked independently from interference by external political actors, including members of the government that initiated the process. The secretariat that was hired to run the Citizens' Assembly operated independently from government. Members of the provincial legislature publicly maintained a "hands-off" approach to the process, appearing only at the opening and closing ceremonies of the Citizens' Assembly and the occasional public hearing. And when other organized political actors attempted to lobby the Assembly members

to support a Mixed Member Proportional system, many Assembly members were disinclined to pay attention precisely because they viewed the presentations as politically motivated and nondeliberative in character.

While it guaranteed the Assembly's independence, there were two drawbacks to this hands-off approach. First, the independence of the Citizens' Assembly was clearly a drawback during the referendum phase, when the provincial government declined to offer sufficient funding to publicize the proposal. The rationale for this decision was that providing funding after the fact would undermine the government's neutral stance throughout the process and possibly delegitimize the work of the Assembly. (This could easily be remedied by laying out clear rules for funding a public education campaign in advance of any decision.) Second, the fact that Assembly members were not in dialogue with members of the political class throughout the process may have heightened their oppositional stance to politicians and political parties. While it is doubtful that this oppositional stance was the single deciding reason the Assembly members picked STV, a dislike of political party behavior was clearly on the minds of some Assembly members as they deliberated about which system to choose (this will be discussed further below). The result was that political parties and politicians could argue that their needs were not adequately taken into account in the course of designing a new electoral system. The absence of politicians as stakeholders was likely to have undermined the political will to support the referendum phase of the process and the implementation of any reforms. In sum, the BC case underscores that independence is only a measure of citizen empowerment to the extent that it is accompanied by the political will and institutional mechanisms to advance citizen-made decisions through to the legislative process.

Another important variant on the independence critique has to do with the internal dynamics of citizen deliberative bodies. As discussed above, the informality of the BC Citizens' Assembly's proceedings left much of the everyday decision making up to the Assembly staff members. The information that was presented, the agendas for learning and discussion, and most of the procedural decisions were initiated and made by the staff. Assembly members were solicited for feedback on the proceedings in a variety of ways, including evaluation surveys at the end of each weekend meeting. But while many Assembly member suggestions were incorporated into the proceedings, it was the staff that had the final authority over the organization of the Assembly. For this reason, some critics of the process have argued that the staff's influence over the process and information led the Assembly members to pick STV as their choice.

It is clear that the Citizens' Assembly staff's organizational control sometimes led to conflicts over issues that would affect the outcome of the participants' decision making. For example, the Assembly members debated informally whether their official mandate allowed them to recommend an increase in the size of the legislature. The question was an important one

because keeping the small number of seats in the BC legislature (seventy-nine) sharpened the tradeoff between local representation and proportionality. For example, in a Mixed Member Proportional system, allocating some portion of seventy-nine seats from a party list would mean that the remaining single-member districts would have to grow in geographic size. This is a daunting prospect in a province whose two largest electoral districts currently have land areas greater than 160,000 square kilometers.<sup>21</sup>

It was not explicitly stated in the written mandate whether or not the Assembly was allowed to recommend an increase in the number of seats. After some back and forth questions between Assembly members and staff and discussion among Assembly members on this issue, the staff advised the Assembly that it had to stick to seventy-nine seats. A few Assembly members continued to point out that the mandate didn't explicitly limit the Assembly to seventy-nine seats throughout the process, but there was no movement by the staff to open up the debate. In interviews once the process was over, several Assembly members said they thought that decision probably did bias the process away from picking an MMP system and toward STV. In that sense, the internal organization of the Citizens' Assembly imposed some important substantive limitations on the work of participants. This was a product of institutional design (the limitation of their mandate and the control by staff over procedural matters) rather than concerted political effort.

But if the Assembly staff controlled the process, I argue that the Assembly members did act independently in developing the principles that guided their decision making. Time, space, and a clear division of labor were all features of the Citizens' Assembly process that enhanced the independent decision-making capacity of Assembly members. First, the length of the process allowed Assembly members time to do their own research, seeking out scholarly material on electoral systems in addition to what they had been given. A small group of Assembly members did extensive research outside of the Assembly and then disseminated their findings among the other participants. The year-long process also allowed them to have repeated and lengthy conversations with each other and to solicit views of their community members, families, and friends. This allowed the participants to develop their own analysis of the issues and provided an important check on the learning materials provided by the Assembly staff.

Second, the Assembly members had multiple spaces in which to discuss and develop their own views: plenary sessions, small-group discussions, the online discussion forum, lunch and dinner tables, the bar at the end of the day, travel to and from meetings, and at home in conversation with their families and communities. In interviews, most Assembly members recounted that the smaller spaces of the Assembly, particularly the small-group discussions and the online discussion forum, were the places where they felt they did the most intense learning, thinking, and deliberating. Third, although it managed the logistics of

the process, the Assembly staff explicitly assigned the role of substantive decision maker to the participants. Assembly members were wary about the possibility of “being led down the garden path” by the Assembly staff on the issue of what system was best for British Columbia. However, the Assembly staff made a point of not divulging their own opinions about electoral systems, even when directly questioned by participants. In interviews, most participants felt that the group had made a decision that was authentically theirs.

In sum, the structure of the BC Citizens’ Assembly process imposed some real constraints on the decision making of participants. But the process also facilitated real empowerment of the participants by giving them time, space, and the authority to make decisions about what electoral system they preferred. The consequence of having this time, space, and authority was that the Assembly members were able to develop their *own* criteria for choosing a new electoral system. As described below, this was a complex process involving balancing the values they came in with, the technical information they had learned, and the interests that emerged out of a process of extended interaction with each other.

#### DEVELOPING CRITERIA, MAKING TRADEOFFS

How did 160 randomly selected people with varying levels of formal education and knowledge of politics come to a principled agreement on a new electoral system? Were members of the general public really qualified to discuss such technical matters? Were the more vocal citizens biased against particular systems or outcomes? And how did minority group interests succeed in this deliberative process? These questions are encapsulated by the second criticism often levied at participatory governance processes: from a democratic or a technical standpoint, randomly selected ordinary citizens may not make optimal policy decisions. Likewise, a participatory governance process cannot be called empowering if it leads to technically poor decisions or to a decision that is unrepresentative of what the general public would want.

Consequently, in addition to examining the structure of the process, it is important to look in some detail at the actual discussions among Assembly members. What emerges is a complex process in which Assembly members developed their own criteria for choosing a new electoral system. This was partly fueled by participants’ prior orientations but more so by extensive interaction with one another. This interaction had two important consequences: first, through discussion, the Assembly members reinterpreted the technical information on electoral systems they had been given and reworked some of the traditional criteria used to evaluate electoral systems. Second, extensive interaction with one another helped Assembly members to identify and define a common set of interests. This section is organized around examining each of these parts of the decision-making process in turn.

### *What Did Participants Bring In?*

As described above, the Citizens' Assembly's selection process yielded a group of people whose composition broadly matched the demographics of British Columbia, with the exception of visible minorities. The basic assumption in inviting randomly selected citizens to participate in the Assembly was that a *descriptively representative* group of citizens would yield a *representative sample of views* in the process of deliberation. This is consistent with the theoretical literature on random selection in politics, which argues that a wide variety of perspectives, combined with a lack of entrenched bias/interests, are important benefits of inviting randomly selected citizens to participate in policy making.<sup>22</sup> Mansbridge argues that descriptive representation is particularly useful in situations where interests are as yet uncrystallized.<sup>23</sup> Demographic characteristics such as gender, race, age, or geographic origin may be good proxies for common life experiences—experiences that are then levied in the process of analyzing and forming opinions about an issue.

Underlying these arguments in favor of descriptive representation is the expectation that people who systematically differ in their life experiences will be aware of and willing to articulate these differences. In fact, this was only partially borne out in the case of the Citizens' Assembly. In interviews, few of the ordinary citizens in the BC Citizens' Assembly felt that they were there to act as representatives of any social group to which they belonged. Even if they recognized that particular social groups had a stake in the decision about a new electoral system, few members felt comfortable being advocates for the interests of particular groups. In the words of one Assembly member, "It was so nice to go in there and just be ourselves and not have to be your job or where you're from. To not have anyone ask me 'what does your husband do?' We were just there as citizens."<sup>24</sup> The majority of Assembly members I interviewed said they were there representing their own life experiences, and if pressed, the people of their riding. Together, they believed, they could come up with a decision that met the interests and needs of the population as a whole. This was the case even though the Assembly members had several opportunities to take on the role of advocates as they deliberated about how different electoral systems might increase or decrease the representation of women, rural people, youth, and Aboriginal people.

Because of the timing of the interviews (all were conducted after the process was over), it is difficult to attribute the Assembly members' ideas about representation to either pre-existing sentiment or else the process of interaction among group members. However, some participants did state that it was the process of interacting with other group members that made advocacy more or less appealing as a role. One Assembly member recounted the process of becoming an advocate for Northern (rural) interests in this way:

To be totally honest, until I became part of the Assembly I never really felt the North-South thing. Until I became a member I had no clue that there was that much antagonism between the urban and the rural [areas] of BC. It was kind of a surprise to me that there was so much tension really . . . [In the Assembly] One person commented basically that we were freeloaders and the taxpayers of Vancouver supported us. That was like the second weekend. . . . There were a lot of people—at one town meeting I said I was from [a rural area] and it was important for us to have our input. And one fellow said, “Why? Moose don’t vote!” And I said, well, that’s an interesting way of looking at it and thanks for your input. I didn’t realize how some people view the North. That we’re not as important as the Vancouver area. I hadn’t got any idea of that until I got into the Assembly. And that made me feel that we needed a louder voice in the Assembly.<sup>25</sup>

Another participant said that the dynamic of the Assembly made her *less* inclined to be a vocal advocate in the Assembly’s discussions of women’s representation than she might have been otherwise:

I’m an educated feminist. And so you know I had concerns about how vocal I could be. And just what I would encounter . . . I guess going head to head with patriarchal thinking and attitudes . . . I certainly found it challenging [to present my viewpoint], just challenging the status quo. And definitely the status quo was [assumed to be] better. Whenever we had a conversation about women’s needs, the desire for women to have equal representation in an electoral reform system, as well as Aboriginal people. They were pretty much in my opinion taboo subjects. You couldn’t go there and have any kind of discussion that didn’t quickly go into emotion and some fairly old ideas.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, we can reasonably conclude that the group process itself was important for encouraging some participants to see their individual experiences as part of a collective experience and for encouraging or discouraging participant advocacy on behalf of social group interests. Consequently, the assumption that a randomly selected group will be representative of the views of the general public can’t be sustained just by looking at the demographics of the group. The *process of interaction* among Assembly members shaped the quality of active representation that emerged from a descriptively representative group of citizens.

The nature of the selection process conditioned what participants brought into the Assembly in two additional ways. First, participant self-selection into the process added an important dynamic to the meetings of the Assembly: those who became members had extensive experience participating in their home communities and managed to work together very well from very early on in the process.<sup>27</sup> Second, it is also likely that the participants of the Assembly also brought in some antipathies to political parties and to party politics from the outset. Survey data on the Assembly have not yet been published, but interviews with staff and participants suggest that the early weekends were spent “venting” about recent political scandals within both major parties. There was certainly some venting about party behavior during the public hearings, suggesting that the self-selection into public discussion of electoral reform may be biased

toward those who are dissatisfied with political parties. More broadly, the political culture of British Columbia is noted for fairly polarized political rhetoric, although political scientist Donald Blake argues that in BC, rhetoric is more polarized than actual policy.<sup>28</sup> Finally, the participants of the Citizens' Assembly had lived through the erratic results of the two most recent elections: first the wrong-winner outcome in 1996; then the absolute decimation of the opposition party in 2001. Both of the major parties had suffered scandals after these odd victories, which may have further undermined the public's confidence in elected officials. In summary, there is reason to believe that the citizens coming into the Assembly were in a mood to discipline parties. However, as I will argue below, the nature of the Assembly process and the group interaction was key to bringing this antipathy forward as a criterion that shaped their decision.

### *What Did Participants Learn?*

The Learning Phase was most Assembly members' first exposure to both the mechanics of different electoral systems and the criteria that people use to evaluate them. Most participants that I interviewed didn't know that there were alternative systems out there before joining the Assembly, and those who were aware that alternatives existed had not considered it possible to change their own system. The first of six weekend meetings in the Learning Phase covered introductory information about the Assembly's policies and procedures, rules for working together, and basic information about the province's political system. Importantly, the Assembly staff gave members a set of basic criteria that political scientists use to compare and evaluate different electoral systems. These criteria for evaluating electoral systems were drawn from the Law Commission of Canada's report on electoral reform,<sup>29</sup> an exhaustive review of the literature on electoral reform and its application to the First Past the Post system used federally in Canada. In presenting the criteria, Assembly staff members were careful to pose them as questions for the Assembly members to answer. For example, given that the quality of geographic or local representation was one standard criterion for evaluating electoral systems, Assembly members would be asked to think about whether this kind of representation was important in British Columbia, and if so, what kind of local representation they wanted. Assembly members interviewed felt that the staff did not give away a particular preference for any electoral system or overemphasize particular criteria for evaluating electoral systems.

Some observers of the Citizens' Assembly worried that the Assembly members would take the information in the Learning Phase materials uncritically. However, over the course of the Assembly, members reinterpreted the information and evaluation criteria they had been given in the lectures on electoral

systems. For example, one day, during a discussion about the positive and negative aspects of different criteria, the Assembly members were chewing over the concept of “stable government.” This criterion had been presented in the lecture as the single biggest virtue of British Columbia’s current Single Member Plurality (first past the post) system. The Assembly members had been taught that the current electoral system produces one-party majority governments that are stable in the sense that they are not required to negotiate with anyone to pass legislation. In their discussion of the issue, Assembly members noted that stability was not necessarily a good thing from their perspective, as it meant that government could impose its will on people when the people didn’t like it. In the words of one Assembly member, “voters have no say in majority government, no opposition,” and in the words of another, “there’s no accountability between elections. No voter input, or stabilizing or feedback between elections.”<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, this discussion contained little mention of the other political institutions such as opposition parties or courts that are supposed to act as checks on majority government—in the conversation of the Assembly members, voters had the primary responsibility over government. During a staff meeting later that weekend, several facilitators reported having similar discussions in which Assembly members had criticized the meaning of the term *stable government*, which the facilitators dismissed as “semantic.” But as an outside observer, it was clear that the Assembly members were making a substantive point.

Another important concept on which the Assembly members appeared to have a distinct perspective was “local representation.” This was identified as an important value or feature of an electoral system from the beginning of the process. Other electoral reform commissions across Canada had also voiced the importance of local representation in Canada and in the provinces, taking into account the vast geography of the country. For some Assembly members from urban areas, local representation wasn’t all that important. But it became the major issue for participants from rural areas, who felt that their local representative helped to connect them to the rest of the province. The members’ interpretation of local representation had distinct implications for choosing an electoral system. First, the local representative needed to be someone from the local area who knew the way things worked. By implication, that meant that expanding the size of electoral districts—as would be necessary under some new electoral systems—was not permissible. As one vocal Northern Assembly member put it,

Local representation to me is someone that is accessible to me, who knows the constituency without me having to explain it to them, without having to be educated about it. Someone who has lived there, lived the life. I’m not stuck on single-member ridings. But in my area a riding of more than two [representatives] would be ridiculous. It’s a matter of our traditions, lifestyle and access.<sup>31</sup>

Second, to Assembly members, local representation meant representatives serving the constituency. This accounted for the widespread support of the Single Transferable Vote system, in which voters rank order a party's candidates on the ballot. In practice, ranking candidates would allow voters to control which candidate from the party would represent them, and the candidates would compete with each other to see who could serve the constituency best. This resolved a problem that many Assembly members (and members of the public) saw with the current system, namely, that

many voters think the politicians they send to Victoria or Ottawa are quickly transformed into automatons programmed solely to carry political messages from their parties back to the riding, rather than forcefully fighting in the capitals for the interests of their constituents.<sup>32</sup>

Once again, the Assembly members' interpretation of a key concept was structured around their experiences as voters on the receiving end of governance. Contrary to some critics' views, this process of discussion and interpretation is evidence that they were not being "led down the garden path" by the experts in charge of organizing the Citizens' Assembly. Instead of passively accepting the criteria given to them, the Assembly participants thought long and hard about whether these criteria reflected their own experiences and aspirations as voters. This process of reinterpretation is evidence that the internal organization of the Assembly permitted the Assembly members sufficient autonomy to decide what mattered to them. It also answers another question often levied at citizen involvement efforts: what difference does it make to involve ordinary citizens in political decision making? The difference is that ordinary citizens thought differently about the issues at stake than experts or elected officials.

### *What Came Out of Interaction and Deliberation?*

As they absorbed information on electoral systems and began to consider what values were collectively important for them as *voters*, the Assembly members were also trying to make sense of whether they were there to represent any other groups. There was no clear answer to this question. As a whole, they represented "the people of British Columbia," but as individuals, they could represent multiple constituencies or just themselves. They had been selected on the basis of geography, gender, and age, and two people had been selected to participate on the basis of their Aboriginal ancestry. Within the Assembly context, however, these social identities were not always salient. The salience of particular identities was heightened or reduced through a process of interaction.

Rural Assembly members discovered through conversation with each other (and with urban folk) that they had a common identity and set of experiences as voters. Early on in the Assembly's Learning Phase, this caucusing process was

facilitated by the random assignment of a bunch of rural members to a small-group discussion. In that small discussion group, rural participants discovered that they had a common experience of feeling disconnected from what was going on in the legislature located at the southern tip of the province. Interactions with urban Assembly members helped to crystalize the sense that rural participants had some distinct experiences and interests when it came to electoral politics, as indicated by the Assembly member's comment above. In addition, one Assembly member was a particularly vocal, persistent, and persuasive advocate for rural representation. He was successful in galvanizing other rural Assembly members, and urban Assembly members were receptive to his frequent interventions in the discussion. Finally, rural people in the Assembly had a practical advantage in their deliberations because they could articulate their needs in terms that fit well within general discussions of electoral reform—a desire for strong local representation that would connect them to the rest of the province.

In contrast, Assembly members found it difficult to advocate for an electoral system that would help to increase women's representation or Aboriginal representation. First, the demographics of these groups in the Assembly did not lend themselves to the formation of a caucus. On one hand, women composed half the Assembly members; on the other hand, there were only two Aboriginal members and a handful of non-Aboriginal members who were interested in the issue of Aboriginal representation. There were too many women to organize a caucus and too few proponents of Aboriginal representation to feel comfortable caucusing. Second, there was little agreement on what constituted a common identity or set of interests for these groups. The women of the Assembly were very diverse in their opinions about increasing women's representation in the legislature. While many agreed that increased representation would be a good thing, not as many were willing to take concrete steps to implement it. In addition, several vocal members did not believe that women's representation should be on the table at all as an issue for discussion. In interviews, the Aboriginal representatives also felt that they could not represent the diversity of Aboriginal peoples in British Columbia. Third, some Assembly members were not as willing to listen to claims on behalf of women and Aboriginal representation as they were for rural interests. This was clear not only from interviews with Assembly members but by the quality of listening and responsiveness that was displayed during group discussions on these issues. Finally, advocates for increased representation of women or Aboriginal people could not (within their mandate) identify a mechanism or feature of electoral systems that would be certain to increase their numbers in the legislature. As a result, the representation of diverse interests within the Assembly varied substantially. While a few participants entered the Assembly with a clear sense of collective interests that they favored, the crystalization of collective interests within the Assembly depended on the complex series of interactions among Assembly members.

In the course of figuring out who they were as a group, the Assembly members also counterposed themselves to other political actors. In particular, many Assembly members counterposed their interests as voters to the behavior and interests of political parties. Although this point was not debated as explicitly as others, there was a sense among Assembly members that political parties had too much power over the political process and that a system that could curtail these problems would be an improvement. First, Assembly members wanted to change the overall tenor of political debate. In the words of one Assembly member, “I’m just sick and tired of the complete polarization of politics here in BC, which I like to call “politics by brawl” . . . I couldn’t believe the hate politicians from each side have for each other here. It’s sickening and I’d like to change it.”<sup>33</sup> Second, there was a sense that strict party discipline in the legislature curtailed the autonomy of individual representatives, producing concentrated power in the hands of party leaders. One member summarized these feelings in an interview:

The power of the parties . . . was a close fourth [criterion] for a lot of people [in the Assembly]. The fact that the political parties have become unwieldy in their power. And the power that more and more is concentrated with the few at the top, the premier and whoever’s in at the top of a political group. It seems that there’s so much power there, they have more influence than they really are entitled to. Outstandingly we heard about that time after time that that was something that people just were not happy with. And one of the other things that really concerned me was that although we have local reps and they are important to the people out there, they very often they fail their constituents. After they’re elected their allegiance goes to the party, it’s what their party wants. The concerns of the constituents, if they’re in conflict with what the party wants, come second—a bad second.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, in addition to local representation, voter choice, and proportionality, an important unofficial criterion was the desire to temper party power in the political system.

Importantly, Assembly members were never forced to confront this view of political parties by actually interacting with people involved in the current political system. Ironically, the process that was designed to insulate Assembly members from undue political influence prevented them from seriously considering the challenges facing political representatives and political parties. One Assembly member recounted her experience discussing STV with a political candidate after the Assembly had announced its decision:

It was quite a shock actually . . . [A political candidate] asked me all these questions about how [STV] would work and I had never thought about it from a party’s point of view. So it really stretched my mind there because I had always thought about it from the voter’s point of view, not from what it would be like to be a politician.<sup>35</sup>

The clear exclusion of political actors may have heightened pre-existing antiparty or antipolitician sentiment that Assembly members brought into the

process with them and may have contributed to the development of an us-them sentiment that is a common part of forming a collective identity.<sup>36</sup> It is unlikely that dialogue with political actors would have changed the Assembly members' final decision, but the explicit consideration of the point of view of political actors was built out of the process.

Given the nature of the Assembly members' discussions and the criteria they developed, the choice for STV becomes less surprising. On paper, both STV and MMP offered voter choice, proportionality, and local representation. But in the end, MMP didn't offer the *kinds* of choices and local representation that the Assembly members favored. Limited to a seventy-nine-seat legislature, an MMP system would have meant enlarging geographic districts to compensate for the seats apportioned from party lists. Furthermore, MMP maintained the control of political parties over candidate selection. For Assembly members, the combination of these features undermined the quality of local representation and choices of candidates that they sought. STV increased the size of electoral districts in the North but balanced that with increased voter control over which candidates would represent them. Assembly members expected this increased control would improve constituency service and subtly shift the balance of power in political parties away from party leaders and toward constituents.

### *Creative Deliberation*

As described above, the BC Citizens' Assembly was not able to accommodate some important points of view into its decision making. Nevertheless, the Assembly process of learning, reinterpretation, and the crystallization of certain interests is an improvement on traditional consultation processes, and it has the potential to be highly empowering to citizens. Rather than choosing from a pre-determined set of criteria or policy choices, the participants in the Citizens' Assembly had the time and space to follow a process of *creative deliberation*. Their discussions were not simply structured around weighing the existing justifications for one electoral system or another. Rather, the Citizens' Assembly members engaged in a process of creative deliberation by finding *new* grounds for making their decision. The Assembly members reinterpreted the traditional criteria used to discuss electoral reform in light of their own experiences as voters. They chose to make significant compromises to meet the needs of rural citizens. The Assembly members decided what were the tradeoffs between different principles and worked to find agreement on a system they could all live with. This produced an outcome—the recommendation for STV—that differed significantly from Canadian electoral reform proposals produced by expert panels. The Citizens' Assembly model has the potential to empower by giving citizens the authority to reinterpret existing information, redefine the issues, and come up with new grounds for decision making.

## PROSPECTS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY MODEL

Advocates of citizen deliberation methods argue they are superior to traditional means of citizen consultation for a number of reasons. On complex policy issues, citizens have the chance to become informed not only about the issues but also about their fellow citizens' preferences.<sup>37</sup> Democratic deliberation produces fairer and potentially more moderate outcomes because it insists on justifying decisions through reasons that are acceptable to all those who will be bound.<sup>38</sup> Involving ordinary citizens in deliberative decision making is key to producing potentially more effective decisions, because they bring in their own local knowledge of the problem at hand.<sup>39</sup>

As described above, the experience of the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly largely bears out these theoretical arguments in favor of citizen-led deliberation and decision making. The participants of the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly embraced the task of learning about electoral systems and each other. They worked to find common ground around which to structure their decision, and the majority of participants from urban areas made significant compromises to accommodate the needs of a vocal minority from rural areas. They reinterpreted information given by political science experts, articulated criteria for choosing based on their experiences as voters, and picked a system that best met those principles.

There were two exceptions to the general success story that suggest modifications to the institutional design of the Citizens' Assembly. First, the Assembly members' process of forming common interests as voters could not accommodate claims on behalf of certain groups that were clearly stakeholders in the process of electoral reform. Consequently, critics of the Citizens' Assembly process have argued that the unique "voters' perspective" developed by the participants was too limited. Feminist groups have accused STV of being "bad for women."<sup>40</sup> And politicians have criticized the Assembly's isolation from political stakeholders, leading one Canadian federal politician to note that the Citizens' Assembly process was "like designing a health care system without asking the participation of doctors and nurses."<sup>41</sup> In my view, a second limitation of the process was the control of the Citizens' Assembly staff over significant procedural issues such as the issue of whether or not to challenge the limited mandate of seventy-nine seats.

In the first case, the problem was not that Assembly members were absolutely unwilling to listen to the perspectives of stakeholder groups but that there were few in the Assembly who could or would make a credible argument for why party discipline was necessary, why having more women in the legislature was a good thing on more than just abstract principles, or why the current Single Member Plurality system was a preferable electoral system. It was a mistake to expect ordinary citizens to act as representatives of *all* viewpoints or

interests, but it was not a mistake to trust ordinary citizens to listen to views that challenged their own experiences and to deliberate about them seriously. Future Citizens' Assemblies could remedy this problem by formally incorporating stakeholder perspectives into the structure of citizen learning and deliberation rather than excluding them. The formal inclusion of stakeholder groups in the process of information-giving would provide reasonable arguments that were missing from the Assembly participants' lexicon as well as increase the legitimacy of the process to external political actors.

The issue of organizational control is a difficult one to resolve, as there are good arguments for the division of procedural and substantive labor within an Assembly-type process. The organization of a Citizens' Assembly requires extensive logistical expertise that randomly selected citizens are unlikely to have. Moreover, most Assembly members I interviewed did not relish the thought of having more procedural control, because they felt that learning about electoral systems was already a big challenge. As discussed above, the clear division of labor within the Assembly in some sense clarified the task of the Assembly members. However, a mechanism that would empower participants to deliberatively resolve procedural issues that clearly have a direct impact on decision making would enhance the democratic legitimacy of future Citizens' Assemblies.

None of these changes would compromise the fundamental structure of the Citizens' Assembly model nor alter contribution that ordinary citizens can make to political decision making. The Citizens' Assembly was "for real" because it created the conditions in which authentic citizen decision making could take place. The unique perspective that the participants of the Citizens' Assembly brought to the issue of electoral reform made a difference to decision making that would not have materialized if those citizens had not been given the time, space, and power to make their own decision. As such, the Citizens' Assembly offers an innovative and promising model for empowered participatory governance.

### *Future Applications of Randomocracy*

The success of the BC Citizens' Assembly suggests that the project of "democratizing democracy" is possible at the heart of major political institutions, not just at the political margins. Perhaps the most striking part of the Assembly process was the empowerment of randomly selected citizens as opposed to stakeholder groups or self-selected citizens. In fact, the organization of the BC Citizens' Assembly coincided with a growing movement to extend random selection of citizens into policy making and other political processes, a phenomenon that the BC Citizens' Assembly member Jack MacDonald dubbed "Randomocracy" in his book outlining the BC Citizens' Assembly's decision.<sup>42</sup>

Most frequently, Randomocracy takes the form of a policy-jury model.<sup>43</sup> Policy juries typically invite randomly selected citizens to learn about a policy using materials and witnesses from multiple perspectives and then to deliberate on that issue. Participants are compensated for their time to ensure that a more representative sample of citizens will accept the invitation to participate. Policy juries vary in size, duration, and impact. Group sizes have ranged from ten in Danish Consensus Conferences on technology policy to several hundred in the Deliberative Polling experiments organized by Jim Fishkin and collaborators. The duration can be a weekend, as with the United States National Issues Convention in 1996, to a series of iterated meetings spanning several months, as in the case of German Planning Cells; and the impact has varied from groups independently making recommendations on a policy issue to the formal incorporation of policy juries into planning processes.

In addition to real-world institutions that incorporate randomly selected citizens, recent scholarship has produced a variety of proposals to extend random selection into other arenas. One series of proposals would use random selection to improve referenda and ballot initiative processes. To solve the lack of credible and unbiased information circulating in referendum processes, political scientist Ned Crosby suggests that policy juries be convened to deliberatively evaluate ballot initiatives and produce nonpartisan informational reports to voters. To that end, Crosby has established an organization called the "Citizens Initiative Review" in Washington State, which will organize policy juries to deliberate and weigh in on initiative proposal.<sup>44</sup> Political theorist John Ferejohn has suggested a similar modification to the California ballot initiative process. Ferejohn's proposal would have a randomly selected body of citizens empowered to actually amend initiatives, as a means of checking the power of organized interests and entrenched political actors in pushing for changes through referenda.<sup>45</sup>

Harry Brighouse and Erik Olin Wright have developed another, more radical proposal to refashion the British House of Lords using randomly selected citizens.<sup>46</sup> Instead of an appointed second chamber or one composed of elected representatives of regional interests, Brighouse and Wright would invite randomly selected citizens to serve paid terms of three years. This new institution would have powers similar to the existing House of Lords: the ability to slow the passage of legislation, to send it back for reconsideration, and to exercise veto power. They argue this would provide two benefits: First, the second chamber would act as a check on the excesses of electoral politics, as is the traditional function of the House of Lords. In addition, a second chamber composed of randomly selected citizens would deepen the character of democratic discourse by enhancing the direct participation of a representative sample of ordinary citizens.

*Implications for Democratic Practice*

None of these proposals aims to take the place of existing representative political institutions. As discussed above, there are important limitations to the use of randomly selected citizens in political decision making: a descriptively representative group of ordinary citizens cannot be assumed to take on the burden of acting as representatives for particular constituencies. From that perspective, elected representatives, advocacy groups, and social movements play crucial roles in formally articulating and advocating for distinct political interests and perspectives. As I have argued above, greater participation of organized political interests could improve the quality of citizen deliberation processes such as the Citizens' Assembly by increasing the pool of arguments that deliberating citizens take into consideration.

What is useful and unique about processes such as the Citizens' Assembly is that they provide opportunities for creative deliberation: reframing the issues, refocusing the terms of debate, and even developing new criteria for evaluating policy options, based on the lived experience of a broad array of citizens. This could be a useful exercise in many different policy debates, but it is especially appropriate in some cases. First, it is appropriate when ordinary citizens are very likely to have perspectives on an issue that are distinct from the perspectives of organized political actors. One obvious set of questions are those related to reforming democratic political institutions. Electoral reform, campaign finance, and the regulation of lobbying are all issues where organized political actors have a direct stake in particular outcomes and ordinary citizens have a stake in the integrity of the system as a whole. Another set of issues concerns the delivery of services such as health care, where successful policy implementation depends on understanding how and why citizens are likely to use these services. Understanding citizens' perspectives on the problems to be solved would enable policy makers to produce more effective service delivery. Finally, the use of Citizens' Assemblies is also appropriate in situations that involve making substantial material or ethical tradeoffs. Examples involving such tradeoffs include the development of budget priorities, and in particular, budget retrenchment and the development of new policy areas such as the regulation of new technologies. The broad participation of citizens would enhance the legitimacy of decisions, and citizens may be willing to make different tradeoffs than their elected leaders.

In conclusion, Randomocracy addresses the limitations of current policy processes by circumventing the influence of narrow interests, money, and organization and by refocusing decision making around the search for common ground. As I have argued in this article, the success of Randomocracy or other participatory governance methods ultimately depends on both the institutional

structure and constraints of the deliberative setting and the process of crystallization of interests and criteria over the course of the deliberation. In the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, ordinary citizens were given sufficient time, space, and authority to reinterpret the information given to them by experts and develop their own set of criteria for choosing a new electoral system. Guided by their own experiences as voters, these citizens decided what tradeoffs and compromises they were willing to make and recommended an electoral system that differed substantially from other electoral reform initiatives in Canada. While the process was not perfect, it was a substantial improvement over consultation processes that limit citizen involvement to making expressive statements or that ask citizens to select from a narrow set of pre-defined options. Consequently, the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly is one important example that political institutions may indeed be designed to make participatory governance "for real."

#### NOTES

1. The issue of independence takes into account both structural limitations of a participatory institution, such as its mandate, length of time, and who is allowed to participate, and limitations on the discourse within participatory institutions, for example, the way that information and arguments are framed to favor particular interests. On the problems of structural limitations, see Mark Greaves, "Municipality and Community in Chile," *Politics & Society* 32, no. 2 (June 2004): 203–30. On the problems of limited discourse, see S. C. Stokes, "Pathologies of Deliberation," and Adam Przeworski, "Deliberation and Ideological Domination," both in *Deliberative Democracy*, ed. J. Elster (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

2. Critics focusing on the quality of citizen decision making include those who worry about effects of social-psychological group dynamics within a deliberation process and those who write about effects of cultural capital on deliberation and decision making. On the problem of group dynamics, see Cass Sunstein, "The Law of Group Polarization," *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 10, no. 2 (June 2002): 175–95. On the issue of cultural capital, see Lynn Sanders, "Against Deliberation," *Political Theory* 25, no. 3 (1997): 347–76.

3. In the United States, the single transferable vote is commonly known as "choice voting."

4. "Final Referendum Results," Elections BC, June 9, 2005, <http://www.elections.bc.ca/elections/ge2005/finalrefresults.htm> (accessed October 15, 2005).

5. See The Law Commission of Canada, *Voting Counts: Electoral Reform for Canada* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 2004). In 2003, the provincial government of New Brunswick convened an expert-led Commission on Legislative Democracy, which produced a report favoring MMP at the end of March 2004. See Commission on Legislative Democracy, *Final Report and Recommendation*, March 31, 2004, <http://www.gnb.ca/0100/FinalReport-e.pdf> (accessed August 4, 2006). Although the national electoral reform advocacy group, Fair Vote Canada, did not endorse a particular electoral system in its presentation to the BC Citizens' Assembly, my discussions with British Columbia Fair Vote activists indicated there was some tension within the national organization over the merits of a Single Transferable Vote system. The British Columbia representatives on the national

council of Fair Vote Canada supported Single Transferable Vote, while other leaders supported a Mixed Member Proportional system (field notes, Fall 2004). Fair Vote eventually endorsed the BC-STV system proposed by the Citizens' Assembly, in advance of the May 2005 referendum, but supported Mixed Member Proportional systems in New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Quebec. See Fair Vote Canada, "Proportional Representation in British Columbia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Quebec" March 3, 2005, <http://fairvotecanada.org/files/provsystems-march305.pdf> (accessed August 4, 2006).

6. The effect of STV on political party organization and competition is debated in the comparative electoral systems literature. David Farrell, author of the textbook used by the BC Citizens' Assembly, notes that the most commonly studied STV system—Ireland's—is characterized by localism and fractious intraparty dynamics. He argues that this is likely the product of Ireland's political culture rather than a consequence of the STV electoral system by itself. See David M. Farrell, *Electoral Systems: A Comparative Introduction* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 144–47. Recent research comparing STV systems in different countries similarly concludes that how political parties fare under STV depends on party action and strategy in response to the competitive incentives of an STV system. See Shaun Bowler and Bernard Grofman, eds., *Elections in Australia, Ireland and Malta under the Single Transferable Vote: Reflections on an Embedded Institution* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

7. Field notes, Fall 2004.

8. Staff Interview 1, December 2004.

9. Citizens Assembly on Electoral Reform, "Technical Report," December 10, 2004, [http://citizensassembly.bc.ca/resources/TechReport\(full\).pdf](http://citizensassembly.bc.ca/resources/TechReport(full).pdf) (accessed October 15, 2005).

10. Several people of Aboriginal ancestry had attended the regional selection meetings, but by chance, none had had their names selected. The Chair pooled the names of these people and chose a man and a woman at random to participate as "Aboriginal representation."

11. Citizens' Assembly Chief Research Officer Ken Carty, personal communication.

12. Census of Canada, "2001 Census Profile: British Columbia," September 2005, <http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/data/cen01/profiles/59000000.pdf> (accessed May 7, 2006).

13. Citizens' Assembly Chief Research Officer Ken Carty, personal communication.

14. Staff Interview 2, December 2004.

15. Assembly Member Interview, April 25, 2005.

16. That is not to say participants were unaware of each others' political leanings. But overt talk about politics was confined to the private spaces and the off-hours of the Assembly.

17. All figures are from the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, "Technical Report."

18. Elections BC, "Registered Referendum Advertising Sponsors Disclosure Reports," no date, [http://www.elections.bc.ca/fin/refo\\_2005/refo\\_2005\\_sponsors.html](http://www.elections.bc.ca/fin/refo_2005/refo_2005_sponsors.html) (accessed October 15, 2005).

19. Ipsos-Reid, "BC Election 2005—Part IV: BC-STV," April 30, 2005, and "BC Election Day Nears—Part IV BC STV," May 14, 2005, <http://www.ipsos-na.com/news/results.cfm?geo=1> (accessed October 15, 2005).

20. Richard Johnston and Fred Cutler, "What Were They Thinking? And When? The BC Referendum Survey, n=2661" (paper presented at the Designing Democratic Institutions Workshop, University of British Columbia, June 2005).

21. See "Electoral Maps/Profiles," Elections BC, <http://www.elections.bc.ca/map/edpro01.htm> (accessed August 4, 2006).

22. See James Fishkin, *The Voice of the People* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995); Lyn Carson and Brian Martin, *Random Selection in Politics* (New York: Praeger, 1999).

23. Jane Mansbridge, "Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent Yes," *Journal of Politics* 61, no. 3 (1999): 628–57.

24. Assembly Member Interview, April 8, 2005.

25. Assembly Member Interview, April 26, 2005.

26. Assembly Member Interview, April 30, 2005.

27. One Assembly staff person told me that when they first were organizing the process, the staff joked about other dynamics that random selection could introduce into the Assembly's work—if the group was truly representative of the general population, then they could expect that a certain number of alcoholics, drug addicts, and other difficult characters would participate in the Assembly. This, of course, did not turn out to be the case. Field notes, March 6, 2004.

28. Donald Blake, *Two Political Worlds: Parties and Voting in British Columbia* (Vancouver: The University of British Columbia Press, 1985).

29. Law Commission of Canada, *Voting Counts*.

30. Field notes, March 7, 2004.

31. Field notes, October 16, 2004.

32. Assembly member Jack MacDonald, *Randomocracy* (Victoria, BC: PCG Publications, 2004).

33. Assembly Member Interview, April 26, 2005.

34. Assembly Member Interview, April 2, 2005.

35. Assembly Member Interview, April 3, 2005.

36. Donelson R. Forsyth, *Group Dynamics*, 3rd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1999).

37. See Fishkin, *The Voice of the People*; James Fishkin and Robert Luskin, "Bringing Deliberation to the Democratic Dialogue," in *The Poll With a Human Face*, ed. M. McCombs and A. Reynolds (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Earlbaum, 1999).

38. Amy Gutman and Dennis Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

39. Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright, eds. *Deepening Democracy* (New York: Verso, 2003).

40. See, for example, a statement written by Equal Voice, an organization dedicated to increasing women's political representation, October 20, 2005, [http://www.equalvoice.ca/news\\_marie\\_102005.htm](http://www.equalvoice.ca/news_marie_102005.htm) (accessed May 7, 2006).

41. Government of Canada, 38th Parliament Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, "Evidence Thursday March 10, 2005," <http://www.parl.gc.ca/infocomdoc/38/1/PROC/Meetings/Evidence/PROCEV25-E.HTM#Int-1168247> (accessed May 7, 2006).

42. Jack MacDonald, *Randomocracy*. A former high-level public servant, Assembly member Jack MacDonald wrote the book to inform the BC public about the system in advance of the first referendum.

43. Case studies include Fishkin and Luskin, "Bringing Deliberation to the Democratic Dialogue;" Carolyn Hendricks, "Consensus Conferences and Planning Cells," in *The Deliberative Democracy Handbook*, ed. Peter Levine and John Gastil (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005); and Ned Crosby and Doug Nethercut, "Citizens Juries: Creating a Trustworthy Voice of the People," in *The Deliberative Democracy Handbook*.

44. Crosby and Nethercut, "Citizens Juries." See also the Web site of The Citizens Initiative Review, <http://www.cirwa.org>.

45. John Ferejohn, "The Citizens Assembly Model" (paper presented at the Designing Democratic Institutions Workshop, University of British Columbia, June 2005).

46. Harry Brighouse and Erik Olin Wright, "Transforming the House of Lords into a Citizens Assembly" (working paper, March 2005); also Erik Olin Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias* (London: Verso, forthcoming).

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