

Editorial ? Ranked ballots offer benefits

The province has announced that it will give municipalities the option of using ranked ballots in future elections. Ranked ballots, sometimes known as weighted ballots or preferential ballots, allow voters to rank the candidates on the ballot according to preference (first choice, second choice, third choice, etc.) The ballots for the candidate coming in last would be examined for who the second choice was, and those votes would be distributed to those candidates. The process would continue until one candidate had a clear majority.

We can see many advantages to such a system, although possibly not at the municipal level. For one thing, we would be spared the problem of people being elected when the majority of people voted for someone else. By letting people present their choices in order of importance, the final victor has somewhat more credibility when it comes to exercising his or her mandate.

We spoke to several current members of Town council last week, and one issue a couple of them raised is such a system would benefit incumbents, owing to name recognition. They could well have a point.

But we would like to see ranked ballots used at the Provincial and federal levels.

Although name recognition is, and always will be a factor at those levels too, other matters, such as party affiliation or the leader, come into play. Many popular and respected MPs and MPPs have gone down to defeat over the years, simply because their party or leader was out of favour with the voters.

We hear many complaints about how some parties are able to form majority governments in their respective legislative assemblies with considerably less than 50 per cent of the total vote. And we have also heard from parties that have the support of many people across the country, but that have trouble electing MPs to the House of Commons because that support is not concentrated in any one area. That leads to calls for such concepts like proportional representation, which we believe would be a bad alternative.

We wonder how many people would really like to vote for a particular party, but are afraid to because they fear their vote will be wasted. Indeed, we suspect a lot of people in that situation simply don't bother voting at all. With rank ballots, they would be able to mark their ballots the way they please, knowing they will still have the chance for some influence if their second or third choice comes into play.

Allowing people to express their alternate choices gives more legitimacy to those candidates who are eventually elected. True, we suspect bringing in such a system would create enormous problems in terms of organization. But if it improves the situation, and helps get more voters engaged in the process, the inconvenience might be worth it.