

The Tiered Democracy System

The Tiered Democratic system (TD) selects the custodians of governance on a tier-by-tier basis. The citizens elect their neighbourhood representative to constitute the first tier. The neighbourhood representatives elect the district representative to constitute the second tier. The district representatives elect the representatives of the next tier. This process continues, tier-by-tier, until the final tier of government State Federal Representative (Head of State) is selected. The number of tiers would depend on how each jurisdiction wants to govern itself.

Each tier provides an important communications link to the tier below and the tier above. Any citizen can provide a question, suggestion, insight, perspective, or idea which can then travel to the highest tiers, via the various representatives.

The ultimate responsibility, authority, and decision-making rest with the highest tier. However, this tier can delegate some of its responsibility to the lower tiers, or it may keep control of certain aspects of governance if it feels best. Likewise, intermediate tiers may delegate some of their control, which was granted to them from a higher level, to a lower level.

The Neighbourhood

The foundation of the TD is the neighbourhood. Citizens who live in close proximity to each other form an electoral neighbourhood. Unlike contemporary electoral districts of the western democratic model where most people do not know much about their elected representatives, these neighbourhoods should have 25 to 250 people and constitute an environment in which citizens have the opportunity to form some kind of community.

Every year, the citizens in each neighbourhood gather to elect their neighbourhood representative. All citizens are eligible for election, and there are no nominations or campaigning. Before the voting, the citizens are reminded to vote for the individual in their neighbourhood who best exemplifies good character and capacity for governance.

Voting is done by secret ballot, whereby each citizen writes in the name of the person of their choice. Votes are counted, and the individual with the most votes becomes the neighbourhood representative for the year.

Duties of the Neighbourhood Representative

The neighbourhood representative conveys the ideas and concerns of the neighbourhood to the higher tiers of government and also the ideas and concerns

from the government to the neighbourhood. He or she can use formal meetings and one-on-one conversations to communicate with the neighbours.

Another responsibility of the neighbourhood representative is working with other neighbourhood representatives in the same district, representatives of higher tiers of government, civil authorities, and leaders of citizen groups to solve problems within the community.

The last responsibility of the neighbourhood representative is electing the representative to the next tier of government.

The District

The next tier of the TD is called, the “district.” Each district will consist of three to twenty neighbourhoods. In the district, the neighbourhood representatives will be working together to resolve various issues of governance within the district. As well as resolving the issues of governance, the representatives will be getting to know each other's characters and how they perform in the field of governance.

Every year, the neighbourhood representatives in each district gather to elect their district representative. Only neighbourhood representatives are eligible to vote in this election, which is similar to the elections of the neighbourhood representatives; i.e., no nominations or campaigning and basing the vote on good character and capacity for governance.

The individual with the most votes becomes the district representative for the year.

Elections of the neighbourhood and district representatives should be staggered by six months which gives the neighbourhood representatives the opportunity to work together and see how each other perform in governance.

Duties of the District Representative

The duties of a district representative will be more involved in governance than the neighbourhood representative. There will be more meetings with neighbourhood representatives, higher levels of governments, civil servants, and citizens' groups to discuss and resolve the affairs of governance. Higher levels of governance may assign specific duties for the district representatives; district representatives may assign specific duties to the neighbourhood representatives. The district representatives will be the primary conduit of communication between the higher levels of government to the neighbourhoods.

As well, the higher tiers might assign some discretionary authority for the district representative, in which the representative becomes a decision-maker on certain facets.

A number of districts will constitute the electoral area for the next tier. Once a year, the district representatives will elect an individual for the next tier of governance, State Federal Representative.

State Federal Representative (Head of State)

The next tier of the TD is called, the “Federal representative.” Each Federal representative represents their state at national level

The TD Election Process

Behind the rather simplistic explanation and example of how a TD is constructed, there are some very powerful words that warrant a more thorough investigation. Let's look a little closer.

All citizens in each neighbourhood are eligible. The TD removes the barrier of party politics to enter public office. All citizens are, in effect, candidates for the job of neighbourhood representative.

Citizens . . . vote for the individual in their neighbourhood who best exemplifies good character and capacity and ability for governance. Citizens vote for people with whom they are quite familiar: their neighbours. Neighbours usually have a good idea about which neighbours exhibit the good characteristics of honesty, reliability, compassion, tactfulness, and other virtues. Neighbours also know which neighbours are more community-minded, open to new ideas, and have collaborative skills. In essence, they are making a reasonably intelligent choice about the people they are voting for.

There are no nominations . . . Each citizen's vote must not be influenced by what other citizens think. Each citizen should base his or her vote on what he or she has seen of his or her fellow neighbours. With this process, each neighbour is actually being analysed from as many viewpoints as there are voting neighbours. The neighbours who come at the top of this list have indeed been scrutinized for their good character and capacity for governance from many different perspectives.

There are no nominations or campaigning. People who know each other reasonably well have little need to rely on electioneering propaganda to select who is best for the position of governance. In fact, a citizen who engages in some self promotion for position should be seen as someone who wants the job a little too much—and not worthy of casting a vote towards.

Every year, citizens . . . elect their neighbourhood representative. The first purpose of annual elections is to hold the neighbourhood representative accountable to his or her neighbourhood. The citizens in a TD always have a first-hand look at how well their neighbourhood representative is doing his or her job,

and if another citizen is better for the job, that first citizen can be replaced in the next election. The neighbourhood is not burdened for a long period of time with an ineffective representative.

The second purpose for annual elections is to provide societies with a more continuous and yet a more revitalizing form of government. The elections in a mature TD would probably keep most of its accrued knowledge, experience, and wisdom; competent incumbents could be returned to office for many years. But there would be enough new people regularly entering the field of governance as neighbourhood representatives to generate new ideas and new enthusiasm. Every annual election in the TD allows society to keep the best of the old blood and add new blood to increase its vitality. There will be no sacrifice of experience for vitality in a mature TD.

Voting is done by secret ballot. In a TD election, each voter must make his or her choice unencumbered of what other people may think of that choice. The secret ballot ensures that no citizen can be judged on the choices he or she has made.

The opportunity to work together and see how each other performs in governance. With the TD, advancement is based on how well individuals have worked with their peers, not on creating marketing messages or making effective alliances to gain influence.

The Credibility of the Representative

At any tier, the position of a TD representative has great credibility. A neighbourhood representative is someone who has gained the trust of people who know him or her reasonably well: his or her neighbours. People who meet a neighbourhood representative for the first time can confidently assume that the neighbourhood representative is someone of good character and has some capacity for governance. Likewise, a district representative gains his or her credibility from the trust and respect earned by working with fellow neighbourhood representatives.

Those citizens who reach the highest levels have actually passed informal, yet severe, character and competence tests several times. The higher the tier and the longer a citizen remains elected in the TD, the more society-at-large can trust this individual to serve the society well.

In essence, the position of a TD representative has credibility in itself, regardless of who holds the position. By knowing that the elected members of a TD are very credible people, the entire system of governance becomes very credible. Average citizens will be more inclined to accept and respect the decisions made by such a system even if the decisions seem, in the short term, to negatively affect the citizenry. With this credibility, governmental decisions become easier to implement, monitor, and change if needed.

Options to the TD

I have left out many of the details of setting up a Tiered Democratic System. There is a good reason for this: each jurisdiction will require a different TD structure to best implement a TD within that jurisdiction. It makes sense that a rural Russian community would be better governed by a different TD than what a big American city or an African nation with 20 different cultures would use. As well, two similar jurisdictions may evolve differently, each with a different, yet still effective, form of TD. It makes sense to let each jurisdiction design its own TD.

The next section lists some of the options for a TD to design itself.

Number of Tiers

A small town or rural community may need only one tier of government. A large metropolis could have as many as ten tiers.

Size of Neighborhoods

Setting up a TD with neighborhoods having 200 or more citizens will create efficiencies of scale, but some citizens will find themselves distant from their neighborhood representative. Smaller neighborhoods probably create a closer community, but the cost of meetings and running elections will increase. As well, having too many neighborhood representatives would only deprive the volunteer sector of many capable people. Each jurisdiction will strike its own balance.

Responsibilities of Each Tier

The responsibilities of each tier will evolve within each jurisdiction. For example, some cities may assign some street repair decisions to the neighbourhoods; other cities may want more central control. Each jurisdiction will create its own responsibility, authority, and budget for each tier.

Remuneration for Representatives

I believe that the lowest tier, the neighbourhood representative, should be a volunteer position and thus receive no pay. For the district tier, the representatives may get a small remuneration.

In the higher tiers, the responsibilities and time commitment for representatives increase. These people should expect reasonable remuneration from their society for their time and sacrifice.

Multiple Positions and Eligibility

Each TD will have to decide whether citizens can hold representative positions in two or more tiers. Some jurisdictions may be better governed if a citizen resigns a lower tier position before taking on the higher position.

While eligibility for the neighbourhood representative should somehow be based on residence in that neighbourhood, a TD might want to put some restrictions for the district and higher level representatives. For the position of district representative, one example of an eligibility list could be current neighbourhood representatives, current district representative, and former neighbourhood and district representatives from the past three years. With such a list, voters (the neighbourhood representatives) can focus their voting decision on those citizens who are serving and have recently served locally with the TD.

Multiple Representatives in each Electoral District

There may be some advantages to creating electoral units such that more than one person is elected. By having two or more citizens elected as a neighbourhood representative or higher level, much of the desire for electioneering is reduced as the contest is no longer between first and second place, where first place gets everything and second place gets nothing. For example, a neighbourhood can elect three neighbourhood representatives. In a three-position election, the eventual first-place finisher probably wouldn't need any electioneering to gain this position as this person has great respect from the citizens. So he or she would set the tone for no electioneering, and other aspirants would be looked on with disfavour if they do electioneer. If there is any contest, it is between the third and fourth place finisher—which cannot create the drama and temptation of a one-position election.

An example of multiple representation at the higher tiers is the illustration on page 33. While the neighbourhood and district levels in this hypothetical TD elect only one representative, it opted for multiple representatives for the higher levels. At the quadrant tier, the 20 or so district representatives under each quadrant elect four quadrant representative rather than the standard one representative. This election becomes a contest between fourth and fifth place. At the highest tier, the 20 quadrant representatives elect seven members, creating a contest between seventh and eighth place.

A slightly different version of the above example ensures each of the five quadrants is represented at the highest tier. For each quadrant, the quadrant representative with the highest number of votes is sent to the top tier—for a total of five representatives. The other two representatives will be two quadrant representatives who did not attain the highest vote count in their quadrant, but had the most votes of the remaining quadrant representatives.

Multiple representatives in one or more electoral levels should reduce the number of tiers needed. This option should be seriously considered.

Transferable Ballot

The standard version of the TD is a plurality election: the person with the most votes earns the position. In many TD elections, the votes are likely to split among several people, meaning the top voter earner did not get at least 50% of total vote, the level which is often considered democratically legitimate. For example, a TD election with a 100-person neighbourhood has this result: A-33 votes, B-32 votes, C-31 votes, and D-4 votes. With a plurality vote, Citizen A would become the neighbourhood representative. But it could be argued that Citizen A does not have majority approval since 67 votes were cast in another direction.

A transferable ballot will bring a higher sense of democratic legitimacy. If a TD goes in this direction, the ballot might provide two places for each voter to indicate his or her first and second preference. In the first round of counting, the first preference votes are counted. In the second round, the lower contenders would be dropped off the list. Those ballots would go to the second preference. Maybe the four votes cast for Candidate D would go to Candidate B, giving B 36 votes. Even though 36 votes is still not 50%, Candidate B is now showing a higher degree of democratic legitimacy than Candidate A.

If a TD does use a transferable ballot, it will design its own rules for 1) how many spots on the ballot, 2) the cut-off level to be eligible for the second round, and 3) how many rounds after the first round. This transferable ballot option must be designed with care as not to enhance the drama of the annual elections (which could increase the temptation for electioneering and deal making) or make the voting too complicated. Attaining a 50% legitimacy could cause problems a plurality system would not have.

Another advantage of the transferable ballot is that strategic voting is not a factor in the electoral decision. In the example, Citizen D only got four votes. He might have received more votes, but some voters felt he was unlikely to be elected. So rather than “throwing their vote away,” they cast their votes towards A, B, or C, whoever was actually their second choice. By not voting for D, these voters are more likely to ensure their vote is cast to one of their favored citizens. With a transferable ballot, these voters could vote for D and not have to be concerned about D's chances to become the representative. If D does not move on to the second round, the ballot will be counted towards the second preference. In this way, the neighbourhood learns the true level of D's readiness for being the neighbourhood representative.

Relationship Among Municipal, Provincial (or State), and Federal Governments

Current forms of western democracy have clear distinctions between these three levels of government. The TD can replicate these divisions, which means each

neighbourhood would elect three representatives, one for each level of government.

Or the three levels of current government could be considered as tiers. The federal level would become the highest tier, the provincial the second highest, and the municipal the third highest. The lower tiers would be below the municipal level.

The early stages of the building of the TD need not make this kind of decision. The direction will become more apparent as the TD evolves.

The TD Constitutions

Chapter 6 describes a process for the TD to evolve into a new system of governance. Part of this process is for each neighbourhood to write its own local TD constitution. Then adjacent TDs will merge, which means a new constitution for the merged area. It is expected that some neighbourhoods and mergers will be experimenting with some of these options—and perhaps a few not thought of in this book. Each time a neighbourhood or a merger tries something new, it will be a good lesson for the rest of the TD—whether the experiment worked well or not.

The Checks and Balances

The TD also has several checks and balances. As I mention them, I hope they will provide further insights into how a TD works.

The Annual Elections

The TD uses annual elections. The reason for the shorter term of the TD is that if an elected official, at any tier, is no longer serving his or her position well (for example, health reasons or corrupt activities), that person can be replaced within one year. There is no need for any kind of political subterfuge or an impeachment process or allowing ineffective representation to carry through for several years. The person is replaced rather efficiently and without much fanfare. The TD more or less continues with normal operations knowing ineffective representatives won't be around much longer.

The Indirect Elections

In a TD, most citizens will vote only for their neighbourhood representative. They will not vote for people at the higher tiers. This feature ensures a better judgement for advancement in the TD. By serving together, the elected representatives are in a much better position than the general citizenry to observe the qualities that merit advancement in the TD. They will have first-hand experience with words, actions, people skills, intellect, wisdom, and commitment to service to the people of the other elected representatives at the same level. In essence, a certain tier is actually

a very good judge of who, from amongst itself, should be promoted to the next highest level.

With each tier making reasonably wise decisions about who should move up, the TD will promote the more capable and trustworthy citizens to the top positions of governance by the indirect election process.

More Citizen Involvement

In that 100,000-person city I gave earlier as an example of a TD, about 630 citizens would hold an official elected position. In contrast, a similar city in Canada (with its western democratic structure) would have less than 20 representatives at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels.

With the TD, many more citizens will be called into governance at some time in their lives. Their service, whether it be short or long or whether it be in the lower or higher tiers, will give them a sense of fulfilment in their lives, and that they have taken an important part in trying to make the world a better place. In essence, the TD creates a more contented citizenry which ultimately should be the goal of governance.

As well, these citizens will have a greater appreciation for the complexities of governance. Not only will they, when they are no longer serving, have more respect and empathy for those citizens in the TD trying to wrestle with the various societal issues, they will be credible spokespeople to their friends and acquaintances of how well the TD works. They can also use their TD experience to help make their own community stronger without having a formal position.

Just as the western democratic model opened many opportunities for citizens who were not born into aristocratic families to channel some pent-up social pressure into more constructive activities, the TD is going to use more people whose knowledge, experiences, and wisdom can be a great asset in governance.

An Advisory Board

The TD should appoint advisors to itself. These advisors should have considerable experience working in the TD system. When appointed, however, they can no longer serve as a representative anywhere in the TD and can no longer be a direct part of the decision-making process.

Instead these advisors will mostly be concerned with the process of providing better governance. They will meet with the elected institutions and provide them with experience and new insights about governance. The advisors will be working with several elected institutions and this experience of seeing the TD from different angles will become part of the advisor's tools.

In essence, this check and balance of the TD is a positive force rather than the negative or constraining check and balances—the opposition politicians and the media—employed by the western democratic model.

I will discuss the advisory role more thoroughly in Chapter 5.

Answers for the Critics

I am going to anticipate some constructive criticism on the TD, and hopefully these answers will also provide some further insight on the TD.

Citizens Cannot Vote for the Leaders of Society

Citizens in the western democratic model have a direct or somewhat direct electoral process to select individuals for governance at all levels. Because the citizens have very little opportunity to really know those who aspire to govern them, they must rely on the media and party propaganda to make their voting decision. I discussed this feature of western democracy in more detail in the previous chapter.

Instead of making a decision based on faulty information, TD citizens pass the responsibility of selecting people for the higher levels of governance to their elected representatives. These representatives, by working with each other on a regular basis, are much more likely to make better selections for the next level of governance than the collective citizenry with limited and tainted information of modern election campaigns.

I have to concede that a significant and very vocal minority of citizens will disagree with these last two paragraphs—and there is not much hope in convincing them otherwise. However, if we ask those citizens who do not bother voting (sometimes up to 50% of the population) and those citizens who see the election process as choosing between the lesser of two evils (probably about 50% of those who do vote), we will probably find that these two groups of citizens, who do constitute a majority, would prefer to vote for someone in their neighbourhood they know reasonably well and let this citizen deal with issues of governance—including voting for those citizens who should go up to the next tier.

I believe a majority of citizens would be just as satisfied voting in a TD than voting directly for their political leaders. Some could be much more satisfied voting for an individual they personally know, and entrusting that individual to vote for someone to the next highest tier.

Governments Need a Term of Office

Western democratic societies have come to believe that governments need a two- to seven-year term to accomplish great things while in office. This term is especially important to enact much needed, but very unpopular, reforms because a governing party can see the possibility of a return to power if they enact these reforms early in their term. The one-year term of the TD goes against this thought.

Although the TD has elections every year, most of the current office holders will be re-elected if they have proven themselves to be effective representatives. Therefore the TD does not produce that major break in personnel, direction, or momentum that a society sees when one political party replaces another party in governance. If past TD decisions had good reasoning behind them or perhaps some concerns that need monitoring, they will not be thrown aside because new people who were not part of this decision are now in power. Thus the returning office holders of the TD provide that long-term continuous thought required to implement multi-generational solutions for society.

With each election, a few new representatives will be elected and they will add fresh knowledge, experience, and wisdom to the process of governance. Previous office holders, who have gained great experience working in the TD, can be appointed to committees, the civil service where their experience would be an asset, or task forces on specific issues. They may even become the special advisors to the process of governance as will be described in Chapter 5.

Neighbours are Actually Strangers

In many of today's neighbourhoods, neighbours do not really know each other. So a critic of the TD may rightly complain that neighbours cannot make an intelligent vote as to who best exemplifies good character and capacity for governance. Unless neighbours spend time with each other, the TD may not be very effective.

Such neighbourhoods are not yet communities. But let's look at how the TD can change this dynamic.

Electing their neighbourhood representative will become a common event for all the neighbours. If a citizen wants to do his or her democratic duty and make a trip to the ballot box, he or she should not find the cold and informal atmosphere of the western democratic model designed to process many voters in short time. Instead, that person will likely be greeted by someone that already knows them. There will be some pleasant exchange and small talk before and after the person fills in the ballot, and perhaps even some refreshments and local entertainment to add to the festivities of electing the neighbourhood representative. The election should be designed so that neighbours are very comfortable to stay around an hour or two to do some socializing. Going to vote once a year may actually be a pleasurable experience.

And if these elections are held every year, then neighbours are—sooner or later—going to get to know each other.

A good neighbourhood representative should hold at least two town hall meetings a year to discuss affairs of governance with the neighbourhood—maybe several meetings each with different themes. Like the election itself, neighbours attending these events will be getting to know each other better. New friendships and relationships will develop, and informal support networks will appear that would never have appeared with the western democratic model.

And let's look at the significance of the small electoral districts of the TD. Voters coming to a TD election know that it is very likely that they will personally know the person who is elected. If they don't know the elected person, they will only have to attend a few town hall meetings to learn about him or her. If the voters have been active in the community, they could even be elected as the neighbourhood representative themselves.



By making each neighbourhood a centre for better governance, each neighbourhood will become a stronger community. The TD will serve as a catalyst for positive social change at the local level, where the benefits of this social change could even surpass the benefits of this new system of governance.