

AN ELECTORAL SYSTEM FOR ALL

Canada's Historic Moment

Canada's democracy is at a crossroads. The Liberal government has committed to getting rid of our "winner-take-all" electoral system and replacing it with something better suited to a 21st century democracy.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH OUR CURRENT SYSTEM?

Under our first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system, nine million votes cast in the 2015 election were wasted — that's more than the populations of Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and the Atlantic provinces combined whose votes did not go towards electing an MP. Our electoral system is broken.

Here are some other key problems of our current system:

- Distorts election results and creates false majorities: 39% of the popular vote gives a party 100% of the power in parliament.
- Tends to pit regions against one another and to increase antagonistic behaviour among political parties.
- Elects on average fewer women and candidates from underrepresented groups than other systems.
- Encourages people to vote against a candidate or party rather than for their first choice, sometimes known as "strategic voting."
- Encourages political cynicism and apathy towards democratic institutions, which can reduce voter participation in elections.

WHY PR IS THE ANSWER:

- Practically eliminates all forms of vote distortion, such as false majorities.
- Fosters greater collaboration among political parties and improves regional representation.
- Can elect 1.5% to 8% more women.
- Eliminates the phenomena of vote wasting and reduces strategic voting, as everyone's vote truly counts.
- Increases voter turnout by 5% to 7%, and improves rates of satisfaction and attitudes towards the political system.

THE CHANGE WE NEED: PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

Canadians deserve an electoral system that is fair, equal and engaging. Proportional representation can give us that system. PR systems are simply ones where the seats in parliament closely match the level of popular vote a party receives in an election.

85%

85% of OECD countries use a form of PR, including Germany, Sweden and New Zealand. PR systems are the most commonly used electoral systems in the world.

Among the top 10 countries in The Economist's Intelligence Unit rankings, 8 have built proportionality into the voting systems used for their main legislative chambers.

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THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF PR

There are several types of proportional representation, including "pure" PR (with open or closed lists), single transferable vote (STV) PR, and mixed-member proportional (MMP). In a country as vast and diverse as Canada we can design a system with local representation to meet our needs.

To understand how voting and our parliament would change under PR let's take a look at one example of PR.

MMP or mixed member proportional incorporates elements of both the current FPTP system and PR – hence its "mixed" status – and is used in countries such as Germany and New Zealand.

With MMP, voters have two votes on a single ballot. With their first vote, citizens elect a single local MP to represent their riding (just as we do now). The winning candidate is the person who gets the most votes.

Citizens then have a second vote in order to indicate their support for a party. A portion of seats are reserved in order to "top up" parties' total seats so that parliament reflects, as closely as possible, the proportion of votes each party actually receives from voters.

YOU HAVE TWO VOTES

PARTY VOTE This vote decides the share of seats each of the parties listed below will have in Parliament.	RIDING VOTE This vote decides the candidate who will be elected.
Vote for only one party	Vote for only one candidate
POOL PARTY	NG, Marissa POOL PARTY
PIZZA PARTY	WILSON, Andrew PIZZA PARTY
SLUMBER PARTY	LEBOWSKI, Jeffrey SLUMBER PARTY
DANCE PARTY	TERRIEN, Jeanne DANCE PARTY

A FINAL WORD OF CAUTION

Some people will talk about ranked ballots (a.k.a. alternative voting, AV or preferential voting) as an option during the debate on electoral reform. What they are talking about is tacking on a ranked ballot on to our current majoritarian system, so instead of simply marking an "X", voters would rank the candidates. It is not a voting system or a form of PR. Rather, it is a way to vote that can be used under either a majoritarian or proportional voting system.

Tacking ranked ballots on to our current system doesn't solve any of the problems with FPTP. In fact, it exacerbates them. It would lead to significant vote distortion (votes aren't attributed proportionately), would increase "strategic voting," and ultimately disproportionately favour centrist parties. That's why it's called FPTP on steroids!

MYTHBUSTING PR

WATCH OUT!

There is a lot of misinformation out there about PR. Here is a quick guide to debunking the most common myths:

PR is way too weird and too difficult to understand

Canadians deserve more credit than that! If some of the largest democracies in the world use it, so can we.

PR leads to more frequent elections

Canada already has plenty of elections. In fact, we have had more federal elections than many other democracies: 22 since 1945. That makes us even more “unstable” than Italy—a country that uses PR and is often used as the poster child for instability.

PR will fragment the party system and lead to instability in the House of Commons

Canada already has five parties in the House of Commons. PR countries like Germany and New Zealand have five and seven parties respectively, and yet they're still **considered some of the most stable and manageable democracies** in the world.

PR reduces accountability and local representation

Real talk: how can it be any worse than it already is? **As it stands, Canada has a majority government, even though the majority of Canadians voted for other parties.** Various forms of PR allow the direct election of a local representative as well as a political party, and in a country as vast as Canada, PR would be developed in a way that maintained this local representation.

Meh...our system works just fine the way it is — what's the point of changing it?

Why would only 40% of Canadian voters get the chance to influence the course of our country?

No system is perfect, but in 2016, we can definitely do better than the antiquated system we inherited from the 19th century when Canada had only two parties. It's pretty simple: every voter should count and their first choice should actually count.