

Proportional Representation

Proportional Representation (PR) is any voting system in which the representative body (Parliament, Legislature or Council) is elected in numbers proportionate to the number of votes they received. There are three main types of PR voting systems:

PR System Summary

<p><i>PR List</i></p>	<p>The most common form of PR. In this system parties present lists of candidates and seats are awarded according to their party's share of the vote.¹ Generally there is a quota which prevents parties that are too small from winning seats.² Which countries use it? 80 countries, including Argentina, Iceland and Sweden.</p>
<p><i>Mixed Member Proportional (MMP)</i></p>	<p>Voters continue to directly elect local MPs in single-member constituencies where they live, while simultaneously ensuring that the number of seats each party wins in the House reflects the percentage of the popular vote they received.³ Often it is thought of as a "one ballot, two votes" system.⁴ The voter casts a vote for who she wishes to become the local constituency MP, and then proceeds to cast a second vote (on the same ballot).⁵ On the second vote the voter chooses from a list of names presented for election by the party she prefers.⁶ What is very important with this type of system is that a citizen can vote for a local MP with her first vote and choose a different party with her second vote.⁷ Which countries use it? 8 countries including Germany, New Zealand and Scotland.</p>
<p><i>Single Transferable Vote (STV)</i></p>	<p>In this system, voters rank local candidates in order of preference.⁸ To get elected, each candidate needs to reach a set share of the votes, determined by the number of seats to be filled.⁹ Each voter gets one vote, which can transfer from their first preference to their second preference if your preferred candidate either has no chance of getting elected, or has already passed the threshold.¹⁰ STV thus ensures that very few votes are wasted. Which countries use it? Northern Ireland, Ireland, Malta, Australia and India.</p>

¹ "Party List PR." Electoral Reform Society. Electoral Reform Society UK, 2010. Web.

² *ibid*

³ Wherry, Aaron. "The Case for Mixed-member Proportional Representation - Macleans.ca." Macleans.ca. MacLeans, 08 Dec. 2014. Web.

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ *ibid*

⁸ "Single Transferable Vote." Electoral Reform Society. Electoral Reform Society UK, 2010. Web.

⁹ *ibid*

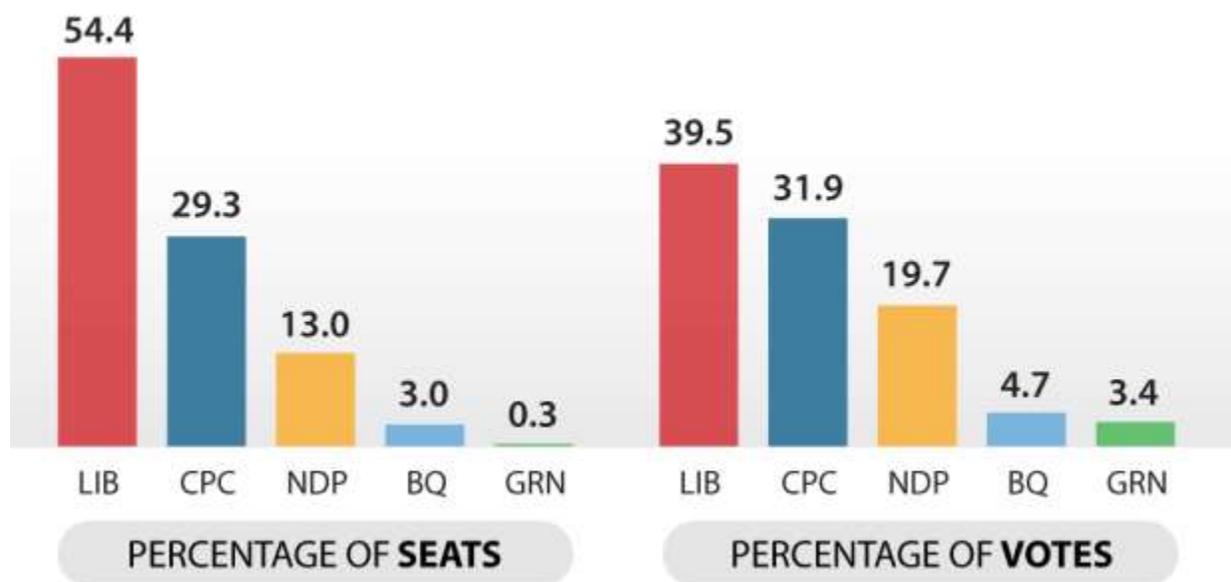
¹⁰ *ibid*

All of these systems can be tweaked for the specific country in which they are being used. If you study national voting systems closely, you will notice subtle differences in how their electoral systems operate despite being from the same family.

Plurality vs. Proportionality

First-Past-the-Post (FPTP), the electoral system we use in Canada, is a Plurality electoral system. Plurality systems rely on a “winner-takes-all” model to elect political leaders. In this system, voters cast a ballot for their favoured candidate. The candidate with the most votes in each constituency wins. Candidates do not have to win *the majority* of votes, just more than any of their opponents.¹¹ As a result, many candidates win their ridings with no more than 30% of the vote, because the other 70% was divided amongst the other candidates. In this system, any vote cast in that riding for another candidate results in zero representation. In our FPTP system we often have elections where a party wins a majority of seats after winning as little as 39% of the popular vote. This means that representatives wield majority power in the legislature, while a majority of the Canadian electorate did not vote for them.

2015 FEDERAL ELECTION RESULTS



SOURCE: ELECTIONS CANADA

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Proportional Representation reflects the actual popular vote. Parties are awarded seats directly in proportion to how many votes they received (often with a 5% threshold to win a seat). If the 2015 election had been conducted in a PR system, the Liberals would have won 135 seats, the Conservatives 108, the NDP 68.¹² Canada would have a minority Government that would have to negotiate with the other voices in Parliament.

¹¹ "First Past the Post." What Is First Past The Post. Electoral Reform Society UK, 2010. Web.

¹² Warzecha, Monica. "What the Federal Election Would Have Looked like with Proportional Representation." National Post What the Federal Election Would Have Looked like with Proportional Representation Comments. The National Post, 21 Oct. 2015. Web.

Canadians Want Change

Since 2000 there has been significant movement towards electoral reform both federally and provincially. Numerous studies, surveys and expert reports have recommended the same thing: incorporate proportionality into our electoral system. To give you a glimpse:

In 2004 the Law Commission of Canada issued a report recommending a Mixed Member Proportional system to replace First-Past-the-Post federally.¹³

That same year, British Columbia created the Citizens' Assembly. 160 citizens met and debated the merits of changing the provincial electoral system.¹⁴ There were public consultations as well and that Fall the Assembly recommended that the province adopt the Single Transferable Vote system of Proportional Representation.¹⁵

In 2010, Environics Research Group conducted a poll for the Council of Canadians and found that 62% of Canadians supported "moving towards a system of Proportional Representation".¹⁶ The number was quite high as Canadians responded to Prime Minister Harper, who won a majority government with less than 40% of the vote, proroguing Parliament.¹⁷

The most recent poll, commissioned by the Broadbent Institute and conducted by Abacus Data in December of 2015, strongly supports change to the electoral process. Of those surveyed, 80% wanted to see at least some reform – with half of them supporting major reform.¹⁸ Among those who support reform, the priority was a system where the number of seats held by a party accurately reflects its level of support across the country.¹⁹

In total, over a decade of public opinion polls show majority support for proportional representation. Canadians want their votes to count. They do not want to compromise their values by having to vote strategically, or see their vote wasted by voting for a party that is regionally dispersed or otherwise smaller.

The major issue in the electoral reform debate is lack of knowledge: Canadians are not overwhelmingly educated on the various types of electoral systems, nor how their votes are currently being counted in First-Past-the-Post. This is unsurprising, as the multitude of systems are complex, and are often tweaked to fit different countries. The most important differentiation in voting systems is between plurality and Proportional Representation. At the end of the day, PR is what is more fair and democratic, regardless of whether it's a Mixed Member Proportional or a Party List. We call on our Government to act in the interest of Canadians and of democracy: to change the Canadian electoral system to a process of Proportional Representation, where our votes result in representation and none are wasted.

¹³ Law Commission of Canada. Voting Counts: Electoral Reform for Canada. Publication. N.p.: Government of Canada, n.d. Print.

¹⁴ Heard, Andrew. "Canadian Electoral Reform." Canadian Electoral Reform. Simon Fraser University, n.d. Web.

¹⁵ *ibid*

¹⁶ The Council of Canadians. Most Want Proportional Representation: Council of Canadians Poll. Rabble.ca. Rabble.ca, 15 Apr. 2010. Web. <<http://rabble.ca/news/2010/04/most-canadians-want-proportional-representation-council-canadians-poll>>.

¹⁷ *ibid*

¹⁸ Coletto, David, and Maciej Czop. Abacus Data. Rep. The Broadbent Institute, Dec. 2015. Web. <https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/broadbent/pages/4770/attachments/original/1448994262/Canadian_Electoral_Reform_-_Report.pdf?1448994262>.

¹⁹ *ibid*

The Politics

The Liberal Party campaigned on a promise that the 2015 election would be the last election conducted using First-Past-the-Post. Initially, this caused optimism among advocates for change. However it is widely believed that the Liberal Party, who hold a majority of seats in the House, are not likely to move towards a system of PR, but rather a Ranked Ballot, another plurality system. In a Ranked Ballot system, voters rank local candidates in order of preference. If a candidate wins a majority, they win. If there isn't a candidate with a majority, then there is an instant runoff where the candidate with the smallest share of votes is dropped and the voters' second preferences are counted.

The problem with this system is that it favours middle-of-the-road parties – i.e. the Liberal Party. The Liberal Party is likely to be the second choice for a great number of both Conservative and NDP supporters, whereas NDP supporters are unlikely to rank a Conservative as second choice, and vice versa. In a Ranked Ballot system, Liberals would win not only the votes of their base but would also be likely to win in close ridings where the tally moves to the second ballot. Critics comment that if Canada were to move to a Ranked Ballot, our Government would consistently be majority Liberal.

A ranked ballot system would not solve the problems created by FPTP. We believe Canadians should be free from pressure to vote strategically, with confidence that their vote will result in accurate representation.