

WHAT WE
TALK ABOUT
WHEN WE
TALK ABOUT
ELECTORAL
REFORM

Q&As ON FIVE POSSIBLE ELECTORAL
SYSTEMS FOR CANADA

By Samara Canada with Stewart Prest, PhD



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In the 149 years since Canada became a country, our democracy has evolved—from expanding the right to vote, to implementing stricter regulations around political party financing and adding new electoral districts (also called ridings or constituencies). Yet one thing has remained the same: Every four years or so, Canadians head to the ballot box to vote for a candidate in their local riding. The candidate who wins the most votes in each riding heads to Ottawa as a Member of Parliament.

This electoral system is called “First Past the Post” (or FPTP). Though it’s the system Canadians are most familiar with—it is used at all political levels across all provinces—it is just one of several electoral systems in operation around the world today. Other countries offer alternative systems for how their citizens vote and how those votes are counted.

In recent years, many Canadians—from elected leaders to academics to everyday citizens—have begun to question how our electoral system itself should evolve or if Canadians should adopt a new system altogether. In the past decade, five provinces have explored changes to their electoral systems. Most recently, the House of Commons has created a Special Committee on Electoral Reform (ERRE) in Spring 2016 to review Canada’s national electoral system.

WHY DOES VOTING MATTER?

In a democracy, how votes are cast, counted and translated into power is extremely important to citizens and their governance. Voting allows people to be represented by a group or person of their choice, and have their voice heard. If citizens do not feel that their vote for who governs them is adequately reflected in the results of an election, the legitimacy of government—and possibly for democracy itself—may erode.

In 2015, Samara issued a report card on the state of democracy in Canada. The report, [“Democracy 360: A Report Card on how Canadians Communicate, Participate and Lead in Politics,”](#) examined a wide spectrum of data sources and arrived at a sobering result: a meager “C” grade for Canadian democracy. The result reflected the reality that, while our democracy ranks high compared to others internationally, at home there is a sense that politics can work better. There are many potential ways to ensure Canadians are connected to politics, and some people suggest that changing the electoral system may lessen the frustration and dissatisfaction Canadians have with our democracy.

Some frequent criticisms of Canadian democracy that critics link to the first-past-the-post system focus on how majority governments have gained power without a majority of the popular vote, low diversity in the House of Commons, and a decline in voter turnout (a trend that reversed in 2015). Yet dissatisfaction with how democracy functions is not only a Canadian phenomenon. Indeed, countries who use other electoral systems continue to have citizens who express frustration with politics. In other words, changing the electoral system does not guarantee a significant boost in satisfaction with the way democracy works.



WHY IS THIS REPORT NEEDED?

As Parliament proceeds with considering electoral reform, it is important that citizens become educated about the options before them. A national conversation about how we, as citizens, choose our representatives is an excellent opportunity to get Canadians engaged—to make democracy more accessible, more familiar, and more relevant to them.

Samara Canada is a nonpartisan charity that is committed to strengthening Canada's democracy and reconnecting citizens to politics. With this report, Samara aims to provide an entry point for Canadians seeking high-quality, nonpartisan information about the options for electoral reform. Samara Canada commissioned the descriptions of the five systems below from Stewart Prest, a postdoctoral fellow at Carleton University with a PhD in political science.

WHAT'S IN THIS REPORT?

Various electoral systems are used by countries and jurisdictions around the world. The systems in this report are organized into three families based on the outcomes they generate: **non-proportional**, **proportional** and **semi-proportional** ("semi" because the degree of proportionality depends on the design). Five frequently discussed options are profiled in this report, but readers should be aware that the details of each system matter, and significantly impact both the process and outcomes of elections for voters, candidates and parties alike.

"What we talk about when we talk about electoral reform" is an entry point to a discussion on electoral reform. This report strives to provide accurate and essential information about the design and implications of each alternative without overwhelming the reader in detail. For each system, readers will learn about how votes are cast and how ballots are counted, as well as the potential implications for voters, parties and Parliament.

After the description of the options, there is also a Further Reading section, which allows readers to explore some of the other ideas and considerations that are not covered in this report. Additionally, words in bold throughout the text are explained in the Glossary.

WHAT SHOULD I THINK ABOUT AS I READ ABOUT THE OPTIONS FOR ELECTORAL SYSTEMS?

- 1. NO MAGIC BULLET:** Each voting system has trade-offs. There is no single electoral system that is objectively the "best" system, as each instead brings its own set of strengths and weaknesses. To select the system that works for Canada, Canadians must identify the values we want reflected in our politics and choose a system that best reflects this vision, understanding that no system will be perfect.
- 2. STICKINESS:** Change in electoral systems is hard to achieve. Investing the time to find the right system is important because once a system is chosen, it will be hard to change.
- 3. THERE WILL ALWAYS BE WINNERS AND LOSERS:** Every system for voting takes a different approach to translating citizens' preferences into a representative government. The choice of a system can significantly affect the result, and no system eliminates the need for Canadians



to think strategically about their vote.

Partisan advantage is hard to predict: What electoral system is assumed to work better for one political party over another in the short term may not hold in the long run as parties and candidates adapt their behaviour under the new rules, and new political parties emerge.

4. PARTY MEMBERS WILL MATTER: The nomination process plays a significant role in determining who will stand for MP as a party's candidate. Under a new electoral system, parties and their members may need to reconsider their internal roles, rules and processes. Their decisions will shape the outcomes of electoral reform.

5. MADE-IN-CANADA SOLUTION: Canada's unique geography, political culture and history will matter as Canadians consider which option will work best here. We can learn from the experiences of other countries, but we should not assume something will work well in Canada because it works somewhere else.

6. DEMOCRATIC REFORM IS MORE THAN ELECTORAL REFORM: While this report considers political reform through a wholesale change of the electoral system, Canadians should also know that there are small changes that could make a difference to how people experience democracy. Dozens of small reforms are being proposed by elected officials and others—changes to electoral rules, parliamentary procedures, party financing and beyond—many of which may be worthwhile considering in addition to or beyond electoral reform.

7. LONG ROAD TO IMPLEMENTATION: In addition to debating the merits of the best electoral system for Canada, many disagree about the most legitimate process to determine this change. Beyond the process currently being driven by Parliament and government, some have called for a national referendum. Others suggest that the courts will likely be asked to weigh in on the constitutionality of any change.



WHAT SHOULD I DO AFTER READING THIS REPORT?

GET INFORMED.

- After reading the five options for electoral systems below, check out the Further Reading section.
- Sign up for alerts from the House of Commons' Special Committee on Electoral Reform about their meetings.
<http://www.parl.gc.ca/Committees/en/ERRE>

DISCUSS.

- Talk about the options with friends, family and co-workers. There are lots of trade-offs to consider. Sometimes talking through the options helps!
- Join the social media conversation using key hashtags like #EngagedInER and #CdnDemocracy (championed by the Ministry of Democratic Institutions) and #ERRE #Q (championed by the Commons' committee).
- Consider hosting your own local event on electoral reform. The government has created a step-by-step guide and a calendar to track events: <https://www.canada.ca/en/campaign/electoral-reform/participate-in-canadian-federal-electoral-reform-consultations/host-a-canadian-federal-electoral-reform-dialogue-in-your-community.html>

HAVE YOUR VOICE HEARD.

- Call or email your MP and find out when they are doing their town hall in your community.
- Consider submitting a written brief or a request to appear before the committee by October 7, 2016, or complete their 30 minute survey on electoral reform: <http://www.parl.gc.ca/Committees/en/ERRE/StudyActivity?studyActivityId=9013025>
- Subscribe to Samara's newsletter and follow Samara on social media (@samaracda on Twitter and SamaraCanada on Facebook) to learn more about Canadian politics.

LEARN MORE ABOUT CANADIAN POLITICS.

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FIRST PAST THE POST

OVERVIEW

First Past the Post (FPTP) is Canada's current electoral system. Voters in each **riding** vote for one candidate in that riding. Whoever has the most votes is elected as the MP for that riding.

WHAT FAMILY DOES IT BELONG TO? **Non-proportional.**

WHERE IS IT USED TODAY? It is used in 58 countries, including the United Kingdom, the US and India.

HOW DOES THE SYSTEM WORK FOR VOTERS? People vote for one candidate to become the MP in their riding. Candidates are normally associated with a party, and the name of their party now appears on the ballot with the name of the candidate.

HOW ARE THE BALLOTS COUNTED? Whoever wins the most of the votes (a **plurality**)—even if he or she doesn't receive more than 50% of the votes (a **majority**)—becomes the Member of Parliament for that riding, and represents it in the House of Commons.

WHAT DO RIDINGS LOOK LIKE? There are 338 ridings across the country, with an average of about 100,000 Canadians in each. Some riding populations deviate greatly due to the distribution of Canada's population in places like the North.

HOW ARE PARLIAMENT AND GOVERNMENT FORMED? HOW IS THE PRIME MINISTER SELECTED? The party that wins a majority of seats normally forms the government, with the party leader as prime minister. If no party wins a majority, the prime minister at **dissolution** may try to form a **minority** or **coalition government** that has the support (also called "**confidence**") of a majority of MPs. If they cannot, the governor general invites the leader with the largest number of seats in Parliament to try.

ALSO KNOWN AS: FPTP; single-member plurality, plurality system

WHAT DOES IT MEAN...

1. FOR CAMPAIGNING? Campaigning is split between the national race, focussed on the party leaders, and the 338 local races in ridings across the country. While the national party offices





closely control election strategies and the party leaders attract significant media attention, local candidates can still shape their own campaigns. They have considerable incentive to go door to door and get to know their constituents and the local media, particularly in close races. Additionally, independent candidates who are unaffiliated with a party can mount campaigns in ridings (though they are rarely successful). In close riding races, a relatively small number of voters become strategically important to the outcome. Likewise, in close national elections, a small number of “battleground” ridings become important in determining the result.

2. FOR VOTE CHOICE? Voters choose one candidate, whether that person is affiliated with a party or an independent. Voters therefore weigh the personal characteristics of the candidate, as well as the appeal of their party affiliation and electability when casting a ballot.

3. FOR LOCAL REPRESENTATION? FPTP ensures that after an election, a particular MP is the voice for all voters in the riding. Accordingly, all voters can turn to an individual person if they have a concern about how the federal government is working. While everyone has a local MP to turn to, voters may feel less represented if their MP is not from their preferred party, particularly if they support a small party that won few or no seats overall in Parliament.

4. FOR PARTIES IN PARLIAMENT? FPTP favours “big tent” parties with sufficiently broad appeal to win the support of a significant proportion of the electorate—though not usually a majority of voters nationwide. Small regional parties with support concentrated in specific ridings can often win seats as well (e.g., consider the Bloc Québécois in the 1990s). Small issue-based parties, whose support is spread across the country, are less likely to win seats. It is very difficult for fringe parties to win seats.

The significant influence of the party leader on local electoral success often helps to strengthen party discipline among MPs within a party.

Increasing diversity in Parliament depends on more women, visible minorities and other diverse Canadians running and winning the local party nomination—a process managed internally by political parties.

5. FOR GOVERNING? A single party often wins more than half of the seats in the House under FPTP, forming a **majority government**. Majority governments can usually enact legislation without difficulty. The prime minister must maintain the support of the MPs in their own party on **confidence motions** like the budget or the **speech from the throne**. When no single party wins a majority of seats, it is referred to as a **minority government**. Opposition parties have more influence on the **governing party** under these circumstances. This is because they can threaten to withhold support for confidence motions. To receive this support, the governing party may need to compromise on legislation and policy, though it may not need to enter into a formal **coalition** with another party to do so. Formal coalitions, which function like a majority government so long as they stay together, are also possible.



WHAT WOULD THE BALLOT LOOK LIKE?

FIRST PAST THE POST (FPTP) / SYSTÈME MAJORITAIRE UNINOMINAL À UN TOUR

Place an X in the circle next to the candidate of your choice.
Veuillez inscrire un X dans le cercle en regard du candidat de votre choix.

- CANDIDATE A / CANDIDAT A
PARTY 1 / PARTI 1
- CANDIDATE B / CANDIDAT B
PARTY 2 / PARTI 2
- CANDIDATE C / CANDIDAT C
PARTY 3 / PARTI 3
- CANDIDATE D / CANDIDAT D
PARTY 4 / PARTI 4
- CANDIDATE E / CANDIDAT E
PARTY 5 / PARTI 5



ALTERNATIVE VOTE

OVERVIEW

Under alternative vote (AV), each **riding** elects one Member of Parliament (MP). Voters rank candidates in order of preference. The winning candidate must have the support of a majority of voters in the riding, if necessary via a transfer of votes from eliminated candidates.

WHAT FAMILY DOES IT BELONG TO? **Non-proportional.**

WHERE IS IT USED TODAY? It is used for national legislative elections in two countries: Australia and Papua New Guinea.

HOW DOES THE SYSTEM WORK FOR VOTERS? Voters rank the candidates running in their riding (i.e., first choice, second choice and so on). Systems may require that the voter rank some or all candidates, or may allow the voter to choose only their top candidate.

HOW ARE THE BALLOTS COUNTED? If a candidate has a majority of first choice votes in a riding, they are declared the winner. If no one has a majority, the last place candidate is eliminated, and their votes are reallocated to the voters' next choice on the ballot. This process continues until one candidate has a majority of votes.

WHAT DO RIDINGS LOOK LIKE? Ridings would look the same as they do now, with one MP elected in each of Canada's 338 electoral districts.

HOW ARE PARLIAMENT AND GOVERNMENT FORMED? HOW IS THE PRIME MINISTER SELECTED? If one party wins a majority of seats, it forms the government, with its party leader as prime minister. If no party wins a majority, the prime minister at **dissolution** may try to form either a **minority** or **coalition government**. If they cannot, the governor general will invite the leader of the party with the largest number of seats in the House of Commons to try. With AV, parties can win a majority of seats in Parliament with less than 50% of the popular national vote, even though individual MPs must receive 50% of votes in their riding to win. This is because of the winner-take-all nature of the riding level contests. The victorious party can win a large number of seats by a narrow margin while being defeated in many others by a large margin.

ALSO KNOWN AS: AV; supplementary vote; instant run-off; preferential voting; ranked-choice voting



WHAT DOES IT MEAN...

1. FOR CAMPAIGNING? Campaigning is split between the national race focussed on the party leaders and the 338 local races in ridings across the country. While the national party office closely controls the election strategy and the party leader attracts significant media attention, local candidates can still shape their own campaigns. They have considerable incentive to go door to door and get to know their constituents and the local media, particularly in close races. Additionally, independent candidates who are unaffiliated with a party can mount campaigns in ridings (though they are rarely successful). AV encourages inclusive campaign strategies, as there are incentives for parties and candidates to appeal to a broad a range of voters in order to get second and third choice votes from voters whose first choice goes to other candidates.

2. FOR VOTE CHOICE? If voters know that their first choice is likely to be eliminated and that their vote will shift to their next choice on the ballot, they are likely to give considerable thought to their second and third choice votes.

3. FOR LOCAL REPRESENTATION? AV has local representatives for each **constituency**. The winner of the riding is the voice in Parliament for everyone in the riding, regardless of how they voted. At least 50% of voters in each riding will have a representative whom they supported as their first, second or some subsequent choice. It can be difficult for candidates from smaller parties to amass that breadth of support. As a result, voters that identify with smaller parties might feel they do not have an MP who effectively represents their point of view.

4. FOR PARTIES IN PARLIAMENT? Parliament would likely be dominated by a small number of large parties. Popular regionally-based parties may also win seats. Smaller parties with dispersed support would have difficulty winning a specific riding to send an MP to Ottawa. AV allows similar parties to coexist, which may result in coalition governments of like-minded parties.

The significant influence of the party leader on local electoral success often helps to strengthen **party discipline** among MPs within a party.

Increasing diversity in Parliament depends on more women, visible minorities and other diverse Canadians running and winning the local party nomination—a process managed internally by political parties.

5. FOR GOVERNING? Many forms of government are possible under AV. A single-party majority or a **coalition** of like-minded parties may form a **majority government**. Such governments can usually enact legislation without difficulty. As with all systems, the prime minister still needs to maintain the support of MPs in his or her own party on **confidence motions** such as the budget or the **speech from the throne**. Opposition parties have little influence in a majority situation. When no single party or like-minded coalition holds more than half of seats, the result is a **minority government**. Opposition parties have more influence on the **governing party** under these circumstances. This is because they can threaten to withhold support for confidence motions such as the budget or the speech from the throne.



WHAT WOULD THE BALLOT LOOK LIKE?

ALTERNATIVE VOTE (AV) / VOTE PRÉFÉRENTIEL

Place a 1 in the circle next to your first choice candidate, and number as many other candidates as you wish in order of preference.

Veillez inscrire un 1 dans le cercle en regard du candidat qui est votre premier choix et numéroter par ordre de préférence tous les autres candidats que vous désirez.

- 4 CANDIDATE A / CANDIDAT A
PARTY V / PARTI V
- CANDIDATE B / CANDIDAT B
PARTY W / PARTI W
- 3 CANDIDATE C / CANDIDAT C
PARTY X / PARTI X
- 1 CANDIDATE D / CANDIDAT D
PARTY Y / PARTI Y
- 2 CANDIDATE E / CANDIDAT E
PARTY Z / PARTI Z



LIST PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

OVERVIEW

List Proportional Representation (PR) systems are designed to match parties' proportion of seats in the legislature to their share of votes cast nationally, provincially or regionally—depending on the design of the system. **Ridings** are typically large (the average internationally is about 10 MPs per district), and each Canadian will thus have many MPs. Voters generally cast a ballot for a political party or a specific candidate on a list prepared by the party.

WHAT FAMILY DOES IT BELONG TO? Proportional.

WHERE IS IT USED TODAY? List PR is used in 83 countries around the world, including Denmark, Norway and Spain.

HOW DOES THE SYSTEM WORK FOR VOTERS? There are two major variants of list PR, “closed list” and “open list”; both employ multi-member districts. In closed-list PR, voters cast a single vote for their preferred party rather than voting for a person from that party. Before the election, parties set a list of candidates who are elected in the order they are placed on the list. It is typically left to parties' internal processes to set their candidate list. In this system, voters choose which party wins, but have little control over who their specific representatives are.

In open-list PR, voters express a preference for their party, as well as for one or more candidates on their party's list of candidates. The vote for a specific individual influences the order in which candidates are elected by a given party, effectively nudging voters' preferred candidate(s) up the party list. In some systems, voters may even support candidates from more than one party.

HOW ARE THE BALLOTS COUNTED? The proportion of votes cast for each party determines the number of seats it receives on the basis of an **electoral formula**. Different forms of List PR use different formulas to translate votes into seats, but generally, a party that receives 20% of the votes cast will win roughly 20% of the seats. However, parties that receive a share



LIST PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

of votes below a **minimum threshold** (anywhere from under one to 5%, depending on decisions at implementation) do not receive any seats.

WHAT DO RIDINGS LOOK LIKE? List PR elects multiple candidates from large geographic regions. Depending on the way the system is implemented, votes may be counted at a district, regional, provincial or national level. For instance, if the system operated at the provincial level, each party would assemble a list of candidates for each province. It would then elect MPs from each geographic region in proportion to each party's share of the vote in that province. Alternatively, major cities and rural regions might constitute separate districts, each with its own list of candidates.

HOW ARE PARLIAMENT AND GOVERNMENT FORMED? HOW IS THE PRIME MINISTER SELECTED? Following an election, if a party receives more than half the seats, the governor general would invite its leader to form a government. However, under List PR it is less likely a single party would have a **majority**, requiring a **minority government** or a **coalition** of two or more parties to come together to form a government. The prime minister would usually be the leader of the largest party in the coalition. This would involve negotiation between the parties.

ALSO KNOWN AS: PR; party-list proportional representation; pure PR



WHAT DOES IT MEAN...

- 1. FOR CAMPAIGNING?** Campaigns would focus primarily on the central contest between parties and party leaders. Individual candidates would still campaign, however, especially under an "open list" where they can earn a direct vote as candidate. However, PR electoral districts will be larger than the single-member ridings in Canada today, and may require new campaign organizations and strategies. In general, the smaller the size of the geographic region (for example, a municipality instead of a province) at which lists are set and seats are allocated, the more candidates would see value focussing on local issues.
- 2. FOR VOTE CHOICE?** Closed-list ballots are straightforward, offering the voters a choice between competing parties. In contrast, open-list ballot styles vary considerably, offering different ways to incorporate votes for individual candidates. Given that voters choose from many candidates, sometimes from multiple parties, the ballots in open-list PR can be quite large, and voters who want to select individual candidates must familiarize themselves with a large number of contenders. Although voters may have more choice under open lists, their votes rarely shift the party's preferred order of candidates; many voters still cast a ballot for the party generally.
- 3. FOR LOCAL REPRESENTATION?** The relationship between voters and particular representatives can be diluted, particularly as the electoral district grows larger. Voters will not have a single MP who is directly responsible to them, but rather many MPs serving a much larger **constituency**. Instead, most voters will identify with one party in the legislature that they voted for and that they therefore feel best represents their perspective.
- 4. FOR PARTIES IN PARLIAMENT?** Proportional electoral systems like List PR will result in a



LIST PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

greater number of parties represented in Parliament than less proportional systems, though this effect is modified by the minimum threshold discussed above, which makes it more difficult for **fringe parties** to win seats. List PR systems allow parties with small pockets of support spread out over the entire country to win seats in proportion to that national support.

MPs elected via party lists, however, may adhere closely to **party discipline** in order to keep or improve their standing on the list at the next election. This dynamic will be shaped by parties' internal processes to select their list and the decision-making power of senior party officials.

List PR allows for easy public scrutiny of the diversity of candidates. As such, parties may seek to put forward lists that increase the representation of women, visible minorities and other diverse Canadians in Parliament.

5. FOR GOVERNING? Many forms of government are possible under List PR though typically no single party will win a majority of seats. Parties thus have to work with other parties in order to govern. The largest party may form a minority government, or parties may form a government **coalition**. Party leaders may forge alliances with other parties before an election is held, or wait until after the results are known before agreeing to form a coalition. Accordingly, voters may not know who will be in government even after the votes are counted, as it may take time for party leaders to agree on a governing coalition. Governments may change when coalitions break down. Members can move to opposition, or join other parties to form a new governing coalition. If no coalition emerges, the sitting prime minister may request that the governor general call an election.

WHAT WOULD THE BALLOT LOOK LIKE?

LIST PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION / SCRUTIN DE LISTE (OPEN LIST)

Place an X in the circle next to the candidate of your choice.
(Your vote counts for both the candidate and the party.)

Veillez inscrire un X dans le cercle en regard du candidat de votre choix. (Votre vote compte pour le candidat et le parti.)

PARTY W / PARTI W	PARTY X / PARTI X	PARTY Y / PARTI Y	PARTY Z / PARTI Z
<input type="radio"/> CANDIDATE A CANDIDAT A	<input type="radio"/> CANDIDATE A CANDIDAT A	<input type="radio"/> CANDIDATE A CANDIDAT A	<input type="radio"/> CANDIDATE A CANDIDAT A
<input type="radio"/> CANDIDATE B CANDIDAT B	<input checked="" type="radio"/> CANDIDATE B CANDIDAT B	<input type="radio"/> CANDIDATE B CANDIDAT B	<input type="radio"/> CANDIDATE B CANDIDAT B
<input type="radio"/> CANDIDATE C CANDIDAT C	<input type="radio"/> CANDIDATE C CANDIDAT C	<input type="radio"/> CANDIDATE C CANDIDAT C	
<input type="radio"/> CANDIDATE D CANDIDAT D		<input type="radio"/> CANDIDATE D CANDIDAT D	

LIST PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION / SCRUTIN DE LISTE (CLOSED LIST)

Place an X in the circle next to the party of your choice.

Veillez inscrire un X dans le cercle en regard du candidat de votre choix.

<input type="radio"/> PARTY W PARTI W
<input checked="" type="radio"/> PARTY X PARTI X
<input type="radio"/> PARTY Y PARTI Y
<input type="radio"/> PARTY Z PARTI Z



MIXED-MEMBER PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

OVERVIEW

Mixed-member proportional representation (MMP) is mixed or “hybrid” because it combines elements of **proportional** and single-member **plurality systems**. With MMP, voters have a single MP who represents their **riding**, while other seats are distributed proportionately to total votes cast in the election.

WHAT FAMILY DOES IT BELONG TO? **Proportional.**

WHERE IS IT USED TODAY? MMP is used in nine countries, including Germany and New Zealand. The Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly use a version of the system as well.

HOW DOES THE SYSTEM WORK FOR VOTERS? Voters have two votes, one for a candidate running in their riding, and a second for a party list. The riding candidates can be affiliated with a party or run as independents.

HOW ARE THE BALLOTS COUNTED? The system produces two kinds of MPs, the first elected directly in **constituency** races, and the second elected via List PR. In most cases, the victors in the constituency races win their seats in the legislature using FPTP, but there is one variation of MMP that uses AV instead. The overall share of seats in the house is determined by the party vote, however.

An **electoral formula** is used to translate the party vote into the specific number of seats. After the total number of **constituency seats** won by each party is known, parties are assigned **list seats** equal to the number of proportional seats they are entitled to in order to “top up” the number of constituency seats won in each geographical region. Simply put, the party vote determines the total number of seats each party receives, and list MPs make up the difference between that total and the number of constituency seats won. Parties’ internal rules typically determine the process used to establish the list candidates and the order that they will be elected. In advance of the election, each party will make a list of candidates to fill out the proportional seats won.

MMP systems often use a **minimum vote threshold** requiring parties to win a certain share of the vote and/or a certain number of seats. Parties that fail to reach the threshold do not get any seats.



MIXED-MEMBER PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

WHAT DO RIDINGS LOOK LIKE? MMP provides ridings with individual representatives for part of the seats in the House. The rest of the candidates are elected from a list that each party prepares before the election. Depending on the total number of MPs and the ratio of list to constituency MPs, ridings could be anywhere from the same size to twice as big as they are now.

List MPs are then elected at the regional, provincial or national level, depending on the system design.

HOW ARE PARLIAMENT AND GOVERNMENT FORMED? HOW IS THE PRIME MINISTER

SELECTED? The governor general invites any party that receives more than half the seats to form a government. However, it is unlikely a single party would have a majority. More likely, the largest party will lead a **minority government**, or a **coalition** of two or more parties would come together to form a government. The prime minister is generally the leader of the largest party in the coalition.

ALSO KNOWN AS: MMP; additional member system



WHAT DOES IT MEAN...

- 1. FOR CAMPAIGNING?** Campaigning is split between the national race and the local races across the country. Candidates running in local constituencies still focus on local issues, but the importance of the party vote means the national campaign is more significant.
- 2. FOR VOTE CHOICE?** MMP allows the voter to choose a representative at the constituency level, while voting separately for a party at the national level. Voters can decide whether to vote for a candidate of the same party they are voting for, or support a local candidate of a different party.
- 3. FOR LOCAL REPRESENTATION?** MMP ensures voters have a single representative responsible for their riding and that a party in the legislature represents their perspective, with the exception of voters who support **fringe parties**.
- 4. FOR PARTIES IN PARLIAMENT?** As a proportional system, MMP allows smaller parties to gain seats in the House of Commons, leading to a larger greater number of parties overall. It is for this reason that MMP systems use the threshold rule described above, which limits the ability of fringe parties to win seats.

The system produces two types of elected MPs—constituency and list—each with different motivations. Constituency MPs may pay more attention to local issues, while list MPs focus more on the national party and its agenda. Candidates elected by party list may also be more responsive to **party discipline**, given their need to maintain a high ranking on the list in subsequent elections. Smaller parties will typically have more MPs elected from lists, whereas larger parties will have more MPs elected by constituencies.

Under MMP, parties can offer lists with proportionate numbers of women, visible minorities and other diverse Canadians, which can increase their representation in Parliament.



MIXED-MEMBER PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

5. FOR GOVERNING? As parties often have to form coalitions to govern, politicians need to work with members from other parties. Party leaders may forge alliances with other parties before an election is held, or wait until after the results are known before agreeing to form a coalition. Accordingly, voters may not know who will be in government even after the votes are counted, as they must wait for a governing coalition to emerge from among the parties. Governments may change when coalitions break down. Members can move to opposition or join other parties to form a new governing coalition.

WHAT WOULD THE BALLOT LOOK LIKE?

MIXED-MEMBER PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION REPRÉSENTATION PROPORTIONNELLE MIXTE

Place an X in the circle next to the party of your choice.
Place another X in the circle next to the candidate of your choice.
Veuillez inscrire un X dans le cercle en regard du parti de votre choix
et un autre X dans le cercle en regard du candidat de votre choix.

Here's the first vote / Le premier vote
PARTY VOTE / VOTE DE PARTI

Here's the second / le deuxième
LOCAL CANDIDATE / CANDIDAT LOCAL

<input type="radio"/>	PARTY W PARTI W	<input type="radio"/>
<input checked="" type="radio"/>	PARTY X PARTI X	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
	INDEPENDENT CANDIDATE CANDIDAT INDÉPENDANT	
<input type="radio"/>	PARTY Y PARTI Y	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	PARTY Z PARTI Z	<input type="radio"/>

<input type="radio"/>	CANDIDATE A CANDIDAT A	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	CANDIDATE B CANDIDAT B	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	CANDIDATE C CANDIDAT C	<input type="radio"/>
<input checked="" type="radio"/>	CANDIDATE D CANDIDAT D	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
	NO LOCAL CANDIDATE AUCUN CANDIDAT LOCAL	



SINGLE TRANSFERABLE VOTE

OVERVIEW

The single transferable vote (STV) combines elements of different systems to both achieve a relatively proportional result and to elect MPs from specific constituencies. It has ranked ballots and large ridings, each with multiple elected MPs.

WHAT FAMILY DOES IT BELONG TO? Semi-proportional.

WHERE IS IT USED TODAY? Two countries use STV to elect their lower houses of government: Ireland and Malta.

HOW DOES THE SYSTEM WORK FOR VOTERS? Voters rank candidates in order of preference. They can vote for candidates from a variety of parties or from a single party. Some forms of STV require voters to rank all candidates, while others make it optional. By the time all seats from the riding are assigned, nearly all electors' votes will have counted towards the election of a candidate, producing a relatively proportional result. The result tends to grow more proportional with larger ridings that have more MPs.

WHAT DO RIDINGS LOOK LIKE? STV features multiple member constituencies, with the number of MPs in each riding decided when the system is introduced (e.g., this would likely be between three and seven MPs). Accordingly, ridings are bigger than they are in systems that elect only one MP per riding.

HOW ARE THE BALLOTS COUNTED? To be elected, a candidate must receive a certain **quota**: a number of votes required to win calculated using the number of votes cast in the riding and the number of seats to be won there. Candidates who reach the quota are elected and become MPs. Excess votes beyond that quota are transferred to the next choice on voters' ballots. If no candidate has reached the quota, the last-place candidate is eliminated, and their votes are transferred to remaining candidates. Counting continues in this way through subsequent rounds until each seat is filled. This process can take many rounds to complete and cannot begin until all votes are counted. Therefore the results may not be known for some time after voting closes.



SINGLE TRANSFERABLE VOTE

HOW ARE PARLIAMENT AND GOVERNMENT FORMED? HOW IS THE PRIME MINISTER

SELECTED? The combination of multi-member districts and a quota-based **electoral formula** ensures the results are broadly proportional across the entire country. If any party receives more than half the seats, the governor general invites its leader to form a government. More often, no single party has a majority, and two or more parties come together to form a coalition. The prime minister is usually the leader of the largest party in the coalition.

ALSO KNOWN AS: STV



WHAT DOES IT MEAN...

1. FOR CAMPAIGNING? Campaigning is split between the national race and the local races across the country. A unique feature of the STV system is the power it gives to voters to choose among candidates within each party. This means local races can attract significant voter and media attention. Candidates must work not only to distinguish themselves from the candidates from other parties, but also from others competing to represent the same party in the same riding. They want to help their party win as many seats as possible, while also ensuring they are ranked highly by their parties' supporters. Parties still have control the nomination process and who runs as their party candidates, but voters have the final say over which candidates get into parliament from each party in a given riding.

2. FOR VOTE CHOICE? Given the option to rank all candidates, voters have considerable choice. They may prefer to support a single party or candidates from different parties or independents. In exchange for giving voters the ability to express nuanced preferences, STV asks voters to become familiar with many candidates from multiple parties.

3. FOR LOCAL REPRESENTATION? Multiple MPs per district can weaken the line of responsibility between MPs and the voters they represent. However, there is local representation. In providing proportional results, STV makes it easier for voters to point to a specific MP or party that represents their perspective and candidates often win by attracting local support. Given the need for larger ridings, there are questions on how to represent sparsely populated areas of the country. Either huge geographical ridings could be created in northern and some rural areas, or such areas could elect fewer MPs per riding than elsewhere. At the extreme, less populated areas might remain as single member ridings, with MPs effectively elected by the alternative vote (AV) method.

4. FOR PARTIES IN PARLIAMENT? In general, STV produces seat allocations relatively proportional to parties' share of the vote. As districts grow smaller, overall proportionality is moderated as it becomes more difficult for smaller parties to win seats. Thus, by limiting the number of MPs elected by riding, STV can be designed to limit the number of parties represented in the House.

Due to competition between candidates from the same party to win a seat, **party discipline** in the House of Commons may be reduced as MPs exercise greater independence to distinguish themselves among their own party colleagues and future MP candidates.



SINGLE TRANSFERABLE VOTE

Parties may promote a slate of candidates that increase the representation of women, visible minorities and other diverse Canadians in Parliament, but the makeup of the legislature ultimately remains in the hands of voters choosing between candidates.

5. FOR GOVERNING? Many forms of government are possible under STV, though typically no single party will win a majority of seats; in such cases a **minority government** or **coalition** government will form. Under STV party leaders have an incentive to forge alliances with other parties before an election is held, because the ranked ballot allows party supporters to rank candidates from allied parties higher. Even so, some parties may prefer to wait until after the results are known before agreeing to cooperate. Regardless, voters may not know which parties will be in government, even after election results are announced. Additionally, governments may change when coalitions break down.

WHAT WOULD THE BALLOT LOOK LIKE?

SINGLE TRANSFERABLE VOTE / VOTE UNIQUE TRANSFÉRABLE

There are three members to be elected in this riding. Place a 1 in the circle next to your first choice candidate, and number as many other candidates as you wish in order of preference.

Il y a trois députés à élire dans cette circonscription. Veuillez inscrire un 1 dans le cercle en regard du candidat qui est votre premier choix et numéroter par ordre de préférence tous les autres candidats que vous désirez.

PARTY X / PARTI X	PARTY Y / PARTI Y	PARTY Z / PARTI Z	INDEPENDENT INDÉPENDANT
<input checked="" type="radio"/> 5 CANDIDATE A CANDIDAT A	<input checked="" type="radio"/> 4 CANDIDATE A CANDIDAT A	<input type="radio"/> CANDIDATE A CANDIDAT A	<input checked="" type="radio"/> 3 CANDIDATE A CANDIDAT A
<input type="radio"/> CANDIDATE B CANDIDAT B	<input type="radio"/> CANDIDATE B CANDIDAT B	<input checked="" type="radio"/> 2 CANDIDATE B CANDIDAT B	
<input checked="" type="radio"/> 1 CANDIDATE C CANDIDAT C	<input type="radio"/> CANDIDATE C CANDIDAT C		



BALLOT STRUCTURE: The choices available to voters in an election. Some ballots offer a categorical choice (between candidates or parties); others provide the ability to rank different options in order of preference. Some ballots allow voters to make multiple choices, while others limit voters to a single choice.

COALITION GOVERNMENT: A coalition government is one in which two or more parties share power in order to ensure the government has enough votes to maintain the confidence of the House.

CONFIDENCE MOTION: a vote on a bill that signals whether the House of Commons continues to support the government of the day. It may take several forms, including explicitly worded bills that indicate confidence or a lack of it, important bills such as the budget and the speech from the throne, and bills that are designated as confidence motions by the government itself.

CONSTITUENCY: see glossary definition for “Riding”

CONSTITUENCY SEATS: seats that are assigned on the basis of a vote in a specific riding or constituency. In FPTP, AV and STV systems, all seats are constituency seats. In MMP systems, a portion of seats are constituency-based.

DISSOLUTION: When the prime minister asks the governor general to end Parliament and call an election, it is referred to as dissolution. In general, this occurs when the government’s fixed term is complete (currently four years in Canada), the government loses a vote of confidence, or a vote on an important bill such as the budget or the speech from the throne.

ELECTORAL FORMULA: the process by which votes are tallied and used to assign seats in an electoral system. The formulas can be quite simple, as in FPTP, or more complex, as in proportional systems. The Further Readings section provides sources with more information on the different kinds of electoral formulas used around the world.

FRINGE PARTY: At the opposite extreme from a major party, fringe parties attract only a small fraction of the vote. The presence of many such very small parties is often seen as destabilizing in a legislature, as they can make the process of coalition-building more complex. As a result, proportional electoral systems include some form of minimum threshold to limit the total number of parties in the legislature and ensure those that are represented have some minimum level of national or regional support.

LIST SEATS: In an MMP system, some seats are assigned to parties according to an electoral formula, to ensure their total number of representatives matches their share of the total vote. The people who win these seats are drawn in order from each party’s candidate list.

MAJOR PARTY: Sometimes referred to as a “big tent” party, major parties are the largest in a given political system, usually attracting support from across the country. Under majoritarian systems they often can form majority governments on their own. In proportional systems, they form a minority government or the core of a governing coalition.



MAJORITY GOVERNMENT: A majority government is one in which a single party (or a single coalition of likeminded parties) holds more than half the seats in the House of Commons. It is therefore able to pass legislation without the support of opposition parties.

Minimum threshold: Proportional systems may include a rule requiring parties to receive a certain share of the vote in order to receive any seats. That threshold may take the form of a certain percentage of the national vote, or a share of the vote in one or more districts. In MMP systems, the threshold may also require a certain number of constituency seats be won.

MINORITY GOVERNMENT: A minority government is one in which no party holds more than half the seats in the House of Commons. Sometimes, two or more parties will form a coalition to govern together, agreeing to a shared set of goals in government. In other cases, a single party (generally the largest in the House) will attempt to govern without a formal coalition with another party, instead building support for legislation, particularly confidence motions, on a case-by-case basis.

NON-PROPORTIONAL SYSTEM: electoral systems that are not designed to generate an outcome where seats won by political parties reflect their share of total votes cast. They include “majoritarian” and “plurality” systems (such as AV and FPTP, respectively) where candidates must win riding-level contests by capturing a plurality or majority of votes cast.

PARTY DISCIPLINE: the ability of party leaders to ensure party members’ support their policies in Parliament through various means, including control of MPs’ nomination for election and membership in the caucus and their assignment to various party and parliamentary roles.

PLURALITY: The candidate in a given riding with the most votes is said to have a plurality of votes. It may or may not be more than half of the total votes cast.

Proportional system: Proportional electoral systems are designed to allocate seats in proportion to votes cast for political parties.

QUOTA: In STV systems, candidates are elected when they receive a certain amount of votes, known as a quota. The quota is determined by a mathematical formula.

RIDING: the geographic area that one or more MPs represent in the House of Commons. Canada is currently divided into 338 separate ridings. They can also be referred to as electoral districts or constituencies.

SEMI-PROPORTIONAL SYSTEM: an electoral system designed to allocate seats in relatively proportional manner to the votes cast for political parties. STV is a semi-proportional system that can become more or less proportional, depending on the number of MPs elected from each riding.

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE: A statement prepared by cabinet and delivered by the governor general to open a new session of Parliament. The speech lays out the government’s agenda for that Parliament, and a subsequent vote regarding the speech is considered a motion of confidence.



There is a wide variety of readings on the subject of electoral systems and electoral reform, both in general and with regard to the Canadian context.

GENERAL READINGS AND RESOURCES

→ **Farrell, D. M. (2011). Electoral systems: a comparative introduction.**

Palgrave Macmillan.

David Farrell provides a single volume comparative study of the major different types of electoral system. It is a highly regarded textbook and was a key resource in the preparation of this report.

→ **Norris, P. (2004). Electoral engineering: Voting rules and political behavior. Cambridge University Press.**

Pippa Norris examines how political institutions and culture interact to shape voter behaviour as electoral reform is undertaken across many different contexts.

→ **International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance**

(IDEA International, <http://idea.int>)

An intergovernmental organization supported by Canada and other countries devoted to the development of sustainable democracy worldwide. Provides numerous resources related to the comparative study and practice of elections and electoral reform.

→ **ACE Electoral Knowledge Network** (<http://aceproject.org>)

An online knowledge repository combining analytical articles, cross-national statistics, an electoral encyclopedia including descriptions and empirical examples of all major electoral systems and other resources. Elections Canada, International IDEA, the United Nations Electoral Assistance Division and other national and international electoral bodies provide support for its work.

→ **Making Electoral Democracy Work**

A collaborative project organized by researchers in Canada and abroad, affiliated with the University of Montreal, the project considers various facets of democracy including party strategies and voter behaviour. <http://electoraldemocracy.com/>

SPECIFIC ANALYSES AND COMMENTARY

→ **Library of Parliament Canada**

The Library of Parliament conducted a study examining the question of electoral reform, considering a number of alternatives and some of the trade-offs involved. It also charted previous attempts at reform in Canada, including successful early initiatives that were later repealed. <http://www.lop.parl.gc.ca/Content/LOP/ResearchPublications/2016-06-e.html>
cat=government

→ **Policy Options Special Feature**

Policy Options is hosting a series of short writings on the goals and process of electoral reform here: <http://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/june-2016/electoral-reform/>

→ **Ottawa Citizen**

Likewise, the Ottawa Citizen is assembling opinions on both the substance and process of



change; a partial collection of the contributions exists here: <http://ottawacitizen.com/opinion/columnists/icymi-heres-your-guide-so-far-to-electoral-reform>.

They include arguments for and against specific change, considerations of process, and what the implications of change might be for voters and the Canadian political system.

→ **Springtide Collective**

This 2015 report models how five different electoral systems would work in practice for Nova Scotia provincially, including FPTP, AV, List PR, MMP and STV. http://nslegislature.ca/pdfs/committees/62_2_LACSubmissions/20160502/20160502-162-001.pdf

SYSTEM-SPECIFIC READINGS

FIRST PAST THE POST

While readers are most likely to be familiar with FPTP, there are many resources available to learn more about how it and other aspects of Canadian governance function, along with factors to consider when contemplating changes to the current electoral system.

→ **Parliament of Canada**

The Canadian Parliament website provides a great deal of material regarding the specifics of how Canada's government works, ranging from the definition and description of key terms and functions to the specific schedules and agendas for both the House of Commons and the Senate to the official record of debates in the House (known as the Hansard). <http://www.parl.gc.ca/Default.aspx?Language=E>

→ **Open Parliament**

Open Parliament is a volunteer-run website that works to render available but difficult-to-use data more accessible to Canadians. Topics include parliamentary bills, debates and votes. <https://openparliament.ca/>.

→ **André Blais ed. (2008). To Keep or To Change First Past The Post?**

Oxford University Press.

Well-regarded academics from Canada and abroad address a variety of subjects related to the principles and politics of reform in countries that currently use FPTP, including Canada, the US and the UK.

ALTERNATIVE VOTE

There are a number of possible variations to the AV system regarding the ballot structure—such as how candidates are listed, and whether voters must rank all candidates to have their vote considered valid. Other systems such as two-round voting have many of the same characteristics as AV as well, with the significant difference that voters may further consider the final choice on the basis of additional campaigning by the remaining candidates.

The following readings give some insight into these variations, along with insight into the specific effects of AV.

→ **BBC**

The BBC provides a summary of the Australian experience with AV prepared for an



international audience. The piece suggests that there may be few differences between AV and FPTP in terms of electoral outcomes. <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-13065069>

→ ACE Project

ACE describes the features of AV. <http://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/es/esd/esd01/esd01d/default>. The same website also outlines some advantages and disadvantages of the system, and gives another account of the Australian experience.

→ Asselin, Robert. (2014). “An Agenda for Democratic Reform in Canada”, Canada 2020.

Asselin argues in favour of the alternative vote because of its ability to require and signal stronger support for winning candidates due to the majority requirement (i.e., 50% threshold). <http://canada2020.ca/agenda-democratic-reform-canada/>

LIST PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

In considering how List PR might be implemented in Canada, choices would have to be made about a number of factors, including the geographical unit for which lists are prepared (district, regional, provincial or national); whether to employ closed or open lists, and how to structure the ballot as a result; the particular electoral formula to use to translate votes into seats; different methods of vote counting; and whether to use a minimum threshold and, if so, what it should be.

→ ACE Project

ACE provides a description of the functioning of List PR systems, its advantages and disadvantages, and various factors for consideration when implementing such a system. <http://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/es/esd/esd02/esd02c/default>

→ Broadbent Institute

This 2016 report argues Canada should adopt proportional representation. https://d3n8a8pro7vnm.cloudfront.net/broadbent/pages/4935/attachments/original/1456927971/An_Electoral_System_for_All_Report.pdf?1456927971

→ MacDonald Laurier Institute

This 2011 report offers a critique of proportional systems in Canada <http://www.macdonaldlaurier.ca/files/pdf/John-Pepall-Electoral-Reform-in-Canada.pdf>

→ Making Electoral Democracy Work

A consideration of how strategic voting can unfold in a PR system, looking at the Swedish case. <http://electoraldemocracy.com/strategic-voting-pr-evidence-2010-swedish-general-election-1293>

MIXED-MEMBER PROPORTIONAL

Some of the most important considerations when considering and implementing MMP include: ratio of constituency to list MPs; the ballot structure (for example, whether to separate party and constituency votes); the size of ridings; the electoral formula that translates votes into seats; and how to set the minimum threshold. These issues and many others are addressed in the following readings:

→ Law Commission of Canada

In 2004, Law Commission of Canada released a study reviewing the possibility and potential consequences of electoral reform in Canada. It explored potential implications



of various alternatives and recommended that Canada adopt a form of MMP system based on the experience of Scotland and Wales. <http://publications.gc.ca/collections/Collection/J31-61-2004E.pdf>

→ Ontario Citizens' Assembly

In 2007, the Ontario Citizens' Assembly released its final report recommending the province adopt MMP (a proposal rejected in a subsequent referendum). The archived webpage for the assembly includes links to the final report explaining the process of deliberation and reasons for the recommendation, and to the more detailed background report. <http://www.citizensassembly.gov.on.ca/>

→ James Bolger, former prime minister of New Zealand

Jim Bolger reflected in 2001 on the experience and aftermath of introducing MMP in New Zealand during his premiership. Among his conclusions are that MMP achieved many of the anticipated outcomes such as a more proportional legislature with greater representation of women and visible minorities, but that ambiguity persisted among New Zealanders as to the popularity of the change at the time the comments were made. <http://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/votes-and-seats/new-zealand-adopts-pr-a-prime-ministers-view/>

→ ACE Project

ACE examines the workings of the German system in detail. http://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/es/esy/esy_de. The site also provides an evaluation of some advantages and disadvantages of the system in general.

SINGLE TRANSFERABLE VOTE

There are a number of important choices to be made when designing an STV system, including how to calculate the quota, how to transfer excess vote shares from winning candidates, and how to design the ballots effectively given the large number of choices voters must make. The following resources address these and other issues.

→ BC Citizens' Assembly

In 2007, the BC Citizens' Assembly released its final report recommending the province adopt STV. The recommendation narrowly failed a referendum, with the yes vote falling just two percent shy of the 60% threshold the government had set. The proposal was defeated more decisively in a subsequent referendum. The archived webpage for the assembly includes links to the final report, explaining the method of deliberation and reasons for the recommendation, and to the more detailed background report. <http://citizensassembly.arts.ubc.ca/>

→ BC Referendum video

In preparation for the BC referendum, the following animated explanatory video was produced: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y-4_yuK-K-k.

→ ACE Project

ACE provides a case study of Ireland as the most well-known example of STV in action. http://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/es/esy/esy_ie

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