A National Seat Proposal For Canada

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Party Promise – Framework for Action

As part of the 2015 Federal Liberal Party election platform, the party stated that "we are committed to ensuring that 2015 will be the last federal election conducted under the first-past-the-post voting system." After the Liberal election majority win, a mandate was publicly issued to the Minister of Democratic Institutions "(to) bring forward a proposal to establish a special parliamentary committee to consult on electoral reform, including preferential ballots, proportional representation, mandatory voting, and online voting." The all-party committee has been formed, and has as its guiding principles the following:

1. Canadians should believe that their intentions as voters are fairly translated into elections results, without the significant distortion that often characterizes elections conducted under the first-past-the-post system.
2. Canadians' confidence needs to be restored in their ability to influence politics and in their belief that their vote is meaningful.
3. Reforms need to increase diversity in the House of Commons and politics more broadly.
4. The chosen reform can't make the electoral system more complex.
5. Voting needs to be more user-friendly and accessible.
6. The system needs to maintain the vital local connection that MPs have with their constituents.
7. The system needs to be secure and verifiable.
8. Canadians need to be inspired to find common ground and consensus.

Our Current System

Canadians already have (and a majority seem to want to keep) an electoral system with the following characteristics.

- Members of parliament are locally nominated and elected, and have a solid connection to their constituents.
- Majority governments are a rule rather than an exception.
- The Prime Minister's party has the most seats.
- Only parties with significant support have seats in parliament.
- The voting system is easy to understand and can be trusted.

Wish List Of Improvements

Canadians want to keep what's best about our system, but make some changes so that:

- their votes count even if the candidate or party they vote for doesn't win;
- elections are decided as much out West as they are back East;
- and there is a higher voter turnout without paying more to make and then enforce new laws.

All political parties seem to want:

- to keep the seats they win even if their vote % is lower than their seat %;
- more seats when they get a higher % of votes than their seat %;
- from a local riding perspective, the ability to continue choosing and electing candidates locally rather than centrally;
- a system that helps attract good candidates to run for their parties;
- workers to stay motivated even if their candidate isn't polling first; and
- to regionally benefit from vote concentration regardless of the number of seats in that region.

National Seats: A Made-In-Canada Solution

A system of National Seats can address all of these issues.

When a party wins a least one seat, and gets a significantly larger % of national votes than its % of Riding Seats, a formula for additional National Seats is applied.

- Calculate the nation-wide vote totals of each party that won at least one seat.
- Add the party totals together for a new nation-wide working total.
- Calculate each party's % of the working total, and its % of total Riding Seats.
- Determine the difference between them.

If a party receives a higher % of riding Seats than its vote total % would warrant, the party keeps its Riding Seats, but no National Seats are awarded.

However, if a party receives a lower % of riding Seats than its vote total %, then National Seat eligibility is calculated.

National Seat Formula

- Up to 50% of the % difference is awarded in the form of National Seats.
- Maximum number of total National Seats is 7.5 % of total number of Riding Seats in that General Election (between 5 % and 10 % was found to be significant over the last 10 elections) (e.g. max. 25 seats added to a 338 seat parliament).
- National Seats are filled by party candidates that won the highest % of riding vote of all their party's candidates nation-wide, but did not win a Riding Seat.

- National Seats are added to Riding Seats to determine total number of seats per party, and the total number of votes in Parliament – and are therefore a factor in determining whether a government is majority or minority, and whether a party has achieved party status.
- Independent candidates and candidates with no affiliation are not eligible for National Seats, regardless of whether non-affiliates win one or more seats.
- If 50% of the total seat eligibility of all parties exceeds the maximum number of additional seats (7.5% of Riding Seats) then a lower percentage than 50% is applied until the maximum number of National Seats are allocated (e.g., 48% in 2000, 39 % in 1993).
- Number of National Seats per party are rounded down to the nearest whole number.
- To determine who will win their National Seats, parties can determine how their own candidate vote percentages are calculated (e.g., for Quebec candidates, their percentages can be calculated without regional party votes to compare apples to apples across the country).
- The minimum and maximum number of seats in the House of Commons are known before a general election – the actual number is not known until all votes are counted and additional seats are calculated.
- Although an approximate number of National Seats and who will fill them will be known on election night when all ballots are counted, any judicial recounts must be completed before the number of National Seats and the names of those who will fill them can be finally determined (5 in 2015, settled between 10 and 18 days after election day, Riding Seat winners remained the same).

Role of National Members of Parliament

It is proposed that National MPs:

- represent all voters nation-wide that voted for their party, unlike Riding MPs that represent all the constituents in their geographic ridings as well as their parties;
- not sit in the House of Commons but have a vote that is cast by the leader of the party;
- be eligible for MP budget minus constituency-related expenses;
- be eligible for committee membership and critic roles; and
- can resign, but cannot move to another party or sit as independents (party cannot replace them in this event).

If the National Seat is vacated for any other reason, it can be replaced by the party with the next of their candidates that won the highest % of riding vote, but did not win a Riding Seat (if next candidate does not accept, continue down the candidate list from the last election).

Additional Cost To Canadians

A National Seat overlay to our existing system would require:

- operating costs for up to 25 National MPs in addition to 338 Riding MPs (in 2015, the number would have been 22) – however no additional constituency costs
- information campaign to explain how "one vote counts twice"
- minor changes to how analysis is generated on election night
- detailed description of the difference between Riding MPs and National MPs – their roles, responsibilities to their parties and to their national and riding constituents

The introduction of a system of National Seats would involve a very low cost to Canadians when compared to other systems that are currently used around the world.

Electoral Reform Committee Guiding Principles

A system of National Seats supports the committee's principles.

1   Voters' intentions are more fairly translated.

One vote is counted twice. Once in your riding, and once with everyone else who voted for your party, in order to determine the final election outcome. Knowing this before the election will most certainly increase voter turnout.

2   Confidence is restored in voters' ability to influence elections.

Not only is each vote counted twice, elections are decided as much in the West as they are in the East. The number of National Seats, majority vs. minority, and party statuses isn't determined until the last vote is counted on Vancouver Island. No more calling elections in the Thunder Bay time zone.

3   The changes support an increase in political diversity.

Good candidates from diverse backgrounds are more easily attracted by parties in ridings that are not their traditional strongholds. The chance at winning a National seat if the Riding Seat is not won can be very motivating.

4   The voting system isn't made any more complex.

The electoral system base is the same as we currently have, however a game-changing layer of fairness is added. When compared with introductory costs and increased complexity of other voting systems, a National Seat system wins hands down.

5   The system can be made more user-friendly and accessible.

By adding an overlay of fairness to our existing system, rather than instituting complex and costly changes, more time and resources can be devoted to a secure system of on-line voting. Another increase in voter turnout would result.

6   The vital connection between MPs and their constituents is maintained.

Local riding associations will continue to choose their local candidates locally. No central list. The list of a party's candidates is the list. Anyone who earns a National Seat has been chosen locally, run in a local campaign, and earned the highest percentage of votes for the party without winning a Riding Seat. It would be much fairer to local voters and to Riding MPs that put themselves out there during the campaign.

7   Voting results continue to be secure and verifiable.

Our current system, with an overlay of fairness through the assignment of National Seats, would require the same security measures as we now employ. Therefore more resources can be devoted to the security of a new on-line system of voting.

8   Canadians are inspired to find common ground and consensus.

For the first time in Canadian electoral history, voters who support the same party will vote together right across the country. They will have a common purpose and effect, regardless of the region in which they live. Together they and every other party will have added impact on the fairness of the government we elect.

Added Benefits

Helps all parties attract the best candidates.
When potential candidates know that National Seats may be won by their parties, there is more incentive to run in tough ridings. Having a chance at a "wild card" spot is something that Canadians understand very well.

Motivates all candidates and volunteers to get every vote out.
Near the end of a campaign, if a candidate is not polling first, workers will still be motivated to get every party supporter out to vote. It could mean the difference between a National Seat, or nothing, for their candidate or party. Result: higher voter turnout.

Votes in party strongholds count regardless of Riding seats in the region.
When all votes are counted twice, political parties with regional strongholds are also better motivated to get out every party supporter to vote. There is incentive not only to win, but to win as big as possible. Result: even higher voter turnout.

Best Of All …

Canadians keep what they like best about their system.

All seats are awarded to local candidates that are chosen locally and run locally – unlike New Zealand and other countries with mixed-member proportional systems that rely on a separate central list.

Majority governments are a rule rather than an exception – no perpetual minorities like Israel, or perpetual coalition governments as in Australia that has seen elections an average of every 2.5 years instead of 3.5 and 4 years like Canada and the United Kingdom – less chance for "policy paralysis".

The Prime Minister's party has the most seats and with that, the ability to better introduce policy change – no 4-year gridlock as recently witnessed south of the border with the unworkable divisions between the President's Office and the two houses of governance, most notably related to gun control policies.

Only parties with significant support have seats in parliament – unlike Italy that has perpetual coalitions and currently has 40 parties with seats in their two houses of governance.

The voting system is easy to understand and can be trusted – although trusted, Sweden's system of determining party seats requires an advanced degree in algebra to understand.

Possible Referendum Question

Should the government decide to hold a national referendum, a simple question would be:

> **When political parties win fewer seats than their national vote percentage,**
> **should they be given more seats to make the result fairer?**
> **Yes or No?**

If the answer is yes, a National Seat system would fit the bill. As an added benefit, it does not require that our current system be irreversibly altered or irrevocably dismantled. Yet the proposed change represents more than a toe in the water. It would be a monumental change to our electoral system as we determine how many seats each party wins, which parties achieve full status, and whether the result is a majority or minority, in a fairer way. Should subsequent governments receive a mandate from

Canadians to make further adjustments, it can be determined at that time if our current system needs to be significantly changed or completely dismantled in favour of another.

As Canadians, the least we owe our electoral tradition is the chance for it to work even better, with an overlay of added fairness.

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6 pages of tables applying a National Seats formula to the last 10 general elections in Canada

System of National Seats Applied To Last 10 General Elections

Election Year	National Seats Added/ Maximum	Results Under Proposed System
2015	22/25	Liberal Majority of 14 Seats reduced to 3, *BQ achieves party status*
2011	23/23	**Conservative Majority of 11 seats reduced to bare majority**, *BQ achieves party status*
2008	10/23	Conservative Minority maintained
2006	13/23	Conservative Minority maintained
2004	14/23	Liberal Minority maintained
2000	22/22	Liberal Majority of 21 Seats reduced to 10
1997	22/22	**Liberal Majority of 4 Seats becomes Liberal Minority**
1993	22/22	Liberal Majority of 29 Seats reduced to 18, *NDP and PC achieve party status*
1988	13/22	PC Majority of 21 Seats reduced to 14
1984	21/21	PC Majority of 69 Seats reduced to 59

2015 Election
Liberal, Justin Trudeau
Conservative, Stephen Harper
NDP, Thomas Mulcair
BQ, Gilles Duceppe
Green, Elizabeth May

Current System	Riding Seats	National Seats	Total Seats	Proposed System
Liberal Majority of 14 Seats	184	0	184	Liberal Majority of 3 Seats
Conservative	99	4	103	
NDP	44	11	55	
BQ	10	2	12	BQ Achieves Party Status
Green	1	5	6	
170 Needed For Majority	338	22	360	181 Needed For Majority

2015 National Seat Winners (22 seats)
8 = Quebec, 8 = Ontario, 4 = British Columbia, 1 = Alberta, 1 = Newfoundland/Labrador

Johanne Regimbald, Laurentide-Labelle	Bloc Quebecois		Jack Harris, St. John's East	NDP
Gilles Duceppe, Laurier-Sainte Marie	Bloc Quebecois		Pierre Dionne Labelle, Riviere du Nord	NDP
Joan Crockatt, Calgary Centre	Conservative		Mylene Freeman, Mirabel	NDP
Costas Menegakis, Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond	Conservative		Andrew Cash, Davenport	NDP
Julian Fantino, Vaughan-Woodbridge	Conservative		Phillip Toone, Gaspe-Les Isles-de-la-Madeleine	NDP
Mark Adler, York Centre	Conservative		Craig Scott, Toronto-Davenport	NDP
Jo-Ann Roberts, Victoria	Green		Eve Peclet, La Pointe-de-l'Ile	NDP
Frances Litman, Esquimault-Saanich-Sooke	Green		Peggy Nash, Parkdale-High Park	NDP
Paul Manly, Nanaimo-Ladysmith	Green		Laurin Liu, Riviere-des-Mille-Iles	NDP
Fran Hunt, Jinnouchi/ Cowichan/ Malahat/Langford	Green		Jason Godin, Acadie-Bathurst	NDP
Bruce Hyer, Thunder Bay-Superior North	Green		Paul Dewar, Ottawa Centre	NDP

2011 Election
Conservative, Stephen Harper
NDP, Jack Layton
Liberal, Michael Ignatieff
BQ, Gilles Duceppe
Green, Elizabeth May

Current System	Riding Seats	National Seats	Total Seats	Proposed System
Conservative Majority of 11 Seats	166	0	166	*Conservative Bare Majority*
NDP	103	0	103	
Liberal	34	11	45	
BQ	4	7	11	*BQ Achieves Party Status*
Green	1	5	6	
155 Needed For Majority	308	23	331	166 Needed For Majority

2008 Election

Conservative, Stephen Harper
Liberal, Stephane Dion
NDP, Jack Layton
BQ, Gilles Duceppe
Green, Elizabeth May (no seats won)

Current System	Riding Seats	National Seats	Total Seats	Proposed System
Conservative Minority	143	0	143	Conservative Minority
Liberal	77	1	78	
BQ	49	0	49	
NDP	37	9	46	
Independents	2	0	2	
155 Needed For Majority	308	10	318	160 Needed For Majority

2006 Election

Conservative, Stephen Harper
Liberal, Paul Martin
BQ, Gilles Duceppe
NDP, Jack Layton

Current System	Riding Seats	National Seats	Total Seats	Proposed System
Conservative Minority	124	0	124	Conservative Minority
Liberal	103	1	104	
BQ	51	0	51	
NDP	29	12	41	
Independent	1	0	1	
155 Needed For Majority	308	13	321	161 Needed For Majority

2004 Election

Liberal, Paul Martin
Conservative, Stephen Harper
BQ, Gilles Duceppe
NDP, Jack Layton

Current System	Riding Seats	National Seats	Total Seats	Proposed System
Liberal Minority	135	0	135	Liberal Minority
Conservative	99	0	99	
BQ	54	0	54	
NDP	19	14	33	
Independent	1	0	1	
155 Needed For Majority	308	14	322	162 Needed For Majority

2000 Election

Liberal, Jean Chretien
Alliance, Stockwell Day
BQ, Gilles Duceppe
NDP, Alexa McDonough
PC, Joe Clark

Current System	Riding Seats	National Seats	Total Seats	Proposed System
Liberal Majority of 21 Seats	172	0	172	Liberal Majority of 10 Seats
Alliance	66	5	71	
BQ	38	0	38	
NDP	13	6	19	
PC	12	11	23	
151 Needed For Majority	301	22	323	162 Needed For Majority

1997 Election

Liberal, Jean Chretien
Reform, Preston Manning
BQ, Gilles Duceppe
NDP, Alexa McDonough
PC, Jean Charest

Current System	Riding Seats	National Seats	Total Seats	Proposed System
Liberal Majority of 4 Seats	155	0	155	*Liberal Minority*
Reform	60	0	60	
BQ	44	0	44	
NDP	21	5	26	
PC	20	17	37	
151 Needed For Majority	301	22	323	162 Needed For Majority

1993 Election

Liberal, Jean Chretien
Reform, Preston Manning
PC, Kim Campbell
BQ, Lucien Bouchard
NDP, Audrey McLaughlin

Current System	Riding Seats	National Seats	Total Seats	Proposed System
Liberal Majority of 29 Seats	177	0	177	Liberal Majority of 18 Seats
BQ	54	0	54	
Reform	52	1	53	
NDP	9	4	13	*NDP Achieves Party Status*
PC	2	17	19	*PC Achieves Party Status*
148 Needed For Majority	295	22	317	159 Needed For Majority

1988 Election

PC, Brian Mulroney
Liberal, John Turner
NDP, Ed Broadbent

Current System	Riding Seats	National Seats	Total Seats	Proposed System
PC Majority of 21 Seats	169	0	169	PC Majority of 14 Seats
Liberal	83	5	88	
NDP	43	8	51	
148 Needed For Majority	295	13	308	155 Needed For Majority

1984 Election

PC, Brian Mulroney
Liberal, John Turner
NDP, Ed Broadbent

Current System	Riding Seats	National Seats	Total Seats	Proposed System
PC Majority of 69 Seats	211	0	211	PC Majority of 59 Seats
Liberal	40	13	53	
NDP	30	8	38	
Independent	1	0	1	
142 Needed For Majority	282	21	303	152 Needed For Majority