

Summary

- The current electoral system does not accurately represent Canadians and must either be fixed or changed by the next election.
- The current first-past-the-post system fosters an adversarial form of partisan politics, and causes Canadians to feel that their votes are wasted and their interests are not represented.
- Changing the current system to a mixed member proportional system will provide accurate political representation for Canadians and solve voter apathy.
- By changing to a mixed member proportional electoral system, Canadians will have elections that better represent their interests and a government that can focus on collaboration instead of partisanship.

Issue

1. The Government has promised a new electoral system by the next election that will better represent the electorate.

Recommendation

2. It is recommended that the Department of Democratic Institutions legislate and begin to implement a mixed member proportional (MMP) electoral system by April 19th 2017.

3. It is recommended that the funding table below be approved:

Year	1	2	3	4	5	Total
\$ (Million)	1.82	2.73	3.64	.91	.91	10.01
FTE	10	15	20	5	5	55

Rationale

4. Electoral reform is a pressing issue with public support that must be solved by the next election in order to fairly and accurately represent Canadians through democratic Federal elections. Since 2003, Canadians have been debating electoral reform in official discussions. In 2015, Canadians elected a government which ran on a platform of electoral reform.

5. The current electoral system in Canada, the first-past-the-post system (FPTP), has been criticized for producing ‘wasted votes’ that contributes to voter apathy in Canada, and for creating ‘false majorities’ within governments, wherein a party can win 50% of the seats in the House of Commons without having won 50% of Canadians’ support. The current government has committed to changing the FPTP electoral system to a more representative electoral system by the 2019 federal election, in order to encourage an open and transparent government and restore Canadian’s faith in public institutions.

6. The cost of keeping this electoral system is too high to outweigh its’ benefits. Complaints about the current FPTP electoral system include the production of wasted votes and false majorities, but further criticize the system for contributing to the underrepresentation of women and minorities, encouraging strategic voting, and facilitating adversarial politics along party lines. The current government has committed to reducing partisanship and giving Canadians a stronger voice in the House

of Commons. The counter-arguments for keeping the FPTP electoral system are that it is simple to use and understand, creates a coherent opposition for the government, gives voters clear-cut choices, and often produces stable, single-party majority governments.

7. Canada has used the FPTP electoral system since the first federal election in 1867. In 1921, new political parties were formed and Canada moved from a two-party to a multi-party system. The multi-party system does not function well in a first-past-the-post election, and negates some positive aspects of the electoral system. Canada's multiple party system means that we often elect minority or coalition governments despite the FPTP system. In contrast, proportional representation electoral systems are successfully used elsewhere in the Commonwealth and are a viable option for Canada's electoral future. The Department of Democratic Institutions can create a new MMP electoral system, as the department and The Special Committee on Electoral Reform have access to sufficient expertise to make an informed decision on behalf of Canadians.

Proposed Approach and Options

8. By implementing a mixed member proportional electoral system, the current government will give Canada elections that better represent Canadians. Canada must craft their own system rather than borrow from another country in order to tailor the system to Canadian's needs. The proposed system will create new electoral districts superimposed over existing ridings in order to facilitate the MMP system's dual votes. Both the ballot for the local representative and the Federal party will be ranked ballots, to solve the wasted vote problem found in the current system. Because the system is built for multi-party elections, the divisive partisanship created in FPTP elections does not occur in MMP elections. The MMP system proposed will solve the underrepresentation of women and minorities in the House of Commons by creating criteria for diversity of list MPs proposed by the parties.

9. As an alternative to the proposed MMP system, a proportional representation (PR) electoral system is a much simpler approach. In a PR electoral system, citizens vote for the party that they prefer and Members of Parliament are chosen from party lists and allocated seats based on their share of the total vote. This system allows for much greater diversity and minority representation within parliament. PR systems and high voter turnout are correlated, so a PR system may solve some voter apathy within Canada. The current infrastructure would not function with a PR system and Canada would need to create a totally new system. PR electoral systems tend to lose local issues, as constituencies are large and there is no local representative.

10. A preferential voting (PV) system could be implemented in Canada using existing infrastructure and is therefore the most affordable option. This system would solve the false majorities that are produced by a FPTP electoral system. Australia uses variations of this system for both national and state elections, and it is the system that the United Kingdom proposed changing to in 2011. This system has support in the commonwealth. PV is simple to understand, but it encourages strategic voting and has no advantages over the current system other than solving false majorities.

Under a pure PV system, Canadians would still be misrepresented at the federal level.

11. Adopting a PV electoral system would be a simple process shift for Canadians and could use existing infrastructure, reducing the cost of implementation drastically. Both PR and MMP electoral systems require a Canadian paradigm shift as they have few similarities to our current system and require new electoral infrastructure to function properly. Though PR and MMP may be more time-consuming and expensive than PV, they are more intricate systems that will produce a more representative House of Commons and fulfill the current Mandate letter of the Department of Democratic Institutions. By creating a new MMP electoral system in Canada, Canadians could have the benefits of PR and PV without the costs that comes with both of the alternatives as the MMP system solves both the local representation problem of PR systems and the over-simplicity of PV systems.

12. The funding table in the previous section proposes 55 new employees over 5 years. This is necessary to implement the new electoral system, aid Elections Canada in carrying out the election in 2019, conduct a follow-up analysis after the election has passed, and provide support for two years post-election in order to use the analysis and tailor the electoral system. This funding table is intended to account for the cost of implementation, rather than for the application or maintenance of a new electoral system.

Considerations

13. Changing the electoral system in Canada to a mixed member proportional system requires that key stakeholders cooperate with one another. The provinces of Canada have a high level of interest in Canada's federal electoral system. Five of the thirteen provinces have created official committees that looked into electoral reform at the provincial level. The Citizen's Assembly of British Columbia announced in 2004 that the province would attempt to change the FPTP system. In 2007, the Ontario-based Democratic Renewal Secretariat recommended a move from the old system to a mixed member proportional electoral system. The Commission on Prince Edward Island's Electoral Future attempted to change their provincial system to mixed member proportional in 2005. Both Quebec's Report of the Chief Electoral Officer and New Brunswick's *An Accountable and Responsible Government* recommended moving to a mixed member proportional system in 2007.

14. Though the mixed member proportional system failed to garner the popular vote in Ontario and Prince Edward Island, it has been roundly supported through other provincial and federal reports. There is provincial unrest with the current electoral system. Though Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, the Yukon, Nunavut, and the Northwest Territories have not conducted provincial inquiries, over 75% of Canadians have been exposed to provincial reports on electoral reform. In the 2015 federal election, the Liberal Party won a majority of seats in the House of Commons while campaigning on the promise of federal electoral reform. The public

support is present and the official support for a mixed member proportional system is well-documented.

15. There are important stakeholders to consider aside from the general public and the provinces of Canada. The Department of Democratic Institutions is committed to producing an electoral system that will better represent Canadians in the 2019 federal election. Elections Canada the Special Committee on Electoral Reform, the Department of Public Works, and the Department of Canadian Heritage will work with the Department of Democratic Institutions to ensure that the ministerial mandate is fulfilled. The political parties of Canada have made their stances on electoral reform clear through their election campaigns in the 2015 federal election and through motions in the House of Commons since then.

16. The Assembly of First Nations is a key stakeholder in this issue that must be routinely consulted. In 1996 the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People recommended a separate and unique Aboriginal Parliament for Canada, stating that parliamentary reform may not go far enough to represent Aboriginal Canadians. While the Assembly of First Nations is not a proponent of the MMP electoral system, the creation of reserved list space for Aboriginal members of parliament assuages some of their concerns. During the 2011 federal election, a social movement called “Rock the Vote” dedicated to solving low Indigenous voter turnout in Canada demonstrated that Indigenous Canadians are open to electoral reform.

17. Media outlets across Canada have reported that electoral reform requires a constitutional amendment, giving rise to concerns about the legality of changing an electoral system through an act of Parliament. Section 44 of the *Constitution Act 1982* allows parliament to amend the executive government of Canada including the Senate and the House of Commons without provincial consensus. The *Report of the Law Commission of Canada* in 2004 to the Minister of Justice found that changes to the constitution are not a necessary aspect of electoral reform.

18. Though electoral reform is expensive, the current budget already includes 10.7 million dollars to the Department of Democratic Institutions in order to research electoral reform options. The budget is large enough to allow for the implementation of the MMP electoral system in Canada over the next five years. The MMP electoral system is simple to use and understand while also being complex enough to fairly represent the electorate. MMP is an affordable, feasible alternative to the current FPTP electoral system that will better represent the Canadian electorate.