

# **Comparing STV+ to MMP Using ERRE Principles**

**Mark Batten-Carew**

**October 7, 2016**

## Executive Summary

The purpose of this submission is to aid the Electoral Reform Commission (ERRE) in comparing two proportional electoral systems, MMP and STV+, using the 5 principals the ERRE is mandated to uphold.

Please note that this submission strongly endorses the submissions from both **Fair Vote Canada** and **LeadNow.ca** and therefore this submission will not repeat their excellent arguments as to why the final recommendation from the ERRE should be a proportional representation system.

This submission first describes the two proportional electoral systems, Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) and Single Transferable Vote Plus (also known as Proportional-STV, PR-STV, or STV+), then uses each of the principles listed in ERRE's mandate to do a comprehensive comparison of the two systems.

This submission concludes that **STV+** is the proposal which best satisfies all five principles, is the most proportional system, and will fundamentally change for the better the way politics is done in Canada.

**In summary, this submission recommends:**

Canada adopt an STV+ electoral system.

- Local Representation: **Over 90% of Canadians get a local MP from their party of choice.**
- Effectiveness and Legitimacy: **Most proportional system**, enabling over 90% of Canadians to locally elect a member from their party of choice, and is fair to independent candidates.
- Engagement: **Multiple winners per riding leads to more collaborative politics, more support for independent and minority candidates, and enhanced voter participation.**
- Accessibility and Inclusiveness: Simplest ballot design - uses a single ranked vote.
- Integrity: Retaining paper ballots will ensure reliable, verifiable and trusted results.

**Detailed STV+ implementation suggestions:**

- The total number of seats in Parliament remain the same.
- The STV+ ridings be created by merging 4-7 existing ridings (to avoid recalculating riding boundaries) retaining their 4-7 seats, but one seat from each riding be moved to a top-up region, so STV+ ridings actually end up with 3-6 seats.
- The top-up regions be province-wide, except possibly for Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia, and Alberta, which might have their provincial-wide regions divided into smaller regions.
- Four exceptions would be Labrador, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Yukon, which would each be single-seat ridings, with the three territories having no top-up region.
- Top-up seats are allocated proportionally to the party's best runner's-up in each region.
- **Candidates from excessively large ridings be provided extra travel reimbursements, instead of modifying the electoral system to handle these exceptional cases.**

## A Tale of Two Proportional Electoral Systems

### Mixed Member Proportional (MMP)

Under an MMP system, each voter gets a single ballot with two votes. They are voting for both a single local riding representative and contributing to a proportional vote for regional representatives.

The first vote is identical to a First-Past-The-Post vote, electing a single local member to represent their riding. Whoever gets the most votes wins, just like the current system. There is no requirement to have over 50% of the vote.

The second vote is for a regional candidate and determines the proportional of seats each party should have in Parliament. Once the ratio of seats deserved by each party is determined, the regional seats are allocated proportionally to the regional candidates based on which candidate from each party got the most votes.

The arguments in favour of MMP are that:

- 1) the first vote is identical to our current voting system so it is familiar, and
- 2) the system allows the voter to vote separately for a) the candidate they most like as their local representative, and b) the party they actually prefer.

### Single Transferable Vote Plus (STV+)

Under an STV+ system, each voter gets a single ballot with a single, ranked vote. Their vote will contribute to electing 3-5 local riding representatives as well as contributing to a proportional vote for regional representatives.

**The key difference between MMP and STV+ is the fact the STV+ provides multiple local representatives for each riding. This will show up as a benefit under almost every ERRE principle.**

When a voter fills in their ballot, they rank as many or as few of the candidates as they wish, in order from most wanted to least wanted.

Under STV+ a candidate must pass a minimum threshold of the vote before they can earn their seat. In a 4-seat riding, a candidate must earn at least 20% of the vote to show they deserve one of the seats.

If a candidate gets more support than they need, their excess votes are transferred to the voters' second choices. If no candidate has enough support, the lowest candidate is dropped and that candidate's votes are transferred to their second choices. The remaining seats are assigned as candidates meet the threshold.

Once all the riding seats are earned, party proportionality is determined by counting all first-rank votes. Regional top-up seats are used to bring each party up to their proportional share of seats by assigning them to the best runner-up candidates for each party from the riding contests.

The key arguments in favour of STV+ are that:

- 1) almost every Canadian will get a **local** representative from their own party,
- 2) it is a more proportional system than MMP,
- 3) voters get to specify a complete list of ranked choices,
- 4) it uses a simpler ballot than MMP, and
- 5) significantly, it will lead to more collaborative politics.

## Comparing MMP to STV+

The basic difference between MMP and STV+, since they both have top-up regional seats, is the fact that MMP retains single-seat ridings elected by a First-Past-The-Post vote, while STV+ merges multiple ridings into a single larger riding with multiple seats elected by a ranked ballot.

Another way to look at MMP is that MMP is just FPTP with the addition of a regional layer of proportionality that is intended to correct the problems caused by having single-seat ridings. This is done by adding a second vote to each ballot, in order to answer the question: *Since you were forced to vote strategically at the riding level, what party did you really want to vote for?*

Because MMP needs a significant number of regional seats to correct the imbalances of the FPTP single-seat ridings, MMP ridings need to be significantly larger, often up to 30-40% larger, each still managed by a single representative. On the other hand, STV+ would merge 5 ridings into one larger riding, but have 4 representatives, so each representative would only be covering 25% more voters. (The 5th representative would be moved to the STV+ top-up region.)

The reason for this difference is that STV+ is naturally more proportional due to having multiple representatives for the same riding. Therefore fewer representatives are needed at the regional level to correct proportional imbalances.

Reviewing the committee appearances so far, it seems that presenters are mentioning MMP about twice as often as STV, with a few people mentioning Rural-Urban Proportional (RU-PR). This demonstrates MMP's strongest appeal – it is familiar since it retains single-seat FPTP ridings. **But does that make it the best choice for this historic chance to improve Canada's electoral system?** The ERRE could take this opportunity to select an electoral system that has benefits way beyond “it is familiar **and** proportional”.

Besides familiarity, the only other benefit of MMP is that it allows the voter to specify both the local candidate they want, and separately, the party they prefer. This is an appealing concept, but it has two problems. First it causes FPTP ridings to be retained, and second, it is susceptible to being taken advantage of. “Party A” could run lots of regional candidates, but then run all their riding candidates under a second party called “Friends of Party A”. In the end, the two supposedly distinct parties would end up with potentially double their proper proportional share of seats because regionally it would seem like “Party A” deserves a large share of proportional seats, but has none since they are not “Friends of Party A” and did not run any riding candidates.

This is a problem for any electoral system that gives voters two separate votes.

STV+ does not allow for multiple votes. As its name implies, every voter gets a Single Transferable Vote. Although they get to specify their order of preference, they only get to elect a single member and it is their first preference that determines the party they want to support proportionally, so there is no way to rig the system.

So far, I have discussed the good and bad aspects of MMP, but now it is time to look at STV+.

As mentioned at the end of the last section, STV+ has quite a few benefits, including the following:

- 1) almost every Canadian will get a **local** representative from their own party,
- 2) it is a more proportional system than MMP,
- 3) voters get to specify a complete list of ranked choices,
- 4) it uses a simpler ballot than MMP, and
- 5) significantly, it will lead to more collaborative politics.

Because STV+ has 3-5 representatives per riding, it is very likely that in most ridings at least one seat in each riding will be filled by each of the three main parties. In a 5-seat riding, a party would only need about 17% support to earn a seat. That means that even before filling the proportional top-up seats, it is very likely that almost every Canadian will get a local representative from their own party.

Few people watching election results roll in on election day will be worried about whether or not their party won the riding. Instead they will be on the edge of their seats wondering solely *which* of their party's candidates won. **Effectively every Canadian is a winner.**

The above is possible because STV+ is a much more proportional system. How proportional a system is can be measured by the Gallagher Index, which is:

*a measure of the amount of disproportionality generated by an election outcome, by which is meant the disparity, if any, between the distribution of votes at the election and the allocation of seats.*<sup>1</sup>

Gallagher numbers below 5 are considered good, which means the electoral system provides seat counts which are very close to the proportion of popular vote.

When Byron Weber Becker (who has been invited to speak to ERRE) ran an analysis of STV+ as I've described it in this submission, it earned a Composite Gallagher Index of 2.2%, the lowest (best) of all 62 electoral simulations he has listed at his electoral website, Election-Modelling.ca. In fact, out of 45 different instances of STV, only 5 were above 5%, the worst being 6.5%.

In contrast, while there were 2 instances of MMP with Composite Gallagher Index just below 5%, the other four instances were above 5%, the worst being over 15%.

---

<sup>1</sup> Michael Gallagher's website: [http://www.tcd.ie/Political\\_Science/staff/michael\\_gallagher/EISystems/Docts/Isq.php](http://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/staff/michael_gallagher/EISystems/Docts/Isq.php)

This demonstrates that STV+ is significantly more proportional than MMP, and STV+ does this with fewer top-up seats required.

There are two final points to make before I get to the comparison specifically using ERRE principles.

First, STV+ ballots are simpler than MMP ballots. MMP ballots require voters to vote for two different things, their local candidate and their regional candidate, and each of these sections will require a separate explanation of what to do on the ballot.

In comparison, an STV+ ballot requires only one explanation, such as “Rank the candidates below in your order of preference, starting with 1 beside your first choice” and therefore is less likely to cause voters trouble.

Finally, I believe there is a very significant difference between how MMP and STV+ elections would be fought. MMP riding elections, being FPTP contests, will be no different than current elections. Negative tactics will be used as they are now, with candidates attempting to discredit their opponents, typically ganging up on whichever opponent is considered favoured to win.

But in STV+ elections, every major party is likely to win at least one seat in each riding, so there will be no incentive for candidates to fight negatively.

Imagine there are 15 candidates vying for 5 seats in a riding. Under STV+, there is no longer any reason for divisive electioneering. At least one MP from each major party is likely to win, so how would any candidate know who to attack of the other candidates? Campaigning will naturally shift to candidates portraying themselves and their policies in the best light because it will be very difficult to determine where to apply your resources against the 14 other candidates. The battle will have to be over party policies and to show that you are the best representative for the riding, which is exactly what electioneering should be.

Another reason electioneering under STV+ will be more civil is that, unlike MMP where only one candidate wins, after an STV+ election, each successful candidate will be working with 3-5 of their former opponents the following week.

Finally, since STV+ is both a proportional system and elects multiple MPs per riding, there will be a strong incentive for collaboration. Not only would an election likely return close to the same percentage of support for each party, but very likely the same representatives from each riding would be re-elected, barring people dropping out of politics. Therefore, if anything is to get done, it will have to be done through compromise with the current set of colleagues.

## **MMP vs STV+ Evaluated Under ERRE Principles**

### **Effectiveness and Legitimacy**

With STV+, voting effectiveness is enhanced in two ways. First, as mentioned before, it is extremely likely that the vast majority of voters will end up with a seated representative that is aligned with their own values. This is part of the reason for requiring at least 3 seats in each riding, so there is at least the chance for each of the three major parties to have one representative seated.

In addition, since STV+ is the most proportional system, every voter, even for the smaller parties who don't get a local representative, will know that their vote counted toward electing someone from their party of choice.

Compare this to MMP, where at most one party is represented per riding and, in all ridings which were won with less than 50% of the vote, the majority of voters are required to reach out to a regionally seated representative for support. So under MMP, the majority of voters will continue to live in ridings without a representative matching their values and will not receive the same benefit from a new electoral system as they would with STV+.

Significantly, this also means that to avoid a local representative one really doesn't want, MMP still encourages strategic voting!

So, for these reasons, many Canadians would consider MMP much less effective than STV+.

### **Engagement**

Because STV+ gives most voters a representative of their own party right in their own riding, Canadians would once again feel that their vote actually matters and this would encourage a rise in voter participation.

In addition, one of the primary advantages of STV+ over MMP is that multiple representatives are elected at the riding level, even before party alignment at regional level is considered for proportionality. What this means is that in ridings with ethnic minorities, an ethnic minority candidate would stand a good chance of being elected to one of the five or so seats, regardless of their party affiliation. This again is going to encourage voter participation, especially for underrepresented groups.

But, I've saved the best Engagement argument for last: As I mentioned above, because multiple MPs are being elected from every single riding, STV+ will cause a major shift towards civility and collaboration,

especially during elections, but also once the representatives are in Ottawa. In contrast, with MMP, electioneering would remain business as usual, with the ongoing and growing cynicism that entails.

Also mentioned above, since STV+ is both a proportional system and elects multiple MPs per riding, elections will become much less frequent, because everyone will know that an election will likely return close to the same percentage of support for each party and very likely the same representatives from each riding. Again, in contrast under MMP, since two-thirds of the ridings are FPTP contests, representatives will continue to know that a slight change in popularity may change the winning riding representative.

### **Accessibility and Inclusiveness**

Voting under STV+ is exceedingly simple, definitely simpler than the two-part ballot required by MMP, while providing voters with a much better ability to indicate their intentions. And since the instructions on an STV+ ballot will be much simpler than those on an MMP ballot, the STV+ ballot will be easier to use, shorter, and more accessible to all voters, regardless of physical or social condition.

### **Integrity**

Assuming that the committee recommends remaining with secret paper ballots for post-election verifiability and recounts, public trust in the election process should remain high under both MMP and STV+.

But Elections Canada could enhance confidence in a new STV+ system by releasing the raw STV+ counting results on a per round basis. This would allow people to see the progress of the vote and get used to the idea of their preferred candidate winning or losing as individual candidates gradually earn a seat or are eliminated.

### **Local Representation**

This is where STV+ shines. **Compared to MMP, STV+ is the only system which will enable the majority of Canadians to have a local representative that matches their own values.** Under STV+, all representatives are answerable to the voters of the riding they ran in, while in addition, the regional representatives have extra responsibility to the rest of the voters from the region that elected them.



This is not true of MMP. Under MMP, it is quite likely that a majority of Canadians will not have local representation from their party of choice as is usual under FPTP ridings. Under MMP, most Canadians will have to look to regional representatives for legislative support.

## **Conclusions**

Please see the Executive Summary at the beginning of this submission for a list of conclusions.