

Representation of Women with PR-STV and MMP

Introduction

This relates to the ERRE principle of engagement: “***offer opportunities for inclusion of underrepresented groups*** in the political process.”

ERRE has heard conflicting testimony.

Arend Lijphart looked at 36 democracies over decades and found that the election of women is 8 percentage points higher, on average, in proportional systems.

Yet you heard one expert witness testify that the electoral system is utterly irrelevant, and if political parties had the will, they would just create *gender parity* through their internal policies *immediately*.

Of course they could, but they won't.

Proportional representation, *while fixing the major problems of distortion and ineffective ballots*, may also have a significant natural and positive effect on the representation of women in Parliament.

At many ERRE meetings I have heard MP Sherry Romanado say something like:

“I am a woman and I won in my riding. *The electoral system had nothing to do with my decision to run*. I've talked to other women and it had nothing to do with their decision to run either.”

That is certainly a valid viewpoint and plain common sense. I don't think many women who are contemplating running as a candidate think specifically, “*Since it's first-past-the-post, I won't run for office, but if Canada had a different electoral system, I might*.”

That might be something that someone who wanted to run for the Greens anywhere or the Liberals in Alberta might be thinking.

But neither is that view a complete picture of what is going on.

Every researcher will tell you that the representation of women is a complex issue. The electoral system cannot address every barrier.

But some factors are interconnected.

With a great deal of caution to be expected considering the multi-partisan nature of some of its [major endorsers](#), Equal Voice seems to be concurring with most experts that well-designed, a proportional electoral system may enhance the representation of women in the House.

MMP, STV and Women

The main purpose of this brief is to dig deeper into MMP and STV specifically, in the hopes that it may provide some clarity in terms of **what we can hope for and what we can expect**.

Introduction to Electoral Systems and Women: Why "PR Elects More Women"

PR doesn't elect more women: *Voters do*.

Why does that happen more often in countries using PR?

The most relevant factor for Canada: Women have to be put on the ballot in order for voters to choose them.

And here is the crux of the problem and the solution: *The party nomination process. The party culture.*

Winner-take-all systems make it more difficult for women to break in

With single member ridings, each party nominates just one candidate to run in each riding.

Often:

- a) the incumbent MP in the riding is a male
- b) the popular candidate who ran in the previous elections is male

Either of those factors make it less likely for the party to actively seek out women to run in that riding, and make it more difficult for a new woman to win that nomination.

How PR systems help women get nominated

PR systems mean **multi-member ridings** of some sort. Most of the time, the major parties must nominate *more than one* candidate.

The parties can no longer nominate women most often in ridings which are strongholds for other parties, [like Marc André Bodet and Melanee Thomas have found they do in our winner-take-all](#)

[system](#). As long as the party has a minimum level of support in a region/district *they will now win seats in every area of the country.*

With PR, if more women are on the ballot in Canada, more women will get elected.

As soon as the parties must nominate more than one candidate, it allows new candidates who are women to enter the system without having to fight to displace the male incumbents.

It also makes a party look very bad if the party has a list and 70% of the names on the list are men.

Or with STV, if the party is running two candidates and both of them are men.

Anything that so obviously doesn't reflect the diversity of the area is hard to miss.

In a winner-take-all system, with only one name on the ballot, there is simply not the same embarrassment factor. Each riding is its own little silo.

PR increases the natural incentive for parties to reach out and search harder for female candidates and encourage them to run.

Single Transferable Vote, Mixed Member Proportional and List PR

Women's groups historically have tended to support List PR systems.

The parties can zipper the lists (alternate male/female). In many countries, the lists are "closed" - voters cannot choose individuals.

Or the lists can be "flexible", which means you can vote for a party OR for one of their list candidates. To alter the order in which candidates are elected from the list, a very popular candidate would have to receive a certain percentage of personal votes to *override the list order*.

Flexible list systems *in practical effect* are similar to closed list. Imagine you are a voter faced with a long list. A good number of people will just choose the party name.

[Research](#) shows that the reason candidates on a flexible list even try to gain personal votes when it makes little difference to their chances of being elected is so the party members will put them higher on the list next time.

The third option is open lists. If a party puts up gender balanced slate, and voters in that country are not biased towards male candidates, women are just as likely as men to get elected from an open list.

It's easy to see why the top countries to elect more women use List PR.

The impact of voter choice on substantive versus descriptive representation

Equal Voice has released [a fascinating piece of research](#) suggesting that the very factors that lead to more women being elected with List PR - namely, party control over the lists - decreases the ability of those women to be a voice for women's issues in legislature. The more control voters have over which candidates are elected, the more the women elected are able to be effective advocates:

“New research undertaken by Dr. Grace Lore at the University of British Columbia finds that while these features of a PR list system increase descriptive representation, they simultaneously decrease substantive representation. Lore's multi-year study, using extensive statistical analysis and in-depth interviews with women in politics in seven countries, reveals that more party control over the election of candidates in PR systems reduces the amount individual women can do to pursue women's issues, specifically, once elected.

“This may be because women must focus on party priorities to ensure their re-election. On the other hand, greater voter control over who is elected increases the power of the electorate and frees politicians from strict party discipline. In these systems, Lore's research found that women do more to represent women and spend more time on issues that disproportionately affect their lives. However, weakening the party's role has the effect of decreasing descriptive representation – the number of women.”

We're not getting List PR in Canada

We're not getting a nation-wide, or province-wide, party list system. All the systems for Canada are rather unique because they keep local representation. (The only realistic list-based option would be regional list PR, which is rarely mentioned.)

It also means that when we talk about electing more women "naturally" with PR, we need to look at the proportional models on the table:

- MMP
- STV
- Rural-Urban PR (a blend with a majority of multi-member ridings)

Both MMP and STV are relatively uncommon voting systems. If you look at the 80 or 90 countries which use PR, MMP is used in 8.

STV is used to elect the lower house in two countries (Ireland and Malta) and SNTV (a variation of STV) is used in four others (for a total of 6).

STV is also used in the Australian Senate, in two Australian territories (ACT and Tasmania) and for local elections in New Zealand and Scotland. (And as you know was used provincially in cities in Alberta and Manitoba for 30 years.)

Neither system provides a large pool of international data to compare rates of women being elected. From the places that do use these systems, some are so culturally different from Canada that it makes no sense to generalize from them - it's not hard to pick out which ones.

But from what we've covered about how PR elects women already, and the countries which do use MMP or STV, we can deduce a few things.

MMP and Women

Women's groups in Canada have tended in the past to support MMP mainly, I think, because it involves a party list.

Important fact number one: Most MMP advocates won't go above 38% list seats.

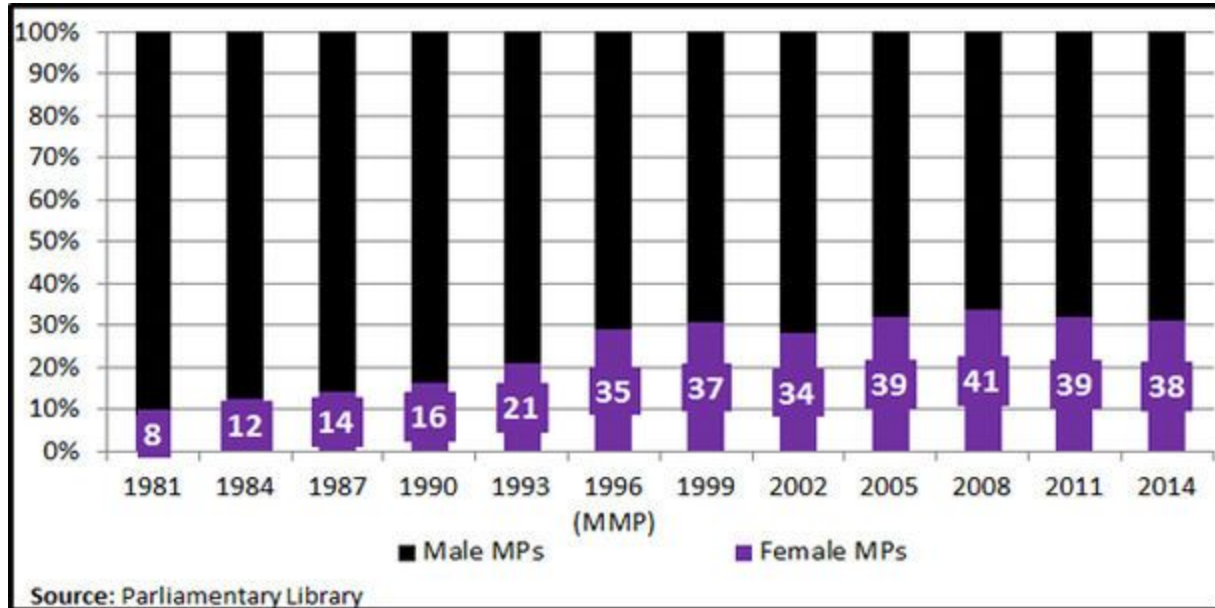
So right away, with MMP for Canada, in almost 2/3 of the contests women will face the same barriers they do today - *nominations in single member constituencies*.

The potential to elect more women initially lies with roughly 40% of seats filled by the open lists.

This is exactly what happened in New Zealand. In New Zealand, *almost half* the seats are filled by closed party lists.

In their first election with MMP, in 1996, the percentage of women *jumped significantly* - from 21% to 29%.

It now sits at around 30% (Canada is 26%) and it hasn't moved in 15 years (see chart below).



Initially, almost all of the new women MPs were initially getting elected on the list side.

Over time that percentage dropped so that fewer were getting elected on the list and more in the local constituencies, until the percentage elected on both sides is now about equal, at 31%.

Detailed history in NZ:

1996: 15% women in constituencies, 44% women on lists;

1999: 21% / 40%

2002: 26% / 31%

2005: 20% / 40%

2008: 24% / 37%

2011: 30% / 37%

2014: 32% / 30%

How do other countries with MMP do?

Scotland has an MMP system that is the most similar to what has been proposed for Canada (16 member regions - except it's a closed list). In Scotland, 42% of the seats are list seats.

Scotland currently sits at 34% women.

1999, the first election of the Scottish Parliament, saw an historic breakthrough for representation of women - 37% women elected. *More women were elected to the Scottish*

Parliament in one day than had been elected to represent Scotland in the UK House of Commons since women were first able to run in 1918.

But since then, representation of women with MMP has [stalled or fallen](#) and women's organizations are campaigning for 50% quotas.

What about other MMP countries?

Germany: 36.5% women (*50% of seats are closed list*). Hungary: 10%.

Point being: PR can open the door. But culture matters and additional measures may be necessary.

Single Transferable Vote and Women

Some women's groups actually *opposed* STV in BC.

They preferred to keep first-past-the-post - claiming that STV doesn't elect more women. (Thankfully, that is not the case today!)

When STV came within 2 percent of winning the BC referendum (58% when the government set the bar at 60%) *seeing women's groups take an anti-STV position was disappointing to say the least.*

It defies both research and logic.

Here are some questions to consider.

Which countries elect the most women to the European Parliament and what voting system do they use to do it?

1) Malta (**STV**) 67%

2) Finland (Open List PR) 62%

3) Ireland (**STV**) 55%

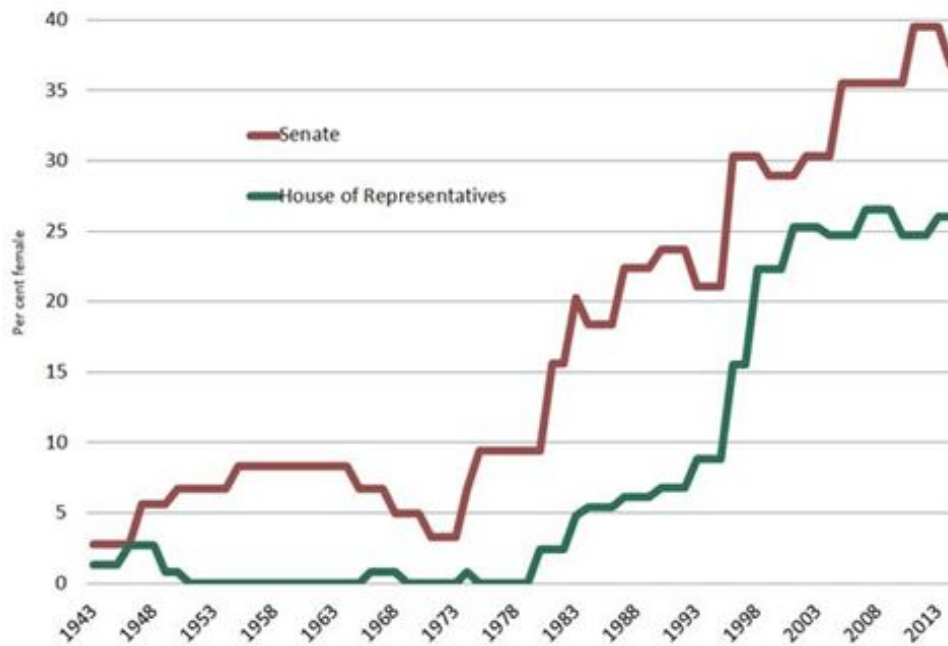
But STV can't elect women?

Now let's take a look at Australia (below). Here's an interesting comparison. Their lower house (the green line) uses a winner-take-all system (Alternative Vote).

Their Senate is elected by STV.

Same country, same voters.

The percentage of women in the lower house is comparable to Canada. Their Senate is 10% higher (38%) and it keeps trending up.



However, the STV system in the Australian Senate functions more like a closed party list system.

So let's look at the Australian [states and territories](#) that use STV

Here we can see territories using an STV system that looks more like what we would see in Canada. (See sample ballot for Canada [here](#)).

Tasmania uses STV to elect its lower house, with each district electing 5 members. Percentage of women elected: **44%**

ACT (Australian Capital Territory) uses STV to elect its lower house, with most districts electing 5 members. Percentage of women elected: **35%**

Those are higher on average than Germany and New Zealand with MMP closed list and about 50% top-up seats.

Neither of these territories use gender quotas.

On average in the Australian territories the difference in terms of representation of women using different electoral systems is small, but it is in favour of STV.

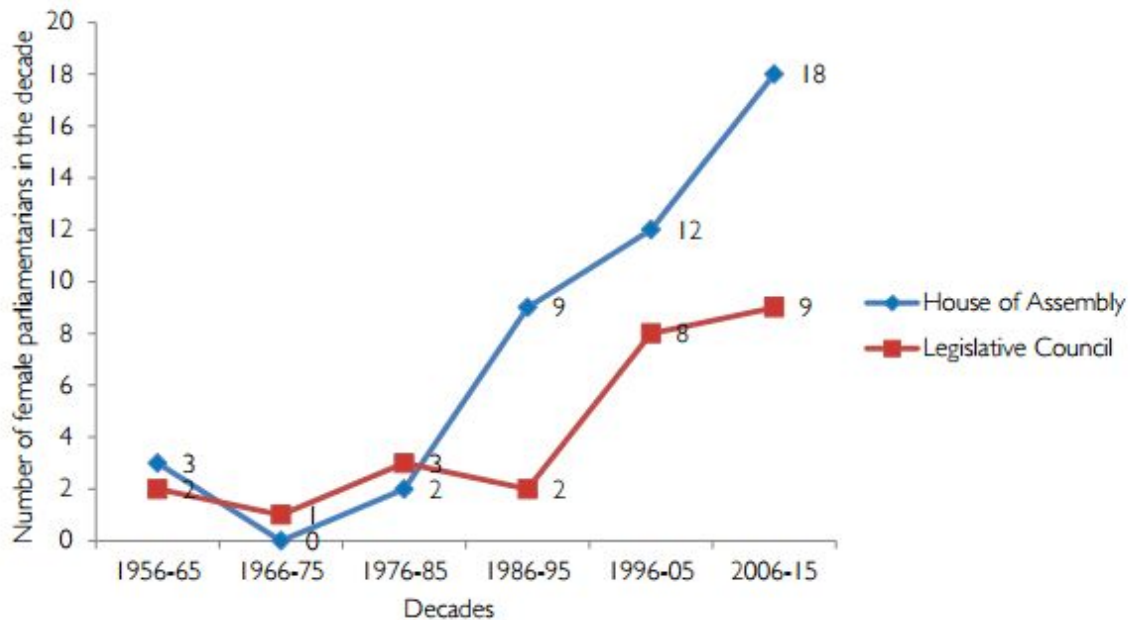
Table 1: Composition of Australian parliaments by party and gender (by chamber), as at 16 September 2016
(includes any by-election results and any casual vacancies filled since the most recent general election, as shown, in each jurisdiction)

	Cwth (2.7.16)			NSW (28.3.15)			Vic. (29.11.14)			Qld (31.1.15)			WA (9.3.13)			SA (15.3.14)			Tas. (15.3.14)			ACT (20.10.12)			NT (27.8.16)			Total		
	M	F	%F	M	F	%F	M	F	%F	M	F	%F	M	F	%F	M	F	%F	M	F	%F	M	F	%F	M	F	%F	M	F	%F
Lower House																														
ALP	41	28	40.6	19	13	40.6	25	22	46.8	25	17	40.5	14	7	33.3	14	10	41.7	3	4	57.1	5	3	37.5	9	9	50.0	155	113	42.2
LP	48	12	20.0	28	8	22.2	23	7	23.3				25	5	16.7	18	3	14.3	11	4	26.7	5	3	37.5				158	42	21.0
NATS	15	1	6.3	13	3	18.8	6	2	25.0				5	2	28.6												39	8	17.0	
LNP							34	8	19.0																		34	8	19.0	
CLP																									1	1	50.0	1	1	50.0
GRN	1		0.0	1	2	66.7	1	1	50.0										3	100.0	1	0.0				4	6	60.0		
IND LIB													1	0.0																
KAP	1		0.0									2	0.0														3	0.0		
NXT		1	100.0																									1	100.0	
IND	1	1	50.0	3		0.0	1	100.0	3		0.0				2		0.0							3	2	40.0	12	4	25.0	
Total	107	43	28.7	64	26	28.9	55	33	37.5	64	25	28.1	45	14	23.7	34	13	27.7	14	11	44.0	11	6	35.3	13	12	48.0	406	183	31.1
Upper House																														
ALP	12	14	53.8	8	4	33.3	9	5	35.7				4	7	63.6	7	1	12.5	2		0.0						42	31	42.5	
LP	18	6	25.0	11	2	15.4	9	5	35.7				11	5	31.3	6	2	25.0	2		100.0						55	22	28.6	
NATS	3	2	40.0	5	2	28.6	1	1	50.0				4	1	20.0												13	6	31.6	
CLP	1		0.0																								1		0.0	
GRN	4	5	55.6	3	2	40.0	1	4	80.0				1	1	50.0	1	1	50.0									10	13	56.5	
AJP				1		0.0																					1		0.0	
ASP							1	100.0																			1	100.0		
CDP				2		0.0																					2		0.0	
d4d															1	100.0											1	100.0		
DHJP	1		0.0																								1		0.0	
DLP							1	100.0																			1	100.0		
FFP	1		0.0												2		0.0										3		0.0	
JLN		1	100.0																								1	100.0		
NXT	2	1	33.3												1		0.0										3	1	25.0	
LDP	1		0.0																								1		0.0	
PHON	3	1	25.0																								4	1	20.0	
S&F				2		0.0	2		0.0				2		0.0												6		0.0	
V1LJ							1		0.0																		1		0.0	
IND																			8	3	27.3						8	3	27.3	
Total	46	30	39.5	32	10	23.8	23	17	42.5				22	14	38.9	17	5	22.7	10	5	33.3					151	81	34.9		

O=STV

Source: Parliamentary Library using data from state and territory parliament websites.

Figure 2. Number of women in the Tasmanian Parliament over time



Note: In 1998 the Tasmanian House of Assembly was reduced from 35 members to 25.

Data source: Accessed at http://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/tpl/datasheets/MP_Women_Terms.htm 27 January 2016.

As an interesting side note, STV was used in New York City in the 1920's. It was brought in - fought for by the left - to improve diversity of representation.

What happened?

It improved diversity of representation.

Too many blacks were getting elected for the liking of some people [so the elites got rid of it](#).

In the 1920's getting more women elected wasn't a high priority but researcher [Karen Bird](#) has concluded that PR elects more women and more minorities.

So what was the former opposition to STV from women's groups about?

It appears to be about Ireland and Malta. While both recently beat the rest of Europe in electing women to the European Parliament with STV, their record of electing women at home is *very poor*.

Malta has only 12.9% women. Ireland elected 23% women in it's last election - only because a quota was put in place tying party funding to nominating at least 30% women. Prior to that only 16% of their legislature was female.

If STV does not elect women, feminist researchers in Ireland must be taking note of their flawed electoral system and demanding a better PR system, right?

Actually, no.

The latest research from Ireland [using a "feminist-institutionalist framework"](#) concluded that STV provides the appropriate structure for electing women. The problem is the culture of the parties in Ireland (emphasis mine):

"the research finds internal party cultures, systems of party competition, and electoral preferences for incumbency mainly account for the dearth of women representatives in Ireland, not the specific mechanics of STV. **If anything, STV's multi-member nature facilitates the election of new women, which would not have been the case under a single-seat system."**

"Thus, as a whole, the literature suggests we cannot conclude any universalised theory as to STV's impact on women's representation – rather, its effect on female seat-holding is highly contextualised, depending on the specific environment in which it operates."

Applying some common sense to a complicated topic in a Canadian context

What can we expect in Canada?

First, Canadian voters have shown that when women are on the ballot, they will select a woman as often as a man.

So with Canada's culture, that brings us back to the party nomination processes.

With MMP, 60% or more of the seats will still be elected in single member constituencies-presenting the same disincentive for parties.

If the most of the parties are proactive with making sure half their regional lists are women we can expect to see more women elected on the lists.

With STV, single member ridings are history.

Multi-member districts of various sizes provide an excellent opportunity to nominate and elect more women.

Depending on the number of seats in a multi-member riding:

- If a party runs two candidates, that "natural incentive" kicks in to make one candidate a man, and one a woman - so instantly, in many of those ridings 50% of the candidates are women. Running two men doesn't look very good.
- If a party runs three candidates, and if they don't run at least one woman out of the three, they will look very bad. So right away, in those ridings, at least 33% of the candidates for those parties are women.

But here's the catch:

In Canada's rural areas, STV may mean 2 or 3 seat districts. In these cases, most of the parties might only run one candidate.

In these cases, women will face the same uphill battle to win the nomination as they do in single member ridings. So the number of smaller districts in an STV model will have an impact on how many women are on the ballot.

However, if the *majority* of ridings are larger districts (4-5 MPs) in urban areas, the prospects may still be more positive than a system where the majority of districts are still single member.

Conclusion

Both STV and MMP have great potential to significantly increase the representation of women in the House.

Well known social activist Judy Rebick concluded the same thing in [her response to the opposition to STV from women's groups](#).

As [Equal Voice](#) notes in its recent report, **"The adoption of a new electoral system could also hold significant promise for women in Canada. But it is all in the design."**