

## **Submission to ERRE by Anita Nickerson**

*In this brief I speak only for myself. My opinions are in no way a reflection of the views of Fair Vote Canada. Their views are well set out in this [submission](#) to ERRE.*

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### **Who am I?**

I am a 42 year old woman who lives in Kitchener, Ontario. I have bachelor degrees in Psychology and Social Work, and a college diploma in Drug and Alcohol Counselling. I worked as an addictions counsellor for 8 years. I have been at home with my 15 year old daughter with special needs (we homeschool) since 2006. My husband of 16 years is a Registered Practical Nurse.

For the past year, I have been employed part time by Fair Vote Canada. I've been working with FVC first on a local and then on a national level since 2008. I support volunteers, help coordinate national actions, and have contributed to almost every other aspect of our national campaign. This cause is my full time passion.

Around 2007 I was like most Canadians - I voted, but I paid *very* little attention to politics between elections. I made voting decisions based on clips of leaders I saw on TV or something I read in the paper. I didn't belong to and was not involved with any party or activist group. I had voted for all the parties at one time or another.

Enter the 2007 MMP referendum in Ontario. Up until that point, *I had NO IDEA there was any other way to vote*. I assumed there was only one voting method in the world - ours.

When I learned about PR it was a real eye opener.

I had become concerned about global warming. With the MMP referendum, it occurred to me that maybe it *wasn't* that Canadians didn't care enough about long term issues to push politicians. There was something wrong with the system. Voices were not coming to the table. The way votes translated into power wasn't fair. The ability of governments to develop and implement long term policy plans was inhibited.

PR seemed like a no brainer. I started setting up Fair Vote Canada tables in the park.

In hindsight, if I had known then the road travelled by those behind me or that path ahead of me on this issue, I would never have started what was to become an intense six years.

Fair Vote Canada is a citizens campaign, funded by individuals, powered by passionate volunteer leaders and many helpers over time in almost every riding across Canada. ***This is a huge team effort by ordinary people who care.***

Over the years, out of necessity, I have learned as much as any Citizens' Assembly and many academics about this issue.

I do not think PR will solve all the problems of the world or *guarantee* any positive outcomes beyond fairness to voters. But I believe it will make a difference.

### **Evidence is not black and white, but it's real**

Some people, in their enthusiasm to urge you to keep your promise, will get up at a mic and *unintentionally* overstate some aspect of the case for PR.

PR countries on average do have higher turnout. If you go through databases and do the math anybody can reaffirm this research. Lijphart did the additional work of controlling for other factors. But of course adopting PR is not *guaranteed* to improve voter turnout, as Andre Blais has noted from the results in NZ.

Similarly, PR does not *end* strategic voting. Human beings are strategic. *It changes how much and what type of strategic voting occurs significantly, and it depends on the system.* You can [read my blog](#) explaining the differences.

### **Why PR**

Proportional representation gives voters an *effective tool* to be part of the collective solution to our common problems - and to be part of creating the best country we can be.

*PR changes who is at the table, how power is shared, and how decisions are made.*

The evidence from Arend Lijphart to [Carey and Hix at the London School of Economics](#) - suggests that overall, PR countries do better on significant issues.

When my daughter is old enough to put her ballot in the box **I want her to know that her vote contributed to the election of a voice for the issues she cares about.**

### **What System Do I Like?**

I started off liking MMP best because I was surrounded by MMP fans who knew little about any other PR system.

Over time, my opinion shifted.

I support almost any strongly proportional system. The element of local representation built into all the PR models for Canada means they are already fairly moderate, often with natural thresholds to earn a seat well above the European average.

If choosing between an MMP system or an STV system with [design choices](#) producing roughly the same overall proportionality in the House, **I prefer STV.**

There is no doubt STV gives voters the most say over what individual candidates are elected.

With STV, if I vote for you first in my multi-member riding, my vote counts for you, not for someone else in your party. I determine my second choice on that ballot, and my third choice, etc.

As someone explained to me, STV is like having a dollar to spend but you don't *have* to spend it all on one candidate (or all on one party).

Or, even better: STV is like an instruction card to Elections Canada that tells them exactly what to do with my ballot at each step

***With STV, winner-take-all races are replaced by something better.***

***Multi-member ridings with diverse MPs is highly appealing to me.***

STV is an easy-to-use, *candidate-centered* system. I wouldn't support it if it wasn't also party-proportional. But on the path to proportionality, STV lets voters prioritize what is most important to them.

## **What System Do I Hope You Adopt?**

Let's suppose you might surprise me and go with STV.

The question of how to implement multi-member ridings in large, sparsely populated areas is the obstacle I hear you wrestling with at ERRE meetings.

Participants of the BC Citizens Assembly told you that the citizens from northern ridings wanted to participate in small, multi-member ridings. Witnesses explained that in many of those ridings, populations are mainly clustered in a few places or along highways.

But I have seen your skepticism and I hear the voices, such as Mr. Kingsley's, saying that there may not be enough support in large rural ridings to turn them into multi-member ridings.

**I strongly suggest you consider implementing Rural-Urban Proportional Representation - specifically, STV+.**

Building on the basic structure of Mr. Kingsley's model, [STV+](#) means:

- STV in the cities
- Single members elected by ranked ballot in a flexible number of rural ridings, and
- A small top up layer of 15% compensatory MPs ("at large MPs") for every region.

The small number of top-up seats makes the results fully proportional and gives rural voters who did not elect a local candidate a choice of representatives, too (just like MMP).

Best runners up is the simplest way to elect the top-up seats and means one easy ranked ballot for all voters, rural and urban.

STV+ should be given a name which embodies concepts most PR supporters and most Canadians already have a positive association with. Words that communicate fairness (proportionality), moderation, and a local link. Words such as "proportional" and "mixed."

## **The Process of Developing Rural-Urban Proportional Representation**

It may *seem* to you like Fair Vote Canada is a narrow minded "special interest group."

Through my experience working with hundreds of volunteers over 8 years, I can tell you we are a very big tent with a large range of opinions, party affiliations, people who are experts in systems and those passionate about citizen engagement.

Our board is elected by STV and we function basically like a coalition government.

It took months of work - collaboration, compromise, and intense discussions between people with different passions and opinions - to prepare our submission to you. In the end, I am proud of what we produced, which was much better than what any one of us could have written alone.

Nowhere was this coalition-like process more pronounced and successful than in developing Rural-Urban PR. **This is a model that many people who strongly prefer either STV or MMP created together and are pleased to get behind.**

The basic idea comes with many design choices for your committee. It is a wonderful opportunity to take the positives of different systems and tailor PR to Canada.

### **Special Issues**

**Note:** The other important issue not listed here is the issue of representation of women with STV or MMP. I would strongly encourage you to read the brief submitted by Lenny Everson.

### **Simplicity**

"Canadians don't need a dumbed down electoral system" noted a woman at the ERRE mic in Yukon.

ERRE heard from the Electoral Commission in Scotland that their voters use four systems - FPTP, MMP, STV and List PR - *and they have no problem with any of them*. STV was introduced with one year between decision and implementation.

You heard from the top experts in Ireland that voters have no problem with PR-STV - reaffirmed with an 80% vote for STV in their 2013 Citizens Assembly - but they sometimes think the List PR systems used in the rest of Europe sound complicated :).

The Electoral Reform Society did a short [documentary](#) of the first STV election Scotland, from the perspective of parties and voters.

**Anything that you've never used seems more complicated than what you know now, until you use it.**

As soon as you use it - read the directions, push the button, and see how it works - it ceases to be complicated and starts to be normal.

The objective of ERRE isn't to create a system that everybody in Canada is going to feel familiar with before they even use it. It's to create a system that is FAIR.

### **Competition and Collaboration in Multi-Member Ridings**

With STV in an urban area, 2-3 candidates of the same party are on the ballot for the voters. See a sample ballot for a 4-member riding [here](#).

This was the third value of the BC Citizens' Assembly, based on what they heard from fellow voters: Voter Choice.

I wonder if some MPs are apprehensive about having to run "against" colleagues of the same party. They may worry the campaign will get nasty or disrupt party unity.

The important thing I really want to impress upon you is this:

**Because STV uses a preferential ballot the parties and their candidates use strategies to make the campaigns more collaborative and therefore maximize the number of seats each party will win in a district.**

I would encourage you to read "[Candidate Centered But Party Wrapped](#)" - a look at party and candidate campaigning with STV in Ireland.

First, candidates do most of their campaigning in the part of the riding where they live, and parties make sure to have candidates running from different parts of the riding.

Second, when you knock on a door, you are often saying "Please vote for me first, but consider voting for (colleague in same party) second." You are trying to get elected first and help your colleagues of the same party second, not trying to knock each other off!

With intra-party voter choice, [Ireland has one of the highest incumbency rates in the world](#). ***Local MPs who do a good job are directly re-elected by local voters.***

Even when the voters "kick the bums out" (change which parties form government) STV is nuanced enough that the best local MPs are more likely to survive the sweep.

The ranked ballot means you are also looking for second choice preferences of voters who prefer other parties or independents.

Unlike Alternative Vote, where second choices sound nice but really only matter in a handful of swing ridings, with STV they really matter everywhere.

## **Local Representation**

I am weary of hearing from academics that with multi-member ridings local representation will be "diluted" and this is one of the "trade-offs."

The BC Citizens' Assembly chose "Effective Local Representation" as their second of three top values.

They believed that having multiple MPs representing a local area - giving almost all voters an MP aligned with his/her values and a team of MPs attuned to local issues - would mean BETTER local representation.

I'd encourage you to read [this report](#) from Ireland about STV and the strong connection TD's have to their communities. For a real life example, watch this short but entertaining campaign [video](#) from a major party candidate in Ireland.

Of course, Canada's geography creates a different experience, just as MPs in Britain elected in single member constituencies have a different experience than you, but the value of local representation in both systems is the same.

Services like help with immigration, passports and various other MP constituency functions will now be shared. As former MP and MMP advocate Craig Scott recently testified about STV to ERRE, this kind of local service can be coordinated.

It will mean that MPs will need to accept that they are not the only MP for the riding. In a larger riding (like now) you cannot attend every event.

In the larger ridings (like now) you will have branch offices to make sure you are available to meet with constituents.

With STV, you will be just as important to your local constituents.

**From a voter centered perspective:** There is no loss of local services for the voter - they are almost guaranteed to be just as close to an MP's office - but they also get better legislative representation that diversity offers.

### **Familiarity Bias about Systems, Support for PR**

When polled about the *principle* of proportional representation - votes matching seats - over 15 years, Canadians have [always said YES](#), with usually about 20-30% opposed and 10% undecided:

2001, Ipsos-Reid: 64%

2002, Decima: 61%

2003, Centre for Research and Information on Canada: 71%

2004, Vector: 61%

2010, Environics: 61%

2012: Forum: 71% (of decided voters, missing complete data here)

2013, Environics: 70%

When you get into public polling and town hall events asking about *specific* systems, you are dealing with [familiarity bias](#) for first-past-the-post **AND** among proportional options.

At many of the public meetings outside of BC, you will hear many more supporters of PR mention MMP specifically than STV. Why? Is it because MMP is definitely a superior system?

No, it's *because that's the option they have heard of or know something about.*

PEI and Ontario had a referendum on MMP. Quebec and New Brunswick had commissions for MMP. We have had almost zero political or civil society leadership on other options.

The federal NDP - the major party to advocate PR and communicate information on PR up until now - has been communicating only about MMP specifically for years.

In its [national poll](#) on electoral system options last year, the Broadbent Institute did not even describe or ask people about STV. Instead they asked people about MMP and "pure proportional representation" - described as a national party list (no local representation, unconstitutional) - and 47% chose "pure PR" as their first or second choice!

There has been little leadership - **yet** - for options such as STV and or other "mixed systems" such as Rural-Urban PR which achieve the same results and values people want.

What you are consistently seeing in in polls, town halls, and testimony is **support for the principle of proportionality.**

### **Referendum and Mandate**

The last four referendums - the experience of campaigners, polling station officers, researchers, and regular people you might ask - has confirmed:

*Most Canadians are not going to take the time to study up on different voting systems - their specific mechanics, implications - to be able to compare and make an informed choice.*

I **strongly** encourage you to read these two research papers below about the role, influence and position of the media in Ontario - home of our largest newspapers. This is really important to understanding the **context** of electoral reform referendums:



[“Covering Democracy: The Coverage of FPTP vs MMP in the Ontario Referendum on Electoral Reform”](#)

["The Quiet Referendum: Why Electoral Reform Failed in Ontario."](#)

## **Conclusion**

Most of your parties campaigned on change. Three parties made a promise.

If parties representing a majority of voters can agree to a proportional system - which benefits all voters regardless of party - you have a genuine majority mandate to proceed. Jean-Pierre Kingsley and many other witnesses [agree](#) with this.

PR a key component of a healthier and more inclusive democracy. Evidence from [Lijphart and many other researchers](#) suggests that improved representation is strongly correlated with better policy outcomes. Researcher Salomon Orellana [gives us some insight](#) into why, *among other reasons*, this might be so.

All correlational evidence aside, the bottom line is:

**PR gives almost every voter a ballot that influences the election and creates results that closely reflect how people voted.**

Since the first all-party committee and promise to implement PR (STV) in [1923](#), it has always been “the right thing to do.”

You will never find the perfect system or the perfect process.

Faced with pressure within many of your own caucuses, it will *always* be easier to find a reason to duck out.

The key ingredient will always be political will.

There will never be a better time than now.

In May of 2015, we invited Canadians to write **personal, handwritten, snail-mailed** letters to Maryam Monsef, telling her why making every vote count was important to them.

I have removed the name, but **I wanted to share one such letter with you**. It touched me. It is from a gentleman I had never heard from before, or since. He arrived here from the Ukraine 18

years ago. [It speaks for itself.](#)