

# Electoral Reform:

## Key Federal Policy Recommendations

Researched and written by CFUW National Office & CFUW Leaside – East York and Etobicoke

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## About CFUW

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CFUW is a non-partisan, voluntary, self-funded organization with over 100 Clubs, located in every province across Canada. Since its founding in 1919, CFUW has been working to improve the status of women, and to promote human rights, public education, social justice, and peace. It holds special consultative status with the United Nations (ECOSOC) and belongs to the Education Committee of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO. CFUW is the largest affiliate of the Graduate Women International (GWI), which represents women worldwide.

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## Overview

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Canadians are not being represented by the current electoral process, which favours false majorities, strategic voting and wasted votes. CFUW implores the Government to seriously consider the arguments against plurality systems – including First Past the Post and Ranked Ballot. These systems leave Canadians unrepresented and disengaged from their electoral process. Numerous studies conducted over the past decade all conclude the same thing: we need to incorporate some form of proportionality into our electoral process. CFUW is a strong supporter of implementing a new electoral process based in Proportional Representation (PR). This could take many forms, as other countries have adapted systems of PR to fit their specific country needs. We urge you to consider the strong arguments listed below in support of PR.

# CFUW: Electoral Reform

## **Electoral Reform: Changing the First Past the Post Electoral System to Proportional Representation in Canada**

Prepared by: CFUW Leaside – East York and CFUW Etobicoke

RESOLVED, That the Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW) urge the Government of Canada to reform the electoral system by adopting a proportional representation (PR) model to ensure that each party's share of the seats in Parliament reflects the popular vote.

RESOLVED, That CFUW call upon the Government of Canada to proceed with a process for selecting and implementing a PR model that is transparent, adequately resourced, and involves, but is not limited to:

1. Consultation with electoral reform experts;
2. Public consultations and ongoing dialogue with citizens;
3. Public education throughout the process, during implementation and post implementation;
4. An unbiased and transparent review of the new electoral system after elections take place under the new system.

## CFUW's Commitment to Democracy

CFUW is an organization of engaged, active citizens who care about Canadian democracy. We have long been advocating for improvements to the electoral system to make it more accessible, transparent and fair. In 2014, we passed new policy called Fair Elections for Canada. This policy reinforces the authority of Elections Canada, requires parties to declare and account for all funds received, enforces limits on donations and restores the per-vote annual democratic basic funding system, which was removed under the last government.

Our members strongly believe in the importance of voting at every level. Our clubs across Canada initiate, engage in and promote activities to educate Canadians about the democratic process. Several of our clubs have spearheaded incredibly successful Get out the Vote campaigns, which have increased education and voter turnout in their respective constituencies.

## Why Plurality Systems Don't Work

### **Winner Takes All and Wasted Votes**

In our First-Past-The-Post system, not every vote results in representation. Across Canada, politicians who do not win the majority of the vote in their constituency are elected to office, and the votes cast for other candidates come to nothing. In FPTP systems, regional

parties and large parties with geographically concentrated support are over-represented, while smaller parties and parties with more diffuse support are under-represented.

Wasted votes are votes that result in no representation. In Canadian elections there are often four or five parties competing in every constituency. Whichever party wins the most votes in that constituency – not the majority of votes, just more votes than the other parties – has its candidate elected. Every vote cast for any other party – even if they won 30 or 40% of the votes – results in zero representation.

The Simon Fraser University Canadian Elections website has a detailed analysis of the 2011 federal election in which voter turnout was 61.1%.<sup>i</sup> With 3.7% of the votes, the Green Party won only 1 seat - or 0.3%.<sup>ii</sup> In Ontario, with an almost identical percentage of votes as the Liberal party, the NDP party gained twice as many seats, but in Saskatchewan, where they gained almost a third of the votes, not one seat was won.<sup>iii</sup> The Conservative Party formed a majority government with 39.6% of the votes.<sup>iv</sup> It is clear that votes cast in this system are not translated into representation.

In the seven Canadian federal elections between 1980 and 2004, just over 49% of the votes were wasted.<sup>v</sup> Fair Vote Canada compares Canada (50% wasted votes in 2004) to countries using PR systems: New Zealand (1% wasted, 2005), Germany (4% wasted, 2005) and Scotland (6% wasted, 2003).<sup>vi</sup> In Proportional Representation systems, votes cast are faithfully translated into seats won. All opinions are heard and represented in the legislature, and there are no “bonus seats” for larger parties or parties with regional monopolies.

As a result of the “winner-takes all” structure, our FPTP system continues to produce false majority governments. The two most recent federal elections have produced majority governments who have won less than even 40% of the popular vote. This is highly undemocratic.

## **Decrease in Voter Turnout**

An important part of any democratic system is how citizens perceive their ability to impact power and decision making through the electoral process. In First-Past-the-Post systems, voter satisfaction is markedly low. When people feel that their votes have little impact, they don't vote. There has been a dramatic decrease in voter turnout for Canadian federal elections: from as high as 80% in the 1950s and 60s, to 60% in 2008 and 2011.<sup>vii</sup> The winner-takes-all structure provides incentive for voters to cast their votes strategically, which can cause disillusionment with the process. This is the same in First Past the Post and Ranked Ballot systems. International studies demonstrate that citizen participation and satisfaction are significantly higher in countries with PR systems, whether citizens voted for the winning party or not.<sup>viii</sup>

## **Representation of Women and Minorities**

In plurality systems, women and minorities are less likely to be on the ballot. It is not because they are not electable. It is because in nomination processes parties have historically favoured white male candidates as the best choice for the “winner takes all” competition.<sup>ix</sup> White

men are often considered to be a more “acceptable” candidate, and thus there is a disincentive to choose women to run. Despite the fact that women are in fact the majority in almost every country in the world, they see abysmal representation in their governments. The current government continues to have a false majority having received 39.5% of the popular vote, similar to the 39.6% received by the majority government in 2011. Although women may be well represented in cabinet, only 26% of seats are held by women.

In PR systems Indigenous peoples, minority groups and women have a greater chance of being included through party lists of multi-member districts. In fact, party lists can be “zippered”, alternating men and women. Lists give parties incentive to include candidates who appeal to a cross section of the electorate. Parties can also develop quotas for women candidates.

WHEN ONE COMPARES THE THREE REMAINING MAJOR WESTERN DEMOCRACIES USING FPTP SYSTEMS WITH MAJOR WESTERN DEMOCRACIES USING VARIOUS FORMS OF PR, THE ADVANTAGE FOR FEMALE REPRESENTATION IS CLEAR.

Every country below using a system of Proportional Representation has surpassed the UN minimum recommendation for 30% female members of parliament, most exceeding it by 5-7%.<sup>x</sup> In the countries using First Past the Post, none reach the 30% mark.

<b>Electoral System</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Percentage of Women in Parliament</b>
First Past the Post	Canada	26.04%
	United Kingdom	29.38%
	United States	19.35%
Proportional Representation	Sweden	43.55%
	Norway	39.64%
	Denmark	37.43%
	Finland	41.50%
	Netherlands	37.33%
	Spain	40%
	Germany	36.45%
	Iceland	41.27%

## Moving to PR: Questions and Concerns

### **Government Stability**

In PR systems, because of the direct translation of votes into seats, more coalition governments are elected. While governing terms are often shorter, there is no evidence that governing itself is less effective or that the economy is adversely impacted. In fact we believe that coalition governments embody the true spirit of democracy: a plethora of voices negotiating for the best outcome for citizens.

## **Party Proliferation**

Most governments that use a system of proportional representation require 5% of voter support before a party gains status and seats.<sup>xi</sup> This common rule would prevent party proliferation in Canada. Further, history shows that switching to proportional representation only marginally increases the number of parties that win seats.<sup>xii</sup> Voters have common sense, and generally only want to support parties that have the potential to gain seats or grow. The fear that too many parties will win seats is unfounded.

## **Never-Ending Coalition Governments**

In our current system of First Past the Post, every party is essentially already a coalition within itself. We see the factions of these coalitions negotiate during leadership races and conventions, but rarely during elections. When elections are proportional, this coalition-building becomes much more visible to the Canadian public. It is in fact a much more democratic way of conducting politics, when interests are publically represented and negotiated.

## **Moving Forward**

### **Canadians Want Change**

Fourteen years of public opinion polls show majority support for proportional representation.<sup>xiii</sup> There have been ten commissions and assemblies on electoral reform in Canada.<sup>xiv</sup> Every single one has come to the same conclusion: proportionality must be a component of our electoral system.<sup>xv</sup>

This brief has highlighted the great pitfalls of our winner-takes-all First Past the Post system, which neither serves nor represents Canadians. Other plurality majority systems, such as ranked ballots, fail to overcome the shortcomings of the First Past the Post system.

Among the benefits of a system of Proportional Representation are higher satisfaction among citizens. In PR systems voters are more satisfied with the effectiveness of the process, and thus are more engaged and more likely to vote. In a system of PR we have a greater opportunity to represent the faces that make up the Canadian mosaic by electing more women, indigenous peoples and minorities. Lastly and more importantly, a system of proportional representation is the right and fair thing to do. In systems of proportional representation, it is guaranteed that election results accurately reflect the casting of ballots. If we truly believe in democracy, we must incorporate proportional representation into our electoral system.

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- <sup>i</sup> Heard, Andrew. "2011 Canadian Election Results." *2011 Canadian Election Results*. Simon Fraser University, n.d. Web.
- <sup>ii</sup> *ibid*
- <sup>iii</sup> *ibid*
- <sup>iv</sup> *ibid*
- <sup>v</sup> Fair Vote Canada. (2006). *Dubious Democracy: Report on Federal Elections in Canada from 1980-2004*. Retrieved from <http://www.fairvote.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Dubious-Democracy-Federal.pdf>. Page 4.
- <sup>vi</sup> Fair Vote Canada. (2013). *This is Democracy? Why Canadians Need a Fair and Proportional Voting System*. Retrieved from <http://www.fairvote.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/FVC-Tabloid.pdf>
- <sup>vii</sup> "Voter Turnout at Federal Elections and Referendums." Elections Canada. Elections Canada, 2011. Web.
- <sup>viii</sup> Lijphart, A. (2012). *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in 36 Countries*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: Yale University Press.
- <sup>ix</sup> Pilon, D. (2007). *The Politics of Voting: Reforming Canada's Electoral System*. Toronto: Emond Montgomery Publications.
- <sup>x</sup> Percentages from the Inter Parliamentary Union as of April 1, 2016. <http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/parlinesearch.asp>
- <sup>xi</sup> Hoff, Margaret. "Proportional Representation Needs Review." The London Free Press. London Free Press, 10 Apr. 2010. Web.
- <sup>xii</sup> "Fair Vote Campaign 2015." Fair Vote Campaign 2015. Fair Vote Canada, 2015. Web.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Carmichael, Kelly. "The Straw-man Case against Proportional Representation." The Strawman Case against Proportional Representation Comments. IPolitics, 23 Feb. 2015. Web.
- <sup>xiv</sup> *ibid*
- <sup>xv</sup> *ibid*