

# Submission regarding Proportional Representation vs FPTP Voting Systems

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## Executive Summary and Recommendation

According to various studies and academic research, PR systematically outperforms winner-take-all systems on a wide range of measures, including:

- higher quality of democratic life,
- prudent fiscal management,
- higher economic growth,
- better environmental management,
- reduced income inequality,
- higher levels of human development,
- greater tolerance of diversity,
- more reformative law enforcement,
- greater respect for privacy, and
- lower levels of conflict and militarism.

Therefore, Rebuilding Our Democratic Canada urges you to support a Made In Canada form of Proportional Representation, as a way of ensuring that all votes count and more representative election results.

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Rebuilding Our Democratic Canada is a grassroots organization devoted to defending and rebuilding democracy in Canada.

We are interested in the impact of the electoral system on policy choices made by governments, on measures of democracy, quality of life, income equality, environmental protection and fiscal policy.

There are two basic types, or families, of voting systems:

1) **Winner-take-all** or "majoritarian" systems include, among others, the First Past the Post and Alternative Vote systems. All winner-take-all systems result in a high percentage of "wasted" votes, distorted results in which the seats earned do not reflect the popular vote, suppression of minority viewpoints, legislatures which do not accurately reflect the diversity of the country and adversarial politics.

2) **Proportional Representation.** PR systems include Party List systems and also Mixed Member Proportional and Single Transferable Vote systems. PR tends to produce legislatures which better reflect the full range of citizens' views, including ethnic and gender diversity.

Research on the impact of winner-take-all systems vs PR systems covers a wide range of indicators. PR gives a more equal value (real and perceived) to every vote and is likely to lead to increased government accountability and greater voter satisfaction.

Winner-take-all systems create political instability and the phenomenon of "policy lurch" when one majority government is defeated by another at the other end of the political spectrum. It encourages political parties to favour short-term advantage rather than long-term policy issues. The elimination of these tendencies yields increased attention to the long view and greater policy coherence over time.

Salomon Orellana (1) argues that increased opportunities for diversity and dissent allow PR countries to outperform by:

- increasing policy innovation,
- mitigating the pandering of politicians to voters by promising quick-fix solutions,
- increasing the political sophistication of the electorate, and
- limiting elite control over decision making.

### **Measures of Democracy**

Arend Lijphart, compared 36 democracies over 55 years (2) : PR countries outperformed majoritarian ones on 16 out of 17 measures of sound government and decision making, including quality and independence of the public service, quality of policy making, rule of law, and the level and control of corruption.

Lijphart found that with PR, voter turnout was higher by 7.5 percentage points. Government policies were closer to the view of the median voter and citizens were more satisfied with their countries' democratic institutions.

There was a small increase in the number of parties in Parliament. The share of women elected to legislators was 8% higher and scores were higher for political participation and civil liberties.

### **Stability and Policy Perspective**

Regarding political instability, Pilon (3) discusses the cases of Italy and Israel in particular, which have forms of PR but are seen as politically unstable. In his view, the experience of stable countries like Germany and New Zealand would be more relevant in assessing the potential impact of PR in Canada, and neither country has faced the sorts of problems encountered by Italy and Israel.

Using the number of elections between 1945 and 1998, Pilon calculates that countries using FPTP averaged 16.7 elections, while countries using PR averaged only 16.0 elections. He concludes that instability is “not a problem for PR systems in western countries”.

With FPTP there is still the problem of “policy lurch” as countries shift from one majority government to another with focus on short term issues at the expense of long term stability.

### **Economic Performance and Fiscal Responsibility**

Carey and Hix (4) found that countries with PR were more fiscally responsible and more likely to enjoy fiscal surpluses. Orellana found that PR yields higher surpluses or lower deficits and lower levels of national debt. The predicted national debt is 65.7 percent higher in majoritarian countries vs PR.

Knutsen (5) looked at 107 countries from 1820 to 2002, and found that proportional and semi-proportional systems produced an “astonishingly robust” and “quite substantial” increase in economic growth: a 1% increase !

### **Environmental Stewardship**

Frederiksson (6) found that PR countries set stricter environmental policies and Lijphart and Orellana found that countries with PR scored six points higher on the Yale Environmental Performance Index, which measures ten policy areas, including environmental health, air quality, resource management, biodiversity and habitat, forestry, fisheries, agriculture and climate change.

Orellana (1) found that between 1990 and 2007, the increase in carbon emissions was significantly lower in countries with fully proportional systems, at 9.5%, compared to 45.5% in countries using winner-take-all systems.

Orellana (1) found that citizens in with PR were more supportive of environmental action and more willing to pay the costs associated with environmental protection. He found the use of renewable energy to be approximately 117 percent higher in countries with PR.

### **Income Inequality**

Lijphart (2) found that PR countries had considerably lower levels of income inequality. Birchfield and Crepaz (7) found that “consensual political institutions (PR) tend to reduce income inequalities – while majoritarian institutions have the opposite effect”.

The authors explain, "The more widespread the access to political institutions, and the more representative the political system, the more citizens will take part in the political process to change it in their favour, which will manifest itself, among other things, in lower income inequality. Such consensual political institutions make the government more responsive to the demands of a wider range of citizens."

## **Human Development**

Carey and Hix (4) looked at 610 elections over 60 years in 81 countries and found that PR countries garnered higher scores on the United Nations Index of Human Development, which incorporates health, education and standard of living indicators. Lijphart (2) found that countries with PR spent an average of 4.75% more on social expenditures.

## **Prejudice, Tolerance and Changing Attitudes**

Orellana (1) found that citizens in PR countries tend to have higher levels of tolerance for homosexuality, abortion, divorce, euthanasia and prostitution; and a higher level of disagreement with the notion that men make better leaders.

## **Law Enforcement and Defence**

Orellana (1) and Lijphart (2) have found that countries with less proportional systems tend to have more public support for punitive solutions to crime and produce more punitive policy outcomes including higher incarceration rates and greater use of capital punishment.

Orellana (1) found that the predicted level of military spending for countries with majoritarian systems was more than twice as high as for countries with PR (2.6% vs. 1.1% of GDP).

Leblang and Chan (8) found that a country's electoral system is the most important predictor of a country's involvement in war, according to three different measures: (1) when a country was the first to enter a war; (2) when it joined a multinational coalition in an ongoing war; and (3) how long it stayed in a war after becoming a party to it.

## **Is perfect proportionality needed in order to have an impact?**

This is a relevant issue for a country such as Canada, which is considering options such as Mixed Member Proportional or other regionally-based options that are highly, but not fully proportional.

Carey and Hix (4) found that moderately proportional systems involving multi-member districts of six to eight seats made it possible to avoid disproportional results to a degree almost matching that of more purely proportional systems.

## **Conclusion**

The existing body of comparative research is very clear regarding the favourable impact of PR on countries. Canada's democracy needs a reboot. A Made-in-Canada Proportional Representation system is an essential next step.

## References

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