

## Submission to the House of Commons Special Committee on Electoral Reform

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The Committee has an important task and must ensure that their work succeeds in being implemented in the next election. An overly-detailed recommendation may well fail if it is too complicated and too radical a change. The recommendations must be clear, easy to understand, easy to explain and implement. It should also be complete and detailed, so as to avoid major alteration by the rest of Parliament. A reformed voting process that attempts to solve too many problems at the same time may well be unacceptable to a large portion of voters. Voters are used to finding out the result of the election shortly after polls close. A system where the counting of votes is drawn out and complicated is inadvisable. Experiences from other countries, often mentioned, are not necessarily transferable to Canada, considering our size, the cultural and economic differences and diversity across the country.

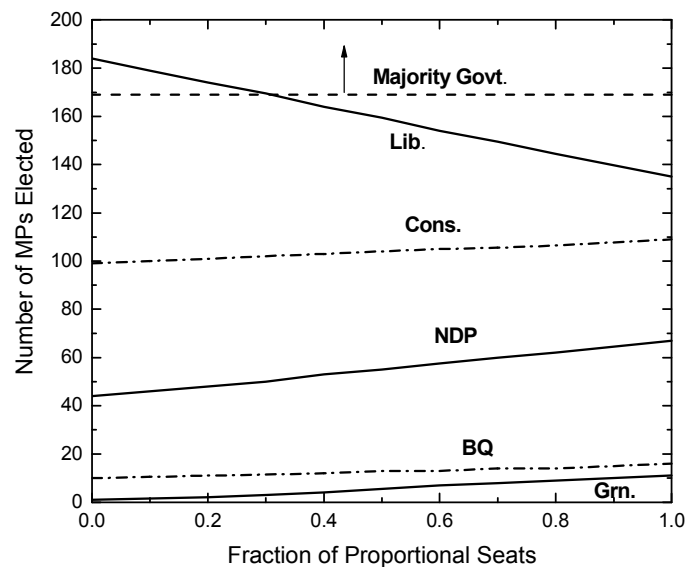
Many submissions have already dealt with the present FPTP voting system (F) and various methods of Proportional Voting (PV). However, some additional comments can be made. The present system has, over the years, often produced effective governments. However a government (with a majority of seats but minority of voter support) can easily undermine faith in the political system when it ignores, does not respect or even fails to consider other views. The previous government did not seem to respect differing opinions, even within its own party. One result is polarization and lack of civility. Many voters can now hear only what they want to hear through the electronic media - division and polarization will only get worse.

Most of the PV suggestions have some merit but there is the potential issue of creating small parties with a particular axe to grind which could almost blackmail a minority government to implement some of their ideas. One only has to look at Israel with its PV system to see how this can occur. Implementing a PV system so that there is local representation inevitably leads to a complicated system of counting and, possibly, voting. Since PV has not been adopted in any Municipal, Territorial or Provincial jurisdiction, convincing voters to accept such a dramatic change in voting at the Federal level is unlikely.

Most voters are not engaged in the current process and too dramatic a change may not even get the support of most politicians, never mind the electorate. The aim is to have a voting system which addresses the issues given to the Committee and yet has an excellent chance of being adopted. There is no perfect way to change the present system and any proposal will have its critics and detractors.

**Proposal.** What is proposed is similar to some other suggestions. It is recommended that a hybrid voting system be adopted – one that is easy to understand and implement. A portion of the seats would be assigned to a proportional pool, with the rest using the current system. Voters would vote in enlarged ridings for both a local member and a party. This preserves local representation but reduces magnifying effects inherent in the current system. Small parties can still gain a voice and those not voting for the 2 major parties will not feel under-represented. Counting the votes would be little different from the current system and the results of an election would not be delayed.

*Simulation* Using the results from the 2015 election, a simulation is shown in the figure below where a portion of the seats are put into a PV pool, and divided up according to the voting percentages for each party, and the other seats, determined by F voting, are split according to the voted seat distribution of the election. By varying the fraction of the total seats assigned to the proportional part, the simulation shows how the final results would have changed between the pure F and the pure PV cases. Increasing the fraction reduces the distortion inherent in the present system. Majority governments would not result when the most popular party has ~40% of the votes, unless the fraction of PV seats was low. Increasing the fraction beyond 0.5 would lead to ridings of 200,000 or more which is undesirable. The proposed fraction is 0.4 (40%).



This simulation is overly simple, e.g. it does not account for strategic voting - this is difficult to include, not knowing exactly how common it was. If strategic voting could be simulated it is likely that the number of Liberal seats would be reduced and the NDP seats increased, without much change in the Conservative results. The hybrid system should reduce strategic voting, but not entirely.

*Implementation.* If adopted, the hybrid system would require modifications of the basic idea. Ridings would have to be enlarged to create the PV pool. This is unrealistic for the vast rural ridings in the North and in other sparsely-populated areas. (ref.: J-P Kingsley). To avoid this ~ 28 ridings could be excluded from the enlarging process. Voters in such ridings would just vote as they do now. The remaining 310 seats would be split. This process would not make voters any less important than they are now. PEI would be a challenge as they would lose at least 1 MP but could still be assigned one from the pool.

Each party would create a list for their pool, containing any number of candidates. (It would have to be made public and presented weeks before an election.) The percentage of the popular vote would determine how many PV MPs each party gets. It is recommended that there be a 2-3% threshold for the pool. Since each party would create and order their lists of potential MPs, openness and clarity in the process is essential. To help, those candidates in the F ridings should also be permitted to be in the pool – if elected they would be removed from the PV list. If the

proposed system was introduced, a number of sitting MPs would lose their seats in the next election, having lost a nomination vote. Sitting MPs should be included in the party lists if they wish. Allowing riding candidates to appear on party lists could help preserve experience and diversity in Parliament. Micromanaging party lists could be un-productive. One important recommendation here is that each party list their potential MPs in the order male/female from top to bottom - this should help with gender balance. What about regional representation in the PV seats? A simple solution is to subdivide both the pool and the lists into 4 regions - the West (North, Manitoba and beyond), Ontario, Quebec and the Atlantic provinces. The lists and pools would have different sizes, proportional to the populations in each region.

*Election Financing* One consequence of introducing this proposal is that it would demand significant changes in how elections were financed. This will not be discussed here. However, the per-vote subsidy should be re-instated.

*By-elections* If the vacant seat was from a normal (F) riding there would be no problem, but if it was a PV seat, where would a by-election occur? A simple solution would be to replace the MP with the next person, if available, on the appropriate list. Seeing that only a few (~6) MPs resign in any year we would only be dealing with a couple of MPs.

*Voting day* Most people vote on the single voting day, and a good number in advanced polls. Here it is recommended that voting be on 2 consecutive days, preferably Sunday and Monday. This would make voting more convenient for those working on weekdays and would help improve voter turnout. Mandatory voting is appealing - how would elections Canada enforce it? It is not recommended here. Elections Canada should have increased funding and instructed to target those groups which are less likely to vote, not inhibited from doing so.

*Electronic Voting* This is inevitable but creates problems for Elections Canada, for instance: security, verifiability and anonymity. If a voter completes a paper ballot and a minute later, outside the polling station, attempts to make an electronic vote, how do you prevent this? How do the people in the polling station determine whether a voter has already cast an electronic vote? The voters' lists would need to be updated in real time. This could be helped by cutting off electronic voting before voting day.

*Other issues* Should the final recommendation, having been approved by Parliament, be subject to a national referendum? This is not easy to answer. If the proposed changes are clear and easy to understand then change may be approved in a referendum. However, if the voter turnout in such a referendum is less than 60% and only 50% approve – its legitimacy will be questioned.

After 2 elections or 10 years, aspects of the hybrid system should be re-examined, since there will always be unintended consequences of the changes. For instance, the fraction of proportional seats could be altered.