

Proportional Representation: Not Such a Great Idea

The democratic system is based on a delicate balance between expression of the majority's wishes and respect for minority rights. Ideally, in a representative democracy, the elected representatives of the people should represent the people's wishes as faithfully as possible. That is why many believe a proportional voting system to be more democratic than our current system. However, in a country as vast and diverse as Canada, local interests often contradict the general interest. To function, we constantly have to compromise and the current system fosters this approach.

In practice, proportional representation leads to perverse effects.

All societies have radical elements who believe that there are simple, straightforward answers to the problems that worry them. These people form a good part of the militant ground roots of political parties. Unlike most citizens, they are willing to spend time and money to support a cause they believe to be important. In the current system, people with a radical discourse soon face a choice: agree to compromise in order to obtain power or maintain their ideas and, at best, have only a few elected representatives. A proportional system will inevitably give them the balance of power. They will impose radical ideas on the major parties, which will no longer be able to govern without their support. Thus, radical and minority ideas will be imposed on the majority. In the end, the main parties may implode into a multitude of smaller parties that will promote ideas that are both radical and supported only by a minority. The biggest loser will be the average citizen, whose position will be less and less represented in the political discourse.

Proportional representation will erode another foundation of a system that has served us well: the direct choice of a local representative. Proportional representation means that the parties will draw up lists of candidates and only the first will have a chance of being elected. This system will foster the maintenance of longstanding radical elements in the parties, which will paralyze political debate.

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