

**Submission to accompany Committee appearance:**

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Place: Victoria, BC

**Special Committee on Electoral Reform**

**Comité spécial sur la réforme électorale**

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# STV

## More than just proportionality

As a former member of the **BC Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform**, I remember listening to a presenter during one of our public hearings.

He said:

***"Everyone can't win an election. Someone wins and someone loses. That's how it works."***

**Old Style Democracy:** The point of FPTP and MMP constituency elections is to find a single representative for all the voters in one geographic area, even if the MP doesn't represent the point of view of 40% to 70% of the voters.

**STV Democracy:** The point of STV is to make sure that:

**Every voter has an equal say in the laws and policies which affect them.**

This requires that all voters have an MP of their choosing and every MP represents about the same number of voters.

All voters win, not just those who vote for the plurality winner.

***Democracy can, and should be, for all of us equally.***

## Why STV for Canada?

### ***STV already has Voter Legitimacy***

- The **BC Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform** has been the most extensive examination of electoral systems, by voters, in the history of Canada.
- 160 randomly chosen voters spent 11 months studying electoral systems, consulting with voters through 50 public hearings, 383 presentations and 1603 written submissions, and deliberating about which electoral system best fulfils our shared values and principles.
- To decide between STV and MMP, the Assembly designed the best STV and MMP systems we could imagine. We then voted.
- STV got 80% and MMP got 20%.
- We then put STV up against FPTP.
- STV won with 93% support. **A very strong consensus.**
- 97% of Assembly members choose to recommend STV to our fellow voters.
- In the BC Referendum, STV got 57.7% support overall and over 50% in 77 of 79 districts.
- 57.7% was deemed a failure because midway through the Assembly process, the BC Legislature imposed a double 60% threshold, instead of the expected 50%.

### ***STV is probably the only Charter compliant electoral system.***

- The BC Assembly didn't directly consider the Charter in it's deliberations. However, it's interesting that many of the values held by the Assembly are expressed in the Charter.
- **Section 3 – Democratic Rights of Citizens**, as interpreted by Justice Beverley McLachlin in a 1991 Supreme Court Reference, seems to prohibit single-member districts.
- Firstly, McLachlin states:  
***"Ours is a representative democracy. Each citizen is entitled to be represented in government. Representation comprehends the idea of having a voice in the deliberations of government."***
- In the last 2015 First Past the Post election, 51.7% of voters didn't vote for the winning candidate. These

9,095,616 voters have been excluded from our democracy by our current electoral system.

- They simply don't have any say in the laws and policies which affect them. They are not “represented in government”. (See Chart 1)

- Conclusion #1:

**In order to represent multiple points of view in a district, there needs to be multiple MPs.**

- Secondly, McLachlin goes on to say:

***" A system which dilutes one citizen's vote unduly as compared with another citizen's vote runs the risk of providing inadequate representation to the citizen whose vote is diluted."***

- In any two single-member districts of the same size, a candidate can be elected with a 30% or a 70% plurality. This results in MPs who represent vastly different numbers of voters with their single voice and single vote in Parliament. (See Table 1)
- This results in some voters having more than twice the Legislative Power of other voters.
- This is clearly, "A system which dilutes one citizen's vote unduly as compared with another citizen's vote."

- Conclusion #2:

**To ensure “relative parity of voting power,” the electoral system must elect MPs (within the same province) with approximately the same number of votes.**

- Justice McLachlin also observed:

***"the Canadian tradition [is] one of evolutionary democracy moving in uneven steps toward the goal of universal suffrage and more effective representation."***

- Section 15 – Equality Rights, states:

***"Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability."***

- When choosing an electoral system, are there any reasons to treat voters unequally?

## Why the BC Citizens' Assembly Chose STV

***STV is an amazing democratic innovation.***

- The BC Assembly chose the best system it could find, not just the easiest to sell.

***STV reduces Exclusion and “False Representation”.***

- On average, in FPTP & MMP, about 50% of the voters in a local district don't vote for the winning candidate. This results in constituency representatives that falsely represent half their voters.
- This means that only half of the people in every single-member district are actually getting any representation at all, let alone “Local Representation”.
- STV, by providing local proportionality and MPs who are each elected by the same number of voters, results in much less false representation and a significant increase in the number of voters who are actually represented in the way they would choose.

***Enhanced Local Representation***

- Multi-member districts make local proportionality possible. This ensures that several points of view will be represented from each district to Parliament. This is especially important in remote areas which aren't very well understood in other parts of the country.
- Even in large rural districts, adding three districts together makes it possible to add a significant component of local proportionality and dramatically reduce false representation.
- The effectiveness of local representation increases everywhere with STV, including sparsely populated rural districts.

***Communities have more than one point of view; they need more than one MP.***

- As a group, your local MPs will form a (formal or informal) “Local Caucus”, taking a basket of ideas from your district to Parliament.

- Communities are built by all of its members. To be successful, all of these ideas need to be expressed and heard, so that the policy that helps build and protect the entire community is chosen, rather than the policy that only serves a plurality of the voters.
- This caucus will be able to forcefully represent local interests in both government and opposition.

### ***Local, Multi-Party Caucuses can take a united stand on important local issues.***

- MPs from different parties, but from the same district, might come together and take a united stand on issues that are important to the local area; for instance, the closing of a hospital.

### ***No more disappearing MPs.***

- During their term of office, it won't be possible for your MP to just take off to Ottawa and re-appear, back in your riding in four years, for the next election.
- When one MP goes back to the district to discuss issues in the local papers, or in public forums, the other MPs will have to scurry back to the district to get their faces in front of the voters. They are going to be discussing local issues. What they learn, they will take back to Ottawa.
- Sometime, they'll be cooperating on issues that are important to everyone in the district, sometimes not. But there will be a continuing discussion about local issues, something that doesn't happen now.
- With Single-Member Districts (FPTP & MMP): There's very little discussion during the term of office because there's only one local MP. With MMP, the regional MPs will be spending time where it counts for them, with the party power brokers, not with the voters.
- With Multi-Member Districts (STV): MPs are going to be in your neighbourhood, discussing issues, because of competition between MPs in between elections; not just in the few weeks before the election.

### ***Getting things done with your MP.***

- If voters have a particular issue that needs to be addressed, there will usually be an MP from the government and MPs from opposition parties that they can go to. They can make their case to both sets of MPs.

- With STV, voters will almost always be able to find an MP who has a sympathetic ear, to address their concerns.

### ***Independents have a real chance to get elected.***

- In Ireland, almost 8% of their TDs are independents.
- Well known local people can get elected, especially with "next preferences". Extremist candidates will have difficulty getting elected because of the need for next preferences, which they're unlikely to get.
- This provides a practical way for MPs to dissent from their party's policies and not commit political suicide at the same time. They will be able to leave their party and still get elected as an independent in the next election.

### ***STV Counting System***

- The STV counting system tries its best to make sure your highest preferences get elected.
- STV doesn't just look at your ballot, throw it in a pile and then forget about you.
- Almost all voters in Canada would get representation they find acceptable in Parliament.
- After stacking all the ballots up with the first preferences, the counting system picks up your ballot and ask how you would like to proceed.
- If your candidate has received more votes than she needs, the counting system uses only the amount of your vote needed to elect your candidate, freeing up a portion of your vote to help elect subsequent preferences. In this way, your vote is not wasted and you don't have to vote strategically.
- If your first choice doesn't stand a chance of winning, the counting system will ask who your next preference is, and your vote will be transferred to that candidate.
- This counting process continues until all the seats are filled and the most preferred candidates in the district are elected.
- Because STV electoral districts have multiple-members, even if your ballot gets stuck on a candidate who can't get elected, it's reasonable to assume that you will have an MP available to

represent you from a party that reflects your point of view, and that you can support.

- The STV counting system is more involved than that of FPTP's. However, the added care and attention given to your ballot is worth the extra algebra that a computer handles so easily.

### ***Strategic Voting – Not needed.***

- The best strategy for an STV voter, is to vote honestly, because strategic voting doesn't work in STV.
- There is no strategic voting except to vote for your first preference first, your second preference next and not actually voting for someone who you don't want to get elected.
- Strategic voting with FPTP and MMP is difficult and prone to errors because it requires you to know how your neighbours are going to vote, in advance.

### ***There will be more female candidates and a greater diversity of candidates.***

- With STV, political parties can't do the same thing that happens in single-member districts right now, where they put up the most likely person they think will win; who too often happens to look like a middle aged white guy. They're going to have to put up more people from diverse backgrounds and more women, or they will lose votes.
- Multi-member districts make it possible for political parties to adopt voluntary quotas, or for Parliament to require a quota.
- Unlike MMP, STV reduces systematic discrimination against women and others, in all districts, for all candidates.
- Female candidates won't be stuck in districts in which they don't stand a chance of winning. They'll be running in all districts, where they actually can get elected, without the need for closed, zippered lists.

### ***STV doesn't discriminate like FPTP & MMP against women and others who want to become constituency or government MPs.***

- Because MMP systems retain the single-member constituency districts, they also retain the discrimination that single-member districts create.

Most government members come from MMP constituency seats. This combination hurts women. The women MMP adds will likely end up in opposition.

- In STV's multi-member districts, the major parties will have the greatest requirement to provide diversity in each district. They will also be the most likely to form government. This helps women to get into government and into Cabinet.

### ***Under STV, all MPs are the same type.***

- All STV MPs from each province will represent essentially the same number of voters. All STV MPs are elected using the same electoral system. All STV MPs are equal.

### ***STV creates the possibility of different kinds of constituencies.***

- Right now, constituencies are just geographic. With STV, there can be different types of constituencies. They might relate to the environment, the arts, health care, cultural relations, social or business issues.
- If women's representation is important to a voter, they can select all women, from different parties, or even zipper their own vote.
- Instead of portraying yourself as a one dimensional, right-wing or left-wing person to the voting system, voters can portray themselves in a multi-dimensional way.
- For instance, a person might portray himself, or herself, as fiscally conservative first, an environmentalist second, socially progressive third, and a health care advocate fourth. These preferences can either be with one party, or across party lines.
- This multi-dimensional sketch of who you are will be put on your ballot and then counted. The counting system will take this into account when it counts your ballot.

### ***"Next Preference Votes" are important and will be sought out by most candidates.***

- This means that there will be a tendency to avoid attack ads and confrontational election campaigns which will turn off voters whose second preferences a

candidate needs. Candidates will have to rely on issues more than smear tactics.

- Extremist candidates, who cannot gain second preferences, will find it more difficult to get elected.

### ***More stable investment climate.***

- With reduced severity of policy swings, home grown and external investors will have less risk and will be more willing to invest in Canada. Unpredictable changes of business, labour, resource, and manufacturing regulations scare away investment.
- When a government uses incentives to attract investment and then those programs are discontinued by the next government, jobs leave the country.

### ***Accountability***

- The only mechanism a voter has to “hold their MP to account” is to withhold their vote in the next election.
- This mechanism is only available to 50% of voters under FPTP and MMP local elections.
- With STV, accountability is available to many more voters, because almost most voters will have elected someone with their vote.

### ***Absolute power corrupts absolutely.***

- Because the Prime Minister will have to reach across party lines for support, and there will often be more than one party represented in Cabinet, it will be less likely that ill considered ideas that pop into the Prime Minister's head will actually see the light of day.
- There will be someone else in the room to add balance to the decision making process.
- Through coalition governments and increased MP accountability, STV will tend to reduce the power of the Prime Minister's Office and the political parties in determining what government and party policy will be.
- This power to influence policy will tend to devolve to MPs and to Parliament, where increased levels of discussion and deliberation can lead to better policy development.

### ***Parties will retain strength to provide structure to political system.***

- Political parties will still remain strong, continuing to provide a useful structure to our political system and culture. However, they will have to be more in touch with the voters.
- Political parties will lose some power, especially around the final candidate selection process, but even this will allow the parties to clear out the dead wood, with help from the voters. This will actually help the parties.
- If a party is to remain dynamic and relevant, and in power, it will need to change with the times. Unfortunately, it may be difficult, within a party, to get rid of powerful people who are holding the party back. The voters can help the parties in this rejuvenation processes.
- More dynamic political parties will lead to a nimbler policy development process, which is important in a rapidly changing world.

### ***STV provides stability for MPs.***

- With FPTP elections, there tends to be electoral sweeps. One party will take all, or most of the seats in a region. The other parties are wiped out. Many hard working, knowledgeable, and popular MPs lose their seats. What a waste.
- Within STV's multi-member districts, MPs will be mostly protected from these sweeps.

### ***MPs will have more power.***

- MPs run for office because they want to work constructively for their communities, but find, once they're elected, that their ability to make a difference is curtailed by party and government pressures.
- MPs will be under increased pressure by the electorate to perform for them. All MPs will have to be more forceful within their party. As a result, party policy will be modified by MPs to better reflect voter's values and desires, rather than the thoughts of a few back room party officials or their party leaders.

### ***Voters will have more power.***

- When voters have more power, MPs will demand more power within their political parties and in Parliament.

### ***STV is simple to use.***

- Without the need to vote strategically, voters will confidently vote for, and get their desired result.
- Preference voting accurately reflects how we normally think about things. This is my favorite, this is my next choice, and that is last. We do it all the time.
- Preference voting is simpler to use than plurality voting because you don't have to figure out how to vote effectively and accurately in a strategic way.

### ***STV isn't all that hard to understand.***

- STV is different and it's new to us. But we learn about new things all the time.
- If people in Ireland, Malta and Australia can understand and use STV, people in Canada certainly can.

### ***STV will increase voter turn out.***

- When you know your vote won't be wasted, and that you'll actually elect someone, you'll be more likely vote.
- Democracy is served when more of us vote. This will happen when we expect, and actually get, the representatives we voted for.

Chart 1

Single-Member Districts → Voter Inequality → Lack of Proportionality

**Single-Member Districts**

In a single-member district (SMD), only a single point of view can be represented by the single MP. Other points of view are unavoidably excluded from Parliament.

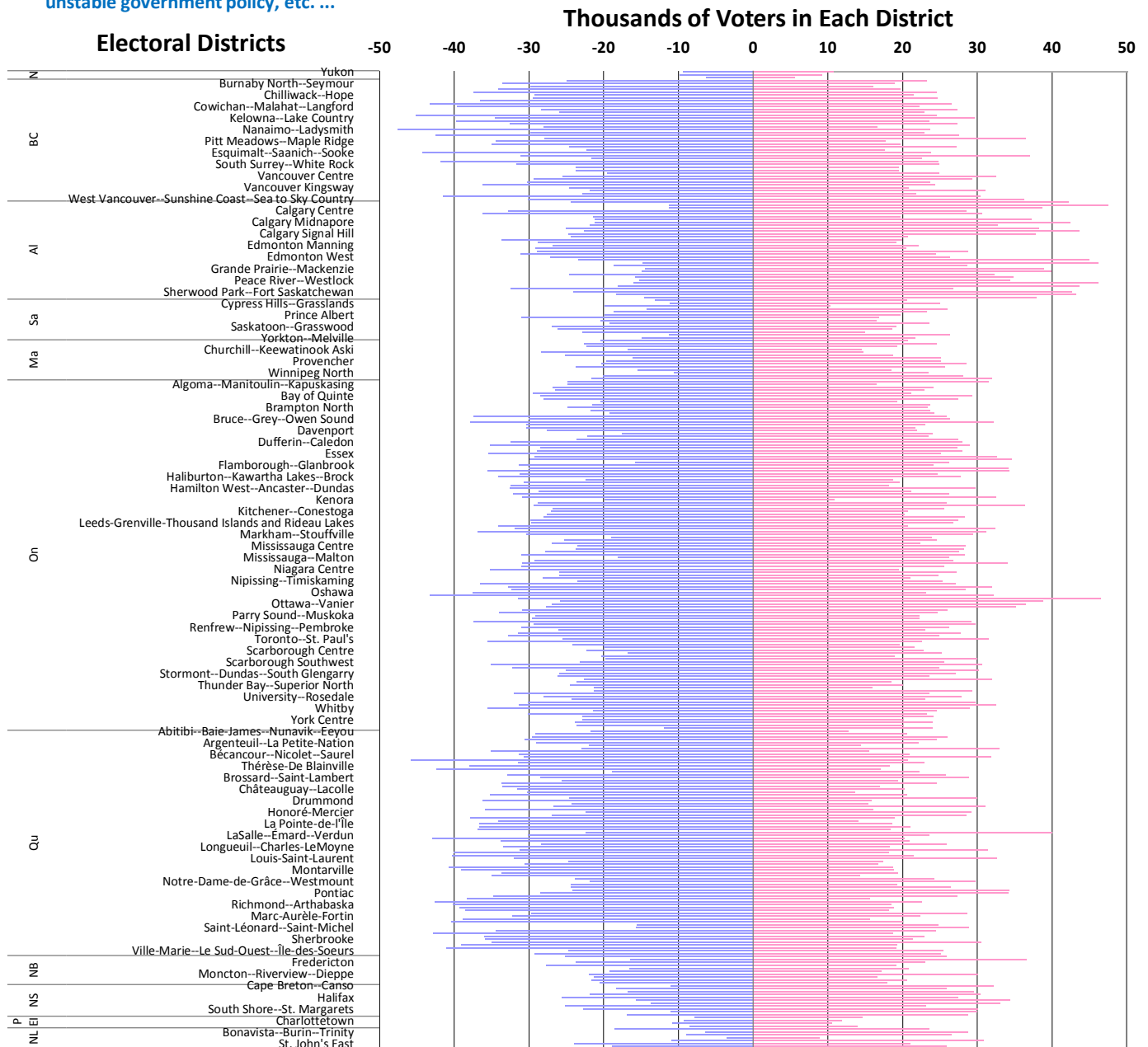
To represent multiple points of view, there needs to be multiple MPs in a district.

SMDs are the root of most electoral ills, including: voter inequality, lack of proportionality, severely ineffective local representation, lack of choice, regionalism, systemic discrimination against women, unstable government policy, etc. ...

**Un-Equal Legislative Power of Voters**

*This chart shows that Canadians who voted federally in 2015 will have vastly different amounts of influence over the laws & policies which affect them between 2015 and 2019.*

■ Excluded Voters	■ Represented Voters
Percent: 51.7 %	Percent: 48.3 %
Total: 9,095,616	Total: 8,485,494
Range: 3,495 - 47,590	Range: 5,618 - 47,552



**Table 1**  
**The Problem with Single-Member Districts (2015 – 2019)**

(Single-Member Districts are part of the following electoral systems: FPTP, IRV, MMP, MMM)

Jurisdiction	Excluded Voters	Represented Voters	Comments
<b>Canada</b> (338 MPs) Total = (%)	9,095,616 = <b>(51.7%)</b>	8,485,494 = <b>(48.3%)</b>	<p>This table summarizes the extent of three of the fundamental errors created by our current FPTP electoral system:</p> <p>1) <b>Some MPs claim:</b>  <i>"I represent everyone in my district."</i>                      Nice sentiment, and surely well meaning, but it's simply impossible and fundamentally dishonest. An MP can't honestly speak both for and against an issue. An MP can't vote for some-thing with their right hand and against it with their left. It can't be done.</p> <p>2) <b>Exclusion of 51.7% of voters from democratic representation:</b> On election night, over half of voters are excluded, for the next four years, from having a say in determining the new laws and policies which will affect them. They will not be represented in Parliament by an MP they voted for.</p> <p>3) <b>The Legislative Power of voters varies greatly, even for those who actually voted for their MP:</b> When our MPs speak and vote in the House, or provide constituency services, they do so on behalf of as few as 5,618 voters or as many as 47,552 voters.</p> <p><b>Jurisdiction:</b> To be fair, the constitutional allocation of seats by province, and the near impossibility of changing the constitution, forces us to accept some of the huge variation in the number of voters represented by each MP. But even within each province, the number of voters shared by each MP can vary by 2, 3 or 4 times.</p> <p><b>Excluded Voters:</b> Voters who didn't vote for the winning candidate don't have an MP representing their point of view in Parliament. They have zero Legislative Power. This exclusion lasts for four years, until the next election. Many voters have been excluded this way for decades.</p> <p><b>Represented Voters:</b> Voters who actually voted for the MP elected in their district.</p> <p><b>Is there a better way?</b> Why, yes. It's STV.</p> <p>To represent multiple points of view from a district, there needs to be multiple MPs. With an average of 5 MPs in a district, almost all voters can have an MP they voted for.</p> <p>Using quotas, instead of plurality, every MP will be elected by about the same number of votes, hence representing the same number of voters.</p>
Range: Least to most Voters / MP		5,618 – 47,552	
Ratio: Least to most Voters / MP		<b>1 : 8.46</b>	
<b>The North</b> (3 MPs) Total = (%)	25,497 = <b>(49.8%)</b>	25,677 = <b>(50.2%)</b>	
Range: Least to most Voters / MP		5,618 – 10,887	
Ratio: Least to most Voters / MP		<b>1 : 1.94</b>	
<b>British Columbia</b> (42 MPs) Total = (%)	1,335,685 = <b>(56.5%)</b>	1,029,091 = <b>(43.5%)</b>	
Range: Least to most Voters / MP		16,094 – 37,070	
Ratio: Least to most Voters / MP		<b>1 : 2.30</b>	
<b>Alberta</b> (34 MPs) Total = (%)	768,689 = <b>(39.8%)</b>	1,161,952 = <b>(60.2%)</b>	
Range: Least to most Voters / MP		19,157 – 47,552	
Ratio: Least to most Voters / MP		<b>1 : 2.48</b>	
<b>Saskatchewan</b> (14 MPs) Total = (%)	269,468 = <b>(48.8%)</b>	282,405 = <b>(51.2%)</b>	
Range: Least to most Voters / MP		10,300 – 26,315	
Ratio: Least to most Voters / MP		<b>1 : 2.55</b>	
<b>Manitoba</b> (14 MPs) Total = (%)	283,190 = <b>(47.1%)</b>	318,623 = <b>(52.9%)</b>	
Range: Least to most Voters / MP		14,469 – 31,993	
Ratio: Least to most Voters / MP		<b>1 : 2.21</b>	
<b>Ontario</b> (121 MPs) Total = (%)	3,374,919 = <b>(51.7%)</b>	3,155,098 = <b>(48.3%)</b>	
Range: Least to most Voters / MP		10,918 – 46,542	
Ratio: Least to most Voters / MP		<b>1 : 4.26</b>	
<b>Quebec</b> (78 MPs) Total = (%)	2,497,766 = <b>(58.9%)</b>	1,743,648 = <b>(41.1%)</b>	
Range: Least to most Voters / MP		12,778 – 39,965	
Ratio: Least to most Voters / MP		<b>1 : 3.13</b>	
<b>New Brunswick</b> (10 MPs) Total = (%)	214,022 = <b>(48.4%)</b>	227,764 = <b>(51.6%)</b>	
Range: Least to most Voters / MP		16,656 – 36,534	
Ratio: Least to most Voters / MP		<b>1 : 2.19</b>	
<b>Nova Scotia</b> (11 MPs) Total = (%)	198,812 = <b>(38.0%)</b>	324,816 = <b>(62.0%)</b>	
Range: Least to most Voters / MP		23,161 – 34,377	
Ratio: Least to most Voters / MP		<b>1 : 1.48</b>	
<b>P.E.I.</b> (4 MPs) Total = (%)	36,482 = <b>(41.7%)</b>	51,002 = <b>(58.3%)</b>	
Range: Least to most Voters / MP		10,521 – 14,621	
Ratio: Least to most Voters / MP		<b>1 : 1.39</b>	
<b>N. &amp; L.</b> (7 MPs) Total = (%)	91,086 = <b>(35.5%)</b>	165,418 = <b>(64.5)</b>	
Range: Least to most Voters / MP		8,878 – 30,889	
Ratio: Least to most Voters / MP		<b>1 : 3.48</b>	