What is FairVote Canada

Fair Vote Canada (FVC) is a national, non-profit, multi-partisan citizen's organization that advocates for (optional: works toward) the introduction of an element of proportional representation (PR) in Canadian elections.  FVC has 43 volunteer chapters across Canada that educate the public & politicians and provides evidence to support the move to a proportional electoral system for Canada.

FVC does not endorse any specific PR system but is campaigning for a citizens led consultation process supported by expert advice to develop a PR system which best serves Canada's size, diversity, political history and traditions.

What is Proportional Representation

Proportional Representation is a principle from which two families of electoral systems have developed, Ranked Ballot and Party Lists.  The fundamental principle of PR is that of fairness and inclusiveness; that every voter is equal to every other voter and that all votes are equal and all votes must be equally effective in electing a representative.

All voters have the right to:

    - cast an equal and effective vote and to be represented fairly in Parliament, regardless of who they voted for or where they live.

     - to be governed by a fairly elected Parliament where the share of seats held by each political party closely reflects the popular vote.

     - to live under laws legitimized by a majority of elected Parliamentarians representing a majority of voters.

                  What Does This Really Mean?

If a party gets 40% of the popular vote, that party should receive 40% of the seats in Parliament.

Why is Electoral Reform Needed?

Our current electoral system is commonly known as First Past the Post (FPTP).  FPTP dates to the time of the Magna Carta (1215 ce) and it hasn't changed much since.  It is a winner- take - all system in single member ridings and are designed to produce single party majority governments.  The problems is that FPTP fails on the basic promises of democracy: it produces distorted results which exaggerate the winners results and suppresses the votes of other party’s supporters, creates regional polarization, forces strategic voting and adversarial politics, contributes to low voter turnout and provides barriers to electing more women and minorities.

A graph would work well for this section:

In 2011, the Conservative Party of Canada received 39.9% of the popular vote, 52% of the seats in Parliament and 100% of the power.

In 2015, the Liberal Party of Canada received 39.5% of the popular vote, 54% of the seats in Parliament and 100% of the power.

                    What Does This Really Mean?

In FPTP, a few voters in swing ridings determine the results of the election. In 2011, just under 7000 voters decided the election. In 2015, XXXX voters decided the results of the election.  If we want an electoral system in which all votes are equal & equally effective and that returns a Parliament that reflects the voting intentions of all Canadians, we will have to look past First Past the Post.

Overview Of The Two Families Of Proportional Systems

A graphic would work well for this section

Ranked Systems                                 List Based Systems

Single Transferable Vote             Mixed Member Proportional

Jenkins Model/AVPlus                 Party

P3 (Dion’s Model)

Mixed Member Proportional

Mixed Member Proportional is a system in which a "mix" of MPs are elected. Some MPs will be elected from single member ridings, just like we have now and some MPs will be elected to represent the Region and come from an open or closed party list.  The MP's representing the Region is the proportional element of the system. A voter will have two votes, one for the riding MP and one for the regional MP. Both types of MPs are elected by and responsible to their constituents, both do the same work in the same way ie  both have a constituency office where they meet & work with their constituents.  Under FPTP, votes for losing candidates are ignored but with MMP those votes are included in the make up of Parliament through the Regional (proportional) MPs.

Visual would do well here:

Map of Waterloo Region showing 5 ridings/5 MPs

Map of Waterloo Region showing 3 ridings/3 MPs  and 2 regional MPs

Visual of a MMP 2 sided ballot.

Most often, MMP requires a consensus to govern effectively which provides a check on dramatic changes of policy and the power of the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister's Office.

Single Transferable Vote

Single Transferable Vote (STV) is a proportional voting system because multiple members are returned from large ridings. In STV, a voter uses a single ballot to rank the candidates in order preference: 1,2,3 and so on. A predetermined threshold is established which the candidates must meet to be elected.  If the voter’s first ranked candidate fails to meet the threshold, their vote is transferred to the voter's second ranked candidate. If the second ranked candidate doesn't meet the threshold, the vote is transferred to the voter's third ranked candidate.  The transfer of vote continues until the voter chooses a candidate that meets the threshold. Candidates only need to meet the threshold, they do not need a majority of votes to win a seat. The threshold is determined by the size of the electorate and the number of seats to be filled.  If a candidate has no chance of winning or the candidate already has enough votes to win, the vote is transferred to the voter’s next choice.

 The strength of STV is that voters cast votes for individuals rather than parties which results in reduced power for parties.  Power remains in the hands of voter rather than residing with parties.  There are no safe seats which forces parties to campaign everywhere and MPs are more responsible to their constituents than to their party.  Under STV there are very few wasted votes and voters have a great deal of choice.

Part List Systems

The Party List system is not an option being discussed for Canada as it isn't considered to be suitable for our circumstance.

Party Lists are a family of voting systems in which multiple candidates are elected from a candidate list.  Parties present lists of candidates and seats are allocated according to the parties share of the popular vote.

There are three types of party lists:

Open - voters choose candidates from a list & individuals are chosen according to the popular vote

Closed - voters vote for the party and the party then determines the MPs

Semi-Open or District - ????

Strengths of PR

Proportional representation creates a parliament that reflects the way voters voted and as a result Parliament is more fair and democratic.  In PR systems politicians must work together to build policy which results in policy that is closer to the views of the average voter. Co-operation between politicians results in more civil discourse in Parliament and better long term planning and policy making. PR allows people to vote for the person they want to represent them and not the person likely to defeat the candidate they don't want to win.

Studies show that there is a strong co-relation between PR and voter satisfaction, lower income equality, better environmental outcomes, higher voter turn out and strong economic growth.  PR keeps power in Parliament with Parliamentarians and undermines power gravitating to the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister's Office. PR returns, on average, 8% more women to Parliament.  Parties know they will receive the votes they deserve and the need to engage in a constant campaign is weakened. PR returns Parliaments that produce better government.

Which Countries Use a PR System.

Visual would work well here.

Map of world with countries that use one form of PR, illustrated in a bright colour.

Eighty five percent of OECD countries use some form of proportional representation. Some of the strongest democracies and economies in the world use PR including: Germany, Austria, New Zealand, the Netherlands and all the Scandinavian countries.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the difference between minority and co-alition governments?

Canadians are used to minority governments in which the party in power has to negotiate with other parties to pass legislation and stay in power.  In our adversarial system, the opposition is always looking for opportunities to undermine the party in power and eventually replace the governing party governments.

In co-alition governments, the governing party invites other party members to sit in cabinet. The governing party and opposition party members build policy and legislation together. This co-operative model provides for longer term governments and public policy that is satisfactory to the majority of citizens.

Aren't Governments elected with PR more unstable?

The unstable governments which use PR that we hear about are Israel and Italy.  Israel uses 100% PR which has led to many small and sometimes extreme parties.  100% PR is not suitable for Canada and it is not under considered as an option for us.  Italy hasn't used PR in 20 years and it has had fewer elections that Canada since WW2. Italy 17, Canada 22.  In Italy, the changes are of leadership not governments.

Most countries that use PR are strong, stable democracies like Germany, Norway, Austria, New Zealand, Switzerland.  Over eighty percent of OECD countries use some form of PR.

Won't we have more politicians and won't it cost a fortune?

No.  We can establish criteria for a made in Canada system which would include no increase to the number of politicians.

Isn't PR Too Complicated?

The voters responsibility is to vote and the ballots are not complicated.  It is Elections Canada's job to do the calculation which is complicated but they are professions and will be up to the job.  Ireland has been using STV since 1921, MMP is used in Tonga and Figi.  If the Irish & Fijians can figure it out, so can we.

Single Issue and Extreme Parties

A threshold of 3 - 6 % of the popular vote is used which a party must achieve before they can win a seat in Parliament.  This threshold prevents single issue or extreme parties from getting a seat in Parliament.

Aren't the Ridings Too Large?

Canada is a large country with a small population and yes, it could be a problem particularly for STV. We have large ridings now so we do know how to deal with large ridings but it is something that would need care considered. Perhaps larger ridings will need to be accepted as a tradeoff for a fair and democratic electoral system.

What is Alternative Vote? AKA Preferential Ballot and Instant RunOff Voting

Alternative Vote (AV), also known as Preferential Ballot (PB) and Instant Run Off Voting (IROV), is a system in which voters rank the candidates in order of preference.  If AV is used in riding to elect one member of Parliament it is a single majoritarian system similar to FPTP and not a proportional system. If it is used to elect multiple members from a riding it is a proportional system which we have looked at called Single Transferable Vote.

Used to elect single members, AV returns results similar to FPTP and shares the same problems as FPTP.  AV won't solve any of the problems we experience with FPTP.  People who support AV often say it is simple and easy to understand which it is but why move to another winner-take-all system that continues the problems of FPTP.