

A compromise proposal for a Canadian electoral system - by Gordon Nicholls

During the past four years, Canadians have gone through an emotional juggernaut over the question of electoral reform. After the great 2015 promise "This will be the last election using First Past The Post (FPTP)" the excitement of long overdue electoral reform was cooled when PM Trudeau announced that there was no consensus. It is probably true that there was no consensus on which voting system should replace FPTP, but the results of the cross country meetings and recent polling made it clear that there indeed is consensus for changing the FPTP system.

Many Canadians are greatly disturbed by the fact that majority governments can be formed by a so called winning party that often earns less than 40% of the total votes. In addition the statistics for the last three elections shown in Table1 make it clear that far too many members are winning a seat in the commons with less than 40% support from their riding, let alone the 50%+1 requirement in the original Westminster system. After the 2019 election we have a minority government where only 37.6% of the members won their seat with at least 50% support in their constituency. The other 62.4% of the new members did NOT win an absolute majority in their riding. There is a growing feeling this is not right.

Table 1-Results for the 2011, 2015 and 2019 Canadian elections

	Commons seats won with percentage of total vote ranging from less than 30% to over 50%								
	Less 30%		From 30 to 39 %		From 40 to 49%		50% and greater		Total
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
Results for 2011 Election	0	0%	43	13.9%	120	38.90%	145	47.0%	308
Results for 2015 Election	5	1.4%	66	19.5%	134	39.6%	133	39.3%	338
Results for 2019 Election	2	0.59%	61	18.05%	148	43.79%	127	37.57%	338

This raises a related question: **Does this mean that all decisions made in the House of Commons pass without a majority?**

The answer is NO! All Canadians should know that all votes in the Commons MUST be approved by at least 50%+1 of the members. This basic principle of democracy has been in effect since Ancient Greece as noted by A.C. Grayling in his recent book 'Democracy and its Crisis'. The current Canadian problem is that over 60% of the MP's passing those resolutions do not have the support of 50% +1 of the voters in their ridings and the parties often have under 40%!

This leads to a second question: **Why is it that in Canada the same MP's who agree with the 'majority principle of 50%+1' to pass a Commons motion also accept that a member can win a riding seat with less than 50% ?**

The situation is so distorted that in the last two elections a total of 7 MP's won their seats with less than 30% support in their riding! After the 2019 election, our new Commons will have 211 MP's out of a total of 338 who did not earn 50%+1 support in their riding.

Clearly there is an inconsistency in how the 'democratic majority principle' is being used by our elected politicians and this inconsistency needs to be removed and corrected.

The third question we need to answer is: **Do Canadians want to change the FPTP system to correct the problem ?**

The Canada wide discussions held in 2016 and 2017 made it clear that a large percentage of Canadians want to see improvements in the voting system. The submissions to the parliamentary committee included several types of proportional and preferential voting systems. Unfortunately there was no clear consensus about which type of system should be used.

Now that we have a new minority government, the time has come to find a compromise that will include ideas from several different sources and hopefully will provide a uniquely Canadian solution. Two basic principles that should be a part of any new electoral system are:

1. **Any electoral reform must recognize the individual constituency riding as a necessity for most of the seats.**
2. **The percentage of total seats for each party must be close to the percentage of votes won in each province.**

In addition consideration should be given to the following ideas for any new voting system.

1. **To avoid any conflict with the constitution and allow for regional differences in our very diverse country any new electoral system must be implemented province by province.**
2. **To guarantee that winners in each individual riding have more than 50% support, a simple form of preferential voting called Second Choice Preferential voting (SCP) should replace FPTP voting for the Riding seats.**

Is this possible? YES, the system, called Mixed Member Proportional (MMP), that is used in Germany and New Zealand preserves the traditional riding MP and yet introduces a component of proportionality which uses Top-up seats to guarantee a close relation between the percentage vote won and the percentage of seats for each party. The main disadvantage of this system is that it uses FPTP voting for the traditional riding seats and, as shown in Table 1, this allows a candidate to win a seat with support as low as 30%. To make a uniquely Canadian voting system that would be fairer than the MMP system approach to riding seats, we could replace FPTP voting with Second Choice Preferential (SCP) voting system. An SCP voting system would guarantee that all riding members must earn 50% +1 support in order to win a Commons seat.

This now raises the question: **How would you combine SCP voting with proportional voting?**

The following proposal would satisfy the above four requirements and be relatively easy for Elections Canada to implement. **This system will be called Mixed Member Preferential-Proportional (MMPP) to make it clear that it is slightly different from the well known MMP system.** The basic features are as follows:

- 1) The number of ridings in each province and territory for a total of 338 will stay the same as at present until the next population review when a reduction to 300 ridings with 75 top-up seats would keep costs under control.
- 2) Instead of FPTP, voting for the member in each riding will be done using **Second Choice Preferential** voting. When the votes are initially counted, either manually or electronically, only the first choice on each ballot will be used. After all the polls have reported, if the winner has more than 50% then that person will win the seat. If the top candidate has less than 50% then a new count must be done using the following approach. First, all ballots that voted for either of the top two candidates will have only their first choice counted. Second all ballots that did NOT vote for either of the top two candidates will have their second choice counted. The results for these Second

Choice ballots will then be added to one of the top two candidates or to one of the candidates not in the top two places. Votes in the last category will represent a lost vote. The new totals for the top two candidates will thus contain the original first choice votes plus whatever votes each candidate earned when the second choice ballots were counted. The winner will have more than 50% except in the most unlikely situation where there would be an exact tie.

3. To determine the Proportional Top-up List seats there would be a question on the ballot asking for the voters preferred party. These numbers would be counted by Province and the percentage for each party would be compared to the percentage of seats won. Top-up seats would then be distributed to re-balance the result so that the distribution of seats across parties by province would more closely resemble the popular vote by party. The number of top-up seats would be somewhere between 20% and 40% of the 338 riding seats. See Appendix A for how a 25% top-up calculation would make the percentage of seats very close to the percentage of votes.
4. The candidates for the Top-up seats should be selected from the candidates who ran in the election, did not win their constituency seat and had the highest number of votes in their respective province.

The final question that must be answered is: **What might the ballot look like if the MMPP system is introduced ?**

Table 2- Example of possible design for the new SCP ballot

Vote for the member to represent the riding of Kitchener Centre, Ontario	Party Vote
Place an X in column one for your preferred choice. If the candidate in first place does not have more than 50% then the second choice vote will be counted on all ballots that did not support the candidates in the top two positions. Place an X in column two for your second choice in case their is a need for a second count.	This is a vote for the party of your choice. This vote will be used to re-balance the proportion of seats for your province, Ontario, so that the percentage of seats is similar to the percentage of votes.

Place only one X in each column				Place only one X for the party of your choice	
<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Party</u>	<u>1st Choice</u>	<u>2nd Choice</u>	Name of the Party	Place only one X for the party of your choice
J. Bull	Conservative			Bloc	
B. Dogmmar	NDP			Conservative	
S. Hill	Liberal			Green	
B. Noble	Green			Liberal	
E. Pine	Libertarian			NDP	
M. Zack	Communist			Other	

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Appendix A- Chart showing the current seat distribution for the 2019 election and a MMP seat distribution

Note the percentages illustrated for the current 338 seat House of Commons would be similar for 300 ridings & 75 top-up seats:

1. There would be a total of 6 Liberal seats in Alberta and Saskatchewan instead of 0 seats
2. The Conservative total would go from 4 to 10 seats in the Maritime provinces
3. The NDP total would go from 24 to 59 seats and the percentage of seats would now be close to the percentage of votes
4. The Green party total would go from 3 to 18 seats and the seat percentage would be closer to the vote percentage
5. Although there is NOT a perfect matching of the percentage votes received to the percentage of seats won this system is much better than using only FPTP and still retains the traditional ridings.
6. There are no seats for the PPC party because the approach I am using for Top-up seats has a cut off at about 5% in the larger provinces and 10% in the smallest provinces. This has the advantage of avoiding the chaos that often occurs in the elections in countries like Italy and Israel where a pure Proportional system is used.
7. This chart does NOT contain the changes that would occur if FPTP voting, that is used in the MMP system in Germany and New Zealand, was to be replaced with Second Choice Preferential voting for the riding candidates.

Chart-Model of an MMP result for the 2019 election using 338 riding seats and 83 Proportional Top-up seats-No SCP calculation

		BC	AB	SK	MB	ON	QC	NB	NS	PE	NL	YT	NT	NU	Total
Liberal	FPTPSeat	11	0	0	4	79	35	6	10	4	6	1	1	0	157
	%Seats	26.1%	0.0%	0.0%	28.5%	65.2%	44.8%	60.0%	90.9%	100.0%	85.7%	100.0%	100.0%	0.0%	46.4%
	% Vote	26.1	13.7	11.6	26.3	41.5	34.2	37.6	41.3	43.6	44.7	33.4	40	31	33.1
	Topup	2	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8
	MMPSeat Tot	13	5	1	4	79	35	6	10	4	6	1	1	0	165
	%MMPSeat	25.0%	11.9%	5.8%	23.5%	52.3%	35.7%	46.1%	71.4%	80.0%	66.6%	100.0%	100.0%	0.0%	39.1%
Conservat	FPTPSeat	17	33	14	7	36	10	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	121
	%Seats	40.4%	97.0%	100.0%	50.0%	29.7%	12.8%	30.0%	9.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	35.7%
	% Vote	34.1	69.2	64.3	45.4	33.2	16	32.8	25.7	27.4	28	33.1	25.8	25.8	34.4
	Topup	2	0	0	1	10	6	1	2	1	2	0	0	0	25
	MMPSeat Tot	19	33	14	8	46	16	4	3	1	2	0	0	0	146
	% MMPSeat	36.5%	78.5%	82.3%	47.0%	30.4%	16.3%	30.7%	21.4%	20.0%	22.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	34.6%
NDP	FPTPSeat	11	1	0	3	6	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	24
	%Seats	26.1%	2.9%	0.0%	21.4%	4.9%	1.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	14.2%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	7.1%
	% Vote	24.4	11.5	19.5	20.7	16.8	10.7	9.4	18.9	7.6	23.9	21.8	21.8	41.2	15.9
	Topup	2	3	2	1	15	10	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	35
	MMPSeat Tot	13	4	2	4	21	11	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	59
	% MMPSeat	25.0%	9.5%	11.7%	23.5%	13.9%	11.2%	7.6%	7.1%	0.0%	11.1%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	14.0%
IND-BC	FPTPSeat	1					32								32
Just BC	%Seats	2.4%					41.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	9.4%
Bloc-QC	% Vote	0.90%					32.5								7.7
For QC &	Topup	0					0								0
totals	MMPSeat Tot						32								32
	% MMPSeat	0	0	0	0	0	32.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	7.6%
Green	FPTPSeat	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
	%Seats	4.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	10.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%
	% Vote	12.4	2.8	2.5	5.1	6.2	4.4	17	11	20.8	3.1	10.3	10.6	2.1	6.5
	Topup	4	0	0	1	5	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	15
	MMPSeat Tot	6	0	0	1	5	4	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	18
	% MMPSeat	11.5%	0.0%	0.0%	5.8%	3.3%	4.0%	15.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	4.2%
PPC& Other	% Seats	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Parties	% Votes	2.80%	2.60%	2.00%	2.40%	2.20%	2.00%	3.10%	2.90%	0.50%	0.4%	1.40%	1.80%	0	2.1
FPTPTot		42	34	14	14	121	78	10	11	4	7	1	1	1	338
TotalFPTP+TopUp		52	42	17	17	151	98	13	14	5	9	1	1	1	421
TopUp per province		10	8	3	3	30	20	3	3	1	2	0	0	0	83
Allowed Topup		10	8	3	3	30	20	3	3	1	2	0	0	0	83

Data Source- Elections Canada