



# **MAKE EVERY VOTE COUNT-ALWAYS!**

*"Voter's Choice": enables voters to choose how their votes are counted !*

**Announcing "Voter's Choice": a flexible electoral reform that provides a politically viable solution!**

## **The electoral reform promised by Canada's Prime Minister:**

- To "make every vote count".
- "The 2015 election will be the last federal election using First-Past-The-Post."

## **The present political predicament:**

- The all-party Electoral Reform Committee produced an ambiguous report—recommending some undetermined form of Proportional Representation with low distortion of the 'Will of the People'.
- The political parties have failed to achieve consensus on a politically viable solution.
- While electoral reform experts overwhelmingly recommend PR, the People's preferences are unknown.
- Citizens' knowledge and concerns regarding electoral reform are generally low, with divided opinions.
- There could be different preferences in different parts of Canada.

## **Looking for the best way forward:**

- The Government has reiterated its commitment to fulfilling its promise of electoral reform (for the 2019 election).
- The Government has refocused on the Citizens (through its ongoing online questionnaire) before addressing the question of electoral reform alternatives.
- The Government is apparently seeking to find an electoral reform solution that has broad acceptability to Citizens and the other political parties.

## **The proposed solution, "Voter's Choice" (a 'made-in-Canada' Electoral System that's focused on the voters):**

- A new and much more flexible conceptual approach—which liberates voters from politically chosen voting systems: **Citizens should be able to choose how their votes are counted.**
- **"Voter's Choice"** is based on a **flexible preferential ballot—that can be counted as either FPTP (First-Past-The-Post) or IRV (Instant Runoff Voting)—as determined by the majority of voters in each riding.**
- **"Voter's Choice"** is also based on **Proxy voting in Parliament—every Citizen's vote is held in trust by an MP, and cast with every vote in Parliament—as designated by each voter through the ballot question:**

**"Who do you choose to hold and cast your vote in Parliament—with every vote in Parliament?"**

- The MP elected from your riding (note that this may not be the person you voted for) —OR—
- Your chosen Party as indicated by your 1<sup>st</sup>-choice vote."

## **Analysis:**

- Under this proposal, Citizens who want to retain FPTP would simply choose just one candidate. Any Party that wants to retain FPTP would inform their supporters to vote for only one candidate. Others would explain the advantages of preferential voting—so voters would understand their options.
- If a majority in a riding chose FPTP (i.e. most of those voters selected just one candidate), all secondary choices on the other ballots in that riding would be ignored. This provides flexibility that respects provincial, regional or local preferences, allowing the voters in each riding to choose how their votes are counted—i.e. whether their riding uses FPTP or IRV to elect their MP!

- Regardless how MPs are elected, their voting power in Parliament would be based directly on the Citizens' votes entrusted to them (i.e. rather than simply one vote per MP); specifically, each MP would hold the votes personally received plus a share of that party's retained votes for defeated candidates. This is essential in order to truly fulfill the promise to "make every vote count" (i.e. no vote must ever be wasted); it also gives all Citizens everywhere (even in 'safe seat' ridings) a much stronger reason to vote. Furthermore, this ensures perfect proportional representation—with zero distortion of the expressed 'Will of the People'.
- Under FPTP, voters cannot differentiate whether their vote is for the candidate or the Party, and all votes for losing candidates are simply wasted.  
Under the "Voter's Choice" Voting System, no Citizen's vote is ever wasted; votes for each winning candidate are held by that MP, and voters for losing candidates choose whether their vote is reassigned to their local MP (effectively equivalent to FPTP) or retained by their chosen Party (i.e. 1<sup>st</sup>-choice vote only) and reassigned to one of its MPs.
- The "**Voter's Choice**" solution takes the key decisions on electoral reform away from the politicians and their parties—giving voters the power to decide how votes are counted to elect their MP—and which party is entrusted to cast their proxy vote in Parliament. "**Voter's Choice**" also fulfills the promise to "make every vote count" by providing perfect proportional representation —while avoiding the distortions, complexities and unintended consequences of conventional forms of PR.
- Citizens will appreciate that the "**Voter's Choice**" Voting System gives them much greater voting power individually—and collectively provides them with unprecedented control over the voting process—as well as many other important benefits:
  - Voters can choose to remain with the existing FPTP voting system, or take advantage of preferential voting—which would eliminate the problems of 'strategic voting', 'vote-splitting' and 'spoiler votes'.
  - The choice between FPTP or IRV is a local decision—made by a majority of voters in each riding.
  - "Every vote always counts"—and will be counted with every vote in Parliament—regardless whether a voter's preferred candidate is elected or defeated!
  - The parliamentary voting power of each party is guaranteed by design to be a perfect reflection of the expressed 'Will of the People'—with zero distortion.
  - The voting process is as easy as "1-2-3" (for preferential voting) —OR— simply "1" (for FPTP voting). A preferential ballot is quite simple for voters, as proven in many countries and several provinces.
    - The actual ballot and voter instructions would be designed by Elections Canada.
    - The suggestion is that voters be invited to choose up to three (or maybe five) acceptable candidates in order of preference—using a ballot with three (or five) columns—i.e. for 1<sup>st</sup>-choice, 2<sup>nd</sup>-choice etc.
    - The suggestion is that voters mark their selection with an "X" in a chosen row and column (i.e. as with FPTP).
    - Voter instructions would explain that only 1<sup>st</sup>-choices would be counted if a majority of voters in that riding chose just one candidate—hence the winner would be the candidate with the most votes (i.e. FPTP).
    - However, where a majority chose to vote for more than one candidate, votes would be counted according to "Instant Runoff Voting" rules (i.e. with a majority of 50%+1 required to win, as is the standard used by all parties to elect their leaders).
  - No need to waste any more time and money on a confusing referendum on electoral reform; with "**Voter's Choice**", voters choose—with their votes—how their votes are counted to elect their MP!

## Implementation Issues and Options:

### 1. Parliamentary voting.

- ❖ Citizens' votes will need to be converted into the equivalent numbers of MP seats—for each province.
  - In principle, the fundamental unit of democracy under "*Voter's Choice*" Voting System is the Citizen's vote (rather than the MP's seat).
  - In practice—unless the Constitution is changed—the parliamentary vote of record would remain denominated in numbers of seats. The numbers of Citizens' votes held in trust by MPs, and cast as proxy votes with every vote in Parliament, would be automatically converted by computer into the equivalent fractional number of seats. [Note that the number of seats for each province is established by law. The ratio of total votes to total seats would result in a different conversion factor for each province.]
- ❖ Given that the "*Voter's Choice*" Voting System removes all systemic electoral distortions (which often lead to 'false-majority' governments—under both FPTP and IRV), there would be increased probability of minority governments. To avoid increased instability, a 'double majority' rule (i.e. a majority of both MP votes as well as Citizens' votes) is recommended for 'non-confidence' votes.

### 2. Some number of "At-Large" seats are needed—to remedy representational deficiencies.

- ❖ To truly "make every vote count", some additional representation needs to be provided for the votes for independent candidates and small parties that failed to elect an MP. Hence, it's recommended that:
  - For any party that achieves a specified threshold (e.g. 3% of the national vote), its leader (or candidate with the most votes) should have a seat in Parliament.
  - The independent candidate with the most votes should have a seat in Parliament, to provide non-partisan representation for all votes for independents and unrepresented parties.
- ❖ **Enhanced representation—through one or more "At-Large" seats for each province or region.**
  - It's important that Parliament should have at least a basic level of balanced representation. For example, the Government (and Official Opposition) should have representation from all provinces or regions.
  - Some level of enhanced representation should also be provided to address the lack of demographic balance, and to reduce extreme levels of under-representation.Hence, it's recommended that:
  - At least one "At-Large" seat should be provided for each province or region, to be filled by the "most appropriate" candidate according to prioritized criteria:
    - (1) to a member of the Government party—if it hadn't elected an MP in that province/region;
    - (2) to a member of the Official Opposition—if it hadn't elected an MP in that province/region;
    - (3) to a member of the most under-represented party (i.e. votes/seats) in that province/region.
  - It's also recommended that the "most appropriate" candidate should be determined by:
    - (1) the under-represented gender;
    - (2) under-representation according to diversity and age criteria;
    - (3) the losing candidate with the most votes (within that party and demographic category).
- ❖ Hence, with a comparatively small number of "At-Large" seats (noting that MMP requires about one-third of seats to be "compensatory", as an imperfect remedy for FPTP distortion), the "*Voter's Choice*" Voting System can be flexibly adapted to achieve major improvements in representational balance—to whatever degree is deemed appropriate—with no complications or negative side-effects (noting that the number of votes for defeated candidates—hence available for reassignment—typically exceeds 50%)!

## Political Considerations:

### 1. Systemic distortions and consequences under FPTP.

- The winning party is typically over-represented by about 50 seats due to FPTP distortions (bias).
- Losing parties are together under-represented by that same number of seats due to FPTP.
- This often results in minority rule—by a ‘false majority’ government with less than 50% of votes. Sometimes the party with the most seats even has fewer votes than the opposition party.
- Given that FPTP typically wastes more than half the votes, many voters (estimated more than 40%) are coerced into so-called ‘strategic voting’—rather than voting for their true 1<sup>st</sup>-choice.
- These FPTP distortions are the power base of the political ‘duopoly’ (i.e. the ‘two party system’).
- The ‘vote-splitting’ problem of FPTP is very unfair to similar parties competing for the same voters.
- The winning party that forms Government is always the beneficiary of all such FPTP distortions—whereas the losers are its victims. This explains why the opposition periodically calls for electoral reform, but the Government and its MPs would likely pay a heavy price for such altruism.
- Unsurprisingly, backroom operators of the duopoly parties normally provide the organizational core (often covertly) of opposition to electoral reform—because FPTP gives them so much more power.

### 2. Systemic distortions and consequences under IRV.

- Under IRV, every MP has ‘democratic legitimacy’—i.e. is supported by more than half of the voters.
- IRV would never result in minority rule—since every MP has majority support (including secondary votes).
- IRV wastes fewer than half the votes. It also eliminates so-called ‘strategic voting’—as well as the ‘vote-splitting’ problem of FPTP—that’s very unfair to similar parties competing for the same voters.
- To the extent that political parties and voters can be accurately defined along a left-right political axis, the systemic distortion of IRV would advantage the political centre, at the disadvantage of parties of the orthodox left and right. But that view is too simplistic—no party ‘owns’ the ‘centre’. Neither the political parties nor voters are ideologically rigid. All parties seek support beyond their political base, and voters shift their support whenever they choose, for whatever reason.
- Given that IRV eliminates the ‘vote-splitting’ problem, the best strategic plan for parties on the left and right would be to broaden their political base towards the centre. Typically, centre-left and centre-right parties have the opportunity to redefine the political ‘centre’, and potentially to form alliances or coalitions with the more orthodox left and right parties.
- Under FPTP, the ‘vote-splitting’ problem caused the divided parties on the right to lose about 40 seats per election from 1993-2000. This forced them to unite, and in 2004 their combined votes dropped by 21% while their total seats increased by 27%. Under IRV, the right could undoubtedly broaden its base by resurrecting the Progressive Conservative party!

### 3. Systemic distortions and consequences under "*Voter's Choice*".

- The degree and kind of systemic distortions in the election of MPs under "*Voter's Choice*" would depend on the extent to which voters chose FPTP or IRV.
- Regardless of how MPs would be elected, and the numbers for each party, "*Voter's Choice*" would ensure that there was zero distortion in the translation of the expressed ‘Will of the People’ into the parliamentary voting power of all parties (i.e. perfect PR)!

4. Acceptability of "Voter's Choice" to each party.

Advocates of any electoral reform must recognize the necessity of political acceptability to at least a majority of MPs—and ideally a consensus of all MPs and parties. As such, it is believed that "Voter's Choice" represents arguably the best and perhaps the only politically viable alternative.

- ❖ No party would get everything it wants—but every party would get what it wants most.
  - The Conservatives and their supporters would get to keep FPTP—in those ridings where it's the choice of a majority of voters—but not to impose FPTP on everyone else.
  - The Liberals would get to fulfill their electoral reform promises, and potentially to replace FPTP with IRV—where it's the majority choice of voters—but not to impose IRV on everyone else.
  - The NDP and the Green party would for the first time have a voting system that was fair to them and their supporters—with perfect PR guaranteed (albeit without any 'party lists')! Also, where IRV was chosen by a majority of voters, the smaller parties would further benefit from the elimination of 'strategic voting and 'vote-splitting'.
- ❖ No party would risk losing many seats due to electoral reform—and all incumbents would have a fair chance to be re-elected.
  - The Conservatives would be able to keep FPTP—if they believe that gives them an electoral advantage—but there would be no more 'false majority' governments.
  - The Liberals would do very well with FPTP, and perhaps even win a few more seats with IRV—but there would be no more 'false majority' governments.
  - The NDP and the Green party, as the major victims of FPTP distortions, would become much more viable under "Voter's Choice"—with perfect PR based on zero distortion. Under IRV, they would also benefit from the elimination of 'strategic voting', which has severely limited their vote under FPTP. They would also stand to benefit from additional "At-Large" seats—if that option is adopted to provide more balanced representation.
- ❖ Political opposition to giving voters more flexibility, power and control over the democratic process through "Voter's Choice" would probably be politically unwise.
  - Voters would see "Voter's Choice" as being more fair to them.
  - Voters would see "Voter's Choice" as being more fair to all political parties.
  - Voters would be pleased that the Government kept its promises—and that the political parties finally found an electoral reform that they could agree on—without wasting time and money on an unwanted referendum.
  - **Voters would probably be outraged if such a 'win-win' solution were rejected by politicians and parties that put their interests above the People's interests and Democratic principles.**