



MAKE EVERY VOTE COUNT-ALWAYS!

"Voters' Choice": the Optional form of Electoral Reform!

WHY "Voters' Choice" IS THE BEST ELECTORAL REFORM FOR ALL CITIZENS AND ALL PARTIES!

AN OPEN LETTER TO CANADA'S NEW MINISTER OF DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS:

Your predecessor's lack of leadership and poor comprehension of electoral reform has left Canada and this Government in a very dismal situation with no apparent path to a successful resolution.

Your fulfillment of the Prime Minister's promise of electoral reform will require the right solution—and your strong leadership.

The right solution must be democratically beyond reproach—and have broad political acceptability—with sufficient flexibility that no party and no person could reasonably object to it.

The ideal solution is called "***Voters' Choice***"—and it can easily be implemented for the next election, with no referendum required!

Rather than politically imposing a uniform electoral system upon all ridings, "*Voters' Choice*" would empower the voters in each riding to democratically choose between remaining with 'First-Past-The-Post' or having 'Perfect Proportional Representation'!

The historic effort to reform Canada's electoral system has reached a critical point. The Prime Minister's explicit campaign promise to "make every vote count", by implementing a new voting system for the next election, is now in jeopardy. Despite the exemplary work of the all-party ERRE Committee, which obtained the best ideas from Canadian and international experts and advocates of electoral reform, the political parties were ultimately unwilling to make the compromises necessary to achieve a consensus. Some of the key political players chose to put their party's interests in maintaining the extremely unfair existing electoral system ahead of the People's interests in democratic reform.

The objective case for electoral reform was overwhelmingly strong, and the vast majority of advocates recommended some form of proportional representation (PR). No case of comparable credibility was made in support of the existing system. Nevertheless, this enormously important and expensive effort to improve the quality of our democracy is on the verge of ignominious failure—largely because the Official Opposition party remains adamantly opposed to electoral reform. And faced with this anti-democratic intransigence, the Government has so far been unwilling to use its strong majority to impose a new electoral system (which would probably be supported by the two smaller parties)—even though it would be well justified in doing so.

Further, from the lessons of recent failed provincial initiatives to achieve electoral reform, the Opposition's call for a referendum is actually just a well-tested and entirely cynical subterfuge—to dupe an unsuspecting public into defeating electoral reform through deceitful negative campaigning. And the Government has declined to publicly call out the Opposition on its shameful duplicity.

Given the sharp political divide between the parties over electoral reform, it's quite likely that similar divisions probably exist among their supporters. Hence, it's clear that both sides (i.e. those who want electoral reform and those who do not) hold their positions quite strongly—and neither side seems willing to accept an electoral system imposed upon them by the other side. Specifically, the great divide is between those who want to retain the existing 'First-Past-The-Post' (FPTP) system, and those who want some form of 'Proportional Representation' (PR) and/or a preferential ballot (i.e. Alternative Vote (AV) or Instant Runoff Voting (IRV)).

This is the context that inspired the conceptual solution of "***Voters' Choice***". The question that has arisen is this: '*Is it really necessary to have a single voting system for all of Canada?*' And it quickly became apparent that significant flexibility in the election of MPs could be readily accommodated. Indeed, it would be quite possible for the voters in each riding to democratically choose between FPTP and a PR electoral system that's based on the same ridings (i.e. "***Voters' Choice***")!

Voting and elections serve two essential democratic purposes:

1. to elect each Member of Parliament—as the voters' representative from each riding;
2. to elect a Government (and Official Opposition)—based on the balance of voting power obtained by each political party.

Election results are supposed to be a true reflection of the 'will of the People'.

The objective of electoral reform is to improve the fidelity of the entire electoral process—i.e. (1) the *expression* of the 'will of the People'; (2) the accuracy of its *translation* into elected members; (3) the aggregate *Parliamentary voting power* of each party.

FPTP is a deeply flawed electoral system. It invariably results in serious distortions of the ‘will of the People’, and suffers from many well-known problems that are democratically debilitating:

1. ‘wasted votes’, where typically more than 50% of votes are for losing candidates and hence ‘thrown away’ under FPTP (also, in so-called ‘safe seats’, no vote has any potential to impact the outcome)
2. ‘strategic voting’ (i.e. for the ‘lesser of evils’), commonly practiced by about 40% of voters (ref. the Broadbent Institute), due to the strong coercive power of FPTP which routinely perverts the *true* expression of the ‘will of the People’
3. ‘vote-splitting’, where two parties appealing to similar voters lead to their mutual defeat (e.g. the former Reform and PC)
4. Some number of ‘wrongful’ winners are elected (i.e. where a defeated candidate may actually be more acceptable to the electorate)—sometimes with less than 30% of votes
5. ‘false majority’ Governments are often elected (e.g. Canada’s present and previous majority governments received only 39% of the votes—but held 100% of the power)
6. Sometimes the ‘wrong’ party forms Government—i.e. with more seats but fewer total votes than the Official Opposition.

A preferential ballot effectively resolves all of these problems. In particular, it makes all votes ‘honest’. It’s also based on the same iterative voting procedure used by all parties to elect their leaders (where it’s most important to ‘get it right’).

However, parties on the left and right are strongly resistant to a preferential ballot—because a party in the centre would theoretically be advantaged by drawing secondary support from both the left and right. That said, the fact is that all parties must compete to hold or expand their part of the political spectrum, and those parties (or coalitions) on the left or right always have the potential to broaden their appeal by moving toward the centre.

The two most common forms of PR are ‘Mixed Member Proportional’ (**MMP**) and ‘Single Transferable Vote’ (**STV**). STV is based on multi-member districts which wouldn’t work with our existing ridings. MMP is a widely advocated form of PR, but it requires about one-third of the MPs to be ‘At-Large’ representatives drawn from ‘party lists’ (i.e. unelected)—as so-called ‘compensatory’ seats—to offset the distortions arising from the use of FPTP to elect the MPs in each riding. This means either about 50% more MPs or 50% larger ridings, or some combination thereof. Hence this also wouldn’t work with existing ridings.

Most experts would agree that STV is superior to MMP, which is far superior to FPTP. These alternatives represent the best ideas of the nineteenth century—but both STV and MMP are far from ideal solutions, and each suffers from its own problems. Fortunately, the digital-age now presents us with new possibilities to create better alternatives.

‘Perfect Proportional Representation’ (PPR123) is a digital-age ‘made-in-Canada’ electoral system that was developed for and presented to the ERRE Committee in 2016. It works within the existing ridings.

PPR123 achieves ‘Perfect’ PR by truly ‘making every vote count’—through **‘proxy’ voting in Parliament:**

every voter’s 1st-choice vote (i.e. uncoerced and ‘honest’) is held by an MP of that party (i.e. by their local candidate, if elected, otherwise it’s reassigned to an MP of that party)—which directly **becomes the voting power of each party in Parliament.**

PPR123 is based upon a preferential ballot (i.e. to ensure that all 1st-choice votes are for each voter’s ‘true’ preference), and processed as AV/IRV. By making every 1st-choice vote an honest vote that is always counted, **PPR123 is scrupulously fair to all voters and all parties: the Parliamentary voting power of each party is precisely equal to its total number of 1st-choice votes** (and no secondary votes)—for all its candidates (i.e. those who are elected and those who are defeated).

Hence, the recommended solution for Canada’s electoral reform is “Voters’ Choice”.

1. Each voter would choose either an FPTP ballot (i.e. ‘single-X’) or a PPR123 ballot (i.e. preferential ranking).
[n.b.: With appropriate instructions, a combined PPR123/FPTP would be possible—but it might cause some confusion.]
2. In each riding, if a majority of voters chose an FPTP ballot, the election of that MP would be counted under FPTP rules (i.e. a simple plurality would determine the winner); for those who voted on a PPR123 ballot, only their 1st-choice vote would be counted.
3. In each riding, if a majority of voters chose a PPR123 ballot, the election of that MP would be counted under IRV rules (i.e. an iterative process, with the bottom candidate eliminated on each round and their votes going to the next choice on those ballots, until the winner is elected with a majority (i.e. 50% + 1 of remaining ballots); for those who voted on a FPTP ballot, their vote would be counted until that candidate was eliminated—in which case that ballot would be exhausted (i.e. no different than an IRV exhausted ballot)—and the majority threshold would be reduced.
4. On FPTP ballots, it is recommended that voters should be given a new empowering choice, expressed such as:
“If your chosen candidate is defeated, do you want your vote to be ‘thrown away’ (i.e. as is normal practice under FPTP), or do you want your vote to be added to that party’s voting power in Parliament?”

It seems probable that most of those who chose FPTP would likely be quite grateful to have their vote count for their chosen party—even if that candidate was defeated; if so, this would become a strong public endorsement of the principles of proxy voting and proportional representation.

5. The voting power of each party in Parliament would be the total number of 1st-choice votes received by all its candidates. All MPs would retain all of their 1st-choice votes (and no secondary votes—i.e. eliminating any theoretical advantage to any party). All 1st-choice votes for defeated candidates would be retained by each party, and equitably reassigned among their MPs. This ensures Perfect Proportional Representation—as well as perfect fairness to all voters and all parties—by always making every 1st-choice vote count!
6. Vote reassignment should be within each province (where possible). Official voting records in Parliament would be converted into equivalent (fractional) numbers of seats (i.e. for each MP and each party), according to the total numbers of votes and total number of seats for each province.
(MPs would each cast a single vote electronically within Parliament (via cell phone or iPad); computers would compile the voting record and automatically convert it into the corresponding Citizens' votes and the equivalent numbers of seats.)
7. It's also recommended that some number of 'At-Large' seats should be added to provide more balanced representation by party, province/region and demographics. This would perhaps be a few dozen additional representatives (i.e. much fewer than MMP), and their voting power would be drawn from the pool of reassigned Citizens' votes won by the defeated candidates of each party.
The 'At-Large' representatives might be selected as the best defeated candidates from each party—with priority given to under-represented gender/demographics. This would ensure representation of the Government and Official Opposition in all provinces/regions, and also provide a much fairer representation for small parties with widely distributed votes.

In summary, "Voters' Choice" is the ideal solution for Canada's present electoral reform dilemma because:

1. Those who want to retain FPTP could do so—where it's the will of the majority in their riding—but they couldn't force it on others.
2. Those who want PR could have it—where it's the will of the majority in their riding—but they couldn't force it on others.
3. Those who want a preferential ballot could have it—where it's the will of the majority in their riding—but they couldn't force it on others.
4. Those who vote for a losing candidate would not have their vote automatically wasted (even under FPTP).
5. No need for a referendum. No need to delay implementation.
6. The parties would explain what their supporters should know about "Voters' Choice"—and their recommended ballot choice. Elections Canada and electoral reform advocacy organizations would also provide thorough explanations of the new electoral system and voters' options.
7. No need to change ridings.
8. PPR123 is based on two key elements: (1) preferential voting, to ensure that every 1st-choice vote is an uncoerced and 'honest' vote for each voter's true preference; (2) proxy voting in Parliament, with the voting power of each party based directly on the number of 1st-choice votes received by all their candidates (i.e. those elected and those defeated). Proxy voting has until now not been used in political democracy—but it is the basis of corporate shareholder democracy (i.e. where it's most important that all owners are treated fairly).
In a political democracy, it should be the Citizens (and hence not the MPs) who are considered and treated as equal shareholders—each entitled to one equal voting share. (Indeed, this is the root cause of the problems with other forms of PR, which compromise democratic principles in order to have the 'right' number of members of each party—rather than electing the rightful winners and giving each party the Parliamentary voting power directly based on the Citizens' votes.)
9. If PPR123 becomes the new normal electoral system, then the results would always be:
 - Perfect Proportional Representation
 - Honest voting
 - Zero distortion of the 'Will of the People'
 - No 'wasted votes', no 'strategic voting', and no 'vote-splitting' problem.
 - No 'false majority' Governments, no 'wrongful' winners
 - Riding boundaries can be permanently fixed on more natural boundaries to better serve the People.
10. Electoral reform, as a promise kept rather than a promise broken, would likely become the crowning achievement and most lasting legacy of this Prime Minister and this Government!
With PPR123, Canada can become the model democracy of the 21st Century—setting a new standard for other countries to follow!! And "Voters' Choice" now enables Canada's Government and Citizens to confidently move forward together!!!