

BC's 2018 REFERENDUM ON ELECTORAL REFORM

**Why all citizens of BC should vote on this referendum
and what they need to understand about FPTP vs ProRep**

Presentation by Jeff & Diana Jewell

OVERVIEW OF BC'S 2018 REFERENDUM ON ELECTORAL REFORM

- ❖ Our goals are to **clarify voter choices**:
 - to avoid the confusion generated by partisans opposed to electoral reform
 - to focus on the fundamental choice between an honest vs dishonest voting system
- ❖ Our work on electoral reform
- ❖ Our recommendations on this referendum
- ❖ Why the voting system matters
- ❖ **A referendum on an honest voting system**
 - The Pros & Cons of FPTP (First Past The Post)
 - The Pros & Cons of ProRep (Proportional Representation)
- ❖ The consequences of ProRep
- ❖ This historic opportunity for BC citizens!

Our work on electoral reform

- ❖ Actively involved in electoral reform since 2004.
- ❖ Submitted electoral reform proposals to the BC Citizens' Assembly (2005), federal ERRE Committee (2016), BC NDP govt. (2018).
- ❖ Active in BC referendum campaigns (2005, 2009, 2018).
- ❖ Broadcast about a dozen one-hour programs on democracy and electoral reform for Vancouver Co-Op radio (2005-2009).
- ❖ Wrote more than 100 documents on electoral reform.
- ❖ Formed **ElectoralJusticeNow.ca**
 - focus on the **principle** of electoral **justice** (rather than the nebulous concept of electoral reform)
- ❖ Developed "**Citizen's Vote Empowerment**", the most simple and perfect form of ProRep.

What are the Two Questions on BC's 2018 PR Referendum?

1. Which system should British Columbia use for provincial elections?

(Vote for only one.)

- The current First Past the Post voting system
- A proportional representation voting system

2. If British Columbia adopts a proportional representation voting system, which of the following voting systems do you prefer?

(Rank in order of preference. You may choose to support one, two, or all three systems.)

- Dual Member Proportional (DMP)
- Mixed Member Proportional (MMP)
- Rural-Urban Proportional (RUP)

Our recommendations on BC's 2018 Referendum

- ❖ **Please VOTE!**
- ❖ **Our recommendations:**
 - **Question #1: vote for ProRep (i.e. an honest voting system)**
 - **Question #2: leave blank**

Question #2: Why it should be ignored by most voters.

- ❖ Asking voters to compare three unknown ProRep systems is a recipe for **confusion** and frustration.
 - The Premier had promised a clear choice—and the experts advised against a confusing technical question.
 - We recommend that you should only vote on Question #1 (for ProRep)—unless you're a voting system wonk.
- ❖ The three designated choices are dubious **partisan** selections by the Premier and his Attorney General.
 - None of their choices are fully defined (with details to be decided later, by the legislature, if adopted).
 - **MMP** (the only choice ever implemented) was rejected by an 80% vote of the BCCA (in favour of STV).
 - **RUP** is even more complex than STV (by adding the quirks of MMP).
 - **DMP** contains the unacceptable feature of 'closed party-lists' (reducing accountability to voters).
 - Arguably three better alternatives were proposed—but arbitrarily rejected by the AG.
 - The ballot lacks the option of '**none-of-the-above**' or a '**write-in**' alternative.
- ❖ The entire process, controlled by the government, lacked transparency and democratic legitimacy.
- ❖ However, despite the many reasonable objections to the partisan process and selections (exploited by opponents of ProRep), **voters should not reject this rare opportunity to improve our electoral system.**

Question #1: A referendum on an honest voting system!

- ❖ An honest voting system would not cheat voters, candidates or parties.
- ❖ FPTP cheats most voters, most candidates and most parties.
 - FPTP fails all criteria for an honest voting system.
- ❖ **FPTP is a fundamentally dishonest voting system—incompatible with basic principles of Democracy.**
 - FPTP actively suppresses the expression of the true ‘will of the People’.
 - FPTP actively distorts the expressed ‘will of the People’—by mistranslating their votes into political power.
 - FPTP fails to deliver ‘majority rule’ based on the ‘will of the People’.
 - FPTP fails to ensure that laws reflect the ‘will of the People’ through ‘majority rule’.
- ❖ ProRep does NOT cheat voters, candidates or parties.
 - NO form of ProRep is dishonest. ProRep is truly democratic (whereas FPTP is not)!
 - Hence, any form of ProRep is acceptable—and ethically superior to FPTP.
 - The differences between ProRep and FPTP are vastly more significant than differences between various forms of ProRep.

FPTP cheats most voters:

- ❖ Approx. half of all votes are **'wasted'** (i.e. all votes for losing candidates have no impact).
- ❖ Approx. one-third of voters are coerced into **'strategic voting'** (i.e. for the **'lesser of evils'**).
- ❖ Approx. two-thirds of ridings are **'safe-seats'**—where no vote makes any difference.
- ❖ Hence, **under FPTP, most citizens have no good reason to vote.**

FPTP cheats most parties:

- ❖ **FPTP is systemically biased**—always giving the government many unearned seats—by cheating the losing parties by as many seats (i.e. based on each party's vote-share, or average votes per seat).
- ❖ This usually results in **low voter turnout** and **'false majority'** governments—often with about 40% vote-share, supported by only 25% of eligible voters.
- ❖ FPTP coerces voters' choices—producing the **'two-party'** system—with power is occasionally swapped between the two main parties.
- ❖ **'Strategic voting'** is very unfair to **'third parties'**—greatly reducing their votes and representatives—relegating them to a negative role as **'spoilers'** (sometimes determining the winner).
- ❖ **'Vote-splitting'** between two similar parties almost always ensures their mutual defeat—eventually leading to **forced mergers** (e.g. PC+Reform=Conservative party).
- ❖ FPTP is highly vulnerable to **geographic distortions** (based on riding boundaries and the concentration of votes by party). This is the underlying cause of **'safe-seats'** and **regional 'polarization'**—and can be exploited as **'gerrymandering'** to advantage one party and disadvantage another.

FPTP cheats Democracy:

- ❖ **The fundamental principle of democracy is ‘majority rule’.**
 - Most FPTP elections produce a majority government (a quasi-dictatorship run by the Premier’s office) with typically only 40% vote-share.
 - With turnout typically 60%, this means a majority government may only have the support of about 25% of citizens.
 - Hence, many laws don’t have majority support—lacking true democratic legitimacy.
- ❖ FPTP exacerbates political divisions—often resulting in extreme **polarization** that misrepresents actual vote-shares (e.g. rural/urban divide between BC Liberal/NDP)
- ❖ FPTP sometimes produces the **‘wrong winner’**—with fewer votes than a losing party (e.g. BC1996). [Donald Trump was elected by FPTP—with 3 million fewer votes than his opponent].
- ❖ FPTP sometimes produces a **‘blow-out’** election—with too few opposition members to form an official opposition (e.g. BC2001—even though 42% voted for opposition candidates).
- ❖ FPTP sometimes produces a fragile minority government (e.g. BC2017), with the ‘third-party’ grossly under-represented compared to vote-share.

ProRep does not cheat voters, parties or Democracy:

- ❖ **Under ProRep, votes for defeated candidates are not wasted—hence the ‘safe-seat’ problem disappears, and there’s no need for ‘strategic voting’—so everyone has a good reason to vote!**
- ❖ **Under ProRep, each party has parliamentary voting power proportional to their total share of votes—hence the ‘vote-splitting’ and ‘gerrymandering’ problems disappear.**

A referendum on an honest voting system!

- ❖ **BC’s Citizens and Democracy deserve an honest voting system!**
- ❖ **In essence, this referendum gives BC voters the choice to replace a fundamentally dishonest voting system (FPTP) with an honest (ProRep) system!**
- ❖ **This is BC’s third (likely our last) chance to vote for an honest voting system.
Let’s not allow ourselves to be distracted by a flawed process or confused by comparatively unimportant criticisms raised by those who benefit from our present dishonest voting system.**

This historic opportunity for the citizens of BC!

- ❖ BC already leads Canada in electoral reform referendums.
- ❖ BC voters now have the chance to achieve electoral reform and make BC the new standard of democracy for the rest of Canada to follow!

Our recommendations on BC's 2018 Referendum

- ❖ **Please VOTE!**
- ❖ Our recommendations:
 - **Question #1: vote for ProRep (i.e. an honest voting system)**
 - Question #2: leave blank
- ❖ In essence, **Question #1 is: A REFERENDUM ON AN HONEST VOTING SYSTEM!**

Questions or comments?

References:

- <https://elections.bc.ca/referendum/about-the-referendum/what-are-we-voting-on/>
- <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/howwewote/>
- <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/app/uploads/sites/271/2018/02/Citizens-Vote-Empowerment.pdf>
- <https://makeeveryvotecount-always.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/A-Referendum-on-Honest-Elections.pdf>

Why the voting system matters:

- ❖ A different voting system could change:
 - which party/parties you may vote for
 - which candidates are elected
 - which party/parties form government
 - which parties exist
 - the political viability of each party
 - party campaign strategies
 - government stability, accountability, responsiveness
 - representational balance in the legislature (by party, gender, diversity etc.)
 - how easy or difficult it may be to replace a representative or government
 - how easy or difficult it is for corporate lobbyists to influence government
- ❖ **Every voting system exerts unseen forces that influence the behaviour of voters, politicians and political parties—hence election results—thereby shaping the quality of Democracy and government.**

The pros & cons of FPTP

- ❖ Under FPTP, voting is simple—but typically:
 - About half the votes are ‘wasted’ and have no say in which party becomes the government
 - About one-third of voters are coerced into ‘strategic voting’ for a perceived ‘lesser of evils’
- ❖ Distorted outcomes always give the winning party a substantial unearned bonus (typically about 20% of total seats) with the losing parties cheated by the same amount
 - Distortions usually produce stable majority governments supported by much less than 50% of the people
 - Majority govt is a quasi-dictatorship run by the PM/Premier’s office
 - Vote-split
 - Safe seats
 - Exaggerated regional polarization
- ❖ Distorted voting results make it easier for a small shift to “throw the bums out”
- ❖ Results in the “two-party system” (duopoly, with a centre-party bias) with all “third parties” relegated to the role of “spoilers”
- ❖ **FPTP is loved by beneficiaries of its distortions (i.e. duopoly parties and patrons, corporate lobbyists).**

The pros & cons of ProRep

- ❖ Voting is usually not as simple as FPTP—but:
 - No ‘strategic voting’ (i.e. voters free to vote for their true preference, without it being a ‘wasted’ vote)
 - No distorted outcomes—no ‘false majority’ or ‘wrong-winner’ governments.
 - No voters, candidates or parties cheated (for parties exceeding threshold)
- ❖ Usually produces majority or coalition governments, always supported by a majority of the voters
- ❖ Some risk of ‘tail wags dog’ syndrome
- ❖ Coalition governments are never a dictatorship
- ❖ Eliminates the ‘two-party system’ (duopoly, with a centre-party bias)
- ❖ all parties have power proportional to their vote-share (eliminates the ‘Vote-split’ problem)
- ❖ Makes every vote count equally—even in ‘safe-seats’
- ❖ Eliminates the problem of regional polarization
- ❖ Coalition governments become the new norm:
 - more co-operation between parties; less negative campaigning etc.

The consequences of ProRep

- ❖ Political parties realign/emerge into Centre-Left and Centre-Right coalitions
- ❖ Some new parties probably emerge (limited by threshold for representation)
- ❖ An honest voting system: people vote for their true preferences
- ❖ An honest voting system: all votes have equal power (regardless what party or riding)
- ❖ An honest voting system: no voters and no parties are ever cheated

What's wrong about referendums on electoral reform?

- ❖ Can easily be made confusing for most voters
 - The NO campaign always exploits public apathy and anxiety about change, with negative campaigning to raise public fears, uncertainty and doubt
- ❖ Commonly a deliberate 'made-to-fail' strategy by a government with an inconvenient promise and a 'conflict of interest'
- ❖ **The BC-STV 2005 referendum was won by the people (i.e. 'stolen' by the BC Liberal govt.)!**
 - **57.8% voted for BC-STV** (i.e. 57.8% of voters rejected FPTP)
 - 93% of BCCA chose STV over MMP
 - 95% of BCCA chose STV over FPTP

What's wrong about this referendum on electoral reform?

- ❖ Entirely partisan process (lacking democratic legitimacy) from start to finish
 - NDP govt. controlled every aspect of the referendum legislation
 - NDP govt. controlled the 'citizen engagement' process, the selection of referendum questions, and ProRep alternatives
 - NDP govt. dictated the referendum voting process and any subsequent ProRep implementation
 - NDP govt. failed to fully specify the details of each of their designated alternatives, and reserved the right to unilaterally determine those details after the referendum
 - NDP govt. failed to establish any reasonable requirements for adoption [e.g. minimum voter participation; regional majorities]
 - Arguably three better ProRep alternatives were ignored
 - Referendum campaign blatantly partisan by all parties
- ❖ Notwithstanding procedural and democratic flaws, it nonetheless remains true that this referendum is the only (perhaps final?) chance for BC voters to get an honest voting system, and any form of ProRep is much more honest than FPTP