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Fair Vote Canada **Représentation équitable au Canada**

Myths and Facts about Proportional Representation

As the all-party committee conducts this important consultation with Canadians about which values and features are important to them in a new electoral system, it is to the benefit of everyone to ground the conversation in facts.

Two Families of Voting Systems

There are two main “families” of voting systems in the world - majoritarian (which is commonly referred to as winner-takes-all) and proportional.

“Proportional representation” is not one system. It is a principle that aims to produce a Parliament which reflects how people voted. For parties, it means that if a party gets 39% of the vote it should get about 39% of the seats. Almost every voter contributes to the composition of Parliament with his/her vote. Often when somebody is repeating a myth about PR, they are referring to one particular feature of one possible system. It is important that we design a made-in-Canada solution.

MYTH: Proportional representation involves “appointed MPs” and “unaccountable politicians”.

FACT: Sometimes by “appointed MPs” or “unaccountable MPs” people are referring to “closed” party lists - a design where the parties nominate candidates (as they do now, in nomination meetings), publish the lists, and voters choose only a party on the ballot rather than selecting from among candidates on the list. This means the MPs are elected according to the order of the published list. **There is no party or advocacy group in Canada advocating closed lists for our federal Parliament.** All proportional models can be designed so that all MPs are elected by voters and accountable to voters.

MYTH: The all-party committee must choose between “ranked ballots or proportional representation.”

FACT: “Ranked ballots” or “preferential ballots” are *not* a voting system. They are a tool/feature that can be used in a majoritarian system (called “Alternative Vote”, used in Papua New Guinea and Australia) or they can be incorporated into the design of almost any proportional system.

Alternative Vote (AV - sometimes called “Instant Run-Off Voting” at a local level) produces virtually identical scores to first-past-the-post on the Index of Disproportionality, which measures how well a legislature reflects the choices of voters. AV wastes up to 50% of the votes, and continues to produce majority governments with less than 50% of the vote. Over 21 elections in Australia, it changed the local outcome 6% of the time. When it

was used in Canada provincially, it shifted the outcome in a riding about 2% of the time. None of the twelve commissions in Canada to date have recommended Alternative Vote.

The Single Transferable Vote (PR-STV) is an example of a proportional system which uses a ranked ballot in a multi-member riding, to elect a team of MPs. Mixed Member Proportional representation can also use a ranked ballot.

MYTH: Proportional systems cause “instability”.

FACT: A study comparing OECD countries using winner-take-all systems and PR systems between 1945 and 1998 showed the average number of elections for first-past-the-post countries was 16.7 and PR countries was 16. Most countries using PR are governed by stable, majority coalition governments. When no party can achieve a majority with 39% of the vote, the incentives change, encouraging more cooperative politics.

Proportional representation also creates a dynamic of long-term stability. You do not see a massive shift in policy due to the fact that parties need consensus to pass legislation. Majoritarian systems like first-past-the-post contribute to policy lurch, a dynamic where a new government spends its term undoing the policy of the previous government. It's an inefficient way to govern and build long term solutions to problems.

MYTH: Local representation is lost or decreased with PR.

FACT: Any proportional systems proposed for Canada maintains local representation as a key feature. PR means you will elect a team of MPs. You will have an MP just as close to your home as you do now, and every voter will help elect an MP who shares his/her values.

MYTH: Canada could become like Israel or Italy.

FACT: Proportional systems are used in over 80 countries around the world. Over 80% of OECD countries use proportional voting systems, including Sweden, Scotland, Germany and New Zealand. No-one is suggesting a nation-wide, closed party list system.

MYTH: Fringe parties will flourish with PR.

FACT: Any proportional system for Canada could have a threshold - either explicit, or built in by design - that a party must reach before qualifying for regional list seats. 3-5% is a common threshold. Germany uses a Mixed Member Proportional system. The number of parties in their current legislature is 4. The number of parties in our 41st Parliament was 6, plus Independents. There is no system proposed for Canada which would make it easy for fringe parties to win seats.

MYTH: PR requires a constitutional amendment.

FACT: All proportional models for Canada require only legislation. The only PR model which would be unconstitutional is a nation-wide party list system used in Israel, which is not suited for Canada and has never been proposed.

MYTH: Since parties need to cooperate and compromise with PR, very little gets done.

FACT: Proportional countries score higher not only on measures of democracy, but on the United Nations Index of Human Development - encompassing many quality of life measures. They create policies closer to the median voter, have lower income inequality, better environmental protection, and greater fiscal responsibility.