



Fair Representation
Vote équitable
Canada au Canada

MAKE EVERY VOTE COUNT!

THIS IS DEMOCRACY?

Why Canadians need a fair and proportional voting system

The voting system is the heart of representative democracy. It's the tool citizens use to create democratic government.

When every citizen's vote has equal value, parliaments can reflect the political will of the people.

If the voting system ignores or distorts what voters say, governments cannot be properly accountable and democracy is compromised. This is the core problem with the Canadian political system. Our 21st century democracy is hobbled by a dysfunctional 12th century voting system that was scrapped long ago by most major democracies.



Fair Vote Canada is a national network of concerned citizens who are pressing for fair voting systems at all levels of government and throughout civil society



First-past-the-post voting originated in the 12th century...

...when people believed the earth was flat. Over the centuries, we learned the earth was round. Most countries also learned there were better ways to vote.



If we asked Canadians who cast wasted votes in the last election to form a line beginning in Halifax, the line would stretch across the country to Victoria, and then far, far into the Pacific Ocean.

The heart of the problem: the winner-take-all principle

Canada's current voting system is based on the winner-take-all principle. It's just what it says. In each riding, one group of voters wins – their votes send an MP to Parliament.

Every other voter in that riding loses – their votes elect no one to represent them in Parliament. They cast ineffective, wasted votes. The only voters sending MPs to Ottawa are those who support the most popular party in their riding. **In other words, your political beliefs and place of residence determine whether your vote counts.** If you hold the “wrong” political views or live in the “wrong” place, your vote does nothing. **In a typical federal election, more than seven million Canadians, or just over half of voters, cast wasted votes.**

The United States and the United Kingdom are the only other major Western democracies using Canada's version of winner-take-all (first-past-the-post). When the new democracies in Eastern Europe chose their voting systems, not one adopted this system.

What is proportional representation?

Proportional representation is any voting system designed to produce a representative body (like a parliament, legislature, or council) where voters elect MPs in proportion to our votes.

Where would you rather vote?

In 2011, both Canada and New Zealand had national elections. Using a proportional voting system, **97% of New Zealand voters were able to elect an MP.** Using first-past-the-post, **just 51% of Canadian voters were able to elect an MP.**

The core principle is to treat all voters equally – **to make every vote count.** When voters are treated equally, election results will be proportional. If voters for a party cast 40% of the votes, they will elect about 40% of the MPs (not 50% or 60%). If voters for another party cast 20% of the vote, they will elect about 20% of the MPs (not 10% or 0%).

In other words, a party's share of MPs will actually reflect how people voted: 81 countries have voting systems with an element of proportional representation.

Isn't that what we have now?

The very strange math of Canadian elections

39.6% elect a Conservative "majority" government
- 2011 federal election

38.5% elect a Liberal "majority" government
- 1997 federal election

37.6% elect an NDP "majority" government
- 1990 Ontario election

Canada's Parliament and provincial legislatures all use a winner-take-all voting system, where each riding has only one winner, and the candidate with the most votes wins.

What's wrong with the candidate with the most votes winning?

With just one winner in each riding, half of Canadian voters don't actually elect anyone, and our Parliaments and legislatures don't actually look anything like Canada's political diversity.

DEMOCRACY FAIL

Voter turnout is plummeting. Cynicism about politics, politicians, and elections is growing. Even our political leaders admit to a very troubling democratic deficit.

That's not surprising when the voting system:

- **fails** to give voters equal votes
- **fails** to give us the representation we want
- **fails** to create legitimate majority government
- **fails** to make politicians accountable to voters
- **fails** to create Parliaments that reflect the diversity of Canada
- **fails** to give most Canadians, particularly young people, a reason to vote

The problem isn't just a few bad politicians or party leaders. It's the rules of the game.

What is Fair Vote Canada?

Fair Vote Canada is a multi-partisan citizens' campaign for voting system reform. We promote the use of fair and proportional voting systems for elections of all levels of government and throughout civil society.

Fair Vote Canada brings together people from all parts of the country, all walks of life, and all points on the political spectrum. Today, FVC has members in every province and territory and about 20 local and regional chapters.

PHONY MAJORITIES, PHONY MANDATES

Since World War I, Canada has had 16 "majority" governments. In each case, one party held a majority of seats and exercised 100 percent of the power.

But just four of these actually won a majority of the popular vote!

And it's getting worse, not better. Since the mid-1960s, Canada has had eight "majority" governments, with only one supported by a majority of voters, and that one just by a hair.

In 1997, the Liberals formed a majority government with just 38 percent of the popular vote, and in 2011, the Conservatives did too, with 39.6%.

Majority governments since World War I...

Legitimate majorities Phony majorities

1940	1930
1949	1935
1958	1945
1984	1953
	1968
	1974
	1980
	1988
	1993
	1997
	2000
	2011

Wrong-winner elections "N.B. PICKS SHAWN!"

...or so said the front page of the September 19, 2006 edition of the Moncton Times & Transcript after the provincial election. A huge photo showed Shawn Graham, leader of the New Brunswick Liberals, celebrating his stunning victory.

Just one problem here.

New Brunswick voters didn't pick Shawn Graham's Liberals. More people voted for Bernard Lord's

Progressive Conservatives. But the winner-take-all system gave the Liberals a majority of seats.

This is just one of the "wrong-winner" provincial elections in recent times. Parties coming second in the popular vote also formed "majority" governments in British Columbia (1996) and Quebec (1994).

In four provincial elections since 1996, the party that came second in the popular vote actually formed a "majority" government!

How bad can it be?

In 2011, the votes of seven million Canadian voters elected no one. Conservatives in Quebec, New Democrats in Saskatchewan, Liberals in Alberta, and Greens everywhere (not just the few of them in one riding) all deserve to be represented by someone they voted for. Canada's regions are actually much more diverse than our voting system reflects.

* "The present [voting] system...creates a wholly false image of the country, based on illusory majorities and exaggerated regionalism, as harmful to the legitimacy of government as it is to national unity."
Andrew Coyne
August 31, 2001, National Post column

All Votes Are Not Equal

Exaggerated Regional Differences

Canada's voting system rewards regional parties, or national parties that focus on a specific region of the country.

A million votes concentrated in one region of the country will gain a party far more seats than the support of a million voters earned from coast to coast.

So naturally, we end up with parties that unfairly dominate certain regions of the country, with little or no representation for their voters outside their strongholds.

Government and opposition caucuses seldom have strong representation from all parts of the country.

Canada's 2011 electoral map made it appear as though 69% of Ontario voters voted Conservative, when just 43% did. It suggested that a huge majority of Quebec voters were NDP supporters, when 57% of them actually voted for other parties.

The map also made it seem that 78% of Western Canadian voters chose the Conservatives, when, in reality, almost half of them voted for other parties.

Our voting system wildly exaggerates differences between regions and all but ignores the diversity within them. It makes it look like there's no such thing as Alberta Liberal voters, Saskatchewan NDP voters, or Montreal Conservative voters.

In fact, in 2011, there were 209,000 Montreal Conservative voters. They just didn't elect anyone. By contrast, only 190,000 Conservative voters in Mississauga and Brampton, Ontario elected all eight of their MPs with only 43.7% of the vote.

Representing differences is at the core of democracy. Surely, exaggerating them is not.

"This is perverse, for a party's breadth of appeal is surely a favourable factor [in choosing a voting system] from the point of view of national cohesion, and its discouragement a count against an electoral system which heavily under-rewards it."

Lord Jenkins, "The Report of the Independent Commission on the Voting System" (United Kingdom) 1998

Given the huge number of votes that elect no one, it's not surprising our elections produce wacky outcomes. If Canada's voting system treated all voters equally, each of our 308 MPs would be elected by, and represent, about 48,000 voters (based on current voter turnout). How did the 2011 election compare to that indicator of democratic equality? Not well...

- A Conservative vote was worth more than two Liberal votes
- An NDP vote was worth 13 Green votes
- Supporters of big parties suffered: 50% of Canada's wasted votes were cast for Conservatives and Liberals
- 1.9 million NDP votes in Ontario and the Prairies elected just 25 MPs, while just 1.6 million NDP votes in Quebec alone elected a whopping 59 MPs.
- 627,962 Conservative voters in Quebec elected just five MPs, while just 256,167 of their fellow Conservatives in Saskatchewan elected 13.
- It took 125,183 Western Liberal voters to elect an MP, but just 32,016 Conservative voters to do the same.
- 428,325 Green voters east of BC didn't elect a single MP, while 333,172 Liberal voters in Atlantic Canada alone elected 12.

It's an election. Doesn't someone have to lose?

Candidates and parties can lose, but voters never should. In their 2011 election, 97% of New Zealand voters cast a vote that elected someone to represent them. In Canada, just **51%** of us did.

Do enough people really think there's a problem?

Many polls from 2001 to 2010 showed a strong majority of Canadians (around 70%) believed that the portion of seats a party wins in the House of Commons should reflect the portion of the votes they receive.

A February 2010 Environics Research poll showed that this is still true. It found that 68 percent of Canadians support "moving towards a system of proportional representation (PR) in Canadian elections".

IN THE 2011 ELECTION it took...

35,152 votes to elect one Conservative MP

43,810 votes to elect one NDP MP

81,855 votes to elect one Liberal MP

222,857 votes to elect one Bloc MP

572,095 votes to elect one Green MP

Fair Vote Canada believes Canadians should be able to...

- cast an equal effective vote and be represented fairly,
- be governed by a fairly elected Parliament that closely reflects the popular vote, *and*
- live under legitimate laws approved by a majority of elected Parliamentarians representing a majority of voters.

DO YOU AGREE?

DONATE!

www.fairvote.ca

You call this voter equality?

Consider the 2011 federal election...

Look at the plight of Conservatives in Quebec, where 627,962 voters elected only five MPs, while just 256,167 of their fellow Conservatives in Saskatchewan elected 13 MPs.

And look at the plight of Liberal voters in the West, where it took 125,183 Liberal voters to elect an MP, and just 32,016 Conservative voters to do the same.

Look at the 428,325 Green voters east of BC who didn't elect a single MP, while 333,172 Liberal voters in Atlantic Canada alone were able to elect 12 MPs.

Wasted Votes and Declining Turnout

Voter Turnout in Canada's Elections

1984	75.3%
1988	75.3%
1993	70.9%
1997	67.0%
2000	64.1%
2004	60.9%
2006	64.7%
2008	58.8%
2011	61.1%

What happens when a voting system wastes votes, provides no representation for nearly half the voters, distorts election outcomes, and routinely creates phony majority governments?

Some people feel pressured to vote against a party they fear rather than for a party they actually support.

But many more just stay home. The October 2008 federal election set another record for the lowest turnout in Canadian history.

Given the way the system treats voters, it's no surprise that 40% of registered voters don't come out — it's surprising that 60% still do.

Canada ranked 131st in the world in voter turnout in 2011, just ahead of Uganda, and slightly behind Estonia.

Based on international experience, if Canada switched to some form of proportional representation, we could expect at least another 1.5 million citizens to participate.

CANADA

#1 in the world in hockey!!!

#131 in voter turnout

What about representation of women and minorities?

Less than a quarter of Canada's parliamentarians are women. That's barely enough to rank 39th in the world, well behind Angola, Belarus, Iraq, Sudan, and Afghanistan. Some countries set aside a certain number of seats for women. But those that elect the most women without such quotas use proportional representation.

In Canada, visible minorities also hold relatively few seats, despite being a growing segment of society. Very few Aboriginal people serve in Parliament.

When parties can only put forward one candidate per riding, they will naturally nominate the candidate that they think is strongest. "As long as there are even subconscious biases in our society about who makes the best MP, white men will be overrepresented."* But when voters can elect several MPs, parties will put forward a more representative range of candidates to earn the votes of a diverse population, and voters will indeed take them up on it.

*Dr. Alan Renwick, University of Reading, 2011



Artist: Barbara Paterson

WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT

Consider the percentage of women parliamentarians in the four major Western countries still using winner-take-all:

Canada	24.7%
Australia	24.7%
UK	22.3%
US	16.8%

Compared to major Western democracies using various forms of proportional representation:

Sweden	44.7%
Iceland	42.5%
Finland	42.5%
Norway	39.6%
Denmark	39.1%
Netherlands	38.7%
Belgium	38.0%
Spain	36.0%
Germany	32.9%
New Zealand	32.2%

Data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (December 2012)

"The current electoral system no longer responds to 21st century Canadian democratic values."

Law Commission of Canada, *Voting Counts: Electoral Reform for Canada* (2004)

Fair Voting: The Alternative to Winner-Take-All

VOTE
 YES
 NO



"The right of decision belongs to the majority, but the right of representation belongs to all."

Ernest Naville, 1865

Voting systems: We have choices

Fortunately, we're not stuck with the system we have. Most established democracies use other voting systems that better represent what voters are saying.

What are the benefits of fair voting?

All voters have a reason to vote, regardless of their political beliefs or place of residence.

Liberals in Conservative regions, Conservatives in Liberal regions, and supporters of smaller parties everywhere will be able to cast effective votes.

Because voters are treated equally, Parliaments are truly representative of the people.

Currently, some parties in Parliament have far more seats and power than their popular vote warrants, while others have too few seats or none at all.

Majority governments represent a genuine majority.

Canadians are usually ruled by "majority" governments that the majority voted against. Countries with fair voting systems typically have stable and responsive coalition governments — stable because the parties know they will never have complete control of government and have to work constructively with partners.

Fair voting systems tend to produce parliaments with more women and visible minorities.

Because parties have to nominate lists of candidates to compete in each region, they quickly learn that candidate lists reflecting the diversity of the population usually attract more votes.

All geographic regions usually have representation both in the government and opposition benches.

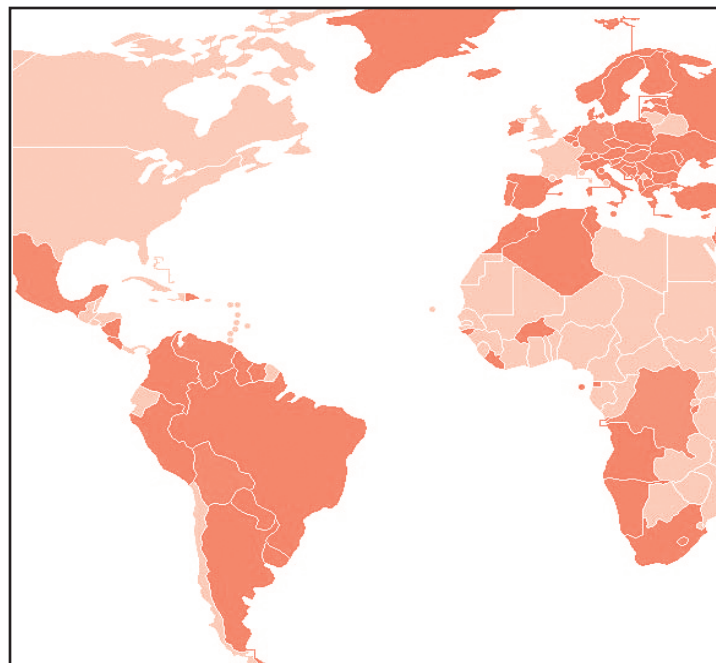
Because every voter is equal, regions generally elect candidates from all parties, unlike our current system where one party often dominates each region

COUNTRIES USING PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION: WHAT WE KNOW

Professor Arend Lijphart's *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries* (1999, Yale University Press), is an excellent source of comparative international data. Lijphart's study examined a large number of countries over extended periods of time and identified these characteristics of "consensus democracies" using proportional voting systems:

- Wasted votes and distorted election results are reduced.
- Phony majority governments are rare.
- Voter turnout tends to be higher.
- Parliaments are more representative of the range of political views.
- Parliaments better reflect the composition of the electorate (gender, ethnicity, region).
- Parliaments tend to pass legislation more in line with the views of the majority of the public.
- Countries maintain strong economic performance.
- Citizens tend to be more satisfied with the way democracy works.

A ten-page summary of key findings (*Can Fair Voting Systems Really Make a Difference?*) is available at www.fairvote.ca



- Countries with proportional voting systems
- Countries with 'Winner-Take-All' voting systems

Partial listing of countries using proportional voting systems

These include **most long-term democracies, most European countries** and most of the **major nations of the Americas**.

Argentina	Estonia	Luxembourg	Portugal	Sweden
Austria	Finland	Netherlands	Romania	Switzerland
Belgium	Germany	New Zealand	Scotland	Turkey
Brazil	Guyana	Nicaragua	Serbia	Uruguay
Bulgaria	Hungary	Norway	Slovakia	Wales
Colombia	Iceland	Paraguay	Slovenia	
Czech Republic	Ireland	Peru	South Africa	
Denmark	Latvia	Poland	Spain	

Developing a Made-in-Canada Fair Voting System

Canadians deserve a voting system that ensures fair representation and accountable government.

The good news is, we don't need to change the constitution or expand the House of Commons to get it. We should use a citizen-driven process to discuss the alternatives and find a Made-in-Canada solution.

Here are just two of many approaches that might be considered

Does Fair Vote Canada advocate for a particular system?

We advocate for voting systems that are designed to produce a representative body (like a parliament, legislature, or council) where seats are more or less in proportion to votes cast. While 81 countries use a type of proportional representation, local circumstances have created unique variations.

Canadians deserve to learn from these experiences to create a uniquely Canadian proportional voting system that minimizes wasted votes and reflects who we are and what we actually vote for.

EXAMPLE 1: MIXED SYSTEMS OFFER MORE OPPORTUNITIES

How would it work?

In Mixed-Member Proportional (MMP) systems like they have in Scotland, Wales, Germany, and New Zealand, voters vote for their individual local representatives the way we do, but also cast a separate second vote to elect several "top-up" regional MPs.

In the "open list" version recommended by the Law Commission of Canada, the top regional vote-getters from an underrepresented party fill top-up seats until their party's share of seats reflects its share of the popular vote.

Law Commission of Canada recommends mixed system

The Law Commission of Canada, an independent federal agency, carried out a two-year study and public consultation on federal voting system reform.

Their final report, tabled in the House of Commons in March 2004, called for replacement of the antiquated winner-take-all system, but not a radical overhaul.

Rather than adopt the traditional form of proportional representation used in most Western countries, the Commission proposed a uniquely Canadian mixed-member proportional system (MMP) designed to add an element of proportionality, while continuing some elements of the current system.

They recommended that two-thirds of the seats would be filled through riding elections and the remaining one-third from regional candidates.

Under this system, voters would gain additional representation because they have two types of competing MPs:

- 1) a local riding MP (who may or may not be someone they voted for) and
- 2) diverse regional MPs, including those elected from the party they support.

Voters have the choice of either voting for their party's regional list, or of voting for a candidate within the list. So MMP systems can ensure that all elected MPs have "faced the voters" and been personally elected.

A similar mixed regional system was recommended in December 2007 by the Chief Electoral Officer of Quebec.

You can find the Law Commission of Canada's report, *Voting Counts: Electoral Reform for Canada*, at www.fairvote.ca.

Importantly, the Commission's approach to designing an MMP system differs from the MMP models presented to voters in the Ontario and PEI referendums, which had closed province-wide lists.

"Best runner-up" MMP is used in the German province of Baden-Wuerttemberg. They have no party lists. The additional "top-up" regional MPs are simply the party's local candidates in the region who did best in their local ridings without winning the local seat.

Wouldn't we be giving all our power away to political parties?

Some people didn't like the "closed list" MMP system put forward in the 2007 Ontario referendum because voters' second votes would have been for parties, not individual candidates, with top-up seats filled from provincewide lists chosen by party members.

It's worth remembering that in today's elections, party candidates are chosen by party members alone. By the time they face the voters in their riding, each candidate

is effectively a closed party list, one candidate long. So even "closed list" MMP offers every Canadian a much better chance of being represented than our current system. After an election, you could take an issue to your local MP or one of your diverse regional MPs. Today, many MPs occupy safe seats. But they might start listening if they knew you could actually take your business elsewhere. In Germany, they call this

"personalized proportional representation."

If you're still worried about giving parties too much power, consider "open list" MMP (as recommended by the Law Commission of Canada), "best runner-up" MMP, or the Single Transferable Vote (STV).

EXAMPLE 2: SINGLE TRANSFERABLE VOTE (STV) IN MULTI-MEMBER RIDINGS

How would it work?

In the Single Transferable Vote (STV) system used in Ireland, Northern Ireland, and two state houses and the national senate in Australia, voters in combined local districts get to elect four, five, six or seven representatives instead of just one, ranking individual local politicians from all parties by order of preference.

STV does everything it can to make sure your vote isn't wasted. If your favourite candidate doesn't have enough

votes to get elected, your vote is transferred to your next-favourite candidate, and so on.

In that case, voting for a shoo-in candidate might seem like a waste if it meant your other choices didn't get in (Remember, you've got only one vote to use to elect five or six people). But the truly great thing about STV (and one thing that sets it apart from the Alternative Vote, which is not proportional) is that if your favourite candidate has more votes than he or she needs, your

vote is similarly transferred to your next-favourite candidate, and so on, until the full weight of your vote ends up where it's most needed to get you the group of representatives you want.

Every voter gets an equal impact on the outcome, and can vote their conscience without wasting their vote. Every politician is elected with equally broad support, and none can benefit from vote-splitting. Importantly, results are proportional.

Single Transferable Vote (STV) – ideal for civil society and non-party elections

STV can be used for traditional party-based national and provincial elections, as it is in Ireland, Malta, and for the Australian Senate.

Because STV is not dependent on party proportionality, it is well suited for use in civil society elections – for example, electing the boards of community groups, unions, co-ops, NGOs and businesses. It is also suitable for municipal elections where candidates have no party affiliation. It was used in many western Canadian municipalities in the early 20th century. STV is already widely used in British civil society, with many organizations, universities, and businesses using it for board elections. It is also used for municipal elections in Scotland and New Zealand.

The city is divided into multi-member districts. Unlike block voting, where you elect many councillors at-large by voting for all of them, which often results in one group winning all the seats, you have only one vote, resulting in proportional results. With STV, you rank as many candidates on the ballot as you wish in order of preference, 1, 2, 3, etc. If candidates are affiliated with parties, you can vote across party lines, or in any manner you wish. You can vote by party, by gender, by ethnic group, by geographic location or whatever criteria you wish.

Candidates are elected by reaching a quota of votes (based on the number of seats in the district and number of votes cast). If a candidate receives

twice as many votes as needed to get elected, the other half of each vote will be transferred to the next preference on the ballots. If a candidate is eliminated, then that candidate's votes will also be transferred to the next preference on each ballot.

STV was recommended by the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform (www.citizensassembly.bc.ca). **In a 2005 referendum, 58% of British Columbia voters voted "Yes" to STV for provincial elections.** Unfortunately, the BC government decided that 60% was required for legitimacy. In the previous election, that same government had won 97% of the seats and 100% of the power with 57% of the vote.

PHONY REFORM

Many politicians who want to derail public demand for fair voting find it more strategic to embrace "reform" while portraying fair voting systems as "too radical" for Canadians. They accept that it's time to scrap first-past-the-post, but propose adopting a different type of winner-take-all voting. They tell us the solution is simple. Just use a ranked ballot and continue to elect just one MP from every riding.

Why don't we just rank candidates in our one riding?

The system of ranking candidates in single-winner ridings is called the Alternative Vote, or Instant Runoff Voting. The Alternative Vote is NOT a proportional system.

As long as there is only one winner in a riding, many (even most) voters in that riding simply do not elect the candidate that best represents them, and nationwide

results are not proportional. Ranking candidates wouldn't change this. As nice as it might be to rank them first on your ballot sheet, candidates of currently underrepresented parties would simply get eliminated in the second or third round of counting, in favour of larger parties. Studies show that 95-98% of the time, we would get the same winners as we do now. If you like ranking candidates, go proportional with multi-member ridings. Try Single Transferable Vote (STV).

THE ALTERNATIVE VOTE (AV): IT'S NO ALTERNATIVE

Just like Canada, Australia's lower house of Parliament has one member per riding. The only difference is that they use ranked ballots. If no candidate wins a majority of first-choice votes, then the least popular candidate is dropped, and those ballots are reassigned according to their second choices, and so on, until one candidate has a majority of the ballots.

This might sound like an improvement, but unfortunately, it simply recreates most of the problems of Canada's system (which is probably why only one major democracy uses this system).

Adding second- and third-choice votes in order to create a winner does not magically create "majority" support that didn't exist before, so we still get phony majority governments. Lower choices are usually the result of voters trying to vote strategically for the "lesser of evils". Most Canadians are already "represented" by their second or third choice — that's the problem, not the solution. If used in Canada, this voting system would do nothing for women and minorities, and could create even more distorted election results than the current system. AV was rejected in referendums in the UK and New Zealand in 2011, supported by only 32% in the UK and only 8% in New Zealand.

(There is one appropriate use of the Alternative Vote – when electing a position that can only be filled by one person, such as a mayor, president, party leader or committee chair. In these elections, the objective is to choose one person rather than create a representative body, such as a parliament, and that requires a winner-take-all voting system.)

For a more detailed discussion, see the Fair Vote Canada paper *The Alternative Vote (or Instant Runoff Voting): It's No Solution for the Democratic Deficit*, available on Resources page at www.fairvote.ca. Or check out sites like www.no2av.ca.

Arguments Against Fair Voting and Proportional Representation

Opponents of fair, proportional voting systems generally warn that if you demand “too much” democracy, you lose the ability to form effective governments. But a look at the list of nations already using fair voting systems shows that these arguments are not supported by the facts.

They are scare tactics, and here are a few of the most common ones to watch out for:

Doesn't all this mean many more politicians?

Proportional systems don't require more politicians. They simply allow you, the voter, to have a say over the occupant of more than one seat. You and your neighbour may vote differently, but we think you both deserve to elect someone. Don't you?

Wouldn't proportional representation let extremists get elected?

In our current system, vote splitting has allowed MPs to be elected with as little as 29% of the vote in their riding.

In Germany's MMP system, parties need to have five per cent of the popular vote before they're allowed a seat. In STV, every single candidate has to earn a certain minimum number of votes to be elected. Most candidates win by earning votes transferred from other candidates from across the political spectrum, ensuring diverse voices with broad support.

Won't parties multiply like rabbits?

Critics sometimes claim that fair voting would produce a proliferation of small parties. It's true that some new parties may form and old parties may restructure, because when all Canadians are free to cast positive and effective votes, parties will truly have to reflect the range of viewpoints in this country.

Conservatives of different stripes, libertarians, and others would not be forced into a broad-tent party in order to have their vote count.

But history shows that the introduction of fair voting will likely only marginally increase the number of parties that can win seats and affect legislation. Why? It's only common sense. Most voters want to support parties that can have impact or growth potential. Some countries also set thresholds (e.g., 4% or 5% of the popular vote) before parties can win seats in parliament. Regional models like Scotland's have similar natural thresholds built-in.

Won't this cause instability, constant elections, and endless minority governments?

Since Italy reformed its voting system in the 1990s, Canada is now the most unstable of the major democracies, with twenty-one elections since World War II. We keep flip-flopping between false majority governments (a majority of seats without a majority of the vote) and unstable minorities at the expense of our country's long-term priorities, and our voting system is largely to blame.

In Ontario's 2011 election, just 2% separated the two leading parties, but one got 49% of the seats while the other got just 35%. In Prince Edward Island, 40% of the vote gets you just 19% of the seats. But bump that up to 50%, and your party sweeps to a dominant 81% majority. When relatively small changes in poll numbers spell the difference between oblivion and absolute power, it's no wonder our politicians seem to be in perpetual, confrontational campaign mode.

In proportional representation, a 2% change in the polls would mean just a 2% change in seats. Politicians would have much more incentive to get down to work on our country's long-term priorities, rather than playing “gotcha” to tweak the poll numbers and spark yet another election. Minority governments could mean cooperation and compromise, not confrontation and instability.

Wouldn't this mean constant coalition governments?

Governments formed under any voting system are coalitions of different groups who negotiate and make deals. That's the way democracy works. Each of Canada's “big tent” parties is already a coalition of internal factions which are generally hidden from public view except during leadership

races. They compete with one another and then negotiate and compromise on the party platform and policies.

When elections are more proportional, such coalitions generally involve more than one party. While Canadians have been taught to fear this, it actually has a few enormous advantages. Negotiations among parties are generally much more visible to the public than those that currently take place within parties, and the compromises are publicly known. When elections are more proportional, the resulting coalition or governing group represents a true majority of voters.

For example, the Law Commission of Canada recommended keeping the same numbers of MPs from each province, making every three ridings into two larger ones, and adding regional MPs elected by voters unrepresented by the local results.

“For those who argue that anything but our existing system will fail to produce [single-party] majority governments — seen by many as a more effective governing vehicle — it is surely fair to respond that “majority” governments reflective of only a minority of the eligible voters in a democracy is a more serious problem. Stable government composed of more than one party is now the effective norm in continental Europe.”

*Ed Broadbent and Hugh Segal
October 1, 2002, Globe and Mail*

Wouldn't small parties have all the power? Wouldn't the “tail wag the dog”?

Any major party “blackmailed” into adopting an agenda out-of-step with its own support base will be severely punished at the next election. On the other hand, when two or more like-minded parties, who together represent a majority of voters, agree to form a coalition focusing on areas of policy agreement, that often indicates majority public support for those policies. That's more like the dog choosing the tail that fits. Research has indeed

shown that coalition governments tend to be better than single-party governments at producing legislation more in line with public thinking.

Won't this spell chaos, just like Italy and Israel?

While 81 countries use proportional representation, critics can find only these two extreme examples, conveniently ignoring stable examples like Germany, Switzerland, and Sweden. Israel has a pure-list PR system that would never work in Canada, and has never been seriously

considered here. These critics should also remember that since Italy reformed its voting system in 1994, Canada is likely the most unstable of the major democracies, with twenty-one elections since World War II compared with 17 in Italy.

FVC Statement of Purpose

The following Statement of Purpose was ratified by FVC members on August 20, 2009.

Fair Vote Canada seeks broad multi-partisan support to embody in new legislation the basic principle of democratic representative government and ultimate safeguard of a free society: the right of each citizen to equal treatment under election laws and equal representation in legislatures.

We campaign for equal effective votes and fair representation at every level of government and throughout civil society by various means including lobbying legislators for electoral law reform, litigation, public education, citizens' assemblies, and referenda.

To create an equal voice for every citizen and give democratic legitimacy to our laws, we must reform our electoral institutions, political parties, public political funding mechanisms and governing processes to achieve these interdependent goals:

Proportional representation - The supporters of all candidates and political parties must be fairly represented in our legislatures in proportion to votes cast. Political parties should have seats in close proportion to their popular support.

Positive voter choice - We need fair and unrestricted competition among political parties presenting democratically-nominated candidates. A democratic voting system must encourage citizens to exercise positive choice by voting for the candidate or party they prefer. They should not find it necessary to embrace negative or strategic voting - to vote for a less-preferred candidate to block the election of one even less preferred. Never should citizens be denied representation simply because their preferred candidate cannot win a single-member riding.

Fair representation - To reflect in the legislatures the diversity of society we must change the voting system and related laws to remove barriers to the nomination and election of candidates from groups now underrepresented including women, cultural minorities and Aboriginals.

Geographic representation - We must change the voting system and related laws to give rural and urban voters in every province, territory and regional community effective votes and fair representation in both government and opposition.

Government accountability to voters - Legislators representing a majority of voters must determine the laws and guide their administration.

Fair Vote Canada: a Call to Action!

How can the system actually be changed?

What is Fair Vote Canada doing about it?

Canada's voting system can be changed through a simple majority vote in Parliament... no constitutional amendment required!

But it won't happen without pressure from all of us.

As a multi-partisan citizens' campaign with chapters across the country, we lobby MPs and educate the media and the public to bring Canada's democracy into the 21st century.

Take action today at www.fairvote.ca!

Become a donor

Fair Vote believes Canadians should be able to...

- Cast an equal and effective vote and be represented fairly,
- Be governed by a fairly elected Parliament where the share of seats held by each political party closely reflects the popular vote,
and
- Live under legitimate laws approved by a majority of elected Parliamentarians representing a majority of voters.

Join Us

FVC is a national network of concerned citizens who are pressing for fair voting systems at all levels of government and throughout civil society. Supporters are encouraged to become FVC members (see back page for member/donor form) and to visit www.fairvote.ca to learn how to take action. FVC members are eligible to vote and run for national and local positions. The 15-member National Council provides overall direction for the organization and campaigns. Five three-year positions on the National Council are elected each year.

Take Action

Taking visible action in communities across Canada is at the heart of what we do. Together we educate the public about the problems with our current voting system and the principle of proportional representation. Many cities have Fair Vote Canada chapters, while others have more informal Local Action Teams. Fair Vote Canada regularly sends out "calls to action", inviting all supporters across Canada to participate in a collective action. In places where Chapters or Local Action Teams exist, supporters can organize and act together. They can also be proactive by having tables at fairs, events, and presentations in their communities. Want to share your time and talent in a different way? Fair Vote Canada supporters collaborate online on projects that are crucial to our movement. These have included high school lesson plans, videos, parallel election sites, and more.

Get involved today at www.fairvote.ca!

Declaration of Voters Rights

On Oct. 16, 2009, FVC launched the Declaration of Voters' Rights at a press conference on Parliament Hill. Since that date, many thousands more have added their names.

We the undersigned Canadian citizens demand the following basic democratic rights:

- to cast an equal and effective vote and to be represented fairly in Parliament, regardless of political belief or place of residence.
- to be governed by a fairly elected Parliament where the share of seats held by each political party closely reflects the popular vote.
- to live under legitimate laws approved by a majority of elected Parliamentarians representing a majority of voters.

The current winner-take-all voting system is absolutely inconsistent with these fundamental democratic rights. As a result, Canada is faced with a spiraling democratic deficit. The need for reform is urgent. We need a Parliament that represents the political and social diversity of Canada.

We demand that the House of Commons immediately undertake a public consultation to amend the Canada Elections Act to incorporate these vital democratic rights. The House, after this consultation, should quickly implement a suitable form of proportional representation.

Sign the Declaration at www.fairvote.ca

Yes, I want to join Fair Vote Canada and "Make Every Vote Count"!

Please fill in the information below and return this form and payment, or credit card information, to:

Fair Vote Canada, 283 Danforth Avenue #408, Toronto ON M4K 1N2.

If you have any questions, please call 416-410-4034 or email office@FairVote.Ca.

Upon receipt of your form, we will forward a questionnaire, which will allow you to indicate how you wish to become involved in the "Make Every Vote Count" campaign. All members of FVC receive a monthly newsletter and are eligible to vote in the FVC National Council elections.

Choose one of the following:

- \$10 annual membership fee
- Democracy 100: automatically debit my chequing account for \$8.33/month
- Democracy 240: automatically debit my chequing account for \$20.00/month
- Dollar-a-Day for Democracy: automatically debit my account for \$30.00/month
- I would like to make this additional donation of: \$ _____

As a monthly donor your direct debit gift is deducted on the 1st of each month or your credit card gift is deducted on the 15th of each month (or next business day). You are free to adjust or cancel monthly giving at any point by calling 416-410-4034 or by email at office@fairvote.ca. Please allow 30 days notice to ensure no additional donations are processed. To obtain a sample cancellation form or for more information on your right to cancel a Pre-Authorized Debit (PAD) Agreement contact your financial institution or visit www.cdnpay.ca.

I'm ready to help with my one-time gift of:

- \$50
- \$35
- \$20
- Other \$ _____

Indicate method of payment:

- Cheque enclosed (payable to Fair Vote Canada)
- Automatic monthly debit (enclose cheque marked "void")
- VISA
- MasterCard

Credit card #: _____

Expiry date: _____

Cardholder name: _____

Cardholder signature: _____

Contact information:

Name _____

Address _____

Phone (day) _____ (evening) _____

Fax: _____ Email: _____

With your donation of \$10 or more you become a one-year member of FVC and are eligible to vote in the National Council elections. If you don't wish to become a member please indicate.

- I prefer to make my donation without becoming a member.