

A New Electoral System for Alberta?

2016-02-24

Introduction

- Mark Hambridge is the Leader of Fair Vote Calgary and author of this submission to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee.
 - Contact information:
 - 1003-4555 Varsity Lane NW, Calgary Alberta T3A 2V6.
 - Phone: (day and evening): 403.239.5516
 - email: calgary@fairvote.ca or mark@hambridge.com
- Fair Vote Calgary is an Action Team of Fair Vote Canada with more than 1200 supporters and members on its Calgary Region mailing list.
- Fair Vote Canada (FVC) is a grassroots, member-supported, not-for-profit, multi-partisan citizens' organization campaigning for electoral system reform.
 - FVC has about 44,000 supporters and members.
 - Approximately 63,000 Canadians have signed the declaration demanding 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.
 - FVC promotes the introduction of an element of proportional representation into elections for all levels of government and throughout civil society.

Recommendations:

- Fair Vote Calgary strongly recommends that Alberta abandons the present 'First Past the Post' electoral system and moves to a form of Proportional Representation.
- Albertans should determine the best model of Proportional Representation for the province.
- A new electoral system must respect the need for all MLAs to face the voters and be accountable to voters.
- We call on Alberta's political parties and Legislature members to commit to conducting a multi-partisan process involving citizen and expert consultation to determine the best model.
- We strongly recommend implementing the model in time to *Make Every Vote Count* equally in the 2019 provincial general election.

What we have now ...

- **A Plurality/Majority (Winner-Take-All or First-Past-the-Post) Electoral System**
 - **Characteristics:**
 - One MLA elected in an electoral district by a plurality of votes where there may be as many as seven candidates (Calgary Hawkwood, May 5, 2015; Calgary Foothills, September 3, 2015) and the winner might have as little as 15% of the vote).
 - Suited to elections where there are only two candidates or parties and a majority can be obtained (but still leaves 49% of the votes discarded or wasted).
 - When there are more than two parties or candidates, results are distorted.
 - Produces governments with 'false majorities' (not reflecting the popular vote), e.g. 2011 federal general election and 2015 Alberta and federal elections: 39% of the popular vote elected 54% of the seats and a government with 100% of the power.
 - Leads to strategic voting - 'against' an unwanted candidate, rather than 'for' a voter's favoured candidate.
 - Regional 'blocs' are seen to be produced when all other votes are discarded or disregarded, giving a false impression of regional domination by the 'winning' party (e.g, Edmonton is NDP, Calgary is Conservative, rural Alberta is Wildrose).

- **Growing dissatisfaction over time and across the country**
 - **Major landmarks:**
 - Libertarian Party claims to have been first party to endorse proportional representation (PR).
 - Christian Heritage Party supports PR.
 - Green Party has had PR as policy since its foundation.
 - Federal NDP adopted Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) PR as policy for the recent Canada general election and intended implementation at the next (2019) general election.
 - Liberal Party of Canada vowed to introduce 'electoral reform' and stated in the campaign '*2015 will be the last unfair election*' and it wants to '*Make Every Vote Count*' (Fair Vote Canada's slogans since 2001). It appears that the Liberal Government of Canada is moving forward on this campaign promise.

A New Electoral System for Alberta?

2016-02-24

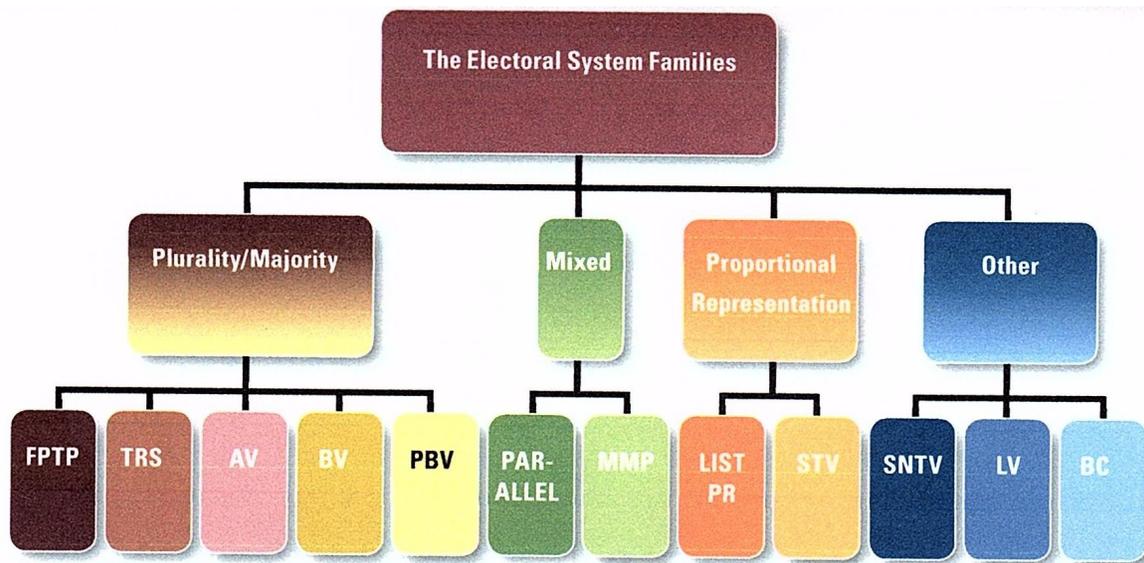
- Many studies and commissions have analysed regional (provincial) options for provinces, none were enacted and implemented.
- **2004: Law Commission of Canada** (LCoC) report 'Voting Counts: Electoral Reform for Canada' carefully and comprehensively considered options for Canada.
- **2013: 70% support for PR (Canada-wide)**. Fair Vote Canada & LeadNow Environics poll; can be downloaded from <http://campaign2015.fairvote.ca/environics-poll-shows-wide-support-for-proportional-representation> .
- **2015:** Federal general election – popular vote 23.4% for PR-supporting parties + 39.5% for Liberal Party (supports electoral reform) = **63% of the electorate favour reform.**
- **2015:** Ten Canadian Commissions, Assemblies and Reports have recommended proportional representation - see <http://campaign2015.fairvote.ca/reports/>
- Canada is one of very few major countries still using FPTP at the federal and provincial level. The majority of OECD members use a proportional representation system. In recent years, all changes or new electoral systems have been to proportional representation systems.
- **Conclusion:** There is a strong desire in the Canadian (and Albertan) electorate to move away from the outdated and flawed FPTP electoral system to a modern designed-for-Alberta proportional representation electoral system.

Families of Electoral Systems

- Many systems are used across the world, each a tailored system to serve the country/population/geography/culture/religious composition of the countries concerned.

One size of PR does NOT fit all jurisdictions.

- What sort of PR system would be suitable for Alberta?



Left to Right, with (selected examples):

First Past the Post (Canada, UK, India, USA)

Two-Round System (France)

Alternative Vote (Australia - lower house)

Block Vote (Syria, Channel Islands)

Party Block Vote (Chad, Cameroon),

Parallel (Russian Federation)

Mixed Member Proportional (Germany, Italy, New Zealand; Scotland, Wales)

List Proportional Representation (Scandinavia, S. America, Israel)

Single Transferable Vote (Ireland, Malta; Australia [Senate])

Single Non-Transferable Vote (Afghanistan)

Limited Vote

Borda Count

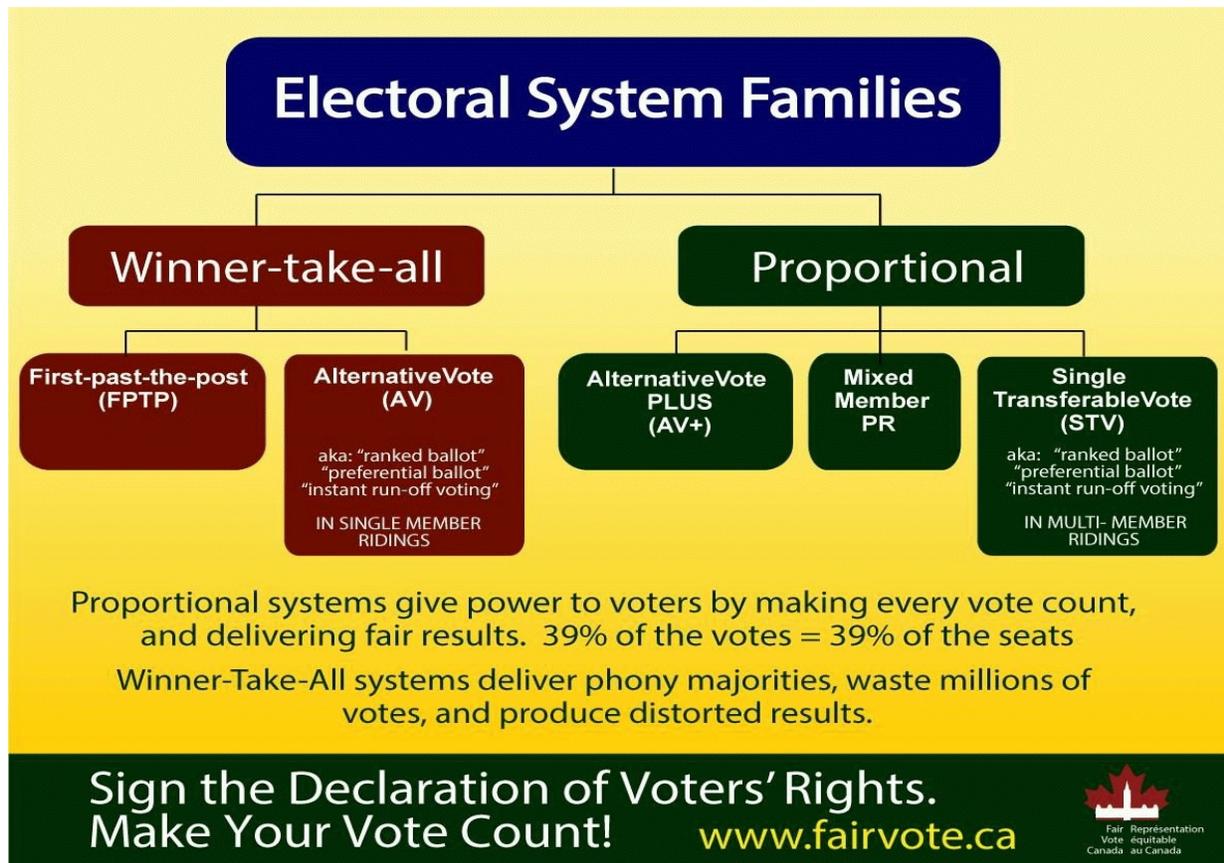
Characteristics of a Desirable Electoral System:

The LCoC (Chapter 3) examined a wide range of **qualities** for electoral systems in the Canadian context. These could also be applied to guide the Alberta context:

- Constitution
 - Geography
 - Fairness
 - Demographic representation
 - Accessibility
 - Meaningfulness
 - Equal weight of vote (make every vote count equally)
 - Effective legislature
 - Accountability
 - Consensus-building
 - Stable/effective government,
 - Effective opposition
 - Ease of administration
 - Ease of transition
-
- The LCoC refined choices to ten **criteria** for assessing electoral systems suitable for Canada:
 - Representation of parties
 - Demographic representation
 - Diversity of ideas
 - Geographic representation
 - Effective government
 - Accountable government
 - Effective opposition
 - Valuing votes
 - Regional balance
 - Inclusive decision making.

Some Alternatives to Winner Take All (First Past the Post) Voting for Alberta

- Two broad families of electoral system exist, or could be developed, and are believed to be generally suitable for Canada (see diagram below).



- There are systems within the proportional family now under consideration and discussion for Canada, apart from the LCoC's recommendations. These could also be considered by Alberta.
- **Winner Take All:**
 - **FPTP First Past The Post** - what we have now; see above at Page 1, above. Unsatisfactory for the reasons previously stated.

A New Electoral System for Alberta?

2016-02-24

- **AV (Alternative Vote)**, also known as Preferential Ballot or Instant Runoff Ballot (**IRB**).
 - Simple;
 - One person to be elected from candidates ranked 1, 2, 3 etc.
 - The person elected has 50% + 1 of the vote, thus a majority.
 - Fosters fairness since the winning candidate is considered to have broad support;
 - Retains a direct link between voter and representative;
 - Encourages political moderation since parties must seek the second preferences of voters who support other parties;
- **BUT**
 - Highly disproportional;
 - Many disregarded (wasted) votes;
 - LCoC: "... the alternative vote system is not sufficiently proportional to constitute a viable alternative to (FPTP)."
 - **Note** that the Liberal Party of Canada platform and approved policy support the use of a 'ranked ballot' or 'preferential ballot' which are alternative names for the **AV** when used in **single-representative electoral districts**.
- **Proportional:**
 - **AV+ (Alternative Vote Plus)**
 - From the UK Electoral Reform Society website:
 - "The Alternative Vote Plus (**AV+**) uses the Alternative Vote (in which voters rank candidates in order of preference) to elect a [single] candidate in each constituency, and then uses a small top-up list to make the overall result more proportional.
 - "Voters can either select their favourite party or choose their favourite candidate from the top-up list and the votes are then allocated to represent each party's share of the votes proportionally.
 - "See more at:
<http://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/alternative-vote-plus#sthash.jMjmbvEK.dpuf>
 - **BUT:**
 - "Where is AV+ used? AV+ has yet to be put into practice anywhere in the world".
 - **MMP (Mixed Member Proportional)**
 - Several versions: LCoC prefers Scottish/Welsh version (vs. German).

A New Electoral System for Alberta?

2016-02-24

- Voters have two votes: one for a single-member ED (as now with FPTP) and one 'compensatory' vote for a regional candidate (within and constrained by Canada's provincial boundaries).
- Results are 'quite' proportional, not perfect (no system is).
- About 25% - 33% of seats would be 'regional' or 'compensatory'.
- LCoC: "A Scottish-inspired mixed-member proportional system would do a much better job of being fair and making every vote count than our current system" (p.99).
- **STV (Single Transferable Vote)**
 - Combines PR with constituency politicians in multi-member electoral districts.
 - Voters select and vote for candidates in order of preference.
 - Reasonably proportional and therefore fair.
 - Voters have greater choice in ranking candidates than with MMP using closed lists (*see below for more on lists*).
 - Permits voter choice among parties and among individual candidates within parties.
 - Retains geographical link between voters and representatives if the number of representatives per electoral district is kept small.
- **BUT**
 - Allegedly complicated ballots and time-consuming tabulating systems.
 - 'Too much' choice alleged.
 - Considerable departure from the one representative per ED 'habit' which Canadians supposedly prefer.
 - **Note** that the Liberal Party of Canada platform and approved policy support the use of 'ranked ballot' or 'preferential ballot' which are alternative names for **STV** when used in **multiple-representative electoral districts**.
- **Size of Electoral District:**
 - In most proportional systems such as the two above, PR adjusts the size of electoral districts and elects more than one MLA from an enlarged electoral district or region. Typically the electoral district would be two or three times the size (and population) of present districts. The voters would vote directly for more than one MLA, electing perhaps two or three depending on the system selected,

A New Electoral System for Alberta?

2016-02-24

- from several candidates from each party (and independent candidates).
- In general, legislatures would maintain the same number of MLAs as they have now.
 - **Closed vs. Open Lists.**
 - In any electoral system, lists of candidates are prepared - by parties when selecting a person for the party candidacy, by the returning officer when placing names on the ballot for the election itself.
 - Concern has been expressed that parties have too much control over whose name appears on the list of candidates within the party and on the election ballot.
 - Concern has been expressed that voters would lose control of who they vote for. This is a typical myth expounded by people who do not understand that there are many forms of PR.
 - Fair Vote Canada (and Calgary) supports an **open list** system:
 - Candidates for party selection should be voted on in a democratic process, rather than selected by party directive.
 - In an electoral system with multiple party candidates in an electoral district, voters should be able to select at the ballot box the candidates they wish to vote for, not be compelled to accept the party-ordered selection. (This was part of the reason for rejection of a PR system proposed for Ontario in 2007).
 - Many refinements of list construction are possible, to ensure men and women are treated equally, or to ensure that the candidate list of each party reflects the ethnic composition of the electoral district.

A New Electoral System for Alberta?

2016-02-24

Resources

The opinions expressed here are in brief and intended to start a discussion which would require more detailed examination of research material to assist in selecting and devising a suitable new proportional electoral system for Alberta. The following is a brief list of resource materials to assist in studying the issue in greater depth.

- Fair Vote Canada's web site www.fairvote.ca. In particular the resource page <http://campaign2015.fairvote.ca/resources/> lists many useful sources.
- Law Commission of Canada: 'Voting Counts: Electoral Reform for Canada'. Out of print - can be downloaded in portable document format from Fair Vote Canada's Resources page.
- 'Electoral System Design: The New International IDEA Handbook'. The international Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. ISBN 91-85391-18-2. IDEA has a comprehensive web site at <http://www.idea.int/>
- 'Patterns of Democracy - Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries', second edition 2012. Arend Lijphart. Yale University Press. ISBN 978-0-300-17202-7. Analyses the performance of countries using different electoral systems. A summary can be downloaded from Fair Vote Canada's web site Resource page.
- Wilf Day's Blog at <http://wilfdays.blogspot.ca/> "*Although I am a member of Fair Vote Canada's Council at the federal level, the views expressed on this blog are my own. I have been a lawyer since 1971, an elected school trustee from 1982 to 1994, past chair of the Board of the Northumberland Community Legal Centre, and so on*". Wilf Day has written extensively on proportional representation in Canada, mostly at the federal level.
- Videos by -
 - Fair Vote Canada:
 - **MMP** as described by the LCoC illustrated by Prof. Denis Pilon - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D3guVBhKmDc>

A New Electoral System for Alberta?

2016-02-24

- CGP Grey:
 - **On FPTP:**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7tWHJfhiyo&list=PL7679C7ACE93A5638&index=1>
 - **On AV:**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Y3jE3B8HsE&list=PL7679C7ACE93A5638&index=2>
 - **on STV:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8XOZJkozfi>
 - **on MMP:**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7tWHJfhiyo&list=PL7679C7ACE93A5638&feature=iv&src_vid=QT0I-sdoSXU&annotation_id=annotation_873960

Party Policies on Electoral Reform in Alberta

- **Alberta Party**

- Per February 2015 Conference Resolution; Source: Greg Clark, Leader.
http://www.albertaparty.ca/alberta_party_policy_concept_statements
- "Immediately after the next election, Alberta Party MLAs shall request an all-party committee be formed in order to report to the Legislature within 12 months, with recommendations for reform to a system by which Albertans' (*sic*) select members of the Legislative Assembly. **The committee shall solicit expert advice, significant citizen input, and shall consider all possible reforms including**, without limitation, a preferential balloting system and/or **forms of proportional representation**, with the overall goal of increasing voter participation and more fairly representing the electoral preferences of Albertans". (*Emphasis added*)

- **Green Party of Alberta**

- Source: <http://greenpartyofalberta.ca/policies/>
- "Like all other Green Parties globally, **the Green Party of Alberta supports electoral reform to introduce proportional representation in Alberta** (*emphasis added*) . . . The Alberta Greens would work towards electoral reform by implementing a two-step process. First, a referendum would be held to ask Albertans if they are in favour of changing the province's current electoral system - FPTP. If over 50% of Albertans vote "yes", indicating their desire for change, a second referendum would be held to give Albertans a chance to accept or reject the alternative system proposed by a Citizens' Assembly.
- "The Green Party of Alberta would strike a Citizens' Assembly to research, consult, advise and educate Albertans on alternative voting systems and to propose such a voting system".

- **Liberal Party of Alberta:**

- From <http://www.albertaliberal.com/issues> > Better Democracy: "Change Alberta's electoral system to instant-runoff (preferential) voting."

A New Electoral System for Alberta?

2016-02-24

- **New Democratic Party - Platform:**
 - The New Democratic Party of Alberta appears not to have a public position on electoral reform.
- **Progressive Conservative Party:**
 - The Prentice Plan for Alberta did not appear to address the need to reform our electoral system.
 - In a recent brief conversation with Ric McIver MLA, Acting Leader of the PCP, he was vehemently opposed to proportional representation.
- **Wildrose Party:**
 - The Party web site says: "We will ... restore balance to our democratic institutions by ... passing legislation that puts more power in voters' hands."

- 30 -