

SPOILED BALLOTS

ELECTORAL REFORM

Trudeau's
broken
promise and
what to do
about it

A RESEARCH PROJECT OF

CMIS CANADIANS FOR A MODERN INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY



CLI CANADIAN LABOUR INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL & ECONOMIC FAIRNESS

CMIS brings together people from labour, business and the community who believe our economic success and social well-being depend on adopting a proactive industrial strategy that:

- recognizes governments have an essential coordinating and enabling role to play in the economy
- is a true partnership involving government, labour, business, community, academic institutions and other stakeholders
- reduces inequality by creating good jobs and putting people and nature at the heart of the economy
- goes beyond the sterile debate between “high-tech” and “smokestack” industries and provides the tools different sectors need to be a vibrant part of a modern economy
- puts long-term needs ahead of short-term considerations

Our activities include:

- providing a forum for discussion on what should be part of a modern industrial strategy
- conducting research and analysis of public policy issues related to a modern industrial strategy
- providing access to research and information
- advocating to government and in public forums for adoption of a modern industrial strategy

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- promoting progressive public policy and campaigning in its support
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- establishing research projects and any other complementary purposes that are consistent with these objects.

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***Spoiled Ballots: Electoral Reform—
The broken Trudeau promise and
what to do about it*** is produced by [Canadians for a Modern Industrial Strategy](#) (CMIS).

It was researched and written by Matthew Byrne, a PhD candidate at the University of British Columbia.

Because of the complexities of electoral reform CMIS has also produced the following four Backgrounders to assist Canadians in having a better understanding of those complexities:

[#1 - An illustrated description of the five major electoral systems.](#)

[#2 - The limitations of referenda for complex issues.](#)

[#3 - The motivation for governing parties to resist electoral reform.](#)

[#4 - An explanation of the predictable failure of the recent BC referendum.](#)

The paper and all four electoral reform backgrounders can be downloaded from the CMIS website.

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Introduction

IN 2015, AFTER NEARLY 10 years of Conservative government, the Canadian electorate was ready for a change. Justin Trudeau, leader of the Liberal party, decided to promote himself to the public as the progressive alternative to then Prime Minister Stephen Harper. His Liberal party would make “Real Change”.¹ This strategy had one significant hurdle—the NDP which was in fact the more progressive party, the official opposition and ahead in the polls. In this context, Trudeau had to at least match the major policies offered by the NDP. This strategy proved effective but required making a lot of promises, some of which he may not want to keep.

Electoral reform is one such promise. The majority of people who favour electoral reform prefer proportional representation to the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system. There has been an active electoral reform movement within civil society for decades pushing for just that. As the official opposition, the NDP attempted in 2014 to have a motion passed for electoral reform. In early 2015 they promised that if they were elected, they would implement a form of proportional representation for the 2019 election (Bolen 2015). If Trudeau had not done the same, his image could have been undermined.

In the months building up to the 2015 election, Trudeau claimed that “2015 will be the last election under FPTP” and declared that he would “make every vote count”. This promise was made over 1,800 times and found its way into the new Liberal government’s Speech from the Throne (Carmichael 2017).

¹ “Real Change” was the name of the Liberal 2015 platform, and “Real Change Now”, their campaign slogan.

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The public could certainly be forgiven for assuming that Trudeau meant that he would implement a proportional system by 2019. The slogan “making every vote count” was adopted from the title of the 2004 final report of the British Columbia Citizens’ Assembly on Electoral Reform, a report that promoted a form of proportional representation. Slight variations are used as a slogan by Fair Vote Canada and in the NDP in its policy manual. Technically speaking the slogan makes sense because only proportional representation electoral systems have the capacity to make every vote count, hence the use of the expression.²

After the election, Trudeau specified that he preferred alternative vote, which is not a proportional system. He cited a 2013 leadership debate speech as evidence that the public was aware of his preference (Wherry 2017c). Given that he had 1,800 opportunities to remind the public that he did not support proportional representation, it is unfortunate that he did not think to do so. In retrospect, that should have raised a red flag. It seems so obvious now.

This paper builds on the previous work of the Public Services Foundation of Canada in conjunction with the National Union of Public and General Employees in 2016.³ It adds to that work by assessing the processes and motivations leading to the broken promise.

This paper begins by offering a brief description of electoral systems. It then demonstrates that, like political parties elsewhere, Canadian political parties prefer the electoral system which benefits them the most. Expert and public opinions are then considered, showing that proportional systems are clearly preferred. The only ambiguity is in the choice between two specific proportional systems. The ability to hold governments accountable, which is the real value of Canada’s current FPTP system, should be exercised by the public. The Liberals should be replaced by a party that actually will implement a proportional system.

² See Table 1 on page 2 for an overview of electoral systems and their families.

³ Electoral Reform in Canada: The Shape of Things to Come (2016). *Public Services Foundation of Canada & National Union of Public and General Employees* Retrieved from https://nupge.ca/sites/default/files/documents/electoral_reform_executive_summary.pdf

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Table 1. Electoral systems: families and types

MAJORITARIAN SYSTEMS	PROPORTIONAL SYSTEMS
winner-take-all	representation proportional to votes
First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) or Single Member Plurality very simple	Party List or Closed List diverse subcategory and implications
Alternative Vote or Ranked Ballot or Instant-Runoff Voting or Preferential Voting more choice	Single Transferable Vote (STV) maximum choice and proportional
	Mixed-Member Proportional (MMP) simple and proportional
Supporting parties: Liberals (alternative vote, FPTP), Conservatives (FPTP)*, Bloc (FPTP)**	Supporting parties: New Democratic Party (MMP), Green (MMP, STV, or other proportional), Bloc (MMP)**

*This preference is inferred from support for a referendum on electoral reform and self-interest (see Appendix B and the following section for explanation).

**The Bloc has voted in favour of proportional representation in the past, but the motion was clearly going to be defeated. They now favour a referendum on electoral reform.



Electoral systems: families and types

DISCUSSION ON electoral reform can be heavy on terminology and inevitably introduces an alphabet soup of acronyms. The new and informed reader alike will find it useful to refer back to Table 1 throughout this paper. It offers the two major families of electoral systems, their major types, some key descriptors and a list of which parties support them. Appendix A provides a more detailed description.

To help the reader get orientated, Canada's current electoral system is **FPTP**. Most advocates of electoral reform favour proportional representation, specifically **STV** or **MMP**. As a result, those three acronyms are used heavily throughout the text. Trudeau prefers alternative vote, but its acronym is not used because other than the Liberals, it seldom comes up as a preference for electoral reform. The terms majoritarian and proportional are also used frequently.

The two electoral system families are differentiated by their underlying logic. The logic of the majoritarian systems is that the public concentrates power in the hands of a single governing party by voting for the party whose platform they prefer. The governing party receives a clear mandate to implement its platform, and with concentrated power, effective implementation can occur. In the next election, the public can hold the government accountable because it is clear that only the governing party should be rewarded or blamed for the results (Powell 2000). Both FPTP and alternative vote work this way.

As opposed to clear lines of power and accountability, proportional systems are based on diverse representation. At election time voters must choose which party best represents their views. Instead of concentrat-

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ing power, diverse parties are authorized to negotiate continuously in post-election bargaining to produce legislation that represents the public interest. Party list, STV and MMP all share this basis of diverse representation and shared power (Powell 2000).



Proportional representation is terrible for the Liberal party

DESPITE THE theoretical differences, political parties differentiate these families of electoral systems in part based on self-interest. With proportional systems, parties roughly get a number of seats proportional to the votes that they win. Smaller parties can form coalition governments and policy is negotiated in exchange for support.⁴ Majoritarian systems, on the other hand, can uniquely elevate a winning party to majority status even if it has not received over 50% of the vote. See Appendix C for a more detailed description.

In Canadian history, when a party wins the majority of seats in the House of Commons, it nearly has never obtained more than half the votes. The current FPTP electoral system distorts election outcomes in favour of the winning party. Receiving around 40% of the votes translates into more than 50% of the seats in the House and a majority government. This artificially generated majority government is called a false majority for that reason.

Since 1930 Canada has had four true majority governments. These governments received more than 50% of the votes and more than 50% of the seats in the House. There were also eight minority governments where the government received less than 50% of the votes and less than 50% of the seats. These results certainly seem fair. But thanks to the FPTP electoral system, the remaining 13 governments were elevated to majority status even though they received less than half the votes.

The creation of these false majorities is how FPTP is said to create strong,

⁴ Party seat count is so important because Members of Parliament (MPs) almost always vote along party lines, a phenomenon known as party discipline. The more important the issue for the party's future, the more likely they are to do so.

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stable and accountable governments. Despite their lack of public support, false majority governments are able to create and pass their legislative agenda without significant legislative constraint. The opposition parties that combined won over 50% of the vote are largely unable to significantly alter government legislation. They can only publicly criticize government and offer an alternative to the public in the next election.⁵

The relevance of false majorities to each political party is shown in Table 2. Without FPTP, the Liberals would not have won a majority government since 1949. The Conservatives would have enjoyed the only majority government in nearly 60 years (in 1984).⁶ In fact, without FPTP, minority governments would be the Canadian norm.

Table 2. Government type since 1930

Party	True Majority	False Majority	Minority
Liberal	2	10	4
Conservative	2	3	5

Note: Results derived from Parliamentary records <https://lop.parl.ca/About/Parliament/FederalRidingsHistory/hfer.asp?Language=E&Search=G>.

The Liberals and Conservatives have historically benefited from false majorities. That being said, parties operate in the present with an eye to the future. Keeping in mind that 170 seats are required to form a majority federal government, Table 3 shows the results of the 2015 election against what they would look like under two other possible systems:

⁵ Opposition MPs are quite busy between elections attempting to represent their constituents and improve legislation in committees. Their capacities to alter or prevent the passage of legislation is however severely limited during majority governments.

⁶ Includes the Progressive Conservatives prior to 2003.

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Table 3. Seat count by party under 3 electoral systems

Party	FPTP (current)	Proportional	Preferential (AV)
Liberal	184	134	224
Conservative	99	109	61
NDP	44	67	50
Bloc	10	16	2
Green	1	12	1

Note: Estimates by Eric Grenier, retrieved from:

www.cbc.ca/news/politics/grenier-preferential-ballot-1.3332566.

Depending on the specifics of their design, MMP and STV would produce a result somewhere between FPTP and the pure proportional estimates given by Eric Grenier and that are outlined in Table 3. These electoral systems typically award parties with less than 50% of the vote less than 50% of the seats. In so doing, they do not create false majorities and are, therefore, considered proportional even if they are technically mixed or not fully proportional.



Party preference maps perfectly with their electoral interest

WHICH PARTIES came out in support of which systems? In an ideal world parties would consult expert opinion and debate the pros and cons of each system, which they claim to do. In reality parties in democracies around the world have been found to base their preferences on two factors: ideology and maximizing their seat count (Bols 2016). Ideologically, progressive parties tend to care more about diverse representation. In other words, they want to ensure that minorities and women are represented. Conservative parties tend to favour majoritarian winner-take-all systems. Canadian federal political parties, on the other hand, map perfectly with their own self-interest.

The Liberal party

In early 2018 Trudeau said, “I will not move towards any form of proportional representation, but if people want to talk about a different system that might benefit Canadians, like a preferential ballot, I’d be open to that.” (von Scheel 2018).⁷

Not surprisingly, the Liberals appear to be okay with the status quo despite their promises. Ten out of 16 of their governments since 1930 have been false majorities (Table 2). FPTP has clearly been beneficial to them. They have, however, expressed a preference for alternative vote, the other majoritarian system. The numbers provided in Table 3 illustrate that a change *within* the winner-take-all majoritarian family would have been even more beneficial to the Liberals than the status quo.

⁷ Here, preferential ballot refers to alternative vote

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If Canada were to change the federal electoral system to alternative vote, the Liberals would likely be the party to benefit the most. They are not as progressive as the NDP and not as conservative as the Conservatives. NDP supporters would be more likely to give their second votes permitted under the alternative vote system to the Liberals than they would the Conservatives, and Conservative voters would also more lean to the Liberals than the NDP. That places the Liberals in an ideal position to attract second votes, a key consideration for winning in an alternative vote system. The Conservatives would attract far fewer second votes. As a result, the only other party to win a federal election in Canadian history would be disadvantaged by alternative vote.

Proportional representation, on the other hand, would have reduced 10 Liberal majorities to minority governments, 2015 included. A proportional voting system is not in their interest. Ideologically, the Liberal position contrasts with the progressive preference for proportional systems. It is unclear if this is because the Liberals are not ideologically committed to this issue or if they fail to understand it. Nonetheless, by openly favouring electoral systems that would maximize their seat count, they are demonstrating a conflict between ideology and self-interest.

The Conservative party

The Conservatives do not indicate a preferred electoral system. Instead, they demand a referendum on electoral reform and indicate that roughly 90% of their constituents do too (Grenier, 2016). From a position of self-interest, this only makes sense if they want to keep FPTP, but do not want to admit it. As explained in Appendix B, a referendum would almost certainly result in the status quo.

Although FPTP benefits the Liberals so extensively, it is crucial for the Conservatives if they want to form an effective federal government in the future. Because the Conservatives are the most ideologically isolated party, they need a majority to govern effectively. If they are to govern with a minority, then they will have to rely on a significantly

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more progressive party to support their legislation, and this would prevent them from being able to pursue a genuinely conservative mandate. Therefore, the system which helps the Conservatives in their bid to achieve a majority—FPT—is the best one for them. Alternative vote could prevent them from winning any federal majorities because the Conservatives are not likely to attract very many second-choice votes.

By advocating for a referendum, the Conservatives are better able to criticize the Liberals for backing out of their promise. It would be awkward to do so if they themselves publicly supported the status quo. The Conservatives also force the Liberals to reject a second democratic choice—referendum—thereby reinforcing to the public that the Liberals have broken a promise made to the voters of Canada. Finally, from a practical, political perspective, demanding a referendum appeals to the Conservative base.

Proportional systems would largely put an end to federal majorities for any party. It is to the Conservatives' advantage to advocate a referendum than to state a preferred electoral system.

The NDP, Green and Bloc Québécois

If two parties have historically enjoyed distortions in their favour, then some party or parties must be facing distortions against them. The NDP have historically won a significantly lower percentage of seats than percentage of votes in federal elections. Not surprisingly, the NDP has historically favoured some form of proportional electoral system, most recently MMP (Wherry 2014). This is also consistent with progressive parties who ideologically prefer diverse representation in government. In other words, the federal NDP's ideology and interest align in support of a proportional system.

The Green party also favours proportional systems for the very same reasons as the NDP. In fact, the Green party is clearly the most disadvantaged by FPTP. In 2011 the party received nearly 7% of the national vote but took no seats! It is not surprising that they, too, support some

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form of proportional system, either MMP, STV or some hybrid of the two (Wiaart 2016).

Finally, the Bloc has remained relatively silent on this issue. This could be because their future is unclear. The Bloc has been a major beneficiary of the FPTP system in the past because FPTP benefits regionally concentrated parties. As a result, a party which fielded a large array of candidates only in Quebec was able to form the official opposition in 1993. To stress this point, the Bloc had 54 seats whereas the Progressive Conservatives had two despite receiving over 300,000 more votes and running in nine more provinces. However, if Bloc support does not increase, they may be better off with proportional representation, though projected weak electoral support in the future is certainly not an issue that they want to talk about publicly.

Their quandary is reflected in their actions. By joining the Conservatives on the question of a referendum, the Special Committee on Electoral Reform had to include a recommendation for a referendum (Bryden 2016). However, the Bloc also voted in favour of the NDP's motion for MMP in 2015. It is unclear what conclusion to draw given the lack of clarity on their future interests.

Political parties world-wide tend to favour the electoral system that benefits them the most, and Canadian parties appear to follow suit. From the perspective of rational self-interest, it is not surprising that the Liberals are not moving forward on electoral reform, unless such reform is to an alternative vote system.



Explanations for breaking the promise

No consensus and no desire for change, both incorrect

Making good on their election promise to consult Canadians, the Liberal government initiated the Special Committee on Electoral Reform to broadly investigate expert and public opinion. The Liberal government was supposed to implement the Committee's recommendation for the 2019 election. Instead, the government rejected the Committee's findings and commissioned a survey to again gauge Canadian public opinion.

The survey, however, avoided asking Canadians about their preferred electoral system, favouring instead questions about the general characteristics of electoral systems. Respondents were then lumped into five made-up categories. Not surprisingly, such a survey found no consensus. Based on the results, Trudeau then offered two reasons to break his promise on electoral reform: There was a lack of consensus (Wherry 2017b) and Canadians showed they did not want change anymore (Wyld 2016).⁸

No desire for change; there is a desire for change

The survey did not provide any useful information about electoral systems. The question "In general, how satisfied are you with the way

⁸ Trudeau offers two additional explanations for breaking his promise: Proportional representation promotes extremism or is bad for a diverse country (Wherry 2017a) and he was never convinced by proportional representation (Wherry 2017c). Proportional representation is in fact better for a diverse country and does not promote extremism (Appendix A), and as indicated in the introduction, he never once mentioned his uncertainty though there were 1,800 opportunities to do so before being elected.

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democracy works in Canada?” could not possibly have provided answers related to electoral reform. Half of the respondents indicated being somewhat satisfied and 17% said they were very satisfied, leading Trudeau to leap to the conclusion that there was no desire for change in the electoral system. Ironically, he reached this conclusion even though the company that conducted the survey on behalf of the government warned in its report that “satisfaction does not necessarily preclude a desire for reforming the electoral system...” (p.5). Even if this question had been useful in gauging public opinion, Trudeau’s conclusion writes off the one-third of Canadians who believe democracy is not working well in Canada. The Liberal government survey in no way supports the contention that Canadians are now somehow OK with FPTP.

The Broadbent Institute had commissioned a similar survey in 2015. Results from that survey indicated that 42% of Canadians thought the electoral system required major changes or needed to be completely replaced. Another 41% thought that minor changes were need. Given that survey respondents tend to opt for status quo when responding to questions about complicated issues, the results of the Broadbent Institute are remarkable and point to significant dissatisfaction with the electoral system.

No consensus; there is a consensus

The more complicated matter is the apparent lack of consensus for one electoral system. While there is debate and competing evidence—as is the case with most governance questions—expert opinion and evidence clearly supports proportional representation.

Given the complexity of the options, it is no wonder that the general public seems to demonstrate ambivalence, wanting an electoral system with characteristics that at first appear to be conflicting. In fact, all could be easily accommodated by MMP and STV systems. An analysis of the evidence follows.



Expert opinion

Proportional systems are better than majoritarian

When put to the test, both majoritarian and proportional logics have some validity, but proportional systems outperform majoritarian systems in general measures of democracy (Powell 2000). Out of 17 measures, proportional representation has been found to significantly outperform majoritarian in nine measures; seven are roughly a tie with proportional representation taking an insignificant lead, and one favours majoritarian (Lijphart 2012). To add some clarity to these measures, proportional systems produce policies which are closer to the median (middle of the road) voter. They produce more stable policy with less policy lurch (policy swinging from Conservative to Liberal and back with every change of government). They are also more representationally inclusive and, therefore, more appropriate for a geographically large and diverse society, such as in Canada (Powell 2000). This empirically validated finding stands in stark contrast to Trudeau's unsubstantiated claim that proportional systems are inappropriate for Canada's diversity (Wherry 2017a). Proportional electoral systems also specifically demonstrate better representation for women and minorities (Norris 2004), another inconsistency given Trudeau's professed desire to represent both.

Proportional electoral systems are also associated with better performance on quite a number of policy measures. Countries with proportional systems demonstrate greater efforts to promote redistribution (Iversen & Soskice 2006) and have been found to have lower inequality (Lijphart 2012). They score higher in environmental regulation (Frederiksson & Millimet 2004) foreign economic policy (Evans 2009), education and welfare spending (Funk and Gathmann 2013), employ-

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ment insurance (Neugart 2005) and other worker protections. These improved outcomes are related to governing parties' increased need to satisfy a larger, more diverse base of electoral support.

In fact, three-quarters of academic experts surveyed had a favoured form of proportional system (Bowler, Farrell and Pettitt 2005). When asked to rank order electoral systems, the average top three that emerged were proportional systems as seen in Table 4. Proportional systems are better.

Table 4. Expert ranking of electoral systems

System	Place	Family	Average	# first place	% first place
MMP	1	PR	2.4	52	32
STV	2	PR	2.6	38	24
Open list PR	3	PR	3.3	18	11
AV	4	Maj	4.1	10	6
Closed list PR	5	PR	4.2	9	6
FPTP	6	Maj	4.7	21	13
Runoff	7	Maj	4.9	7	4
MMM	8	PR	5.2	3	2
SNTV	9	PR	6.8	3	2

Note: Table is a modification of Bowler, Farrell and Pettitt (2005).

Average is the mean rank ordered placement of the electoral system.

Mixed-member proportional (MMP) and single transferable vote (STV) are considered best

The claim that there is no consensus on electoral systems is an exaggeration. It typically ignores the fact that proportional systems are generally considered better. Instead, it focuses on the fact that there are differences regarding which specific type of proportional system is best. This is why many groups in civil society, and for that matter the Special Committee on Electoral Reform, advocate for a proportional system but do not specify a preference. To be more precise, those who do debate proportional system preference tend to favour MMP or STV, though hybrid made-in-Canada solutions often present themselves as well.

As seen in Table 4, the top response was MMP (32%), followed by STV (24%). MMP is a popular choice because it combines proportionality with strong constituent representation and maintains simplicity. It also produces stable, simple and accountable governments. However, this finding is not absolute. Other studies have found that the best electoral systems are proportional with low district magnitudes, such as STV (Carey and Hix 2011). They provide all the benefits of a fully proportional system while producing simple and stable governing coalitions as well. They also maximize voter choice. Voters in STV often get to rank order over a dozen candidates. As seen in Appendix C, however, STV ballots are more complicated than most alternatives.



Canadian opinion: general public and informed public

MOST CANADIANS could not offer detailed explanations of the available electoral systems which make it hard to assess which one they prefer. They do however provide information on what characteristics they like.

The MyDemocracy.ca survey asked respondents about abstract characteristics of electoral systems. These findings are somewhat confused because the MyDemocracy.ca survey focuses on lumping respondents into five made-up categories. Nonetheless, a major finding was that the public's top 2 preferences related to diverse representation and easy accountability (Government of Canada 2016, p.41).

These characteristics appear to be inconsistent; one favours majoritarian and the other proportional. The other top responses demonstrate the same apparent mixed support. This is not unique to the MyDemocracy.ca survey. The top responses are largely the same as the Broadbent Institute listed below, but worded differently.

The Broadbent Institute commissioned a survey to ask what Canadians want in an electoral system (2015). Without the same confusion of the MyDemocracy.ca survey, it likely captures a clearer view of Canadian preference. The top 5 responses were as follows:

1. The ballot is simple and easy to understand.
2. The system produces stable and strong governments.
3. The system allows you to directly elect MPs who represent your community.

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4. The system ensures that the government has MPs from each region of the country.

5. The system ensures that the number of seats held by a party in Parliament closely matches their actual level of support throughout the country (Coletto & Czop 2015, p.9).

Numbers 4 and 5 are much better with proportional and 1 and 2 are sometimes considered support of majoritarian. This mix of characteristics supports what was found in the MyDemocracy.ca survey.

At first glance both survey results *appear* to demonstrate contradictory preferences, but some forms of proportional systems such as MMP and STV do fit these contradictions nicely. MMP adds little complexity and tend to produce strong and stable governments while creating better regional representation and proportionality. STV does the same with the added benefit of greater voter choice, but some degree of added complexity. The public wants the best of both worlds and the Liberals could have given it to them.

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Canadian opinion: an informed public

AN INFORMED public is able to indicate exactly which electoral system is preferred. Prior to initiating the MyDemocracy.ca survey, the Liberal government made good on its promise to consult the public and developed the Special Committee on Electoral Reform, which came out in support of proportional representation, to do so.

In 2004 and 2006, the governments of British Columbia and Ontario respectively created citizens' assemblies that specifically indicated which systems a fully informed public prefers.

Public consultations

The public consultations by the Special Committee on Electoral Reform reflect the views of people who are interested and engaged enough to attend consultations and contribute their opinions. The results were clear. A staggering 88% of experts who testified supported some form of proportional representation whereas only 4% favoured the majoritarian form of alternative vote.

This was echoed at open mic discussions and town hall meetings during which 87% and 69.4% of contributors respectively favoured proportional representation and, again, about 4% preferred alternative vote.

The Committee concluded from these consultations that a proportional system is preferred option, but left it to the government to choose which one (FairVote Canada 2016). The government responded by accusing the Committee of failing its mandate and initiated the MyDemocracy.ca survey instead of acting on the recommendation of the Committee.

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Citizens' assemblies

The 1996 British Columbia provincial election produced the wrong winner. The Liberals received more votes, but the NDP won more seats and formed government. In response, the Liberals promised that if they won the next election that they would re-evaluate the electoral system.

In Ontario, the Liberals had been out of power from 1990 to 2003 and watched the NDP and PC governments make major policy changes. The opposition Liberals were powerless to do anything about it, so they promised to re-evaluate the electoral system if elected (Lang 2007).

Given the known complexities of electoral systems, both British Columbia in 2004 and Ontario in 2006 decided to establish citizens' assemblies to investigate options. The citizens' assemblies were made up of randomly selected volunteers demographically representative of society. Gender, regional, Aboriginal and minority representations were proportional to those found in the general population. The participants were educated on the electoral systems by experts and held public consultations. They then deliberated and decided on the best electoral system.

The British Columbia Citizens' Assembly's main criteria for evaluation were effective local representation, proportionality and voter choice. Not surprisingly they chose STV. The Ontario Citizens' Assembly added simplicity and practicality to the list and chose MMP. A highly informed public, as represented in these citizens' assemblies, came to the same conclusions on electoral reform that every other informed group has made.

REFERENDUMS In both cases, it was decided that a referendum would be required to legitimate their conclusions. The British Columbia Liberal government set the referendum threshold to 60%. STV received 58% support and therefore lost to the status quo. In Ontario, the citizens' assembly's results were inadequately communicated with an estimated 75% of voters knowing only a little or nothing at all about the proposed change (LeDuc 2009). These results are a reminder that an informed public wants proportional representation whereas an uninformed public favours the status quo.



The right plan vs. the Liberal plan

THE LIBERAL PARTY promised public consultation and electoral reform by 2019. They engaged in legitimate public consultation and ignored the results. They also ignored all other avenues that would have led to the same result. Instead, they opted for a survey that didn't address the real issues at hand. Setting aside the large body of evidence in favour of proportional representation, they broke their promise, justifying the decision with a less than ideal interpretation of a less than ideal survey. A small number of additional justifications of equally dubious merit were also offered.

The Liberal government should have studied expert opinion and previous efforts that gauged informed public opinion. In so doing, they would have seen that MMP or STV are the obvious choices. Even if they respected the result of their own Committee's recommendation without doing their homework, the same conclusion would have been clear. In fact, if they had attempted to gauge public opinion through a well-developed poll, or that of the Broadbent Institute, they would have seen that MMP or STV suited a public consensus. The Liberal government should have then chosen either MMP or STV and reformed the electoral system in time for 2019 election.

In terms of a referendum, the Committee's motivation to recommend one before the 2019 election is dubious. In fact, 67% of the expert testimony on this subject indicated a referendum was either undesirable or unnecessary (FairVote Canada 2016). The reasoning is reflected in Appendix B. Instead, a referendum should occur after at least two elections under a proportional system to ensure the public has some knowledge about it, reducing the inherent bias to support what one knows best. Only then could a referendum reasonably gauge whether the public prefers today's FPTP system or proportional representation.

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Conclusion

ONLY THE LIBERAL leadership can know for certain why the party broke its promise on electoral reform. The process and the interpretation of the results reflect one of two possibilities.

FIRST, the Liberals have been dishonest as they attempt to find a way to back out of their promise.

SECOND, they do not understand the basic characteristics of electoral systems and their implications for Canada. In either event, they won an election under FPTP with a mandate to change the electoral system. They did not do it.

According to the logic of FPTP, the public is expected to evaluate the government's performance and judge how well it implemented its mandate. Coming up short, a government should be replaced.

The majority Liberal government was given a mandate by voters which included electoral reform. The government failed to implement this mandate. Voters know exactly which party to blame.

In 2019, they should cast their ballots for a party that promises electoral reform and will deliver on it. In terms of self-interest and ideology, that would be the NDP or the Green party. Both have historically been disadvantaged by FPTP and both are genuinely progressive.

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Appendix A

A closer look at electoral systems

Majoritarian

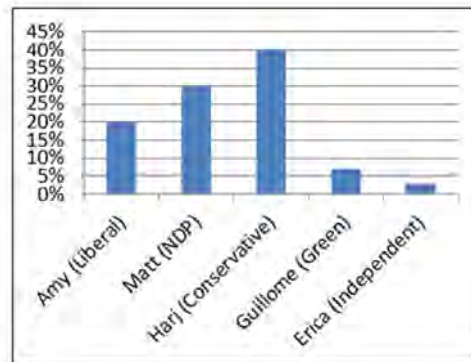
First-past-the-post (FPTP)

HYPOTHETICAL RIDING

Ballot

Amy (Liberal)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Matt (NDP)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Harj (Conservative)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Guillome (Green)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Erica (Independent)	<input type="checkbox"/>

Result



In a Canadian national FPTP election, the country is divided into constituencies (or ridings) which currently number 338. Each riding has its own separate election for an individual MP to represent it in Parliament. Each voter selects their preferred candidate, the votes are counted, and the candidate with the most votes (or a plurality) wins.

FPTP provides a simple electoral system. It tends to generate majority governments with no effective opposition. Those governments are, therefore, strong and stable. Accountability is also high because the public knows who to blame when one party has all the power. It also provides a constituency representative which is considered important by the public. It does, however, generate a considerable number of problems.

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All votes in this hypothetical riding that were not needed for Harj's victory are considered wasted. These wasted votes include all votes cast for any other candidate and all of Harj's surplus votes (here, any vote beyond 30%+1). If all those voters stayed home and did not vote, Harj would have still won, and the Parliament would still have the exact same MP for that riding. In this hypothetical but realistic example, just under 70% of the votes were wasted.

Turning the focus to parties, the balance of these wasted votes across the country is what generates distortions favouring some parties at the expense of others. Imagine a party that receives around 7% of the vote across every riding. They would win no seats. This happened to the Green party in 2011. On the other hand, a party that wins many ridings as Harj did above would get more seats than their vote share. To illustrate, in British Columbia's 2001 provincial election, the Liberals won 77 of 79 seats with just under 58% of the vote.

It is through this mechanism that FPTP creates false majorities. The British Columbia example is quite rare, but in a typical Canadian election either the Liberals or Conservatives turn a favourably dispersed 40% of votes into over 50% of seats and thus gain a majority government. Other than the winner, regional parties are also favoured. The Bloc Québécois formed the official opposition in 1993 with 54 seats but received just over 300,000 votes less than the PCs who won two seats.

Consequently, the electoral system in Canada supports regionalism, which is manifested within parties, too. Governing parties may get only a few, if any, seats in huge swaths of the country. For example, the Liberals may not get even one seat in Alberta while securing very few in Western Canada in general. The Conservatives have the same problem in Quebec. As a result, parties have little incentive to represent the regions where they have few MPs, and when only a few MPs in a party come from one region, they have a weak voice in caucus. This is why Trudeau's statement that Canada's diversity creates the need for a majoritarian system is wrong. On the contrary,

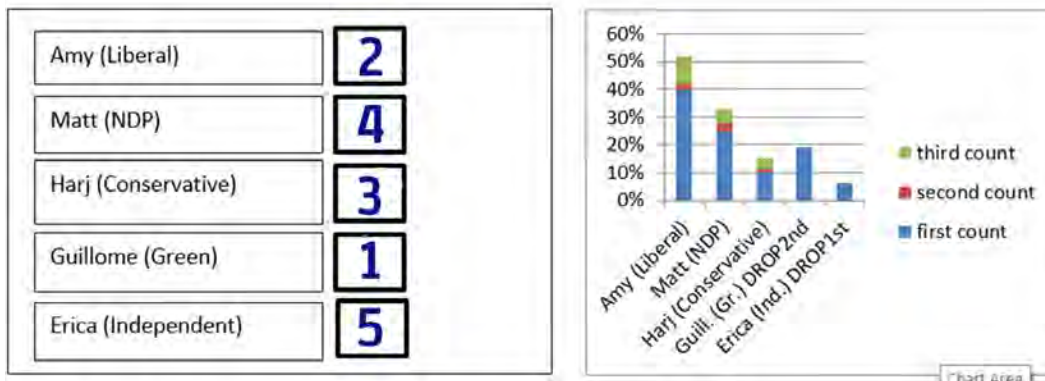
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proportional systems correct these problems by supporting diverse representation.

As the NDP, Bloc or Green party have never formed government, large portions of the electorate are never represented in government. They can only hope to be represented when their favoured parties gain negotiating power in minority governments.

This list of problems with FPTP is not comprehensive; it simply illustrates the more serious problems with the system.



Alternative vote is like FPTP except voters rank order their preferences. The counting of the first-choice votes occurs like an FPTP election. If no candidate has over 50% of the vote, then the last place candidate is removed. The voters who supported that candidate then have their ballots' second choices counted. Their second choices are added to the totals of the remaining candidates.

Like FPTP, a constituency representative is elected, and it is not much more complicated. The primary benefit of the alternative vote system is that the winning candidate gets a majority of the vote rather than a simple plurality. It also reduces the motivation for strategic voting.

Alternative vote lowers the number of wasted votes. As seen in the example above, Amy would have won an FPTP election with 40% of the

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vote. Instead, by including the second and third votes, she received just over 50%, so fewer votes were wasted. Nonetheless, not all the votes are counted; in fact, that would only be possible if all voters cast their first ballot for one candidate. At best, more are counted, but far from all.

Alternative vote looks like a major upgrade from FPTP: ranking instead of one vote and majority instead of plurality. However, the problems with distortions and regionalism that exist with FPTP are not fixed, and these are serious problems for Canada.

Proportional representation

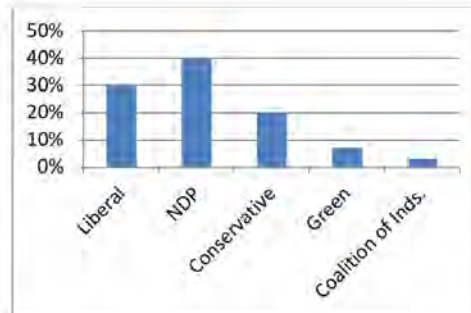
Party list (closed list)

HYPOTHETICAL RIDING

Ballot

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lib	Cons	NDP	Green	Ind.
Sarah	Noel	Carlos	Joy	Jake
Dave	Chris	George	Harash	Ann
Jane	Kate	Imoh	Joe	Fatima
Matt	Gwen	Moe	Mahesh	Sofia
Steve	Ibrah	Al	Jill	Camila

Result



The party list system represents a large change. The primary focus for the voter shifts from the candidate to the party. In its most extreme form, there is one constituency: Canada. Voters select a party rather than a candidate. The results are tallied and the parties are given a percentage of seats equal to their vote share. This extreme form is the source of most of the exaggerated criticisms leveraged against the party list electoral system in general.

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The parties offer a closed list of candidates. Parties fill their allocated seats in the House of Commons according to that list. In the illustration above there are 5, but for a Canada-wide single constituency that list would be 338 long for each party. If the NDP received 40% of the votes, they would get 40% of the seats, and the first 40% of their candidates in their list fill those seats. There are no wasted votes or distortions at all. It is also easy to understand.

With 338 seats, a party needs to win about 0.3% of the vote nationwide to get a seat. As a result, there are generally many more small parties that will win seats and none that will win over 50%. This creates greater representation because so many parties will get a voice. But it also results in instability because governing coalitions need to include so many parties, and they risk falling apart. Accountability is also reduced because it is hard to know which party to reward or blame at election time. The system can also result in extreme parties gaining seats in the Parliament. A well-known solution is to create a threshold so that parties who receive less than that percent of the total vote get no seats. This is often enough to keep extreme parties out. For example Israel uses a 3.25% threshold.

A larger concern for the public is that there are no direct MPs for a riding. As parties, not voters, choose MPs, it is the parties who become more empowered, not the voters. This tends to drive electoral reformers towards open list systems or STV, which will be described next.

Not all party list systems are so extreme. These lists can be subdivided so that each province gets its own list or that ridings are, let's say, five times larger than they are now but have five times more MPs. In such a case, Canada would have roughly 68 ridings with five MPs each. With ridings of this size, the increased instability and advantage to extreme parties all but disappear. For this reason, the argument that proportional representation encourages instability and extremism is an exaggeration to say the least.

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Proportional representation

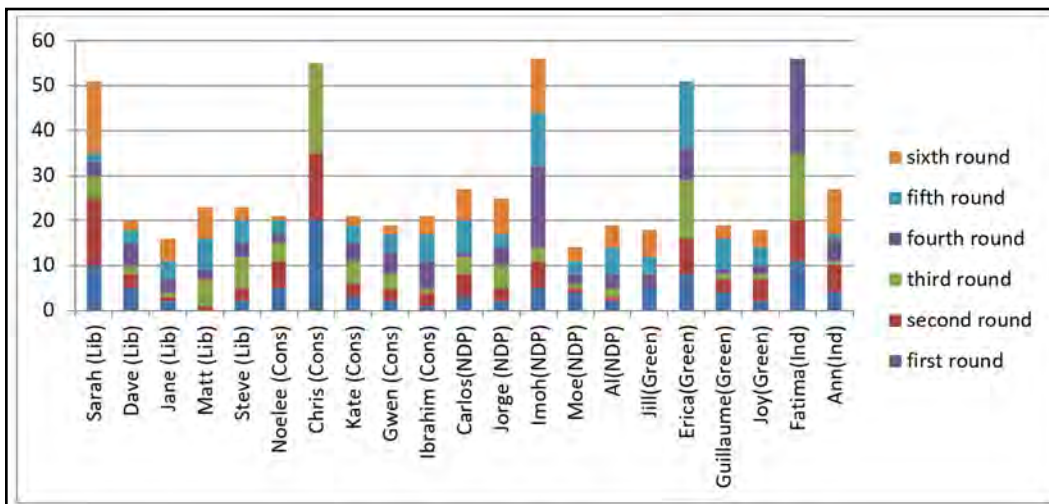
Single transferable vote (STV)

HYPOTHETICAL RIDING

Ballot

	NDP	Liberal	Conserv.	Green	Independent
Sarah	2	Noelle 8	Carlos 17	Jill 14	Ann 20
Dave	4	Chris 19	Jorge 13	Erica 2	Fatima 3
Jane	7	Kate 6	Imoh 16	Guill 12	
Matt	1	Gwen 11	Moe 10	Joy 15	
Steve	5	Ibrihim 9	Al 18		

Results



The STV ballot uses a rank order just like in alternative vote. The counting is similar, except when a candidate passes the 50% threshold in

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the STV system, their surplus votes are transferred to other candidates. Counting procedures vary considerably, but all versions of STV share the same general characteristics. The defining feature is that the district magnitude (the number of candidates who win per riding) is increased; five is generally considered ideal (Carey and Hix 2011). To avoid a massive increase in MPs, the ridings are made five times larger by combining that many adjacent ridings into one. For a Canadian federal election there would be roughly 68 ridings each with five MPs instead of 338 with one each.

STV produces proportional results and, therefore, better representation. It tends to produce more parties in parliament but not many more. As a result, coalitions are made up of few parties and become strong and stable governments. They are also fairly accountable because very few parties share the responsibility of governing.

It also gives voters more choice than any other system both when they cast their ballots and between elections. As illustrated above, two Liberal and one each of Conservative, NDP and Green candidates won, and all represent the same riding. Constituents have more than one MP to choose from when they have a concern to be addressed at the constituency level. For example, a Green supporter with a problem could go to their Green MP for assistance rather than an MP from a party they do not support.

The candidates are also empowered in relation to the party because they are better able to attract votes without the party label. Finally, regionalism is reduced because the critical mass of supporters for any party to get even one MP elected is significantly lower. The number of NDP and Liberal MPs from Alberta would increase if this system existed in Canada.

Given this list of major advantages, it is surprising that experts and electoral reformers have not chosen STV as their runaway favourite. It does come with limitations. The counting procedure is complicated and time consuming, and it is not clear to the public how the candidates

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won. It also requires much more information about the candidates to properly rank order them. Guessing and ordering votes from top to bottom are genuine concerns.

In Australia, where STV is used, voters have the option of bypassing candidates and simply voting for a party. Nearly 90% of voters choose to avoid the rank ordering required of the STV ballot (Above the line, 2016). Despite its ease of use for the most informed and motivated voters, STV appears to lack the simplicity that most voters desire.

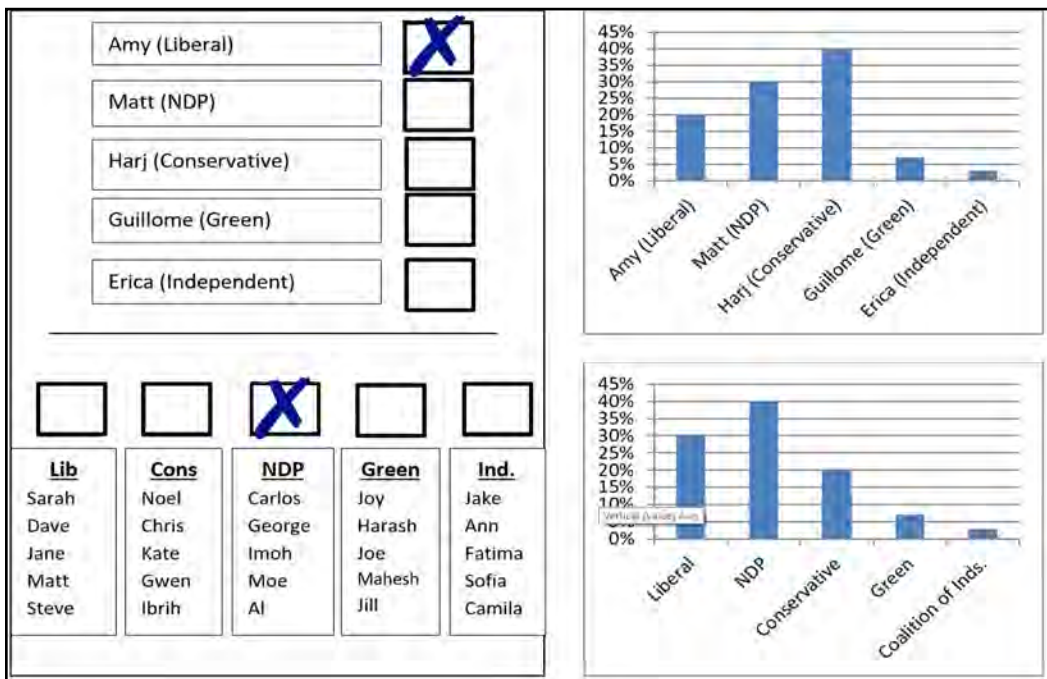
Proportional representation

Mixed-member proportional (MMP)

HYPOTHETICAL RIDING:

Ballot

Result



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MMP is a combination of both FPTP and party list. The voter casts a ballot for a riding MP and a ballot for a party list.

The FPTP election occurs exactly as it does now. Then the party votes are counted. Parties are topped up with extra seats until they have a number proportional to their vote count. All of the advantages of FPTP and party list are combined.

It produces strong and stable governments. Like STV, MMP tends to create a small increase in the number of parties in Parliament. No party tends to win a majority so coalitions form, but they tend to include only two or three parties, so they are stable. The small number of parties in government also means there is good and visible accountability. Further, voters get their local constituency representation through the FPTP ballot, the methods for voting are fairly easy to understand and representation is enhanced through the list part of the ballot.

Furthermore, in New Zealand, political parties have used the list candidates to diversify their caucuses. Women, Maori and pacific islanders in particular saw an immediate increase in representation. The list MPs themselves, for major parties at least, attempted to represent geographically disperse and traditionally under-represented constituencies such as minority groups (Mcleay & Vowles 2007).

Very few criticisms are leveraged against this system. The most common is that it creates two classes of MPs: riding and party list. In theory that is not ideal, in practice it is less of a concern. A second limitation is that unlike STV, it does not offer significantly more choice to the voter.

With so few limitations and so many strengths, it is not surprising that MMP is often considered the best electoral system and is often offered as the proposed proportional system in electoral reform campaigns.

Appendix B

The role of referenda in electoral reform: best choice when done properly, otherwise the worst

Referenda are a form of direct democracy where the public decide directly on the outcome of a policy proposal. It is common for democratic countries to use referenda to decide the outcome of major constitutional questions. Electoral reform is no exception. It is therefore not surprising that whenever there is a call for electoral reform, there is also a call for a referendum on the issue. Unfortunately, referenda are easily manipulated to favour the status quo. In Canada, that status quo is FPTP.

Status quo bias on complicated questions

There are a number of reasons why referenda unfairly hinder electoral reform. First, the public demonstrates a bias towards voting for the status quo. This can be a rather logical position (Lupia 1992). People are typically risk averse because they weigh the risks of change as greater than the benefits (Kahneman 1991). This is especially true of people who have little information on a subject (Magleby 1984). If the wording even points out which option is the status quo, then it can give that option up to an 8%-point advantage (Barber, Gordon, Hill and Price 2017). The potential status quo bias looms large in electoral reform and motivates disingenuous calls for a referendum.

Status quo bias in design

Another form of status quo bias comes from referendum design. One common option suggested for referendum wording is to simply list five possibilities and have the public vote on them. This option has the veneer of fairness, but in fact it is an attempt to manipulate the public to favour a referendum design that significantly leans towards FPTP. In this case, failure of one option to pass a 50% or often 60% threshold results in a win for the status quo which is FPTP. In other words, if FPTP is last, but none of the other options exceeds the threshold, then it still

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wins. This problem is made worse because proportional representation is a family of electoral systems. Presenting three of them significantly splits the proportional system vote.

Political parties bias information about electoral systems

To make matters worse, political parties, including the governing party, have a huge interest in the outcomes of electoral reform. As a result, the information parties provide is often framed to persuade the public towards their desired outcome. In much political or governance discourse, this isn't a serious problem, but when the issues are significant and the public has little good information to begin with, it is quite problematic (Hobolt 2009). Given the complexity of electoral systems, the quality of information being provided the public is a valid concern.

As an example, the argument that proportional representation empowers extreme parties is a remarkable overstatement. First, it is not a problem unique to proportional systems; majoritarian systems have the same problem. Consider the Tea Party's control over the Republican Party or the Donald Trump victory. While extremism may more readily develop in proportional systems than majoritarian ones, minimum electoral thresholds help to prevent it. When the thresholds do not work, mainstream parties can work together to keep the extreme parties out as occurs in Germany.

Unfortunately, when a voter hears the extreme party argument first, they have a major uphill battle overcoming this frame of thought and developing a balanced point of view.

These problems present electoral reformers with a major challenge. How can the public get enough information to overcome status quo bias without partisan framing? The most honest option is for government to simply change the electoral system to something proportional and then after two elections hold the referendum when the public has experience with both the old and new systems. This option is particularly desirable now because the Liberals were given a mandate in the

2015 election to select a proportional system and implement it. The same is true for the BC NDP government.

Appendix C

Why political parties that form government in Canada are resistant to electoral reform

In Canada, the government proposes most of the legislation to be debated in Parliament.⁹ For the legislation to pass, over 50% of the MPs must vote in favour of it. If a government fails to have a significant piece of legislation pass, then it is forced to resign or call an election. After an election, the party most likely to have its proposed legislation pass is given the chance to form government.

Majority government

If one party gets over 50% of the seats in the House of Commons, then it forms a majority government. These majority governments are strong and stable because their MPs will nearly always vote together as a bloc in favour of the government's legislation (through party discipline).

The opposition MPs, on the other hand, do not have the power to stop or significantly alter that legislation. They can only criticize it and offer themselves as a better alternative in the next election. As a result of the government's power, it is easy for the public to know who to reward or blame at election time. This is said to enhance accountability.

Majoritarian, or winner-take-all electoral systems, such as Canada's FPTP or Trudeau's preferred alternative vote, favour the creation of majority governments. They artificially turn 40% of the public's vote into over 50% of the House seats. As a result, they are said to create strong

⁹ Again, for simplicity, we are focussing on the House of Commons, though the Senate also debates proposed legislation.

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and stable governments with high levels of accountability. It is unclear if survey respondents who say they want strong and stable governments truly understand that they are supporting false majorities and completely ineffective oppositions.

Minority government

If no party gets over 50% of the seats, then the party most likely to pass its legislation is chosen to form a minority government. This is nearly always the party with the most seats, but it does not have to be. To stay in power, it negotiates support from at least one other party by offering policies that the other party wants. In exchange, the other party supports major government legislation. So, if the party with the second most seats is better able to do this, then it can form government.

Minority governments are not as strong or stable as majority ones, and the public needs to be discerning when assigning blame for poor governance. On the other hand, representation is enhanced because more parties representing more voters are needed to pass legislation. Under-represented populations such as women, minorities and Indigenous people are likely to be better represented.

Alternatively, the governing party might choose to share government with another party and form a coalition, enhancing stability and strength while still increasing representation. This is not common in Canada and has occurred only once at the federal level.

Proportional electoral systems tend to produce minority governments and coalitions by assigning a proportional number of seats to each party. Purely proportional systems have been found to create weak and unstable governments. They also run the risk of empowering extreme parties.

However, mixed systems and more moderately proportional ones tend to generate a reasonable number of parties and result in strong and stable governments. And despite Trudeau's claims, they are also not

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prone to empowering extreme parties. This is a common exaggeration, as seen with the No BC Proportional Representation Society during the lead-up to the 2018 referendum (<https://www.nobcprorep.ca>).

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SPOILED BALLOTS

ELECTORAL REFORM: THE BROKEN TRUDEAU PROMISE AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT