
CHP Canada Brief to the Parliamentary Committee on Electoral Reform:

The Christian Heritage Party Proposal to Combine Mixed Member Proportional Representation and Preferential Local Balloting

Canada urgently needs electoral reform. Every western democracy but three (Canada, the U.K. and the U.S.A.) has adopted some form of proportional representation, ensuring that more voters have their values represented in Parliament. The question is what form? Of the many models being discussed, the system adopted by Parliament must meet several criteria.

Essential Elements of Effective Electoral Reform

In order to improve our democracy and retain the best elements of our current system (FPTP), a replacement model must achieve the following objectives. It must be:

- Proportional—the outcome should be reflective of the public policy opinions of voters.
- Preferential—elected representatives should have the support of at least 50% of the voters in their districts, if not as their first choice, at least as their second or third choice.
- Responsive to local and regional voters—citizens want to feel they have access to and influence with their elected representatives. This should not be sacrificed in the quest for proportional representation.
- Cost effective—the decision to change the system should not increase the cost of governance or the number of representatives although it may unavoidably impact the cost of the election process itself.

Let's look at these elements in a bit more detail:

1. **Proportionality:**

The purpose of this exercise in electoral reform is to ensure that Canadian voters feel that their votes count and that—in general—the varied values and principles that Canadians hold dear are represented in some proportional measure in the House of Commons. It is well known and well understood that many Canadians—although they consistently vote in general elections—do not see their party represented by even one MP (due to the FPTP system). This must change.

2. **Preferential Options:**

Although preferential balloting may seem to give an advantage to one party due to shared values between several existing parties and the perceived likelihood that voters will group their choices in such a way that that party will benefit, preferential choice may spark a HUGE shift in how people vote, since they would theoretically be free of the “strategic voting / splitting the vote / wasted vote” syndrome. Voters would be free to put the candidate representing one of the smaller parties as their first choice and the candidate representing one of the larger parties second, since—if the small- party candidate failed to achieve a minimal percentage of the vote share, the voters’ second and third choices would still count. The poll results should therefore be much more accurate as to what Canadians really want. We will not all agree on what parties and policies would be best for the country but if we want our Parliament to reflect the will of the people this could be an important step.

3. Local and Regional Representation:

Canadians are accustomed to and desire the ability to elect local representatives for the areas in which they live and to have access to government services and influence on government decisions through those representatives. To maintain that local and regional connection, full proportionality must be tempered with the direct election of local MPs.

4. Affordability:

There should be no cost increase to taxpayers for representation. The cost of this investigation into electoral reform options and of seeking public input, the cost of implementing a new system, the likelihood that any changes will introduce some complexity and administrative effort and the foreseeable need to have extensive public explanations as well as possible boundary redistribution—all indicate that electoral change will not take place without a cost to taxpayers. Indeed, I'm sure the members of the Committee as well as the taxpaying public are aware that the discussions and Town Hall meetings have already cost a considerable amount. Nevertheless, when the dust all settles, the House of Commons should still have 338 MPs with the same amount of staff and resources.

How can these four objectives best be simultaneously achieved?

1. One Third of All Seats Allocated to Achieve Proportionality:

It has been estimated that reasonable proportionality could be achieved by assigning one third of the MPs of every province to "proportional" seats. To keep the number of the representatives in every province the same as today, the remaining two thirds of the districts must increase in size, based on population or area, by one half their current size. Obviously this would involve a one-time geographic redistribution.

2. Two Thirds of All Seats Elected Preferentially:

All MPs elected in the new redrawn districts would be elected by a preferential ballot. Voters would be permitted to rank all the ballot choices (1,2,3, etc.) or they may mark only their first choice. All choices of all voters and the rankings indicated would be recorded and processed electronically with adequate and secure safeguards to ensure that the results cannot be tampered with. Candidates who are ranked by 50% or more of voters as their first choice would be automatically elected. If no candidate received 50% as first choice, the candidates who achieved less than 10% as the first choice would be eliminated and the second choice of those who voted for them as their first choice would be added to the first choice columns of the remaining candidates. If there were still no candidate who achieved 50% or more, all candidates who received less than 20% of the vote would likewise be eliminated and the second choices of the voters who placed them as their first choices would be tallied again, adding them to the first choice columns of the remaining candidates, until one candidate receives at least 50% support.

3. Choosing the Proportional MPs:

The remaining one third of the MPs in any province would be allocated by the proportional method, including both the elected MPs and the proportional seats. That percentage assigned to each party would be simply the actual percentages that all the candidates achieved as the first ballot choice. When the total number of MPs (elected and proportional) are divided by the percentages, the MPs elected proportionally would be chosen by comparing the percentages of votes received by all the candidates running for each party that qualifies for proportional seats within the province. The top scoring candidate in each party would be the first MP to fill any earned proportional seats. These "proportionally-elected" regional MPs would be available to serve all citizens anywhere in the province and would be assigned overflow tasks by offices of the elected MPs on a random basis.

4. **Regional Representation:**

The final results may not be completely reflective of every proportional element nationwide but would bring the complexion of the House of Commons much closer to the actual levels of partisan support in each province. An alternative process for electing the proportional MPs would be to add a second column to the ballot, listing all the registered parties. Voters would choose their local MP by a preferential ballot and the percentage of regional reps would be determined by the percentages of votes earned by the parties. In any case, the party candidates assigned regional (proportional) seats would be based on the level of support earned by each party candidate in the “first choice” column, not by “party lists”. This would still maintain some level of voter choice, even for the proportionally-elected MPs.

5. **Limits to Proportionality:**

For the Territories with only one MP, there would not be any direct allocation of proportional representation but the preferential ballot would still improve the ability of voters to select the candidate with the broadest level of public support.

In the Mixed Member Proportional and Preferential system recommended above, parties would have incentives to build consensus to govern and legislation could not be pushed through as easily by the party in power. That would be positive for Canadian democracy.

Additional recommendations to level the playing field for all parties:

Electoral finance reform is also urgently needed. The “10%-of-the-vote campaign reimbursement threshold” for candidates and parties is arbitrary and results in financial advantages for incumbents and for the more established parties and unfairly penalizes the candidates of smaller and newer parties as they seek to gain recognition and support. We would prefer to see all taxpayer subsidies eliminated but if they are continued the vote % threshold should be removed. Smaller parties with smaller budgets would still receive smaller reimbursements, according to the amounts spent on the campaign trail but at least they would be treated equally and would have the same opportunity to replenish their coffers following a costly campaign.

The CHP has always advocated multi-party cabinets. We would like to see the PM selecting the most qualified MPs from any party to serve in key cabinet positions. We believe this would encourage cooperation across the aisle and give Canadians a greater level of confidence in our government.

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