



Electoral experimentation in BC

Number of seats per district

Although BC and Canada have not experimented a great deal with electoral systems, there have been changes over the years in the way we elect our representatives.

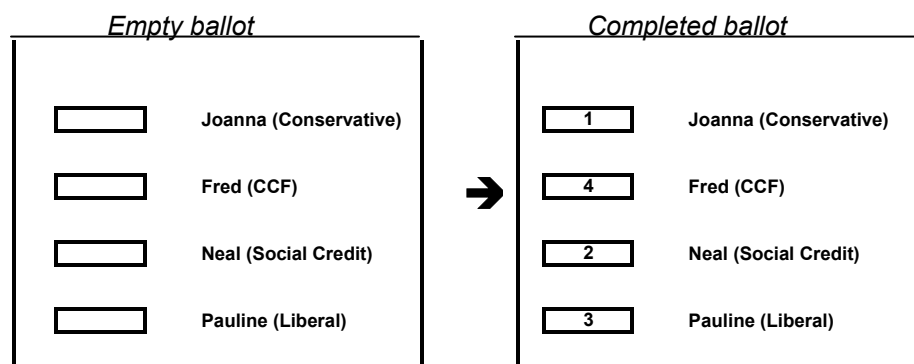
While today, BC has only single member districts – that is, only one person is elected to represent each riding – this was not the case until relatively recently. Between 1871 and 1991, BC's provincial representatives were elected from both single member districts and multimember districts with up to six members per district. By increasing or decreasing the number of seats in a district, the electoral system was able to respond to population shifts without redrawing district boundaries. Since the 1991 general election, all seats in the legislative assembly have been single member seats.

Alternative vote (AV)

BC experimented with alternative vote (AV), a type of majority system, in the 1952 and 1953 provincial elections. The AV electoral system was introduced by the Liberal and Conservative coalition government in 1952 in an attempt to consolidate its power. The fact that the coalition was defeated, in spite of an electoral system which was supposed to work to its benefit, is an excellent example of how the adoption of a new electoral system can have unexpected consequences.

AV ballot example

The diagram below illustrates the structure of the preferential ballot used for the AV electoral system in BC in 1952 and 1953. A voter ranks candidates in the order of the voter's preference. The right-hand ballot shows a completed ballot paper in which the voter's first choice is the Conservative candidate. The voter favoured Social Credit as a second preference rather than the Liberals. Because so many voters marked Social Credit as their second preference, Social Credit, surprisingly, won the election.



Example of type of ballot used in BC in 1952 and 1953 in which voters ranked candidates.

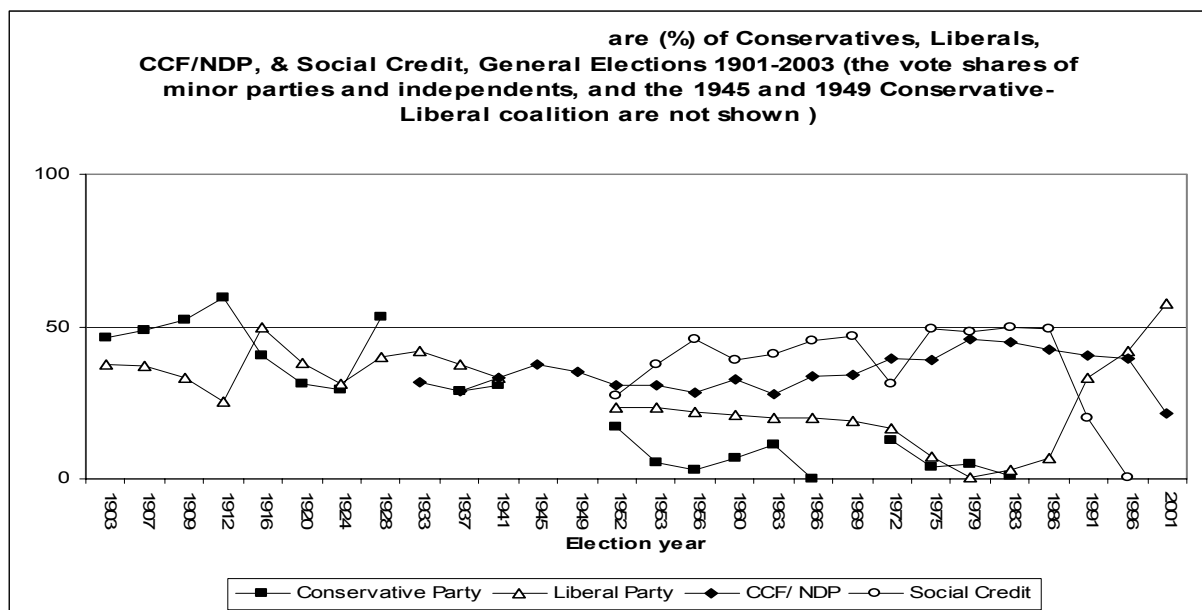
Once the Social Credit party formed the government, it abolished AV and returned to a plurality electoral system.

Alberta's electoral experiments

Our neighbour Alberta also experimented with electoral systems and used preferential voting from 1926 to 1959. Members from the Calgary and Edmonton urban areas were elected according to proportional representation by the single transferable vote system (PR-STV) in multimember districts. Rural areas used a majority formula with preferential voting in single member districts. Now, all members are elected in single member districts.

Electoral voting patterns in BC

Even though there have been few electoral changes in BC, the province has seen dramatic shifts in political party support over the years.



The contribution of the electoral system is to shape the way these changes are represented in the legislature.

NOTE: More detailed information, including lecture notes, presentations and video recordings, is available on the Citizens' Assembly website.

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