



Politics in BC: What do we want?

At the heart of democratic politics is a system of regular elections that allows citizens to make choices about their government and the people who control it. Electoral systems are designed to turn our individual choices into collective choices. Our vote is combined with many others to determine our political representatives. In different electoral systems, that process of combining votes works differently – with different political consequences.

Different electoral systems can have a significant impact on important features of our political landscape.

The people of British Columbia now have the opportunity to decide what kind of politics they want in this province – and choose an electoral system accordingly. There are no guarantees, but knowing what kind of politics we want – how we want political parties and BC's Legislative Assembly to operate – will clarify our thinking about electoral systems. And how we answer some key questions will shape our thinking about what kind of politics we want.

How adversarial or consensual do we want BC politics to be?

Politics in Canada (and in BC) is modeled on the law courts, with two opposing sides – the government and the opposition – vigorously arguing their positions and challenging their opponent's. The result tends toward adversarial politics. Accountability is clear and, on election day, the voter pronounces judgment.

Other political systems do not draw the line between government and opposition as clearly. They favour consensual politics, with multiple views represented in government. The result is often coalition governments and blurred accountability.

No political system is completely adversarial or completely consensual; it will have features of each. But different electoral systems will push our politics in one direction or the other.

Where should the balance of power lie between cabinet and the legislature?

In a parliamentary system, we elect members to a legislature who, in turn, choose the premier and cabinet, make the laws, and decide on taxes and spending. So, in effect, the premier and cabinet are accountable to the legislature. When, however, an electoral system has a tendency to produce majority governments, and that is combined with strict party discipline, the premier and cabinet are able to more easily dominate and the legislature is less able to hold the government accountable.

In order for the balance of power to shift back toward the legislature, changes must be made that weaken party discipline or that lessen the likelihood of majority governments, or both.

Changing electoral systems can address the likelihood of majority governments – although party discipline is only loosely affected by electoral system changes.

Do we need local representatives?

In our current system, we elect local people to represent the interests of a region – which we call a constituency or riding. This gives voters an identifiable political representative, and it gives representatives a clear, geographically-based constituency of voters. Yet party discipline may hamper an MLA's ability to vote the way his or her constituents wish.

Some electoral systems dispense with local representatives. Voters may, for example, elect representatives on a basis other than geography, or they may simply vote for a party and allow the party to designate all the representatives.

Should parties hold seats in the legislature in proportion to their share of the popular vote?

In our system, electoral contests are held simultaneously in a number of ridings around the province. Often, because there are a number of candidates (and parties) running in each riding, a representative is elected with less than 50 per cent of voter support. Frequently, the party that wins the election achieves less than 50 per cent of the popular vote across the province. Occasionally, as happened in BC in 1996, a party can win the election with fewer votes province-wide than the opposition party.

This system tends to exaggerate majorities in the legislature while under-representing smaller parties that achieved a significant percentage of the vote province-wide, but insufficient votes in any one riding to win a seat.

Some electoral systems ensure a party's strength in the legislature is directly proportional to its share of the vote; that is, its share of votes determines its share of seats. To achieve this *proportional representation*, these systems abandon exclusive use of single-member constituencies and shift the focus to parties and away from individual representatives.

Do voters get to make the kinds of choices they want?

Under our current system, BC voters are given a short list of names, together with the party affiliation of each, and are simply asked to choose one. The candidates on the list are determined by the respective political parties without voter input. Sometimes this simple choice creates hard decisions. What do we do if we like the candidate for Party X but prefer Party Z?

Other electoral systems allow the ballot to be organized in different ways, allowing the voter a wider range of choices, including:

- Choice among candidates
- Choice among candidates, including those from the same party
- Choice among parties
- Ranking of candidates and/or parties

Is increasing or changing the kind of choices on the ballot a good thing, or does it simply create more confusion and complication?

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

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Assessing electoral systems

Choosing among electoral systems involves deciding what sort of politics we want and then trying to determine what kind of electoral system will help give it to us – understanding that the same system can work differently and produce different results in different places. As we assess the workings of various electoral systems we want to keep in mind not only their individual characteristics but some of the *trade-offs* that might be involved in choosing one over another. A system which satisfies one of our goals may work counter to another goal. The following criteria and questions may be interesting to consider when assessing electoral systems. *Which of these characteristics are most important to you? And why is this?*

Various electoral systems have different impacts on:

The system of government

- stable and effective government
- electoral accountability
- parliamentary check on government
- fair representation for parties and groups
- democratic political parties

Voters

- degree of choice
- identifiable/local representative
- encouragement to participate
- equality of the vote

“Stable” government

Government stability refers to how secure the governing party is in power. The more tenuous a government’s hold on power, the more difficult it may be for it to make hard decisions and move quickly when necessary – for fear of losing support in the legislature and losing its hold on power. Generally, majority governments tend to be more secure and, at least in this sense, more stable. But such governments can become arrogant and insensitive to public opinion, unwilling to compromise and too easily dominated by autocratic leaders.

How important is the trade-off between government stability (which may mean a majority government) and a legislature that more closely reflects society’s social and political divisions?

Electoral accountability – for parties and individual representatives

Elections are about choosing representatives and governments. In order to make elections about a choice of governments, it is necessary that:

- voters can identify which *parties* were responsible for government decisions in the past
- political parties and candidates clearly signal their intentions with respect to possible future coalition partners
- representatives can be held accountable

What kind of accountability does a particular electoral system provide? How does it do so?

Parliamentary check on governments

One of the key tasks of a legislature is to scrutinize the work of government. The ability of a legislature to do this will depend largely on the rules and procedures it adopts, and the degree and kind of discipline that exists within the political parties. Effective parliamentary checks on government are likely to be found in multi-party legislatures where the government does not command an easy majority. But such minority governments tend to be less stable and accountability is more difficult to determine.

What is the best balance between parliamentary checks and stable, accountable government?

Fair representation for parties and groups

- “Wasted” votes - Under some electoral systems, the vote of someone who supports a losing candidate does not contribute to any candidate being elected.
Is that vote wasted? Is this a concern?
- Proportionality and representation of minority groups – The share of seats a political party wins more closely mirrors its share of votes under some electoral systems. Similarly, minority parties are more likely to win seats under certain electoral systems.
How important is proportionality and the representation of minority parties?
- Some electoral systems seem to produce more diverse legislatures than others, with better representation of all sectors of society including minorities and women.
Does the electoral system disadvantage some members of society?

Democratic political parties

Given the central position parties have in electoral competition, their basic features have a direct impact on the nature of a community’s politics. An important aspect of assessing an electoral system is how it affects the number and nature of the parties.

How would a change in electoral system influence the competitive relationships among parties, and what would this mean for the character of the legislature and government?

Voter choice

Different electoral systems create different choices for voters, such as: choosing among candidates from different parties, choosing among parties, or choosing among candidates from the same party. Voters may also be able to rank candidates or weight their vote.

How much and what kind of choice should an electoral system offer voters?

Identifiable representative

Elections allow voters to choose how they will be represented in the legislature. Under some systems, they choose an individual (as in BC); under others, they choose a party.

How important is it to British Columbians to have our own MLA? Is this more important in rural areas than in urban areas?

Encourage participation

Voter turnout rates are falling in most western democracies. Aspects of an electoral system that could affect voter participation are: clarity, simplicity and choice.

Do some electoral systems encourage participation in the political process?

Equality of the vote

Because of how electoral boundaries are drawn, some representatives can be elected from ridings with few voters, while others represent more populated ridings.

Does this mean voters are not treated equally? Are there counterbalancing arguments?

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Legislatures, elections, representation and parties

In a democracy, we expect government to be responsive to citizens and accountable for its activities. Periodic elections give citizens an opportunity to select their political representatives and hold them accountable.

Legislative assembly

In Canada, governments are accountable to the legislative assembly, because the premier and ministers – the cabinet – are, technically, chosen by the members of the legislative assembly from among those elected to the assembly.

The functions of the legislative assembly are:

- Make laws
- Raise and spend funds
- Oversee the work of government
- Discuss matters of public concern

In order to remain in office, the cabinet – or “government of the day” – must keep the support of a majority of representatives in the legislative assembly. Ministers, who are responsible for policy and the administration of their departments, are open to questions and scrutiny in the assembly. The assembly can force a government to resign by withdrawing its support. If this happens, the opposition members may be called on to form an alternative government – or a general election may be called.

Types of governments based on election results

Depending on election results, governments may be formed in different ways:

Majority government

- The party with a majority of representatives in the legislature forms the government
- Voting is normally by party blocs
- The governing party controls the business of the assembly

Coalition government

- Coalitions can be arranged between two parties when no party possesses a majority of seats
- In coalition governments, two (or more) parties agree to share government and divide ministerial positions between them
- Because of the nature of a coalition, compromise over policy may be necessary
- Coalition governments can collapse and fall when policy differences arise between coalition parties

Minority government

- When no party has a majority of seats in the legislative assembly
- The party with the largest number of seats in the assembly forms a government and is supported in the assembly by another party (or parties)
- The supporting party supports the government in office but not necessarily its legislative program

Representatives – members of the legislative assembly (MLAs)

Current activities of MLAs:

- Attend meetings of the assembly and vote to support the party
- Participate in caucus (party) meetings
- Prepare for debates and committee activity
- Lobby on behalf of constituents
- Respond to concerns of residents within the MLA's riding and participate in community functions, etc.

Political parties and party competition

In most world democracies, political parties have arisen to articulate and package ideas and interests, recruit candidates, campaign on identifiable platforms, and organize and operate governments and oppositions. *Party discipline* means that party members agree to campaign on the same issues, vote together and defend the party's position on issues. In Canada, political parties generally strive to balance national party discipline with local organizational autonomy.

Some electoral systems tend toward two-party competition, while others engender multi-party competition. In systems dominated by two large parties, these parties tend to be centre-of-the-road with minor policy differences and much of the policy debate takes place within the parties. In multi-party systems, voters generally have wide choice between ideologically distinct parties, and debate over government policies takes place between parties in the legislature.

Questions to consider

When examining the different electoral systems, a number of key questions are important in order to determine the priorities and values of British Columbians when it comes to electoral reform. Ask yourself:

- *What are the costs and benefits of majority, coalition and minority governments?*
- *What should be expected from members of the legislative assembly?*
- *How important is local representation?*
- *Does it matter how many political parties we have? How many should there be?*
- *Do we want an electoral system that makes it easy for new parties to grow?*
- *Is multi-party or two-party competition better for BC?*
- *How should candidates be chosen and by whom?*

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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.

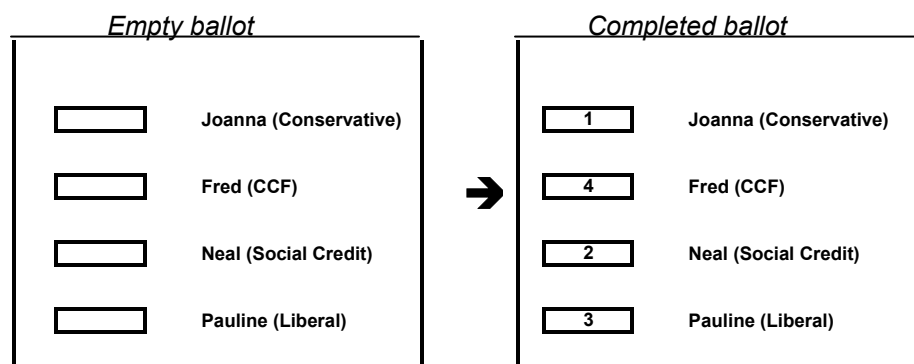
While today, BC has only single member districts – that is, only one person is elected to represent each riding – this was not the case until relatively recently. Between 1871 and 1991, BC's provincial representatives were elected from both single member districts and multimember districts with up to 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.

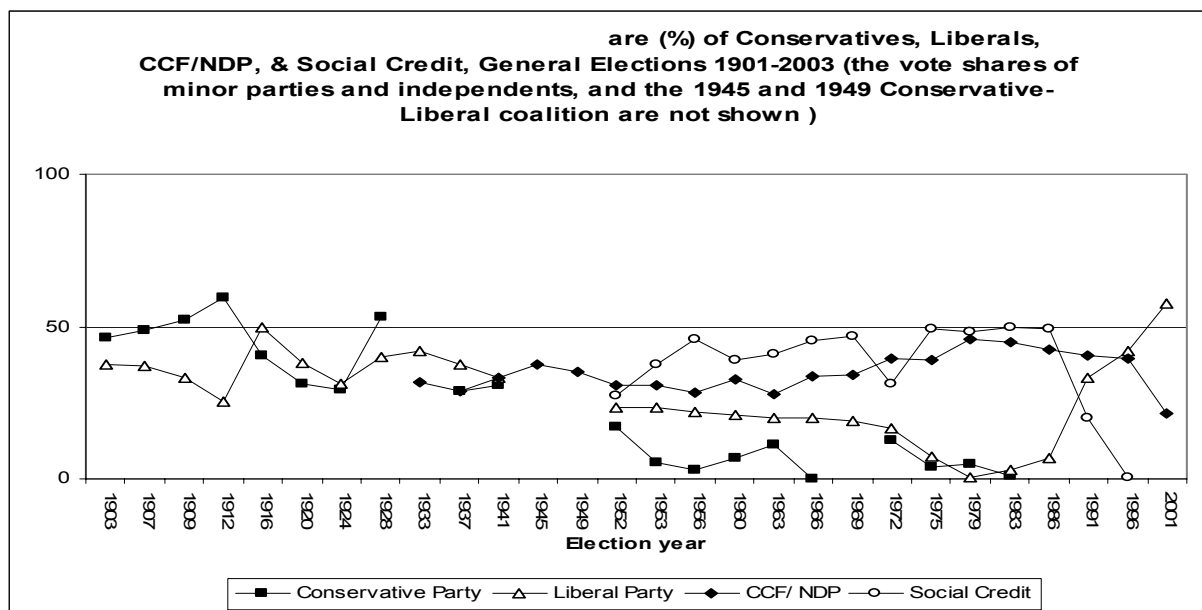
Once the Social Credit party formed the government, it abolished AV and returned to a plurality electoral system.

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.

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Why electoral reform?

Why electoral reform?

For most of the last century (and more), BC has employed the plurality, “first-past-the-post” electoral system with few complaints. This system has generally produced stable majority governments with clear electoral accountability and identifiable local representatives. In recent years, however, some British Columbians have expressed concerns about several aspects of our current system.

1) Should all votes count equally?

In our electoral system, the size of electoral districts – or constituencies – is crucial. When there are big differences in constituency size, votes do not count equally.

For example, in 1983, the MLA from Atlin, a community in northern BC, represented 4,195 voters, whereas a Surrey MLA represented 56,576 voters – 12 times as many. Although he won more than 34,000 votes, MLA Ernie Hall lost his seat in Surrey, while in Atlin, Al Passarell won his seat with fewer than 1,600 votes. These differences in constituency size allowed the NDP to win the Atlin seat with 1,587 votes; the Social Credit party needed 38,081 to win the Surrey riding. This led to the argument that votes in Atlin were worth 12 times as much as those in Surrey.

BC has since reorganized its electoral map to make districts more similar in size. Today, BC constituencies can vary by up to plus or minus 25 per cent from the provincial average.

2) Artificial majorities

A party needs a plurality of votes (not a majority) to win a seat in a district. For example, in a constituency with five candidates, the winner could take the seat with 20 per cent + 1 of the votes, a far cry from a true majority of 50 per cent + 1. This means that a party could win a majority of seats without a majority of votes, creating an “artificial majority.”

3) Wrong winners

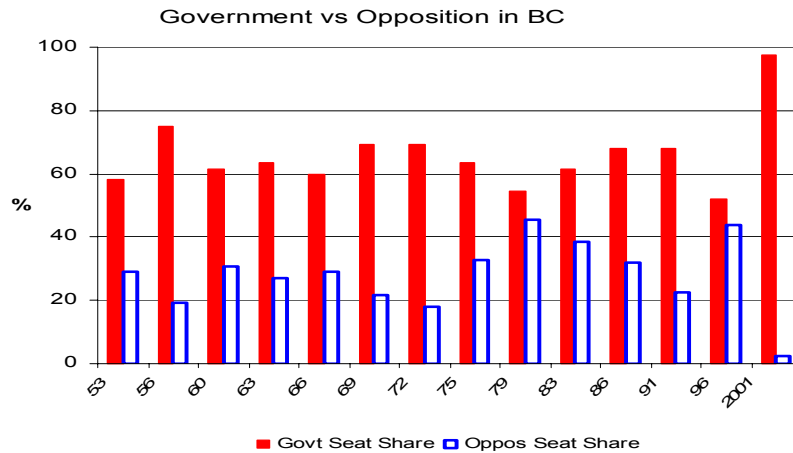
When a party wins lots of seats by smallish margins, and loses others by larger amounts, the totals can add up in very peculiar ways. As a result, a party could win the most seats without having the largest share of the vote. This is a normal – but infrequent – consequence of the system.

4) Oversized governments

Our system creates artificial majorities and, by the same token, tends to produce a weak opposition. In a few recent instances in Canada, the electoral system produced either no opposition or an opposition so small that it had no capacity to do its job.

New Brunswick	1988 (0 opposition seats)
Prince Edward Island	1989 (2), 1993 (1), 2000 (1)
British Columbia	2001 (2)

On average, governments in BC have twice the number of seats as the opposition.



5) Under-representation of women and minorities

In BC, the record of the last five elections suggests the numbers of women in the legislature grew quickly in the early 1990s but has levelled off or perhaps even declined since. At last count, women constitute about 20 per cent of the legislators in Canada.

Different systems appear to make a difference to the proportion of women and minorities elected. Generally speaking, electoral systems which incorporate higher “district magnitudes” and proportional representation list systems are more likely to produce women in the legislature. A recent examination of the world’s major post-industrial democratic societies produced the following compiled statistics:

<i>electoral system</i>	<i>% women in national legislature</i>
Plurality / Majority	16.9
Mixed: constituency-proportional	19.4
Proportional representation (list)	29.5

Why are there such differences? While the causes of these differences are not clear, in plurality and majority systems, parties are more limited in their control over who the candidates are than in proportional representation systems. In plurality and majority systems, with only one or two nominations available, there is often a vigorous local contest the outcome of which cannot easily be controlled. Proportional systems that require a party to present a list of candidates in the order they are to be elected, offers the party leadership considerable influence over who is nominated and ultimately elected.

Other Canadian electoral reform initiatives

Initiatives for reform are getting started elsewhere in Canada too. Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario and the Yukon are currently looking at various ways of reviewing their electoral systems – as is the City of Vancouver.

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Understanding electoral systems

Democratic electoral systems

How do we start thinking about elections? At one level they are deceptively simple: Politicians compete for public support. Voters respond on election day by indicating who they prefer. The votes are tallied and translated into seats in the Legislature. And the electoral system organizes, shapes and governs the process.

The electoral system determines the “exchange rate” between votes and seats — that is, how votes are translated into seats. How many and what kind of votes are needed to get a seat varies from system to system. As a result, different electoral systems give politicians incentives to organize and campaign in different ways. Some electoral systems may even create barriers for certain types of candidates. Different electoral systems give voters different kinds of choices, which can then affect the decisions voters make.

So while electoral systems may appear simple, upon closer examination they can differ in a multitude of ways, with decidedly different effects. Electoral systems are fraught with subtleties and complexities.

Characteristics of electoral systems

To understand electoral systems, three basic dimensions must be considered:

- *District Magnitude*
- *Ballot structure*
- *Electoral Formula*

District magnitude (DM)

District Magnitude refers to the number of representatives chosen from an electoral district.

- DM may range from one (i.e. one member is elected from a constituency) to the total number of seats (i.e. the entire province or country is one constituency)
- Proportional systems require some districts with more than one representative
- The limit to how proportional a system can be is determined by the district magnitude – increasing DM size will increase the potential for proportionality
- There is no need for district magnitudes to be the same in every electoral district
- The “personal connection” between voter and representative is likely to shift as the number of representatives from an area changes

Ballot structure

Ballot structure simply refers to the kinds of choices voters can make on the ballot paper when they go to vote. The range of choices includes:

- marking a single choice for a party or candidate
- indicating a set of preferences
- weighting choices by ranking candidates

The structure of the ballot can:

- influence the balance of control between the parties and the voters, with respect to who actually gets elected as a representative

- influence internal party decision-making with respect to nominations – closed list systems give the party “list makers” significant power
- control the nomination process, especially if it effectively determines election prospects, can affect the nature and strength of party discipline in the legislature

Electoral formula

The *electoral formula* determines how votes are turned into seats given the *district magnitude* and the *ballot structure*. It incorporates the mathematics and procedures for determining how many votes are required for election, and just who gets elected. It may also specify some kind of minimum electoral success – or “threshold” – before a party can gain any representation. While electoral formulas vary widely, they tend to be grouped by three basic principles: *plurality*, *majority*, and *proportional representation*.

Questions to consider

- *If elections are a contest, who are the contestants? Political parties or candidates?*
- *Do you want a proportional system? If so, how proportional must it be?*
- *Do you want to provide for local representation? If so, how big should the area represented be? How many representatives should it have?*
- *What kind of choices should voters have on their ballots?*
- *How important is it that the mechanics of the systems be simple and transparent?*

Additional Resources

This list of readings could be of interest to anyone wanting to know more about electoral reform. The Citizens' Assembly does not endorse the following books and articles or their projections. However, they are useful to illustrate some of the issues being considered by the Citizens' Assembly. A more extensive list is available on the Assembly's website.

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Farrell, D. *Electoral Systems: a Comparative Introduction*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001. [This is the book being issued by Assembly members as a reference book.]

Lijphart, Arend. *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-six Countries*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999.

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- Animated “How your vote counts” explanation of various voting systems
- Other useful resources

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Electoral systems

Families of electoral systems

There are five types – or families – of electoral systems used in democracies around the world:

- Majority systems
- Plurality systems
- Proportional representation list systems
- Proportional representation by single transferable vote systems
- Mixed systems

Majority systems

The fundamental principle of majority systems is that the winning candidate must obtain more than 50 per cent of the vote. This may mean, when there are more than two candidates, some process is required for eliminating the least popular candidates and redistributing their votes to the remaining candidates to ensure an overall majority is achieved. This could be done either:

- Through a second round of voting – or *run-off election* – or
- Through a system where voters rank candidates on the ballot in order of preference – sometimes called an *alternative vote*

Plurality systems

British Columbia's current electoral system is a plurality system – the system now in use throughout Canada, both federally and provincially.

In plurality systems, individual candidates seek election in their electoral district and the winning candidate in each district is the one with the most votes – even if they get less than 50 per cent of voter support. This can result in such anomalies as a party achieving enough seats to form a majority government with less of the popular vote than the opposition party – as happened in BC in 1996.

Proportional representation systems (PR)

Proportional representation (PR) systems vary widely but all are designed to ensure that the range of opinion in the legislature reflects the range of opinion in the electorate. These systems distribute seats in proportion to the share of the vote received by each party or candidate.

There are two major types of proportional representation systems:

- PR-List systems
- PR by the single transferable vote (PR-STV)

Proportional representation list systems (PR-List)

In PR-List systems, each party offers voters a list of candidates for election and voters select between party lists.

Lists can be either “closed” or “open.” If the lists are closed, candidates are elected in the order set out by the party. So candidates listed at the bottom of the list are less likely to be elected

than those at the top. If the lists are open, voters can indicate which candidate(s) they prefer on the party list.

Proportional representation by single transferable vote systems (PR-STV)

PR-STV is also designed to create a representative assembly that mirrors voter support. However, in contrast to PR-List systems which reflect support for political parties, PR-STV is based on voters indicating their preferences for individual candidates.

PR-STV systems ask voters to rank candidates on the ballot (which is called a preferential ballot). This allows voters to choose between candidates for the same party or from different parties.

Mixed systems

In some ways it is misleading to call mixed systems a distinct ‘family’ of electoral systems. As the name implies, these systems mix two (or more) different systems in an attempt to obtain the advantages of the different systems while minimizing their disadvantages.

The most widely used mixed systems attempt to balance two key principles that are often seen as mutually exclusive:

- Identifiable local representatives
- Some measure of proportionality

While there are many ways in which systems can be mixed, the possibilities include:

- Using different systems in different regions
- Using a mix of systems across the country
- Using different systems to elect different levels of government

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Majority systems

Under the majority electoral system, a candidate must receive more than 50 per cent – a majority – of the vote to be elected. When there are only two contestants in an election, unless there is a tie, one will inevitably win with a majority of votes.

But, when there are more than two in the race, it is unusual for one candidate to get more than 50 per cent of the voter support right away. In order for a candidate to attain a majority in this case, a process is needed to eliminate the *least* popular candidates and redistribute their votes to the remaining candidates.

There are two ways to redistribute voter support in majority systems:

- A second round of voting – or *run-off election* – or
- Through a system where voters rank candidates on the ballot in order of preference – sometimes called an *alternative vote*

Second ballot

Under this version of the majority system, voters are often required to vote more than once. Each time they vote, they are able to vote for only one candidate. France currently uses this system to elect members to its National Assembly.

Ballot – round #1

On the first round of elections, if a candidate receives more than 50 per cent of the votes in his/her electoral district, that candidate is declared elected. If no candidate receives more than 50 per cent of the votes on the first ballot, a second vote is required, perhaps several days later.

Ballot – round #2

In most cases, in this second round of voting, only the two candidates who received the most votes on the first ballot in each electoral district can compete. In this way, successful candidates are elected with a majority.

Alternative vote (AV)

Under AV, there is only one round of voting, but there may be several rounds of counting the votes. Rather than voting for just one candidate, voters are able to rank the candidates – “1” indicating first preference, “2” indicating second preference, and so on. This is called a *preferential ballot*. AV was used in BC in the 1952 and 1953 provincial elections.

Counting – round #1

On the first round of counting, all first-preference votes are counted. If a candidate gets more than 50 per cent of the first-preference votes, that candidate is declared elected.

Counting – round #2

If no candidate receives more than 50 per cent of first-preference votes, the candidate with the least number of first preferences is removed from the race. Then the excluded candidate’s ballots are sorted and reallocated to the other candidates based on the second preferences indicated on those ballots.

Counting – round #3 (and so on)

If no candidate gains a majority after this redistribution, this process of eliminating a candidate and redistributing his/her votes is repeated until one of the remaining candidates gains a majority.

An animated example of AV can be found at www.seo.sa.gov.au/flash.htm - click on 'Continue', then 'Exclusion (Bottom up)'.

District magnitude (DM)

The district magnitude is the number of representatives that can be elected – or the “seats” – in an electoral district. The DM varies, but is often one. DM can vary from electoral district to electoral district. In majority systems, as the DM increases beyond one, the system can produce very disproportionate results.

Ballot structure

As discussed, the ballots for second ballot and AV systems are very different.

Formula

Votes are counted on a district-by-district basis for individual candidates, not parties.

How the system works

The key to how majority electoral systems work is the role of minor parties. By forcing the electorate to make majority choices, these systems reinforce the dominance of large parties, but give the voters who support small parties some say in the choice of which large parties will win the most seats. Small parties have little chance of electing candidates but may be able to influence policy by “trading” their voters’ second preferences for policy commitments from one of the large parties – that is they align themselves with a larger party and encourage their voters to select that larger party as their second preference in exchange for policy concessions.

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Plurality systems

The plurality system is currently used in British Columbia and throughout Canada. BC has used the plurality system in all provincial elections with the exception of 1952 and 1953, when the province experimented with a version of the *majority system* called the *alternative vote*.

The contestants in a plurality system election are individuals – frequently aligned with a political party – who want to represent an electoral district. The winner is the most popular candidate, the one who receives more votes than any other. Unlike majority systems, there is no requirement that the winner get more than 50 per cent of the vote.

Plurality systems with single-member districts

- One candidate is elected in each district and voters each have one vote
- Large parties tend to get more than their ‘share’ of the seats, while small parties tend to get less than their share of the seats unless their support is geographically concentrated
- The winning party usually gets a majority of seats without a majority of all votes – a so-called “artificial majority”

Plurality systems with single member districts are often compared to a race in which the winner is the one who crosses the finish line first. For this reason, the system is often called *First-Past-the-Post* (FPTP). For an animated illustration of how the single member district plurality system works visit www.seo.sa.gov.au/flash.htm, click on *Continue*, then *First-Past-the-Post*.

Plurality systems with multi-member districts

Plurality systems with multi-member districts have most of the same features as single-member plurality systems. There are several varieties of multi-member plurality systems:

Votes equal to seats or *block vote*

- Voters have the same number of votes as seats available in the district
- Voters cannot give more than one vote to any one candidate
- Voters may divide support between parties, but generally tend to vote along party lines
- Currently used in Vancouver to elect city councillors

Votes equal to seats or *cumulative vote*

- Voters have the same number of votes as seats available in the district
- Voters are able to indicate a strong preference while still voting for several candidates, by casting more than one of their votes for the same candidate.
- Used in some US cities and states

Votes less than seats or *limited vote*

- Voters have fewer votes than seats available in the district
- Parties may run more than one candidate
- Big party candidates tend to split the party vote among them
- Stimulates rivalry among candidates in same party and makes them very locally oriented
- Possibility for small parties to win a seat if they strongly support one candidate – sometimes called *semi-proportional*
- The share of votes required to win a seat – the *quota* – decreases as DM increases
- Used in Spain to elect their Senate

A variation of the “limited vote” is the *single non-transferable vote* system.

Single non-transferable vote (SNTV)

- Gives voters just one vote in a district that elects several legislators
- Tends to work like a proportional system with regard to vote-seat shares but like a plurality system with regard to generating majority
- Used in Korea and Taiwan

District magnitude (DM):

District magnitude is the number of representatives elected from an electoral district. DM = 1 is now the most common for plurality systems and the easiest to use. As discussed, where the DM is greater than 1, the number of votes a voter casts may or may not equal the number of representatives to be elected. The DM can vary from electoral district to electoral district.

Ballot structure

Voters are presented with a list of candidate names and simply place a mark beside the candidate(s) of their choice. As indicated above, in multi-member electoral districts there are several variations of ballots, each producing different effects.

Formula

Votes are counted on a district-by-district basis for individual candidates, not parties. Independent candidates can have their name on the ballot on the same basis as party candidates. Winning candidates are those with the most votes; there is no minimum number of votes a candidate needs to be elected. Votes cast for the non-elected candidates do not contribute to electing anyone and so are sometimes called “wasted votes.”

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Proportional representation – list systems

Proportional representation (PR) systems

Proportional representation systems vary widely but all are designed to ensure that the range of opinion in the legislature reflects the range of opinion in the electorate. These systems distribute seats in proportion to the share of the vote received by each party or candidate.

Any PR system has three key elements – and it is in the details of these elements that PR systems vary so widely.

- Ballot structure
- District magnitude
- Electoral formula

There are two major types of proportional representation systems:

- PR-List systems
- PR by the single transferable vote (PR-STV)

Proportional representation list systems (PR-List)

Ballot structure

In PR-List systems, each party offers voters a list of candidates for election and voters select between party lists.

There are two types of lists – closed or open.

Closed lists – Voters cast their ballot for the party of their choice and candidates are elected in the order they appear on the list – which is determined by the party. So candidates listed at the bottom of the list are less likely to be elected than those at the top. Closed lists allow party officials control over who gets elected and their subsequent political careers.

Open lists – Voters are able to indicate on the ballot which candidate(s) they prefer on the list. The variations of open lists include:

- Voters may vote for either the party or a candidate – and can thus potentially influence which individuals on a list are elected (as is the case in Belgium)
- By voting for a candidate, voters signal their choice of parties and also which candidate from the party list they wish to elect (as in Finland)
- Voters are given more than one vote and can, thus, spread support among parties and candidates (as in Switzerland)

District magnitude

District magnitude refers to the number of representatives – or seats – in a district. In PR systems, the DM can vary from two seats to the total seats in the Legislative Assembly. In the Netherlands, for example, the entire nation is one district. When there is more than one district, the DM – or number of seats in any given district – can vary from district to district. Higher DMs lead to more proportional outcomes.

Electoral formula

Various mathematical formulas are used for allocating seats in proportion to votes – with decidedly different results. Many PR systems establish a **THRESHOLD**, or minimum percentage of the vote that a party needs before it is entitled to any share of the seats. Typically, *thresholds* are in the 2-5% range. Occasionally, different formulas are used at different levels – or *tiers* – in determining seat allocation.

- **Largest remainder formula** – These formulas involve establishing a **QUOTA** to determine how many votes it takes to win a seat. The votes a party wins is then divided by the *quota* to get the number of seats it is entitled to. If there is a seat left over, then the party with the largest number of remainder (unused) votes gets the seat.
- **Highest average formula** – These formulas involve dividing the votes won by each party by some number and giving the party with the largest average number of votes the seat. These calculations do not involve *quotas*.

Designing a PR system involves making a series of choices, including:

- **Ballot structure** – Should party lists be open or closed?
- **District magnitude** – How many districts? What size? How many seats in each?
- **Formula** – What formula should be used? Should there be a threshold?

Depending on the answers to the district magnitude and formula questions, the proportionality of the electoral system will vary. The nature of the candidate lists on the ballot will determine who has control over which candidates are elected, the parties or the voters.

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Proportional representation by single transferable vote system

Proportional representation by single transferable vote (PR-STV)

Proportional representation by single transferable vote (PR-STV) is a distinctive variant of proportional representation systems. Like PR-List systems – the larger family of PR systems – the PR-STV system is designed to create a representative assembly which mirrors voter support. In contrast to PR-List systems which reflect support for political parties, PR-STV is based on voters indicating their preferences for individual candidates.

PR-STV systems ask voters to rank candidates on the ballot – which is called a *preferential ballot*. Voters' choice is based on ranking candidates rather than on choosing a party, so voters can choose between candidates from the same party or vote for candidates from different parties.

While the mechanics of vote counting under PR-STV can look complicated, the principle is simple – candidates are elected from multi-member districts in proportion to the electoral support for the candidates expressed in the voters' preferences.

Candidates may see their major rival as a member of their own party rather than a member of an opposing party. As a consequence, the ability of parties to discipline their candidates is weakened. This limitation on party control of candidates goes a long way to explain why PR-STV has not been popular with governing parties.

Like all PR electoral systems, there are three key elements of the PR-STV system:

- Ballot structure
- District magnitude
- Electoral formula

Ballot structure

Voters are presented with a list – or lists – of candidates, which they rank by numbering the candidates in order of preference using a preferential ballot. Some systems require the voter to make only one choice (Ireland) while others require the ranking of as many candidates as there are seats (Tasmania).

The design of a PR-STV ballot paper is important. The order of candidates and parties on the ballot paper can be contentious. There are wide variations in the way candidates are listed and grouped on the ballot paper. Some jurisdictions use a system of rotating names on the ballot paper to ensure no candidate gets preferential treatment.

District magnitude (DM)

In PR systems, DM – or the number of representatives in a district – can vary from two seats to the total seats in the Legislative Assembly; DM can also vary from electoral district to electoral district. The biggest source of variation with PR-STV is in the district magnitude. Once the number of seats per district drops below five, substantial reductions in proportionality occur if there are a large number of parties.

Electoral formula

In a PR-STV system, candidates are elected as they gain a *QUOTA* of votes. A quota can be calculated in various ways, but is essentially the minimum number of votes needed to be elected to a seat.

In successive rounds of counting ballots, candidates are declared elected when they reach a quota of votes, least popular candidates are eliminated and votes are redistributed based on voters' subsequent preferences. The votes which are redistributed are:

- The surplus votes – those over and above the quota of votes needed to elect a candidate
- Votes from eliminated candidates

This process of redistribution of surplus votes from elected candidates, followed by the exclusion of the least successful candidates and the redistribution of his/her votes, continues until the required number of members is elected.

“Above the line”

In some PR-STV jurisdictions, voters are able to vote “above the line” – that is, instead of numbering candidates in order of preference, voters have the option of voting for a single party. This gives the party control over the completion of the whole ballot in a party-preferred order and turns the PR-STV system into something very similar to a PR-List system.

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Mixed electoral systems

Mixed electoral systems

In some ways, it is misleading to call mixed systems a distinct “family” of electoral systems. As the name implies, these systems mix two – or more – different systems in an attempt to obtain the advantages of the different systems while minimizing their disadvantages.

The most widely used mixed systems attempt to balance two key principles that are generally seen as mutually exclusive: identifiable local representation and some measure of proportionality.

While there are many ways in which systems can be mixed, the possibilities include:

- Using a mix of systems across the province
- Using different systems in different areas of the province
- Using different systems to elect different levels of government
- Using a mix of different kinds of options

Systems that mix different electoral families across the province

In mixed systems that attempt to combine local representation with some form of proportionality, the most common method is to essentially split the legislature into two types of members: Some members are elected in individual districts, while others are elected by some form of PR-List system.

For example, Germany elects half its 600-member parliament from single-member districts using the plurality system, while the other half are chosen by a party list system with regional lists of candidates.

- German voters have two votes – one for the local member, one for the party list
- Their parties must win 5 per cent of the national vote or three individual constituency seats before they are eligible to receive any list seats

Systems that use different electoral families in different regions

Systems that use different electoral families in different regions are designed to deal with the representational challenges of various communities. One significant issue is how to balance the representational issues of dense urban communities with those of sparsely-populated rural areas.

France, in its system to elect its Senate, uses a combination of majority and plurality rules in single-member rural electoral districts and proportional representation in urban, multi-member districts.

In the past, Alberta and Manitoba experimented with simultaneously using different systems in different parts of the province in an attempt to balance rural and urban interests. In urban areas, they had multi-member districts – that is, more than one representative elected from a district – using proportional representation by single transferable vote (PR-STV), while in rural areas they had single-member districts with a majority formula. The ballot in both urban and rural districts looked the same; voters simply indicated their preference(s) by rank ordering the candidates.

Systems that use different electoral families for different assemblies

Australia and Japan hold simultaneous elections for both their lower and upper houses of parliament – using different systems for the two houses. This often means parties must use different nominating and campaigning strategies and voters have different kinds of decisions to make, on different ballots, at the same time.

Systems that mix different kinds of options

Russia has included a *none of the above* (NOTA) option on their ballot papers, in addition to listing candidates by party. In Russia, the NOTA option has never attracted a very large percentage of the vote. However, if NOTA should win, the procedure would be for another election to be held. An alternate proposal would have a member of the legislature chosen at random if the NOTA option gets a majority.

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Implications of electoral systems

Every electoral system is structured differently and, as a result, each produces different results. Depending on your perspective, these results can be seen as either positive or negative. Yet it would be fair to say that each system has both positive and negative implications. In thinking about electoral systems, we need to keep in mind these implications and think about the “trade-offs.”

Majority systems

- Regularly produce one-party majority governments, or coalition governments
- Identifiable local representative are chosen in and for each area
- Limit the representation of minor political parties but reduce the significance of “wasted” votes for these parties by enabling their supporters to contribute to the choice of large party candidates
- Governments and members are accountable through a direct electoral contest
- Allow the governing party or coalition to dominate parliament
- Distort the vote/seat relationship; there is no obvious, predictable connection between the two except that there is usually a large bonus in seat-share to the party with the most primary votes
- No representation for minority interests – unless these are geographically concentrated
- Provides a mechanisms for eliminating candidates and redistributing voter support – so a majority winner can be achieved:
 - Under the second ballot, two election periods are required
 - Ballot format for alternative vote (AV) is more complex than for a categorical choice
 - Generally, voters for minor-party candidates have a second chance to have their preferences counted; but not those who vote for the largest parties
 - Even though the second preferences of minor-party voters may count in the selection of winning candidates, votes do not count equally in electing members, and many votes – those cast for losing candidates – do not contribute to electing anyone

Plurality systems

- Regularly produce stable one-party majority governments able to easily dominate parliament
- Identifiable local representatives are chosen in and for each area
- Limit the proliferation of minor political parties
- Governments and members are accountable through simple electoral contests
- Systems are easy to use and to understand; voters have a simple either-or choice, often between two major parties
- Systems are familiar; we know how they work in our society
- Distort the vote–seat relationship so there is no obvious, predictable connection between the two
- Minority interests and small voices often get shut out
- Votes do not count equally in electing MLAs; many votes do not contribute to electing anyone

Proportional representation list (PR-List) systems

- Party representation in the legislature is determined by voters; the distribution of seats more closely reflects voter support for parties
- Minority voices are heard in parliament
- Almost all votes contribute to electing legislators
- Strengthen the role of parliament in choosing and checking the government
- Voter turnout tends to be slightly higher
- Do not produce identifiable one-party governments, so electoral accountability is reduced
- Do not provide identifiable local representative
- Individual politicians cannot easily be held accountable by voters

Proportional representation by the single transferable vote (PR-STV) system

- Produces a close match between a party's seat share and its vote share – but this varies with district magnitude
- Gives the voter the opportunity to vote for individual candidates as well as for parties, and the opportunity to choose among candidates from the same party or from different parties
- Permits candidates to be elected who appeal to a particular constituency
- Does not discriminate against independent candidates
- Requires a preferential ballot which is more complicated for voters
- Does not have single, geographically-defined, local members
- Is more likely to produce coalition governments
- May encourage regional and/or sectional politics and/or brokerage politics rather than politics based on province-wide issues
- Has the potential to weaken party control of candidates and MLAs

Mixed systems

Mixed systems are, by definition, various combinations of other electoral system families. As a result, the implications of any one mixed system are the implications of its component systems. Because the systems are mixed, these implications can interact in sometimes unpredictable ways. The most widely used mixed systems attempt to balance local representation and some measure of proportionality.

- Proportional representation systems generally increase the number of parties and the possibility of coalition government
- Some mixed systems create two types of members of the legislature: constituency members responsible to the electorate and list members who owe their position to the party list makers and have no constituency responsibilities
- Creating two types of members can create two types of parties: large ones that do the constituency work and small ones that promote particular issues

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Global context

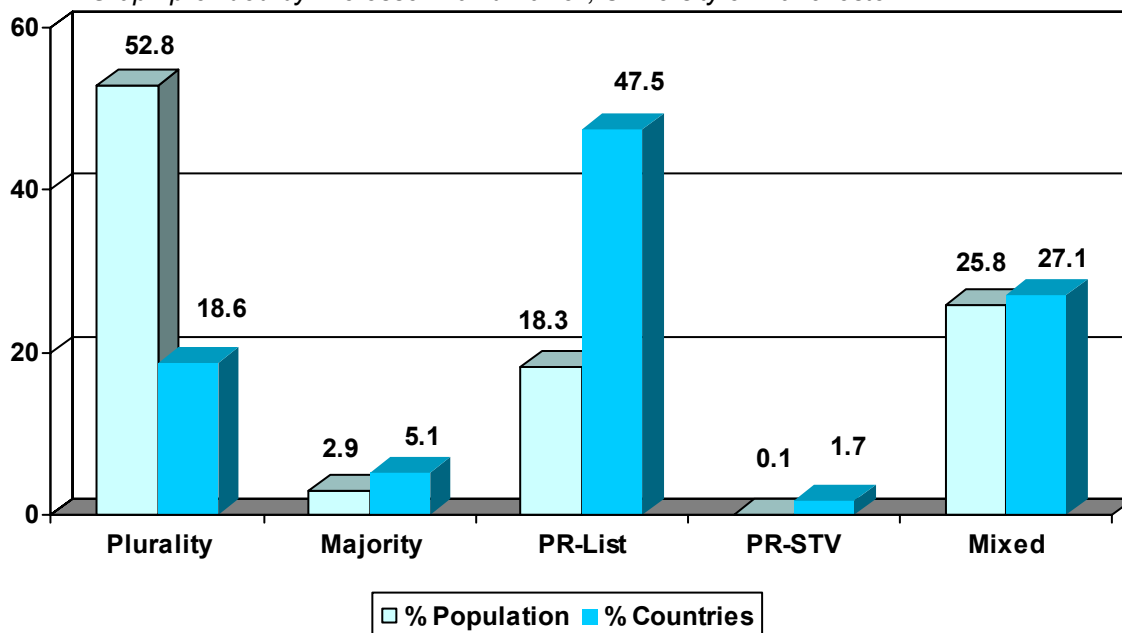
Global activity in electoral reform

Over the past 15 years, many countries – including both emerging and established democracies – have been actively engaged in selecting and implementing new electoral systems. Their experiences provide excellent learning opportunities for British Columbians as we now embark on our own exploration of electoral systems.

A number of former Soviet bloc countries in eastern and central Europe adopted new electoral systems as they emerged from Communism in the late 1980s. Within established democracies, the 1990s saw electoral reform at the national level in New Zealand, Italy, Japan, Israel and Venezuela and at the regional level in other countries.

Popularity of electoral systems in world democracies

Graph provided by Professor David Farrell, University of Manchester



Electoral reform in emerging, post-Communist democracies

When post-Communist countries were addressing electoral reform, existing political elites tended to favour non-proportional representation systems, believing these systems would give the establishment an advantage. Reformers, however, pushed for a proportional representation system that would give small emerging parties a better chance at success.

In holding their first elections, these emerging democracies employed a range of electoral systems, but a number subsequently changed to different systems. (See following chart) By 2002, these countries were all using either PR-List systems or mixed systems – predominantly semi-proportional mixed-member majoritarian (MMM) mixed systems. Most of these countries have also adopted a legal *threshold* – a minimum percentage of the popular vote – which parties must surpass to be awarded seats.

Emerging European democracies – electoral systems

Chart provided by Professor David Farrell, University of Manchester

	Electoral system		Threshold
	<i>First election</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2002</i>
Albania	Majority	Mixed	2.5%*
Bosnia	PR-List	PR-List	
Bulgaria	Mixed	PR-List	4%
Croatia	Mixed	PR-List	5%
Czech Rep	PR-List	PR-List	5%*
Estonia	PR-STV	PR-List	
Hungary	Mixed	Mixed	5%
Latvia	PR-List	PR-List	5%
Lithuania	Mixed	Mixed	5%
Macedonia	Majority	Mixed	
Moldova	PR-List	PR-List	6%
Poland	PR-List	PR-List	5%*
Romania	PR-List	PR-List	5%*
Russia	Mixed	Mixed	5%
Slovakia	PR-List	PR-List	5%*
Slovenia	PR-List	PR-List	4%
Ukraine	Majority	Mixed	4%
Yugoslavia	PR-List	PR-List	5%

* Higher thresholds for coalitions

Electoral reform in established democracies

While New Zealand, Italy and Japan all adopted mixed systems, only New Zealand adopted a fully proportional system, known as a mixed member proportional (MMP) system. Each country's decision to change was driven by different circumstances and needs, with similarly differing results.

Today, in the United Kingdom, every family of electoral system is in use at some level:

European Parliament	PR-List
Northern Ireland Assembly	PR-STV
Mayor of London	Majority - Alternative Vote
Scottish Parliament	Mixed member proportional (MMP)
Welsh Assembly	MMP
London Assembly	MMP
House of Commons	SMP

Electoral system change – lessons from global experience

(Courtesy of Professor David Farrell, University of Manchester, England, and Professor Elizabeth McLeay, Victoria University, Wellington, New Zealand)

- Do not expect a new electoral system to cure all of a political system's problems
- Be patient with a new system; allow voters, parties, legislatures and political systems time to adjust to a change in electoral system
- It is impossible to predict all the effects of electoral system change – there will be some unanticipated consequences
- When considering a change in electoral system, factors to consider include:
 - government stability
 - the need to keep it simple
 - incorporation of minorities
 - trade-offs between features of various electoral systems
 - link between politicians and voters

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Glossary of Terms Relating to Elections, Representation and Government in British Columbia

This list gives brief definitions of terms used to describe the governmental and electoral process in British Columbia. Many of the terms are included because they help to explain the overall system of government in the Province. Others provide background information for the role which elections play in our system of representative parliamentary democracy. In the explanation of a term, words which are in bold are further explained elsewhere in the glossary.

act of parliament See **legislation**

additional member Some **electoral systems** permit the election of additional members to a representative **assembly** as a way of increasing the proportionality of an electoral system or to give an opportunity for the representation of small parties; see **mixed systems**.

adversarial An adversarial political system is one dominated by a struggle for power between two rival party groupings. Politics is seen as highly competitive with little room for compromise. Actions by the governing party are always opposed by the opposition party. See also **consensus**; **majoritarian**.

assembly This term is sometimes used as an abbreviation for **legislative assembly**, the representative body which British Columbians elect as their parliament. More generally, it can refer to an elected body which forms part of the **legislature**, or to any group which claims to represent a political community; the Citizens' Assembly uses the term in this latter sense.

at large election An election held 'at large' is one in which the whole body of voters vote as one **electoral district** for the election of all the members of a representative **assembly**. At large elections are currently used for the election of members to the City Council of Vancouver. See also **multimember district**, **single member district**.

alternative vote (AV) The alternative vote is a preferential electoral system (see **preferential voting**) which requires a voter to number the names of the candidates on the ballot paper in the order of the voter's preference (that is, to rank the candidates by putting 1, 2, 3, etc. next to their names). If no candidate gains a **majority** of votes on the first count, the second preference listed on the ballots of the least successful candidate are distributed among the remaining candidates. This process continues until one candidate has a majority of votes. The alternative vote

system can be supplemented by electing **additional members** to provide an opportunity for the representation of small parties; see **mixed systems**.

British Columbia used the alternative vote to elect members to the legislative assembly at the 1952 and 1953 general elections.

AV See **alternative vote**

back bench In British derived **parliamentary systems**, the members of parliament who are **ministers** sit in the front row of the seats or benches assigned to the governing party. As a consequence, those who sit on the back benches are members of the governing party who are not ministers. These members are known collectively as the back bench. The opposition back bench are those members of the **opposition party** who are not senior members of the party or do not hold a position as **shadow minister** or parliamentary spokesperson for a particular area of policy for the opposition party.

ballot Ballots are the papers on which votes are recorded. A vote can be a single mark, or one or more marks or numbers to elect one or more candidates or parties (see **electoral system**). The term ballot can also be used to refer to the process of casting votes.

BC-STV See **single transferable vote** and the relevant sections elsewhere in this Report

bicameralism A bicameral **parliament** is one which has two **chambers**, a lower house and an upper house. The lower house is often called the legislative assembly or house of assembly and, in **parliamentary systems**, is the house where the **government** is formed. The Canadian parliament is bicameral with the non-elected Senate as the upper house, the House of Commons as the lower house.

British Columbia has always had a unicameral parliament, with its single chamber known as the **legislative assembly**. Some provinces joined confederation with upper houses but all of these have since been abolished, the last being Quebec's Legislative Council in 1968.

bill See **legislation**

BNA Act See **Constitution Act, 1867 (Canada)**

British North America Act 1867 See **Constitution Act, 1867 (Canada)**

by-election The death, resignation or disqualification of a **member of parliament** creates a **casual vacancy** in the chamber. At present, such vacancies in the **legislative assembly** can be filled by holding a special election called a by-election in the **electoral district** whose seat has become vacant. Some electoral systems do not

require by-elections to fill vacancies but use some other procedure specified by the **constitution** or the **electoral system**.

cabinet The cabinet is a meeting of the **premier** and the **ministers** who together make key decisions about government administration and policy. Even though the cabinet plays a central role in the operation of **parliamentary government** in British Columbia, the responsibilities and operation of the cabinet are not written down in any formal constitutional document (see **constitution**; **executive council**; **government**).

candidate A candidate is someone who runs for office at an election. In British Columbia, a candidate is a person who is eligible to stand for election to the **legislative assembly** and who has fulfilled the requirements for **nomination** set out in the **Election Act (British Columbia)** (part 5, division 1). These include being supported by 25 voters in the electoral district in which the candidate intends to run, and making a deposit of \$100.

Almost all successful candidates are members of political **parties** and parties themselves have procedures for choosing candidates. The process of nominating candidates is a vital one for a political party; by choosing a candidate, it permits that candidate to use the party label and to contest the election in the name of the party. See also **nomination**; **party discipline**.

casual vacancy A casual vacancy is the technical term used for a vacancy in the membership of the **legislative assembly** which occurs between **general elections**. Such vacancies can occur because of the death, resignation or disqualification of a member of the legislative assembly. Such vacancies can be filled by holding a **by-election** or through some other procedure specified by the **constitution** or the **electoral system**.

caucus Caucus is a meeting of the **members of parliament** who belong to a particular **party** (as in, the Liberal caucus, the NDP caucus). Meetings of caucus—which are usually held in private—may discuss a wide range of topics of concern to party members, including the policies to be followed by the party and parliamentary tactics. Caucus meetings are an important forum for the exchange of information between the party leaders, ministers (if the party is in government), and the **back bench**. In the past, voting at a meeting of the party caucus was used in Canada as a common way of choosing the **party leader**. Today, leaders are usually chosen at a party convention, or by direct **ballot** of all the party members.

chamber The room in which an **assembly** meets is often called the assembly chamber. By extension, it can refer to a meeting of the assembly or the assembly itself. Bicameral means ‘having two chambers’ so a bicameral parliament is one with two chambers; see **bicameralism**.

coalition A coalition is a grouping of two (and occasionally more than two) **political parties** which work together to win **government** or to increase their influence in a representative **assembly**. The coalition parties may indicate before an election that they intend to work together if they win office, or coalition agreements may be formed after the election when it is clear that no single party has a majority of seats. See also **majority government**.

commission The formal authority given to someone to hold a senior position in government is called a commission. A commission can be issued by the **lieutenant governor** alone or by the **lieutenant governor in council**. **Ministers**, senior public servants and judges are all issued commissions when they are appointed; see **order in council**.

When the party in government is defeated at an election, or loses the support of a majority of members in the **legislative assembly**, the lieutenant governor invites the leader of the party which has the support of a majority of members to form a new **government** by offering to commission the leader as **premier**. Once other ministers have been chosen by the premier, they are given commissions for their departmental responsibilities (sometimes called portfolios).

consensus (system) In contrast to a **majoritarian** or **adversarial** system, a consensus system aims to disperse power among a number of political institutions, actors and parties so that government policy requires compromise and the accommodation of a range of views before action can be taken. Consensus systems do not regard bare majority support as sufficient to legitimize government action—broader support is required so that as many groups as possible can be persuaded of the merits of the action. Electoral systems with **proportional representation** are seen as consensus systems because they are more likely to produce **coalition** governments and the need for parties to compromise over their policies.

constituency This term is often used interchangeably with **riding** to refer to an **electoral district** of the legislative assembly. It can also refer to the audience, interested public, or interest group which is the concern of a particular **member of parliament**.

constitution A constitution is a set of rules which describes the key institutions of **government**—particularly the composition of the **legislature** and the **executive**—and specifies the procedures which government institutions must follow if their actions are to be authoritative. A constitution can be thought of as a higher law because it limits what governments can do.

Constitutional documents vary in what they contain and how much detail they provide about the day-to-day operation of government. British derived constitutional documents typically say little about the institutions of executive government, especially the role of the **premier**, **ministers**, the **cabinet** and the relationship between these institutions and **parliament**.

Many of the constitutional rules establishing the government of the Province of British Columbia can be found in the **Constitution Act (British Columbia)**.

Constitution Act (British Columbia) This provincial constitutional document sets out many of the rules relating to the operation of the **legislative assembly** and executive **government** in British Columbia, but it is far from a complete specification of the operation of government in the Province. Some of the rules relating to the conduct of government can be found in other provincial acts of parliament or official documents; others rely on accepted practices which are not set out in formal constitutional documents. These unwritten rules are sometimes called **constitutional conventions**. (A copy of the Act can be found on the Queen's Printer website (<http://www.qp.gov.bc.ca/statreg/default.htm>). Note that the web version of the Act may not include the most recent amendments.)

Constitution Act, 1867 (Canada) This Act (known before 1982 as the *British North America Act* or simply the *BNA Act*) is a component of the Canadian Constitution together with the *Constitution Act 1982* which includes the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The 1867 Act established the confederation of Canada by setting up a new national government and dividing law-making power between the national government and the provinces. One of its provisions sets out the procedures for appointing and removing the **lieutenant governors** of the provinces. (A copy of the Act can be found on the web (<http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/const/>).)

constitutional conventions Constitutional conventions are accepted practices which supplement or modify the provisions of formal constitutional documents. It is a constitutional convention, for example, that the **premier** of British Columbia is a member of the **legislative assembly**, and that the **lieutenant governor** only **dissolves** parliament on the advice of the premier. See **Constitution Act (British Columbia)**.

Crown The formal exercise of power by **government** in Canada is carried out by the governor general and provincial **lieutenant governors** in the name of the Crown. The Crown is symbolic **head of state** of the Canadian federation and its provincial components, and reflects the fact that Canada is a monarchy under Queen Elizabeth II.

democracy Democracy has become an imprecise term but, at its core, it refers to the belief that **governments** should be responsive to the wishes of the majority of citizens. This explains why elections and democracy are often thought of as being closely related; elections provide a means of choosing a government acceptable to the majority of voters and, by electing a representative **assembly**, creating a body which can make governments accountable. But what we think of as democratic government needs more than just elections; it requires a constitutional structure (see **constitution**) and a set of rules which protect minorities and individuals as well as majorities. See also **representative democracy**.

direct democracy Direct democracy refers to procedures which enable citizens to decide questions directly through their vote rather than indirectly through the election of representatives or through other procedures. The referendum is an example of direct democracy; voters, not elected politicians, decide whether a proposal is accepted or rejected. Other examples include the recall (a procedure for forcing members of parliament to recontest their seats after a specified number of citizens petition for a new election) and the initiative (a procedure for requiring the **legislature** to consider proposals for legislation once the proposal has the required number of supporters). All three of these modes of direct democracy are available in British Columbia (*Recall and Initiative Act*; *Referendum Act*). See also **representative democracy**.

dissolution (legislative assembly) The **legislative assembly** is said to be dissolved when the **lieutenant governor** ends a session of the legislative assembly and starts the process for holding a **general election**. In this matter, the lieutenant governor acts on the advice of the **premier**.

Until 2002, members of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia held their seat for five years from the date of the previous general election but, since 2002, provision has been made for the legislative assembly to have a **fixed term** of four years.

district magnitude (DM) This term refers to the number of representatives to be elected from an **electoral district**. See also **at large election**; **multimember district**; **single member district**.

Droop quota (formula) In counting votes for electing candidates under a **single transferable** vote electoral system, the minimum number of votes needed for a candidate to be elected (the quota) can be calculated by using the Droop quota formula. The quota is calculated as follows: first, the total valid vote in the electoral district is divided by one plus the number of members to be elected; then, one is added to the total (fractions are ignored).

The Droop quota is the smallest number of votes to elect enough candidates to fill all the seats being contested in an electoral district, while being just big enough to prevent any more being elected. If the Droop formula is applied to a single member district, the quota is the total votes (100 percent) divided by 1 plus the number of members to be elected (1); the result is 100 divided by 2 which gives 50 percent plus one vote—a share of the vote that only one candidate can get.

H R Droop was an English lawyer who suggested this formula in 1868 as a component of an electoral system.

election, timing of See **dissolution**

Election Act (British Columbia) The *Election Act* sets out the administrative machinery for running elections in the Province. In 2004, it has 283 sections dealing with the many aspects of organizing an election including the appointment and duties of electoral officials, the qualifications and registration of voters, the procedures for calling an election, the procedures for the nomination of candidates, the arrangements for voting, the scrutiny and counting of votes, the registration of parties, the monitoring of election expenditure and political advertising, and the penalties for breaching the rules laid out in the Act. (A copy of the Act can be found on the Queen's Printer website (<http://www.qp.gov.bc.ca/statreg/default.htm>). Note that the text may not include the most recent amendments.)

electoral district The geographical area from which one or more representatives is chosen at an election is called an electoral district. Electoral districts are also called ridings or constituencies. The number of members to be chosen from an electoral district is often called its **district magnitude**. At present the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia is composed of 79 members each elected from one of 79 single member electoral districts (district magnitude of 1); see also **at large election**; **district magnitude**; **multimember district**; **single member district**; **SMP**.

electoral formula The electoral formula is the rule which governs the translation of votes into seats. The electoral formula for the current electoral system in British Columbia is a simple one: the candidate who wins more votes than any other in each electoral district is elected.

There are many different kinds of electoral formulas, but they can be grouped into a number of families: **plurality** systems where seats are won by the candidate with the most votes even if the candidate does not get a majority of votes; **majority systems** where candidates must get a majority of votes to be elected (see **alternative vote**; and **second ballot**); proportional systems (see **proportional representation**) where the parties fielding candidates are represented in proportion to the votes won by each party or candidate; and **mixed systems** which combine two of these systems.

electoral rules The whole body of rules regulating all aspects of an election; see **Election Act (British Columbia)**; **electoral system**.

electoral system The simplest definition of an electoral system is that it is the set of rules for translating votes cast at an election into seats for a representative **assembly** according to a specified **electoral formula**. Another way of defining an electoral system is to say that it comprises the **electoral formula**, the **ballot** structure, and the number of members in each **electoral district** (the **district magnitude**).

electorate The electorate is the whole body of electors. The term is also used occasionally to mean a single **electoral district**.

endorsed (candidate), endorsement See **candidate**; **nomination**; **party**; **party discipline**

executive The institutions of **government** have traditionally been classified under three heads: the **legislature** which makes laws; the **judiciary** which interprets laws and applies them to particular cases; and the executive which administers laws made by the legislature. The biggest of these components is the executive because it includes most of the activities we associate with government—all government departments and public servants as well as the **premier**, the **cabinet** and **ministers** are part of the executive.

It can be helpful to subdivide the executive into three components: the formal executive, the **head of state** which, in British Columbia is the **lieutenant governor** acting in the name of the **Crown**; the political executive which is the premier, ministers and the cabinet acting as the key decision makers for steering government; and the public service and government agencies which administer the laws of the Province.

Executive Council The Executive Council is a formal meeting of the **premier** and one or more **ministers** to prepare documentation for authorization by the **lieutenant governor**.

federal The term federal is used in two ways: ‘the federal government’ refers to the national government in Ottawa. But as an adjective derived from federalism, federal government is a way of dividing government so that there are two spheres of government activity, a national one with responsibility for services which relate to for the whole country, and several regional governments called states or provinces to look after regional concerns.

first past the post (FPTP) A first past the post electoral system is one in which the candidate with a **plurality** of votes wins the **seat** in a **single member district**. British Columbia currently uses a FPTP electoral system for electing members to the **legislative assembly**. See **majority**.

fixed term Representative **assemblies** can be elected for a fixed term (the United States House of Representatives has a fixed term of two years), or for a maximum term with the provision for an early election.

British derived parliaments have usually had maximum terms which, depending on the parliamentary system, have varied between three to seven years. Few parliaments run their full term and are dissolved earlier at a time when the **government of the day** considers it appropriate to hold a **general election** (see **dissolution**).

In British Columbia, as in all Canadian provinces, the discretion to advise the calling of an election has been a powerful weapon in the armoury of the premier to use for partisan advantage. But, since 2002 and the bringing into force of the *Constitution (Fixed Election Dates) Amendment Act* of 2001, the timing of general

elections in British Columbia has been fixed for ‘...May 17, 2005 and thereafter on the second Tuesday in May in the fourth calendar year following the general voting day for the most recently held general election’ (**Constitution Act (British Columbia)** section 23(2)). Note that the **lieutenant governor** can still dissolve the **legislative assembly** before that date (see section 23(1)) but the circumstances required for this to occur would have to be either that the **parliament** had become unworkable because of split in the governing party or **coalition**, or that a strong willed premier was willing to call a general election notwithstanding the ‘fixed’ date.

FPTP see **first past the post**

general election A general election is an election for all the seats in the **legislative assembly**. Vacancies which occur as a result of the death, resignation or disqualification of a member of parliament in between general elections can be filled at a **by-election**. See also **casual vacancy**; **dissolution**.

government In everyday language, the government is the label given to the whole structure of public sector activities but the term also has narrower meanings (see **executive**). Where there is a distinction made between the government and the parliament, government refers to the **ministers** and public officials who steer the day-to-day operation of departments and agencies, as opposed to the debating, scrutinizing and law making activities which occur in parliament. The **premier** and other ministers, as members of parliament, are politically responsible for government policy and collectively form what is sometimes called the **government of the day** (see also **cabinet**). In this narrow sense, the government is the premier and the body of ministers **commissioned** to implement the policies of the party or coalition which has the support of a majority of the members of the legislative assembly. See also **parliamentary system**.

government of the day See **executive**; **government**

governor general See **lieutenant governor**

Gregory (method) In counting votes under a **single transferable vote** system, if a candidate has more than the minimum number of votes needed to be elected (see **Droop quota**), a procedure is needed to allocate the surplus votes to other candidates. This may be done by taking a number of ballots equal to the surplus at random from the ballots of the successful candidate and assigning votes to the next available preference shown on the ballot (that is, to candidates who have not already been elected or excluded)..

In 1880, J B Gregory contended that this process of random selection could produce varying results depending on the choice of the randomly selected ballots used for making the transfers to other candidates. He suggested that all the relevant ballots should be recounted, assigned to other candidates according to the preferences of

the voters, but at a reduced value called the transfer value. The transfer value is calculated by dividing the surplus votes by the total number of relevant votes.

There are three variations of the Gregory method which differ as to the definition of 'relevant votes' for calculating the transfer value. Gregory's original suggestion was that only the ballots that last contributed to the creation of the surplus votes should be counted (the Gregory last parcel method). Some Australian elections use a second method, the Inclusive Gregory method, where relevant votes are defined as all the votes that contributed to a candidate's surplus. The BC-STV system recommended by the Citizen's Assembly uses the Weighted Inclusive Gregory method under which all votes are counted and assigned to other candidates still in the count according to the voters' preferences, but the ballots are given separate transfer values depending on their origin (that is, whether they are first preferences, or transfers from one or more other candidates).

The Citizens' Assembly decided that the Weighted Inclusive Gregory method was most in keeping with the goals of proportional representation by the single transferable vote, was fairer to the voters than the other options, and did not add significantly to task of counting (or recounting) ballots.

head of government See **premier**; **parliamentary system**

head of state The head of state is the name given to the office which exercises the formal **executive** power of the government and, on official occasions, represents the whole political community. While British Columbia is nominally monarchical in form, the powers of the **Crown** as head of state are exercised by the **lieutenant governor** of the Province. The head of state in parliamentary systems is an office which is seen to be above politics, in contrast to the head of government who is the prime minister or **premier**.

Note that the distinctive characteristic of the United States presidential system is that the roles of head of state and head of government are combined in the office of an elected President. In **parliamentary systems**, the offices of head of state and head of government are kept separate.

House of Commons The House of Commons is the name given to the lower house of the Canadian and British parliaments (see **bicameralism**). Parliament in British Columbia has only one **chamber** called the **legislative assembly**.

independent An independent candidate or member of parliament is one who is not a member of a political **party**. Independents have been elected to the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, the last being in 1949. A member elected to the legislative assembly as a member of a party may subsequently decide to leave the party and sit as an independent.

judiciary The judiciary is the collective term for courts and judges; the judicial branch of government. See also **executive; legislature**.

legislation Laws and government regulations are collectively known as legislation. A bill (a proposal for a law) which has been passed by the **Legislative Assembly of British Columbia** and has been assented to by the **lieutenant governor**, becomes law as an act of parliament. Such an act of parliament can also be referred to as a statute of British Columbia.

legislative assembly The Legislative Assembly of British Columbia has been the elected component of the Province's **parliamentary system** of government since the establishment of self-government in the Province in 1871. It is currently a representative body of 79 members elected from **single member districts** for a term of four years unless dissolved earlier (see **fixed term; dissolution**). The government must maintain the support of a majority of the members of the Assembly to stay in office. The functions of the legislative assembly include passing legislation, authorizing the raising and expenditure of public money, scrutinizing the activities of **government**, raising issues of public concern, investigating matters of public interest, and acting as a forum for publicizing the concerns of individuals and groups throughout British Columbia.

All Canadian provinces have a representative **assembly** which discharges similar functions. All but three provincial assemblies are called the legislative assembly; Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador each have a house of assembly, and Quebec has a national assembly.

legislature The legislature is the law making component of government (see **executive**). In the case of British Columbia, the legislature is the **legislative assembly**, although it should be noted that legislation which has passed through the legislative assembly does not become law until it is assented to by the **lieutenant governor**. To this extent, the legislature of British Columbia is the legislative assembly and the lieutenant governor acting in the name of the Crown. See also **assembly; bicameralism; parliamentary system; representative democracy**.

lieutenant governor All the functions of **head of state** for the Province of British Columbia are performed by the lieutenant governor of British Columbia in the name of the **Crown**. The lieutenant governor is appointed (and can be removed) by the **Governor General** of Canada (see *The Constitution Act, 1867* (Canada) section 59). The appointment (or removal) is made on the advice of the prime minister.

The formal powers of the lieutenant governor are very extensive and include the power to **commission** governments, to appoint all important **executive** and judicial officers in the province, to initiate legislation, to endorse all laws passed by the provincial **legislature**, and to summon and dissolve parliaments (see **dissolution**; note the **Constitution Act (British Columbia)**, sections 7, 9, 13, 21, 23, 46, 48). These powers are, on almost all occasions, exercised on the advice of the **premier**

or the **Executive Council** (a formal meeting of the premier and one or more **ministers**). The current role of the lieutenant governor is to perform official governmental duties as the representative of the Crown, and to represent the Province at a wide range of community functions throughout British Columbia.

The relationships between the lieutenant governor, the premier, the Executive Council, ministers and **parliament** are not well specified in provincial constitutional documents and rely heavily on customary practices (often called **constitutional conventions**) rather than constitutional law (see **constitution; Constitution Act (British Columbia)**).

In relation to the electoral process, the lieutenant governor has a formal role in setting in process the procedures for holding legislative assembly elections, but is not otherwise involved. If, after an election, no party gains a majority of **seats** in the assembly, the lieutenant governor may play an important role in the selection of the premier and the formation of a **government** (see **commission**). The lieutenant governor may also play a role in the choice of premier if a premier resigns in mid-term.

lieutenant governor in council This refers to a formal meeting of the **lieutenant governor** and the members of the **Executive Council** to ratify decisions made by the **premier** and **cabinet**. In practice, this formal ratification usually takes place through an exchange of documents rather than a meeting.

list system (of proportional representation) List systems are one of two families of electoral systems using **proportional representation**. Proportional representation by the list system is based on the voter choosing between lists of **candidates** provided by political **parties**. While there are many ways of counting votes under a list system, and some versions permit voters to select their preferred candidate from a party list (open list or flexible list systems), list systems are based on the representation of parties as organizations rather than individual candidates.

In the simplest list systems, an elector votes for a party list, and the share of votes gained by each party list is matched by a similar proportion of seats in the assembly. If a party wins 30 percent of the votes for an assembly of 100 members, the party is assigned 30 seats, the members being the top 30 of a list of candidates provided by the party before the election.

local member Under the current **single member plurality** electoral system used in British Columbia, each electoral district has one member. This member is often described as the local member. Many British Columbians value having a local member as someone who is aware of local issues and can help constituents in their dealings with government departments.

lower house See **bicameralism**

majoritarian This term is used in a general sense to refer to a system of government where power is concentrated in a single governing party which controls a parliamentary executive having broad constitutional powers to act in the name in the majority. See also **adversarial**; **consensus**.

A majoritarian electoral system is one which privileges parties which win a **majority** of parliamentary seats even if they do not gain a majority of votes. **Single member plurality systems**, and the **alternative vote** and **second ballot** systems are all seen as majoritarian electoral systems.

majority A majority of votes or seats is one more than half the total number of votes or seats; fifty percent plus one. See also **plurality**.

majority system A majority electoral system is one which requires candidates to gain a **majority** of votes before they are elected. The two most common majority systems are the **alternative vote** and the **second ballot**. See also **plurality**.

majority government A majority government is one which is supported by a majority of members of the **legislative assembly**, all of whom are members of the same political party. This is in contrast with a **coalition** government where a parliamentary majority is composed of the members of two (and occasionally more than two) political parties, both of whom have **ministers** in the government. It can also be contrasted with a **minority government** where the governing party does not hold a majority of seats but is kept in office by the support of one or more parties or **independent** members who do not contribute ministers in the government.

While British Columbia has experienced only majority governments since 1953, there were coalition governments between 1941 and 1952 (Liberal and Conservative parties), and a minority government (Social Credit) from 1952 to 1953.

member of the legislative assembly (MLA) This is the title of someone who is elected to the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia. The abbreviation MLA can be used as shorthand for a member of the legislative assembly.

Members of other provincial parliaments usually have titles to suit the name of their legislatures: MLA for a member of the legislative assemblies of Alberta, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Saskatchewan; MHA for a member of the houses of assembly of Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nova Scotia; and MNA for a member of the National Assembly of Quebec (Député de l'assemblée nationale de Québec). Ontario is unusual in that members of its legislative assembly are called MPP—member of provincial parliament. Members of the Canadian House of Commons are called MP—member of parliament.

member of parliament A member of parliament is a member of any representative **assembly** which is part of a **parliamentary system**. See also **Member of the legislative assembly**

minister A government minister in British Columbia is (almost always) a member of the legislative assembly who is **commissioned** by the **lieutenant governor** on the advice of the **premier** to be responsible for one or more government departments or areas of government activity. These responsibilities comprise the minister's portfolio or portfolios. All the ministers in a government, including the premier, are known collectively as the ministry and meet as the **cabinet** to make decisions about government policy and administration. The lieutenant governor, acting on the advice of the premier, can terminate a minister's commission. The resignation or termination of the commission of a premier terminates the commissions of all the ministers in that government.

It is assumed that ministers will be, or will become, members of **parliament** but this is not specified in the Province's constitutional documents; see **Constitution Act (British Columbia)**.

ministerialist See **party**

ministry see **minister**

minority government A minority government is one where the governing **party** does not control a majority of seats in the **assembly**, and has not formed a **coalition** agreement with another party in the assembly to establish a parliamentary majority and to share ministerial posts. A minority government is kept in power by an understanding that the **government** will gain the support of another party (or one or more **independent** members) who will vote to support the government. This support does not involve the party becoming part of the government's ministerial team, and the support may not extend to supporting all of the government's legislative program.

The essence of a minority government is that the support keeping the government in office can be withdrawn at any time, triggering the loss of the government's majority in the assembly. Loss of majority support in the assembly gives the **premier** two choices: the premier can resign in favour of another member of the assembly who can form a government which has the support of a majority of assembly members; or—and this will be the usual outcome—the premier can recommend to the lieutenant-governor that parliament is dissolved and a **general election** is held.

Minority governments are not necessarily unstable or short lived if they can come to an agreement with another party to support the government—the Liberal minority government in Ontario from 1985 to 1987, for example, entered into a formal accord with the Ontario New Democratic Party. Even with this support, the government must work continually to gain support beyond its own partisan supporters for every piece of legislation. Such a situation makes governments

extremely responsive to the views of members of parliament, and open to parliamentary scrutiny in ways which rarely occur under **majority governments**.

mixed member proportional (MMP) The mixed member proportional (MMP) system is a **mixed system** of representation which usually combines a **single member plurality** electoral system with a **list system of proportional representation** to achieve an assembly whose party composition reflects the proportion of votes cast for each party. Voters are required to vote for both a local member and a preferred party (sometimes this is combined into a single choice for a candidate and party), and the assembly is made up of members who are elected from single member electoral districts and members who are elected from party lists. This system has been adopted for the German lower house (the Bundestag) and, more recently, by New Zealand's House of Representatives. This mixed system aims to combine the advantages of geographical representation (the local member) with the proportional representation of parties.

mixed systems It has become common over the last decade for electoral systems to combine two **electoral formulas** for the choice of candidates for a representative **assembly** (see **additional member**). New Zealand, for example, has adopted a system which combines a **single member plurality system** with a **list system of proportional representation** (see **mixed member proportional (MMP)**). While most mixed systems aim to achieve proportional outcomes—the vote share of a party is matched by a similar share of seats in the assembly—this is not always the case. Some mixed systems such as that used for the Japanese House of Representatives produce outcomes which favour large parties. These systems are sometimes called mixed member majority systems (MMM).

MLA See **member of the legislative assembly**

MMM See **mixed systems**

MMP See **mixed member proportional**

multimember district A multimember district is an **electoral district** which returns more than one member to a representative **assembly**. The number of members returned from an electoral district is called the **district magnitude**. Multimember districts have district magnitudes greater than one.

British Columbia has a long history of using multimember districts for the **legislative assembly**. From the first election for the legislative assembly in 1871 until 1986, multimember districts were used to elect a substantial proportion of the members. Two, three, four, five and six member districts have been used, with multimember districts of three or more sometimes being used for the urban areas of Vancouver and Victoria.

The Citizens' Assembly has recommended that British Columbia adopt multimember districts as a component of the BC-STV electoral system. Sparsely settled and remote areas of the province may have electoral districts with as few as two members, while densely populated regions may have electoral districts with from 5 to 7 members.

nomination Nomination is the process of fulfilling the requirements for becoming a **candidate** at an election. It has two components: an official component requiring the candidate to fulfil the formal requirements specified under the **Election Act (British Columbia)**, and a partisan component requiring a candidate who wants to run under a party label to gain the endorsement of a **party** (see **candidate**).

official opposition In a **parliamentary system**, the members of parliament who do not support the **government** are known collectively as the opposition. The largest party grouping of these members is often given formal recognition as the official opposition, with its leader known as the leader of the opposition. This recognizes the opposition as a potential alternative government, and the leader of the opposition as the **party leader** who may become the **premier** after the next **general election**. The office of leader of the official opposition is mentioned in the **Constitution Act (British Columbia)** (section 1), but no role is specified for the office.

opposition See **official opposition**

order in council This is an official document issued by the **lieutenant governor in council** under the authority of an act of the **legislative assembly** appointing someone to an official office or authorizing action by a specified person, office or body. The Citizens' Assembly was established by an order in council.

parliament Parliament is the general name given to representative **assemblies** in Canada. In British Columbia it refers to the **legislative assembly**. These bodies make the laws which regulate our social and economic life and provide the authority for government action. Note that the Parliament of British Columbia comprises the legislative assembly and the **lieutenant governor** acting in the name of the **Crown**; laws cannot be made without the assent of the lieutenant governor. The **executive** can also delay or defer the date on which **legislation** comes into force. This arrangement strengthens the already considerable power of the **government of the day** to control the process of law making. See **parliamentary government**; **parliamentary system**.

parliamentary government Parliamentary government is a system of **representative democracy** in which the most important **executive** officials are chosen from among the members of an elected assembly; see **parliamentary system**.

parliamentary system A parliamentary system of government is one of the two basic forms of **representative democracy**. The distinguishing characteristic of

parliamentary government is that the **government of the day** is chosen from representatives who have been elected to a parliamentary **assembly**. That is, the most important elected offices of government—the **premier** or prime minister and the other ministers who together with the premier form the **government**—are not elected directly but indirectly through parliamentary elections. Since the emergence of **parties** with strong party discipline, parliamentary government has meant that governments in Canada usually have control over stable parliamentary majorities (see **majority government**). This greatly reduces the ability of parliamentary assemblies to challenge the wishes of the government of the day in parliament.

Parliamentary systems make a distinction between the **head of government** (the premier or prime minister) who is the chief elected official in the government, and the **head of state** who represents the formal exercise of executive power (see **lieutenant governor**).

The other system of representative democracy is presidential government. In this system, the president who is both head of government and head of state, is elected separately from a representative **assembly**. Ministers are not usually permitted to be members of the assembly but are appointed by the president. Presidential systems combine the offices of head of government and head of state in the president, but aim to check the power of the government of the day by separating power between the president and a powerful legislature (see **executive**).

parliamentary term See **dissolution**

party The **Constitution Act (British Columbia)** provides a definition of a party as ‘...an affiliation of electors comprised in a political organization whose prime purpose is the fielding of candidates for election to the **legislative assembly**...’ (section 1). For a party’s name to appear on the ballot paper at an election for the legislative assembly, and for a party to gain tax and other financial benefits, the party must be registered under the **Election Act** (Part 9).

Parties as we know them today first contested elections in British Columbia in 1903. Before that date, government majorities were maintained by loose groups of members of the **legislature** united by a general stance on public policy, by loyalty to a particular leader, or by the hope of advancement. The label ‘ministerialist’ is often given to governments which operated in such a system. See also **caucus**; **party discipline**; **party leader**; **independent**.

party convention See **party leader**

party discipline Modern parties are disciplined in the sense that, once elected to a representative **assembly** under the label of a **party**, it is expected that the member will adhere to the general principles and platform of the party and will vote with his or her colleagues in the **assembly**. If the member does not conform to the decisions of the party, he or she may be threatened with expulsion from the party **caucus** and

the withdrawal of the party's **endorsement** at the next election (see **nomination**). This is a powerful inducement for members to conform to the party line. It is the price that members must pay for using the party label to gain election, and to gain the benefits of party membership.

party leader The leader of a political **party** is a person chosen to speak for the party, to be the focus of election campaigns, and to take responsibility for the party's performance in **parliament**. If the party wins enough seats to win **government**, the party leader becomes premier or prime minister. Party leaders in Canada are now chosen by leadership conventions organized by the party, or by a **ballot** of all party members. See also **caucus**.

In British Columbia, the leader of a political party which has four or more members in the **legislative assembly** is recognized by the **Constitution Act (British Columbia)** as being "leader of a recognized political party" (section 1).

plurality A party which gains a plurality of votes or seats is one which has more votes than any other party, but does not have a **majority** of votes or seats.

plurality (electoral) system A plurality electoral system is one which permits candidates to win seats even though they do not gain a **majority** of votes; see **first past the post**; **single member plurality system**.

political party See **party**

portfolio See **minister**

PR See **proportional representation**

preferential voting Any **electoral system** which requires voters to rank candidates on a ballot paper by numbering them in the order of the voter's preference, is a preferential voting system. The **alternative vote** and **proportional representation** by the **single transferable vote** method require voters to number their ballots under a system of preferential voting.

British Columbia used preferential voting with the alternative vote for the 1952 and 1953 general elections in the Province.

The BC-STV electoral system recommended by the Citizens' Assembly uses preferential voting.

premier The premier is the name given to the **head of government** of the Province of British Columbia and is the Province's chief elected **executive** official. The premier is **commissioned** by the **lieutenant governor** to form a government which has the support of a majority of members of the **legislative assembly**. The premier is usually the leader of the political party which has won a majority of seats in the

legislative assembly. See also **coalition; government; head of state; majority government; minority government; minister; parliamentary system.**

Although the premier is mentioned in the **Constitution Act (British Columbia)** as president of the **Executive Council** (section 9(1)), the position and role of the premier in the governmental system is not well specified in provincial constitutional documents. Even though the premier is the most important political office in the province, the functions and responsibilities of the premier as head of government are left to customary practices rather than constitutional law (see **Constitution Act (British Columbia)**).

primary An election to decide which of a party's members will be nominated by the party to contest an election as the party's candidate is called a primary election, or simply a primary. Primaries can be organized by a party to select its candidates, or primaries can be run as part of the official election process and regulated by legislation. This is the case for presidential elections in many states of the United States.

proportionality The view that a party's share of votes should be matched by a similar share of seats in the legislative assembly rests on an idea of representation which stresses the importance of proportionality. Those who argue that fairness—in the sense of producing proportional outcomes—is the most important component of an electoral system, favour **proportional representation.**

proportional representation (PR) Proportional representation refers to a family of **electoral systems** which stress the importance of ensuring that the proportion of **seats** won by a party in a representative **assembly** reflects as closely as possible the proportion of votes won by the party. These systems often use more complicated procedures than other electoral systems for counting votes and allocating seats, but the basic principle on which they are based is straightforward—a representative assembly should reflect the distribution of opinion in the political community as closely as possible. There are two broad ways in which proportional representation can be achieved: the **list system** and the **single transferable vote (STV)** system. Proportional outcomes can also be achieved by mixing proportional representation with a non-proportional system; see **mixed member proportional (MMP)** systems. See also **mixed systems; seat share; vote share.**

The single transferable vote system of proportional representation is sometimes called a quota preferential systems because it uses **quotas** for working out which candidates are to be elected.

All systems of proportional representation require **multimember districts** or **at large elections.**

quota Under the **single transferable vote system** of **proportional representation**, the quota is the minimum number of votes required for a candidate to be elected. The

quota will vary according to the number of members to be elected from the electoral district (**district magnitude**) and the formula used. See **Droop quota**

recall See **direct democracy**

recognized party See **party**

referendum See **direct democracy**

register of voters See **voters list**

representation The notion of representation is a complex one but at its core is the idea that one thing can stand for another. Parliamentary **democracy** is based on the premise that an elected **assembly** can represent the interests of the political community as a whole. Electoral laws are components of this system of representation. What is to be represented and how the representation is to be accomplished are key questions for the design of an electoral system for a parliamentary assembly.

representative assembly See **assembly**

representative democracy A democratic political system is now assumed to be one in which periodic elections are held to choose key **executive** and legislative office holders and to keep the **government** responsive and accountable to citizen voters. That is, popular control of government is achieved indirectly through the election of representatives to act on behalf of the political community. It is now usually taken for granted that **democracy** means representative democracy rather than **direct democracy**.

responsible government The term responsible government is often used to describe the relationship between the **government**—the **premier** and other **ministers**—and the legislative **assembly** in British style **parliamentary systems**. It refers to the fact that the political executive—the premier and ministers—are chosen from and accountable to an elected parliament. In this respect it is a synonym for **parliamentary government**.

Responsible government also suggests that ministers are individually and collectively responsible to parliament for the actions of government. This is true in a broad sense—the government will be held accountable for its actions at the next **general election**—but it is less true if it implies that ministers will be held to account for their actions by parliament. The existence of disciplined political **parties** has meant that ministers can usually escape punishment for reckless or incompetent actions by themselves or their departments by blaming an advisor or a public servant. Punishment is only meted out to ministers if the premier (or prime minister) assesses that the minister has become a political liability to the government as a whole.

riding See **electoral district**

run off See **second ballot**

seat A seat is shorthand for a member of a representative **assembly**. The **Legislative Assembly of British Columbia** has 79 seats, that is, it is made up of 79 members.

seat share The seat share of a **party** is the proportion of **seats** it has won at a **general election** for a representative **assembly**. It can be compared with the party's **vote share** to see if the seat share is proportional to the votes cast; see **proportional representation**.

second ballot The second ballot electoral system is a **majority system** which requires elections to be run in two stages. At the first stage, electors vote using a **first past the post** system. Candidates winning a **majority** of votes are declared elected. In **electoral districts** where no candidate wins a majority of votes, a second election is held where the contest is restricted to the two candidates who won the most votes at the first stage, or only those candidates with more than a certain share of the vote. At the second election, the candidate with the most votes wins. The second ballot system is a majority system because it ensures that all or most successful candidates have majority support.

The second ballot is used in France for the election of the president (an election at large across the whole country). If no presidential candidate wins a majority of votes on the first round, only the top two candidates take part in the runoff election held two weeks later. For the election of the 577 members of the French National Assembly (from 577 single member districts), only those candidates with more than 12.5 percent of the first round vote can participate in the runoff elections held one week later in those electoral districts where no candidate won a majority at the first election. At the 2002 elections for the French National Assembly, only 58 members were elected with majorities on the first round.

Senate (Canadian) See **bicameralism**

shadow minister In some parliamentary systems, the **opposition** party assigns members of the party to take special note of the policy areas dealt with by particular **ministers**. These opposition members who are 'shadow' ministers have no official status but may, as a matter of courtesy, be given more access to government information than other opposition members. Some opposition parties may not choose to create shadow ministers or parliamentary spokespersons for particular policy areas, but may give all opposition members responsibility for monitoring an area of government activity. See also **back bench**.

single member district This is an **electoral district** which is represented by a single member of a representative **assembly**. See also **district magnitude**; **local member**.

single member plurality system (SMP) This electoral system is the system currently used in British Columbia for the **legislative assembly**. See **first past the post**; **local member**; **majority**; **plurality**; **single member district**.

single non-transferable vote (SNTV) The non-transferable vote (SNTV) is an **electoral system** which gives voters a single vote in an **electoral district** which is represented by two or more members of an **assembly** (see **multimember district**). The candidates with the most votes are elected. The implications of this system are that, in order to maximize its representation, a large party must discipline its supporters so that their votes are allocated between the party's candidates. It also means that candidates of the same party are, to some extent, running against each other as much as opposition candidates. The electoral system produces semi-proportional results and has been used in Japan, Korea and Taiwan.

single transferable vote (STV) Single transferable vote (STV) systems are one of two families of **proportional representation**. Proportional representation by the single transferable vote method is based on the idea that the range of opinion in the community should be mirrored in the composition of the representative assembly. While there are many ways in which STV can be modified, it rests on the assumption that voters can choose between candidates rather than parties. Voters are required to rank candidates in the voters' order of preference by numbering the candidates on the ballot (see **preferential voting**). The ballots are then counted in a way which ensures that as many ballots as possible contribute to the election of a candidate of the voters' choice. The procedures for doing this can be complicated, but the principle is straightforward—that a variety of minority as well as majority opinions are represented in the assembly, provided that the minorities have a large enough proportion of votes to cross the **threshold** for representation. This threshold is set by the **quota** of votes needed for representation and can vary depending on the details of the STV system to be used; see **Droop quota**.

The details of the BC-STV recommended for British Columbia by the Citizens' Assembly can be found elsewhere in this Report. See also **Gregory method**.

SMP See **single member plurality system**

SNTV See **single non-transferable vote**

spoiled ballot A spoiled ballot (or vote) is a ballot paper which cannot be counted towards a candidate's or party's total vote because the ballot is incorrectly filled in or has marks or writing on it which break electoral rules for the validity of the ballot. The more complicated the ballot, the higher the likelihood of spoiled ballots.

statute See **legislation**

STV See **single transferable vote**

threshold In its narrow sense, this term refers to the minimum proportion of the vote required to gain representation under any given **electoral formula**. This is particularly important in proportional systems because the threshold affects the number of small parties which can gain representation (see **proportional representation**).

It can also be used more broadly to indicate the minimum proportion of votes, or the minimum number of seats, which must be won before a party can gain representation under an electoral system. Under the German **MMP** system, for example, a party must win 5 percent of the votes or three electoral districts before its vote share can be matched by the appropriate proportion of seats. These rules are designed to prevent the representation of very small parties.

transfer value See **Gregory method**

turnout The proportion of voters on the **voters list** who go to a polling place on election day and cast a vote, is called the turnout. The turnout for the British Columbia provincial general election held in 2001 was 71.0 percent.

vote share The vote share of a party is the proportion (expressed as a percentage) of the total valid votes won by a party at a general election. It can be compared with the party's **seat share** to see if the seat share is proportional to the votes cast. See **proportional representation**.

voters list This is the official list of all persons eligible and registered to vote at an election. See also **turnout**.

Weighted Inclusive Gregory (method) See **Gregory method**

Westminster system This term is often used to describe the British variant of **parliamentary government**. While the term and the British parliamentary tradition are frequently applied to describe the Canadian parliamentary system, Canadian parliamentary institutions differ significantly from the British system, most notably in the limitations on parliamentary government imposed by the federal system and the entrenchment of key sections of the Canadian Constitution, judicial review of government action and legislation, and the existence of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The most important common factor between the British and Canadian parliamentary traditions is a monarchical executive and the failure of constitutional documents to specify the roles, functions and responsibilities of the **head of state**, **head of government** and the relationship between the **premier**, **ministers** and parliament.