

# Canadas first past the post system

[Countries](#), [Canada](#)



In Canada Federal and Provincial First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) elections are based on single member districts or ridings. Each riding chooses one candidate to elect into parliament. In order to win a candidate must obtain the highest number of votes but not necessarily the majority of votes. The party that wins the most ridings is named the official government of Canada with the second place party becoming the official opposition. The (FPTP) system is also known as the 'winner-take-all' system, in which the candidate with the most votes gets elected. FPTP voting methods can be used for single and multiple member elections.

In a single member election the candidate with the highest number, not necessarily a majority, of votes is elected. This system is used in Canada, UK, US, and India. Many Canadians are not happy with the current First Past the Post system currently in place for electing parliamentary officials provincially and federally. I think that Canada's First Past the Post parliamentary electoral system should be changed because it favors tactical voting; it has a negative effect on smaller parties; and opens up the possibility of gerrymandering constituencies.

A new electoral system that is more proportional is needed in order to address these problems. There are a few problems that arise out of the FPTP system. One of the most important problems is the tendency for FPTP to favor tactical voting. Tactical voting happens when voters cast their votes for one of the two candidates that are most likely to win. This is done because it is perceived by the voter that their vote will be wasted if they were to choose to vote for a smaller party, which they would more prefer. This is an

understandable feeling by the voter because only votes for the winning candidate actually count (Blais, 2008).

The position is sometimes summed up, in an extreme form, as " All votes for anyone other than the second place are votes for the winner"(Rosenbaum 2004), because by voting for other candidates, they have denied those votes to the second place candidate who could have won had they received them. Following the 2000 U. S. presidential election, some supporters of Democratic candidate Al Gore believed he lost the extremely close election to Republican George W. Bush because a portion of the electorate (2. 7%) voted for Ralph Nader of the Green Party.

Exit polls indicated that more of these voters would have preferred Gore (45%) to Bush (27%), with the rest not voting in Nader's absence (Rosenbaum 2004). The people, who voted for Ralph Nader despite of his staggering inability to win, effectively voted for Bush by depriving Gore of their votes even though they would have preferred Gore. With tactical voting, voters, have to predict in advance who the top two candidates will be. This can distort results significantly. One factor that influences tactical voting is the Media. Substantial power is given to the media.

Some voters will tend to believe the media's assertions as to who the leading contenders are likely to be in the election. Even voters who distrust the media will know that other voters do believe the media, and therefore that those candidates who receive the most media attention will probably be the most popular and thus most likely to be the top two. The media can also play an important role in persuading voters to use tactical voting. This is exemplified through the use of attack advertisements in television; radio and <https://assignbuster.com/canadas-first-past-the-post-system/>

print media. This happens in the UK. The system may promote votes against as opposed to votes for.

In the UK, entire campaigns have been organized with the aim of voting against the Conservative party by voting either Labour or Liberal Democrat. For example, in a constituency held by the Conservatives, with the Liberal Democrats as the second-place party and the Labour Party in third, Labour supporters might be urged to vote for the Liberal Democrat candidate (who has a smaller shortfall of votes to make up and more support in the constituency) rather than their own candidate, on the basis that Labour supporters would prefer an MP from a competing left/liberal party to a Conservative one (Drogus 2008).

The media holds an important role in informing and influencing the public about political candidates. This causes the FPTP system to turn into run-off voting, which is a two round voting system where voters elect two forerunners for the constituency and select one to be winner. The “ first round” of the election is done within the court of public opinion, the “ second round” happens with the official election. This can be seen in the example of the 1997 Winchester by-election: “ Gerry Malone the former Conservative MP who had lost his seat in the general election, was criticized as a “ poor loser” by the media.

The Labour Party obtained their worst ever results in a parliamentary election, in part because they hardly campaigned at all and instead focused their priorities on the by-election in Beckenham held on the same day. It is presumed that most of the Labour supporters decided to vote Liberal Democrat knowing how unlikely they were to win. ” (Farrell 1998). The

<https://assignbuster.com/canadas-first-past-the-post-system/>

Labour Party voters used their votes tactically because they knew they couldn't win and were turned off by the Conservative candidates negative image in the press.

Another important reason that Canada should select a different election system is that the FPTP system has a large impact on smaller parties. According to Political Scientist Maurice Duverger's Law, given enough time FPTP systems will eventually become a two party system (Duverger 1972). The FPTP system only gives the winner in each district a seat, a party that consistently comes third in every district will not gain any seats in the legislature, even if it receives a significant proportion of the vote.

This puts a heavy strain on parties that are spread geographically thin, such as the Green party of Canada who received approximately 5% of the popular vote from 2004-2011, but had only won a single riding during that time (Elections Canada). The second problem facing smaller parties in FPTP systems is related to tactical voting. Duverger suggested an election in which 100, 000 moderate voters and 80, 000 radical voters are voting for a single official.

If two moderate parties ran candidates and one radical candidate were to run, the radical candidate would win unless one of the moderate candidates gathered fewer than 20, 000 votes. Observing this, moderate voters would be more likely to vote for the candidate most likely to gain more votes, with the goal of defeating the radical candidate. Either the two parties must merge, or one moderate party must fail, as the voters gravitate to the two strong parties, a trend Duverger called polarization (Duverger 1972).

Smaller parties will never have a fair amount of representation in proportion to their size. FPTP tends to reduce the number of viable political parties to a greater extent than other methods. This makes it more likely that a single party will hold a majority of legislative seats. Canada has had 33 majority governments out of 41 elections (Parliament of Canada) FPTP's tendency toward fewer parties and more frequent one-party rule can potentially produce a government that may not consider a wide a range of perspectives and concerns.

It is entirely possible that a voter will find that both major parties agree on a particular issue. In this case, the voter will not have any meaningful way of expressing a dissenting opinion through their vote. These voters will have to resort to tactical voting and vote for a candidate that they mostly disagree with in order to oppose a candidate they disagree with even more. This is a compromise that the voter should not have to make in order to express themselves politically. The third problem with the FPTP system is that it is especially vulnerable to gerrymandering.

Gerrymandering is the process of setting electoral districts in order to establish a political advantage for a particular party or group by manipulating geographic boundaries to create partisan or incumbent-protected districts. The resulting district is known as a gerrymander (Martis 2008). This process is very controversial in Canada and is viewed negatively when attempted. Governments in power to solidify their dominance at the federal and provincial level can use gerrymandering to increase voters in a riding where they do not have as many voters, giving them an unfair advantage upon re-election.

The examples of gerrymandering and its effects can be seen in Canada today. The current federal electoral district boundaries in Saskatchewan have been labeled as evidence of gerrymandering. The province's two major cities, Saskatoon and Regina, are both "cracked" into four districts each, when the populations of the cities proper would justify about three and two and a half of all-urban (or mostly urban) districts respectively; the map instead groups parts of the New Democratic Party-friendly cities with large Conservative-leaning rural areas (Elections Canada)

In 2006, a controversy arose on Prince Edward Island over the provincial government's decision to throw out an electoral map drawn by an independent commission. Instead the government created two new maps. The government adopted the second of these, designed by the caucus of the governing party. Opposition parties and the media attacked Premier Pat Binns for what they saw as gerrymandering of districts. Among other things, the government adopted a map that ensured that every current Member of the Legislative Assembly from the premier's party had a district to run in for re-election, whereas in the original map, several had been redistricted.

Despite this, in the 2007 provincial election only 7 of 20 incumbent Members of the Legislative Assembly were re-elected and the government was defeated. Pat Binns' attempt at gerrymandering and loss of the election showed that the Canadian people do not support gerrymandering by politicians (CBC) Even though the FPTP system has many criticisms it does have some qualities that are found attractive. Firstly FPTP systems are generally good at creating majority governments because of their winner take all attitudes.

Majority governments are viewed as being more efficient because of their ability to swiftly pass laws through Parliament. However, majority governments increase their efficiency at the price of sacrificing a broader range of political views. Secondly, FPTP is a good way of discouraging extremist parties that seek to bring radical change to the government. This is because larger parties are favored to win seats so unless the party has a very concentrated electoral support they will generally never win any ridings.

FPTP has many criticisms and flaws that are easily exploited. These flaws can only be addressed by selecting a new electoral system. The FPTP's key flaw that underlies its criticisms is that it discounts or ignores minority parties and their voters. This effectively causes only voters of the major parties to be able to accurately express themselves politically. In a democracy every vote should count not just the votes cast for the winning party. This is why FPTP is not an adequate system for Canada. The FPTP system fails Canadian voters because it favors tactical voting forcing voters to make unnecessary compromises with their political beliefs. It perpetuates dominance of one or two main parties and discourages growth of newer, smaller parties. FPTP opens up the door for gerrymandering Politicians to take an unfair advantage to solidify their dominance in the government. In conclusion I think that Canada's First Past the Post parliamentary electoral system should be changed because it favors tactical voting; it has a negative effect on smaller parties; and opens up the possibility of gerrymandering constituencies.