

Electoral System Reform in Canada: Objectives, Advocacy and Implications for Governance

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By

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Foreword

Canada is witnessing a growing debate about its processes of democratic governance, especially the issues associated with representation and responsiveness. CPRN has examined such questions in the past, with its work on *The Society We Want*, a project that assessed Canadians values and their expectations of our major public and private institutions. It has also published policy research on key new institutional arrangements such as the social union and the federal role in cities. This new paper by Dr. Leslie Seidle fits squarely within this tradition of attention to governance.

In this paper, he takes a close look at the current debate about the electoral system and its impact on the composition and functioning of the House of Commons and provincial legislatures. The issue of electoral reform has gained prominence in part because it is so important to Canada's basic constitutional framework.

Leslie Seidle demonstrates that there are still concerns about distortions in political parties' elected representation relative to their popular vote in the different regions. Beyond that, however, new links are increasingly being drawn between the electoral system and issues such as women's representation, access to legislative representation for smaller political parties, voter turnout and the power of the executive. Critics of the present system contend that our legislative institutions do not reflect Canada's highly diverse population as well as they should and that having a wider range of voices heard within them would enhance responsiveness in governance.

An important – and positive – development is that this debate has moved beyond academic circles. A number of organizations promoting electoral reform have emerged in the past few years. This paper includes brief case studies of four such groups, three of which are provincially based – in Quebec, British Columbia and Prince Edward Island, a public consultation process addressing the electoral system is in progress or has been promised for the near future. This public dialogue will bring to the fore a range of concerns about how Canadians are governed.

I wish to thank Leslie Seidle for preparing this paper during his recent term as a research associate with CPRN. His keen interest in the health of Canada's political institutions and citizen involvement are evident in the study. I would also like to thank the Law Commission of Canada for contracting this research with CPRN as part of the Commission's current project on electoral system reform. Our collaboration with the Law Commission, and especially Nathalie Des Rosiers (President), Bruno Bonneville (Executive Director) and Steven Bittle (Research Officer), allowed both our organizations to make this contribution to public debate on governance in Canada.

Judith Maxwell
October 2002

Executive Summary

In the past few years, there has been a revival of academic study and political debate about electoral system reform in Canada. As was the case when the issue received attention in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the single-member plurality (SMP) system (often referred to as first past the post) is criticized because its operation does not lead to “fair” party representation in the House of Commons, particularly from the country’s diverse regions. Advocates of change contend that a system based wholly or in large part on proportional representation (PR) would remedy such distortions. However, the critiques of SMP and reform proposals put forward by researchers and advocacy groups increasingly reflect additional objectives related to representation, citizen participation and governance. At the same time, interest in electoral reform has risen in a number of provinces.

Part 1 provides a survey of the contributions of academics, researchers, and federal and provincial political parties to recent debate about the electoral system, including proposals for alternative systems. This literature review demonstrates that links are increasingly being drawn between the electoral system and issues such as women’s representation, access to legislative representation, equality of voting power, turnout and the power of the executive. This critique reflects concerns about the broader political process and governance, notably with respect to civic participation and responsiveness in government.

In contrast to the debate some 20 years ago, a number of groups advocating electoral system reform have emerged. Part 2 includes profiles of four such groups: Fair Vote Canada, *Mouvement pour une démocratie nouvelle* (Quebec), Fair Voting BC and Every Vote Counts (Prince Edward Island). Drawing on interviews with a number of activists in these organizations, the discussion demonstrates that varying objectives motivate their activities but that they share certain concerns about representation and responsiveness in government. Part 2 also provides a review of the role certain civil society organizations played in setting the agenda for the adoption of alternative systems for the New Zealand House of Representatives and the assemblies created by devolution to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. New Zealand’s Electoral Reform Coalition provides interesting lessons: relying on straightforward messages, the energy of its activists and extensive networking, it pressured the two leading parties to allow New Zealanders to decide if they wished to abandon SMP; following two referendums, a mixed proportional system (under which slightly more than half of MPs continue to be elected from constituencies by SMP) was instituted in 1996.

Drawing on the experience of the above-noted countries, Part 3 addresses the potential impact of electoral system reform in Canada. It is assumed that, should the opportunity arise, an electoral system along the lines of New Zealand’s would stand a greater chance of being adopted than a full PR system. The conclusion is that the adoption of such an electoral system could improve the representation of women and of smaller and newer parties. However, other factors, such as nomination practices, would also affect the degree to which parties elected more representative legislative delegations. The author also contends that it is unwise to expect a change of the electoral system alone to reverse declining civic participation, notably at elections. In his view, broader factors are at play, and various actions to foster public involvement are required.

As to the impact on government stability and effectiveness, it is suggested that the probable end of single-party majority governments could attenuate executive power by placing a premium on negotiation and inter-party bargaining. However, the author points out that the task of accommodating regional and other divisions would also enter the inter-party arena, rather than being carried out largely within the governing party. In his view, the federal government's capacity to act relatively decisively in governing a diverse and quite decentralized country would therefore depend on the stability of inter-party agreements or coalitions.

Important issues related to representation, civic participation and governance are being highlighted in the current debate on electoral system reform, which now includes a number of national and provincial advocacy groups. The paper concludes by welcoming these developments. In the author's view, these issues merit Canadians' deeper attention – both in the context of examining electoral rules and as part of a much-needed public dialogue on ways of strengthening the country's democratic processes as a whole.

Key Words: electoral system, electoral reform, proportional representation, women's representation, voter participation.

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Electoral System Reform in Canada: Objectives, Advocacy and Implications for Governance

Introduction

Civic participation and attitudes towards democratic governance in Canada are in a state of considerable ferment. Election turnout has reached new lows, confidence in political institutions has dropped markedly, and citizens doubt the capacity of elected representatives to respond adequately to their views. At the same time, many Canadians support enhanced public involvement, whether through new forms of consultation and citizen engagement, involvement with non-governmental organizations dedicated to particular causes or greater use of certain direct democracy measures such as referendums. This paper is based on the premise that the recent revival of interest in reform of the electoral system should be seen within this broad context.

As was the case during the limited public debate that occurred about 20 years ago, electoral system reform continues to be closely linked to the broad issues of fairness in party representation, including regional aspects. At the same time, as demonstrated in Part 1, academics, researchers, political parties and legislators are drawing links between the electoral system and issues such as women's representation, equality of voting power, turnout and the power of the executive. Their critique of the present system and proposals for its reform reflect concerns about the broader political process, notably with respect to civic participation and responsiveness in government. A noteworthy development is the emergence of a number of groups that advocate electoral system reform. Part 2 consists of profiles of four such groups, three of which focus on reform in their respective provinces, and provides a review of the role certain civil society organizations played in setting the agenda for the adoption of alternative systems for the New Zealand House of Representatives and the assemblies created by devolution to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

In Part 3, drawing on experience in these countries, the potential impact of electoral system reform in Canada is discussed. The conclusion is that adoption of an electoral system with a significant element of proportional representation could have some positive impacts on the representation of women and of smaller and newer parties, but that it is unwise to expect such a change, on its own, to reverse declining civic participation, notably at elections. In response to those who believe such a reform would lead to a more consensual approach to governance, it is suggested that the probable end of single-party majority governments could attenuate executive power. However, particularly at the federal level, the capacity to act relatively decisively in governing a diverse and quite decentralized country would depend on whether or not relatively stable inter-party agreements or coalitions could be secured.

Important issues related to representation, civic participation and governance are being highlighted in the debate on electoral system reform. As suggested in the conclusion, they merit Canadians' deeper attention both in that context and as part of a broader public dialogue on ways to strengthen the country's democratic processes.

Part 1. The Present Electoral System: Critique and Reform Proposals

Canada's plurality electoral system, often referred to as "first past the post," is one of the pillars of the country's institutional framework. Inherited from Great Britain, first past the post was used for pre-Confederation elections in the colonies that later became Canada, starting with Nova Scotia in 1758. The plurality rule has governed federal, provincial and territorial elections since 1867, except in Manitoba, British Columbia and Alberta where, for limited periods, alternative electoral systems were in place.¹ In addition, the plurality rule applied in a number of dual-member constituencies at the federal level and in certain provinces (Qualter, 1970: 118-21). The last dual-member federal constituencies were abolished in the 1960s, and the single-member plurality (SMP) system is now used for all federal, provincial and territorial elections.

The use of SMP for federal elections has occasionally been called into question. Perhaps reflecting the debate that was emerging in certain provinces at that time, in 1916 the federal Liberal party appointed a committee to examine electoral reform; a reference to the issue was added to the party's platform at its 1919 convention (Pilon, 1997: 14). A House of Commons special committee examined the question in 1921, endorsed the alternative vote (AV) (see Appendix A) and called for further study of proportional representation (PR). Legislation to introduce AV for rural constituencies was introduced in 1924 but went nowhere (Treusch, 1980b: 6-7). Perhaps surprisingly, given the broad agenda, the electoral system was almost entirely absent from the rounds of constitutional negotiations that began in the late 1960s. Then, in the late 1970s, it began again to receive attention as part of a debate about national political parties' capacity to represent effectively the country's varied regions.

1.1 Political Parties, Regional Representation and the Federal Government

The interest in electoral system reform in Canada has in large part reflected a concern with what Hanna Pitkin has called "descriptive" representation. Under this view, a high value is placed on "a representative body [being] distinguished by an accurate correspondence or resemblance to what it represents." When this principle is applied to political institutions, a priority is placed on how a legislature is composed (Pitkin, 1972: 60-61). In this regard, advocates of PR seek a more accurate correspondence between political parties' popular vote and their elected representation.

During a brief period in the late 1970s and early 1980s, a number of academic studies and reports from various public bodies addressed the federal electoral system. Their critique of SMP focused on what could be termed *unfairness in party representation*, including its tendency to:

- encourage single-party majorities even though the winning party received considerably less than a majority of the popular vote;
- exaggerate the elected representation of the party that received the most votes;
- lead to under-representation of other nationally-based parties.

¹ In Manitoba, the single transferable vote (STV) was enacted for the Winnipeg provincial constituencies in 1920, and the alternative vote (AV) for rural ridings in 1924; both were repealed in 1955. In 1924, Alberta adopted STV for urban constituencies and AV for rural ridings; both were repealed in 1956. British Columbia used the alternative vote for the 1952 and 1953 elections but then reverted to SMP (Pilon, 1999: 121).

A related criticism was that, under SMP, the party that receives the second-most votes can sometimes elect the greatest number of Members of Parliament (MPs) and form the government; this happened at the federal level in 1957 and 1979.

Echoing the influential analysis of Alan Cairns (1968), the critique of distortions in party representation included a particular – and politically salient – concern about unfairness in *regional* representation:

- regionally-focused parties often elected more members than their share of the popular vote, sometimes nearly sweeping the region and giving the impression of being that region’s “voice” in the House of Commons;
- despite receiving a significant share of the popular vote in certain regions, parties with a national base sometimes elected virtually no MPs, thus weakening their claim to act, with legitimacy, on behalf of all parts of the country.

Concern about parties’ regional representation and the implications for governance came into relief after the 1979 and 1980 federal elections. In 1979, the Progressive Conservatives (PCs) formed a minority government with only two MPs from Quebec, even though the party won 13 percent of the popular vote in that province. In 1980, the Liberals were returned to power but elected only two MPs west of Ontario (both in Manitoba), despite receiving from 22 to 28 percent of the vote in the four provinces. To provide representation for the other three Western provinces in Cabinet, Prime Minister Trudeau appointed four Senators as ministers. Even before this turn of events, various commentators and public bodies had begun to underline the implications of skewed regional representation for the federal government’s legitimacy. One of the starkest diagnoses came in the 1979 report (Canada, Task Force on Canadian Unity, 1979: 105) of the Pepin-Robarts Task Force:

Our research of experience in other federations indicates that when party membership in the central parliament becomes concentrated in regional blocs it is an advance signal of eventual disintegration. The regional polarization of federal political parties corrodes federal unity. Because we see developing signs of such a situation in Canada we have come to the conclusion that electoral reform is urgent and of very high priority.

The Task Force proposed a reform inspired by the German mixed electoral system (see Appendix A): 60 seats would be added to the House of Commons (which then had 282 members); the additional seats would be allotted to the political parties on the basis of their popular vote in the country as a whole; the seats would then be distributed among the provinces, proportional to the parties’ under-representation in each province. Other reform proposals, such as that developed by William Irvine (1979), were also intended to alleviate the under-representation of the governing party in certain regions (Seidle, 1995: 292-294; Dobell, 1980).

In the 1980 Speech from the Throne, the Trudeau government promised to appoint a committee to study the electoral system; however, none was ever struck. Opposition to even modest reforms among MPs was intense (Seidle, 1995: 295), and Prime Minister Trudeau was focusing on patriation of the constitution. Then, concerns about skewed regional representation diminished because successive governments, starting with that of Brian Mulroney in 1984,

gained a broad national base and could appoint a reasonable number of elected Cabinet ministers from all regions. Two royal commissions later addressed the electoral system but proposed no change. After sponsoring some research on the matter, the Royal Commission on the Economic Union and Development Prospects for Canada (1985, Vol. 3: 85) (Macdonald commission) expressed a concern that proportional representation would introduce “potentially far-reaching changes into our party system and the functioning of responsible government”; however, the commission recommended PR for an elected Senate. A few years later, the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing (1991, Vol. 1: 18), chaired by Pierre Lortie, noted that the Macdonald commission had examined alternatives to SMP but that none had been introduced in Parliament; in light of this, the Lortie commission decided it would give the issue no further attention.

1.2 Expanding the Debate on Electoral System Reform

Since the late 1990s, the federal electoral system has been receiving renewed attention (Chénier, 2002). Those involved include political scientists with a longstanding interest in the question (Milner, 1999; Massicotte, 2001b), other political scientists with expertise on electoral behaviour (Johnston, 2001), a handful of MPs, and various partisan and other activists (the origins and objectives of a number of recently formed advocacy groups are reviewed in section 2.2). The Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP) has played a leading role. Under its “Strengthening Canadian Democracy” program, it sponsored an extensive publication program, including a special double issue (July-August 2001) of *Policy Options* on the theme “Votes and Seats,” and a number of conferences and forums across the country (Segal interview). Some other research organizations, including the Law Commission of Canada, have also commissioned studies and held events on electoral reform (Pilon, 2002; Crocker, 2002).

This section provides a review of recent academic and other publications that examine the current electoral system (principally at the federal level) and that, in a number of cases, propose reform. Much of the recent literature and commentary retains the critique of unfairness in the elected representation of political parties, including at the regional level (see, for example, Broadbent and Segal, 2002). The arguments are very similar to those summarized above, and there is no need to repeat them here. But in addition, links are now drawn to issues such as women’s representation, political parties’ access to legislatures, voter turnout and the power of the executive branch of government. Although these issues are addressed from a range of perspectives, they all highlight concerns about broader questions of democratic governance such as civic participation and responsiveness within government.

Women’s Representation

Despite efforts by most major political parties (Young, 2000: Chap. 5), women are sharply under-represented in the House of Commons. Following the 2000 election, only 21 percent of MPs were women. The proportion of MPs was identical in the 1997 election, up slightly from 1993 when 18 percent of MPs were women. For Judy Rebick (2001: 16), former president of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, “[i]t should be a scandal of major proportions that after 30 years of feminism only 20 percent of the members of the House of Commons are women.”

The concern, however, is not merely one of numbers: it is often assumed that women will benefit from being better represented in legislatures. This argument reflects another aspect of Pitkin's (1972: 143) conceptual framework, that of legislators "acting for" those they are meant to represent. The hope that women "acting for" women will have an impact on outcomes (Tremblay, 2001: 7) partly explains certain advocates' support for PR (Rebick, 2000: 218; MacIvor, 1999: 33; Beatty, 2001: 52). Comparative research has shown that, on the whole, the proportion of women in national legislatures is lower under SMP than proportional or dual/multi-member systems (Young, 1994: 4-5). A full PR or mixed system can provide opportunities for parties to promote the election of women, particularly if political parties take steps to place women candidates relatively high on party lists (this is discussed further in Part 3).²

Access to Legislative Representation and Equality of Voting Power

Academic critics have long agreed that the dynamics of SMP work against smaller parties, except those with a regional focus. The result, according to Dennis Pilon (2001: 18), is that choices, and thus the range of voices heard, are too limited: "Embedded in nearly all the defences of SMP is a holdover, antidemocratic fear that, given too much choice or too much room to decide, democracy invariably descends into chaos. The response then tends towards restricting choices and decision-making with highly restrictive party competition and artificial majority governments, something SMP accomplishes admirably." A variation of this argument concerns citizens' voting power. David Beatty (2001: 52) contends: "Those who support national parties like the New Democrats, and more recently the Progressive Conservatives, that have no realistic chance of winning an election not only are denied equality of voting power, but the effective representation of their values and interests is compromised as well. People who vote for small issue-based parties like the Greens, get no representation at all." In this context, it has been suggested (Knight, 1999) that because SMP does not provide relative parity of voting power, the effective representation guaranteed by section 3 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* is not secured (the Green party's court challenge is discussed in section 1.3).

Electoral Participation

Following the 2000 federal election, a wide range of commentators expressed strong concern about the downward trend in voter turnout. That year, only 61 percent of registered electors actually voted. This represented a drop of six percentage points since the 1997 election (when turnout was 67 percent) and 14 points since the 1988 election (75 percent turnout) (Canada, Chief Electoral Officer, 2001: Table 4). Younger people are less likely to vote than other Canadians, and research suggests that people are continuing to abstain as they grow older (Blais *et al.*, 2002: 46-61; O'Neill, 2001: 34).

Some academics have suggested that the relation between votes and party outcomes under the present electoral system partly explains the trend to lower turnout. Bryan Schwartz (2001: 138) asks: "Why should people bother to show up and vote if they are among the majority of voters whose ballot does not produce any effective result?" (see also Mendelsohn, 2001; Milner, 1999: 40;

² Some authors are skeptical of a narrow focus on women's presence in legislatures. They question women's capacity to exercise significant influence when party discipline remains so strong and stress the significance of their being appointed to positions of power, such as Cabinet (Arseneau, 1999: 144).

Segal, 2002). A study of factors influencing voter participation in the 2000 election found that turnout was slightly higher in constituencies where a greater number of parties won at least five percent of the vote (Jansen and Siaroff, 2002: 12).

There is some evidence that, other things being equal, turnout is higher in countries that use a form of PR (Franklin, 1996: 226-227). One study claimed PR would provide added incentives to electoral participation by eliminating “wasted votes” and making elections “more interesting and competitive”; and that, “[s]ince the relative standing of the parties in the House of Commons would more closely reflect their level of popular support, the political system would appear more responsive” (CRIC, 2001: 36). Henry Milner (2002: 89) contends that citizens would be better informed – they would have a “clearer, more complete political map” – under the “consensual institutions” associated with PR.

Divided Opposition and Executive Power

Since 1993 Canada has had a true multi-party system of five parties. One result is that the Liberal party has formed a majority government on three successive occasions, even when its vote share dipped to 38 percent in 1997. Two of the four opposition parties, the *Bloc québécois* (BQ) and the Canadian Alliance (formerly the Reform party), have focused their energies on particular regions (although this was less the case for the Alliance in 2000). Their parliamentary representation from Quebec and the West, respectively, has been well above their share of the nation-wide vote; indeed, the BQ became the Official Opposition in 1993 with 54 MPs and 14 percent of the popular vote. At the same time, the PCs and the New Democratic party (NDP), with their pan-Canadian focus, have been consistently under-represented relative to their vote shares, sometimes quite sharply. For example, the PCs received 19 percent of the popular vote in 1997 but had only seven percent of the seats (20 MPs).

Some have suggested that the over-representation of the governing party and the under-representation of most opposition parties (relative to their share of the popular vote) contribute to the power of the executive, particularly the Prime Minister (Loenen, 1997: 146; Gibson, 2002: 25; Hugh Segal, as quoted in Turenne, 2002). According to Richard Johnston (2001: 14), PR would necessitate parliamentary coalition building, and “the Liberals would not be the only, or even the dominant party in government” (Johnston, 2001: 14). While Johnston’s assessment is sound, some commentators on the issue of executive power and weak opposition attribute too much influence to the electoral system. The latter is only one element of an institutional dynamic characterized by a concentration of power at the centre of government (Savoie, 1999). At the same time, some neglect a separate factor that has nothing to do with the electoral system – the enduring division on the right that followed the founding of the Reform party in the 1980s. Moreover, “stable” government, which some associate with the over-representation of the winning party (Crowley, 2002), has strong support within much of the political class and among Canadians (see the discussion of public opinion in section 1.3).

The preceding literature review demonstrates that the critique of SMP at the federal level in Canada has expanded from a focus on fair party and regional representation to concerns about representation of particular groups (notably women) and smaller, including newer, political parties. What some see as a restriction on choices – at least choices that are likely to be

effective – is being linked to issues such as the drop in voter participation and even to citizen disaffection more generally. Although some critics may over-state the significance of SMP as such (a question that is examined further in Part 3), it is noteworthy that leading political scientists and other researchers are increasingly viewing the electoral system from the broader perspective of civic participation and governance.

1.3 Proposals for Reform and Processes to Examine the Issue

Public opinion is not driving the debate on electoral system reform, although there is evidence that Canadians might support it. In a major survey sponsored by the IRPP in 2000, 49 percent of respondents indicated it was not acceptable that “under our present election system, a party can win a majority of the seats and form the government without winning a majority of the votes”; this had increased from 39 percent in 1990, when the same question was asked in a survey for the Lortie commission (Howe and Northrup, 2000: 13). An Ipsos-Reid survey in February 2001 indicated quite strong support for PR: 64 percent of respondents agreed that seats in Parliament should be awarded according to each party’s popular vote. At the same time, 71 percent believed the electoral system should produce “strong majority governments that get things done.” The same survey also revealed a relatively low level of understanding of electoral rules: 47 percent of respondents believed a political party must win a majority of all votes cast in order to form the government (Bricker and Redfern, 2001: 22-23). This suggests that any process of citizen engagement on this issue must also address the need for public education.

Although electoral system reform does not have a high level of salience in public opinion, it is fair to say that a policy community consistent with John Kingdon’s definition has emerged: Canada has a growing group of specialists who share a concern with an “area of policy problems” and “also have in common their interactions with each other” (Kingdon, 1984: 123). As part of the renewed interest in the electoral system, researchers and political parties (both federal and provincial) have proposed various alternatives. The latter are not always fully developed, but a survey of recent proposals can help identify what are seen as the most salient objectives of reform and how these are linked to the concerns about representation, voter participation and governance that have become more present in the renewed debate on this issue. As we shall see, reform proposals have made more headway in some provinces than on the federal political scene. In some cases, the focus is on a *process* that could lead to a decision to change the electoral system.

Academics and Researchers

A number of academics and researchers propose a mixed electoral system as the most feasible alternative to SMP. During the debate that began in the late 1970s, the German system was a point of reference. More recently, researchers have looked to the mixed member proportional system (MMP) used for New Zealand elections since 1996. Henry Milner (1999: 41) suggests the New Zealand model provides an answer to one of the longstanding arguments against PR: “I choose MMP over the various single-vote list-based PR systems used in much of Europe because Canadian voters – like those in New Zealand – would be unwilling to accept an electoral system that deprived them of having a single MP to represent them.” Louis Massicotte (2001a: 43) also sees considerable virtue in a mixed system such as New Zealand’s: it would not be such a

fundamental break with Canada's "electoral customs" as full-fledged PR; it would retain a framework for MPs' "constituency casework"; and, by lessening regional party polarization, might be "a step towards a less quarrelsome federation" (see also Massicotte, 2001b: 11-12).

Kent Weaver (1997) has proposed another type of mixed electoral system under which "compensation" seats equal to 10 percent of the House of Commons would be added to the existing constituencies, so as to diminish distortions in parties' regional representation. He ran a simulation of all elections from 1965 to 1997. Based on the assumption that voters' preferences would be the same, Weaver's model would have led to a Liberal minority government in 1980; in all the other elections the same party would have formed the government and its status (majority or minority) would not have changed. In a subsequent simulation of the 2000 election results, Weaver found that the Liberals would have kept a safe majority, with seven additional seats in the West, while the Canadian Alliance would have won 10 more seats in Ontario. In Weaver's words, the model "makes the party system appear less regionalized, giving the biggest parties seats where they are relatively weak" (e-mail to the author, October 7, 2001).

Bryan Schwartz (2001) has also proposed a mixed system to alleviate regional distortions: 80 percent of House of Commons seats would continue to be elected by SMP; 20 percent of seats would be allocated to parties according to their regional vote shares for the SMP seats. Based on simulations of the last 10 federal elections, Schwartz (2001: 152-153) found that four of the eight majority governments during that period would have been reduced to a minority. However, he claims that his model would be effective at improving seat/vote ratios.

Other alternatives to SMP have received less attention than mixed systems. Their advocates are most concerned about avoiding minority outcomes and ensuring that a wider range of views are represented in legislatures. The alternative vote (AV), which is used for elections to the Australian House of Representatives, has some supporters. Tom Flanagan (2001: 39) proposes the adoption of AV because he doubts that Canadians would make "a radical leap of faith" to full PR when "less sweeping alternatives are available." He notes that, under AV, all constituencies would remain as is and be represented by a single person; and that voters would still choose among candidates representing parties, although they would be required to rank them numerically (see also Courtney, 1999: 10). The vote counting process ensures that winning candidates have a majority of constituency votes – a strong point, according to some commentators (see Simpson, 2001: 221-222). Flanagan believes AV would create incentives for the Canadian Alliance and the PCs to forge an electoral alliance. However, he acknowledges that, because the Liberals are the second choice of many non-Liberal voters, they might actually win more seats than under SMP (a simulation of the 1997 election under AV is discussed in Bilodeau, 1999; see also Johnston, 2001: 7).

Like AV, run-off systems (see Appendix A) would ensure that legislators are elected by a majority of their constituents. Run-off systems have some advocates (Lovink, 1998), but critics point to the cost that a second round of voting would entail.

Finally, the single transferable vote (STV) (see Appendix A) has some support among those concerned about better representation of a wide range of positions. Nick Loenen, a former Social Credit member of the British Columbia Legislative Assembly and author of a book on

proportional representation, supports STV because it allows voters to rank candidates (even across parties) and, in his view, can give elected representatives independence from their parties (Loenen, 1997: 124-130). Vincent Lemieux (1997) also favours STV; he, too, singles out the capacity for voters to choose among party candidates who represent different interests.

Some of those interested in electoral reform have focused on the nature of a process to advance the issue. For example, Hugh Segal, president of the Institute for Research on Public Policy, suggested to the author (interview) that a lesson of the New Zealand experience is that “a broad research exercise” and a referendum would be necessary. In a similar vein, Matthew Mendelsohn and Andrew Parkin (2001: 59) recommend a commission of enquiry to examine options for reform; the commission would be “embedded within a larger and more participatory” citizens’ forum that would approve the commission’s mandate, debate its findings and approve options to be put to Canadians in a referendum.

Federal Political Parties

Of the five political parties represented in Parliament during the past 25 years, the NDP has demonstrated the greatest interest in electoral reform. In 1978, its leader, Ed Broadbent, proposed abolishing the Senate and adding 100 members to the House of Commons; the additional MPs were to be chosen on the basis of the parties’ votes in five regions (Treusch, 1980a: 9). Lorne Nystrom, one of the party’s senior MPs, has long advocated consideration of PR. On May 18, 2000, he introduced a motion, which was not adopted, calling for an all-party committee to study PR and for a referendum on whatever proposal emerged. The NDP’s leader, Alexa McDonough, introduced a similar motion in 2001. She proposed that an all-party committee be mandated to “examine the merits of various models” of PR and recommend reforms “that would combat the increasing regionalization of Canadian politics, and the declining turnout of Canadians in federal elections.” (*House of Commons Debates*, February 20, 2001: 911). The motion was endorsed by 113 MPs, from all four opposition parties, but defeated by 147 Liberals.³

It is not surprising that the Progressive Conservative (PC) party, one of the two leading federal parties until its crushing election defeat in 1993, has not historically been interested in reforming the electoral system. In recent years, this seems to have changed somewhat. For example, during his campaign for the party leadership in 1998, Hugh Segal called for an all-party committee to study the electoral system. He raised the possibility of run-off elections for candidates who did not obtain 50 percent of the vote (Fraser, 1998). More recently, a PC party report on democratic reform (Progressive Conservative Party of Canada, 2002: Chap. 12) included a proposal that “[u]pon formation of government, a commission will be immediately struck to hold public consultations on the most appropriate electoral system for Canada.” The report was adopted at the party’s national general meeting in August 2002.

³ Speaking to this NDP motion, Don Boudria, the Government House Leader, said “the public has shown almost no interest in PR” and that the present system “allows [MPs] to represent a specific and identified group of constituents” (*House of Commons Debates*, February 20, 2001: 919).

The Canadian Alliance and its predecessor the Reform party (founded in 1988) have advocated parliamentary reform and direct democracy measures such as referendums, citizens' initiatives and recall. Their position on the electoral system has been much less explicit. The latest version of the Canadian Alliance's "Declaration of Policy" states: "To improve the representative nature of our electoral system, we will consider electoral reform, including proportional representation [and] the single transferable ballot ... We will submit such options to voters in a nationwide referendum" (Canadian Alliance, 2002). However, a recent Canadian Alliance parliamentary reform proposal (Reynolds, 2002) did not address the issue, even though the paper went beyond issues such as free votes and the powers of committees to advocate a citizen initiative procedure.

Finally, the Green Party of Canada and its former leader, Joan Russow, have launched a court challenge to the federal electoral system. The party claims that SMP impedes supporters of smaller parties, women, and members of racial and ethnic minorities, that are not concentrated geographically, from "effective representation of their views." It calls for the electoral system to be declared unconstitutional in violation of sections 3 (equality of the vote) and 15 (non-discrimination) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. However, the Green party proposes that the court's ruling be suspended for two years "to give Parliament sufficient time to study the available alternatives with a view to selecting the model that is most suitable to Canada's constitutional traditions and political needs" (Green Party of Canada, 2001). The Green party filed its factum in May 2001, but a trial has not yet been scheduled.

Provincial Governments and Political Parties

Although academics and other researchers have generally focused more on the electoral system at the federal than the provincial level, the situation may be about to change. As a result of political commitments, the issue of electoral reform will be receiving a good measure of attention in a number of provinces.

In Quebec, the electoral system was one of a range of institutions the *Parti québécois* (PQ) scrutinized after it came to power in 1976. A commission studied the question and in 1984 recommended a territorial proportional representation system. Under the model, all but two members of the National Assembly would have been elected from party lists in 29 regional constituencies (Quebec, *Commission de la représentation électorale*, 1984). The proposal was shelved after it met with considerable opposition within the PQ caucus, notably because it retained no single-member constituencies and broke entirely with the tradition of territorially-based representation (Milner, 1994: 45-49; Massicotte and Bernard, 1985: 203).

The results of the 1998 Quebec provincial election drew renewed attention to the electoral system. Some commentators, for example, Paul Cliche (1998) objected to what they labelled a "reversal" of the popular vote: despite receiving fewer votes (43 percent) than the Quebec Liberal party (44 percent), the PQ won 76 of the 125 National Assembly seats. Critics (for example, Venne, 1999) also pointed to the disparity between the popular vote (12 percent) and elected representation (one seat) for the *Action démocratique du Québec* (ADQ). In June 2002, Jean-Pierre Charbonneau, the minister responsible for the reform of democratic institutions, included the electoral system in a group of possible reforms put forward for public reflection in a discussion paper. Other matters covered include the possible adoption of a presidential system;

expanded use of direct democracy measures, including possibly holding referendums at the same time as general elections; new powers for the regions; and new institutions for Aboriginal nations (Quebec, *Ministre responsable de la Réforme des institutions démocratiques*, 2002). Charbonneau has announced that an Estates General on democratic governance will be held by March 31, 2003. This assembly is expected to bring together about a thousand Quebecers. In addition to the process Charbonneau has launched, the National Assembly's *Commission des institutions* will hold hearings on the electoral system during the autumn 2002 session. Rising public support for the ADQ, which advocates a mixed electoral system (ADQ, 2001), will no doubt be a factor as the debate on electoral system reform advances in Quebec. In addition, civil society organizations such as the *Mouvement pour une démocratie nouvelle* (see section 2.2) can be expected to play a more significant role than in the past. However, the chair of the *Commission* has indicated that, even if there is agreement on reform, a new system would not be in place for the next provincial election (Cloutier, 2002).

In other provinces, election commitments and other developments mean that electoral system reform is receiving greater attention. Prior to taking office in 2001, the British Columbia Liberal party proposed a number of institutional changes as part of a broader commitment "to dramatically reforming government decision-making"; this included a commitment to appoint a "Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform" (BC Liberals, 2001). In September 2002, the Attorney General, Geoff Plant, announced that Gordon Gibson, a public affairs commentator and former leader of the BC Liberal party, had been appointed to develop recommendations on the size of the citizens' assembly, the selection process and a timetable so it could report "in time to allow a referendum question to accompany the May 2005 general election, should the assembly recommend a new model" (British Columbia, Attorney General, 2002). Interest in reforming the BC electoral system was also reflected in an attempt in 2002 by the leader of the BC Green party, Adriane Carr, to establish a mixed PR system through the province's initiative legislation. During the 90-day petition period, 98,165 signatures were collected – slightly less than half the number required (212,000) to oblige the government to introduce legislation or put the proposal to a referendum (Free Your Vote, 2002).

The Premier of Prince Edward Island, Pat Binns, indicated in May 2002 that he shares the concern about weak opposition party representation in that province – a theme being emphasized by the advocacy group Every Vote Counts (see section 2.2). He suggested that a commission will likely be established to look into the electoral system and that a referendum may be held in conjunction with the next provincial election (Bricker, 2002). Finally, Ontario Liberal leader Dalton McGuinty, in preparation for the next election, expected in spring 2003, has put forward a series of "democracy proposals" (Ontario Liberal Party, 2002) intended to "give people a real say." On the electoral system, the document states that "[w]e can make [people's] vote count" and includes the following commitment: "The public should decide on whether we need a new system, and if so, what the new system should be, through a binding referendum."

It is evident that those interested in electoral system reform in Canada are working on a larger canvas than was the case some 20 years ago. Although the issue of fairness in party representation, including at the regional level, remains alive, issues such as women's representation, voter turnout and the power of the executive have become more salient. In various ways, this larger canvas reflects concerns about citizen participation, responsiveness

within government and, more broadly, the quality of democratic governance. More than in the past, political leaders in certain provinces are endorsing change – or at least a process of public involvement to consider the issue. In addition, as we shall see, the policy community interested in this issue is expanding to include a number of advocacy organizations, most of which are focused on their respective provinces.

Part 2. Advocacy and Agenda Setting

As with other elements of a constitutional framework, electoral systems are not changed often or easily. In many cases, such change has taken place as part of the transition from one political regime to another – for example, the fall of the French Fourth Republic and the rise of the Fifth. Sometimes it has occurred in response to public disquiet about the functioning of the political process, including on ethical matters – as with the changes in Italy and Japan in the 1990s (Mendelsohn and Parkin, 2001: 55-57). In normal circumstances, it is unusual for governing parties, which may benefit from the existing system, to sponsor a change that would weaken their advantage. However, circumstances can combine so that a “policy window” opens. This provides an opportunity for advocates to draw attention to problems and advance their solutions (Kingdon, 1984: 212).

The main purpose of Part 2 is to explore the role of civil society organizations in advocating electoral system reform. The focus is on the means used to influence the public and governmental agendas – either to encourage the opening of a policy window or to take advantage of an opening when it does occur. The first section reviews the activities of the New Zealand Electoral Reform Coalition leading to the implementation of a new electoral system in 1996. This is followed by an account of factors that influenced the choice of electoral system for the post-devolution legislative assemblies instituted in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Returning to Canada, the second section surveys the origins and objectives of a number of advocacy organizations formed in the past few years at the national and provincial levels. As we shall see, these organizations are motivated by a range of concerns that go beyond fairness in party representation to the quality of democratic governance.

2.1 Advocacy and Choice of Electoral Rules in Other Westminster Systems

Historically, SMP has been a hallmark of the Westminster system of government in the United Kingdom and most countries with a similar constitutional framework. It has been defended in large part because it facilitated single-party majority governments that can govern effectively. Indeed, research suggests that citizens in countries with majoritarian electoral systems value this efficacy (Norris, 2001: 894-95). However, in the past two decades or so, other political objectives have gained ground – for example, ensuring that governments have a broader basis of support within the electorate and encouraging a more consensual approach to governance. To a greater or lesser degree, PR became linked to such objectives. In the second half of the 1990s, SMP was replaced with a mixed system in New Zealand, and alternative models were developed for elections to the assemblies created in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland under the Blair government’s devolution program and for European Parliament elections. While the governing

political parties were the key players in all cases, civil society organizations have also played a role, most notably in New Zealand.

New Zealand

Since New Zealand's founding in 1867, SMP was one of the pillars of a political system that Arend Lijphart (1999: 10) described as the archetype of majoritarian government. However, criticism grew when the Labour party lost both the 1978 and 1981 elections to the National party, even though it received the largest share of the popular vote; in addition, the Social Credit party elected only two MPs in 1981 with 21 percent of the vote. In 1984, the Labour government appointed a royal commission on the electoral system. In its report (New Zealand, Royal Commission on the Electoral System, 1986), the commission recommended the adoption of what it labelled a mixed member proportional (MMP) system: half the members of the House of Representatives would continue to be elected by SMP; the other half would come from party lists. The proposed system was "compensatory" in that the "list MPs" would be allocated to the parties in a manner that ensured their total parliamentary representation reflected their share of the popular vote. The commission further recommended that MMP only be instituted if approved in a referendum. The Prime Minister, David Lange, and the Leader of the Opposition, Jim Bolger, reacted negatively to the MMP plan, as did most of the political class. Commentators considered the prospects of reform to be remote (Jackson and McRobie, 1998: 122-123).

Even before the commission's report was released, a group of New Zealanders formed the Electoral Reform Coalition (ERC). The ERC was a small, relatively informal organization, with good links to trade unions, as well as women's and environmental organizations. Its aim was to promote "fair, proportional representation" and the implementation of MMP. According to Helena Catt (interview), a political scientist who was its vice-president from 1990, the "fairness" theme tapped an important value – "part of what it is to be a New Zealander." In addition, in the face of the wrenching changes that New Zealand society was experiencing with government retrenchment, privatization and globalization, many people began to blame the electoral system (Boston, forthcoming). Some of them claimed SMP led to governments that acted as "elective dictatorships," taking significant action in the face of popular opposition and sometimes breaking major election promises. For others, SMP hindered the emergence of more "consensual" politics, which they understood existed in countries, including Nordic ones, with PR. The emergence of the Green party, whose leadership had long been active in advocating electoral reform, was also a factor.

During the 1987 election campaign, Labour Prime Minister Lange promised a referendum on electoral reform; however, the Labour government did not act on his commitment during the following term. As a result, during the 1990 election campaign, Jim Bolger, leader of the National party, promised to hold such a referendum. National won the election, and Bolger set in play the steps for a series of two referendums. For the first referendum, held in 1992, voters were asked to indicate whether or not they wished to retain SMP; they were also asked to indicate their preference among four alternatives, one of which was MMP.

As the referendum approached, the ERC intensified its activities, continuing to emphasize links with sympathetic organizations. According to Phil Saxby (interview), a Labour party activist and one of the ERC's founding members, the Coalition relied on its spokespersons, a number of whom were academics, rather than spending scarce resources on media advertising. Activists spent a lot of time talking to the media and community groups; other techniques included press statements, letters to the editor and lobbying of MPs. According to Dennis Pilon (2002: 51), "the activism of the ERC ... kept the issue before the public while the parties stalled." In the referendum, despite opposition to change expressed by most politicians and businesses, 85 percent of voters rejected SMP, and 70 percent chose MMP as their preferred alternative.

The National government had promised a second, binding referendum to select a new electoral system. This was held at the time of the 1993 general election, and voters were asked to choose between SMP and MMP. Saxby said the ERC thought it would be an "easy run." However, sections of the business community mobilized to form the Campaign for Better Government (CBG), led by Peter Shirtcliffe, chief executive officer of Telecom (New Zealand's largest company). The CBG's central argument was that single-party majority government was stable; this, in turn, was good for the economy and the country (Catt interview). The CBG reportedly spent more than \$NZ 500,000 on television advertising during the last week of the campaign (Jackson and McRobie, 1998: 194-195). The ERC had to alter its approach. Relying on donations from environmental, peace and other activists, it spent about \$NZ 300,000 during the three months prior to referendum day – "a fortune by previous standards," as Saxby put it. Despite the decline relative to the 1992 result, 54 percent of voters endorsed MMP.

New Zealanders' decision to abandon SMP reflected a range of factors, including dissatisfaction with government and the pace of economic change in the country (Harris, 2001: 32-33). The ERC is, however, a significant part of the story. The royal commission's report became "an effective marker around which the supporters of proportional representation could ... rally" (Jackson and McRobie, 1998: 124), and the ERC "adopted the strategy that all electoral reformers should speak with one voice – the voice of the royal commission" (Aimer, 1999: 152). The ERC knew it had to target the two leading political parties to place the issue on the government agenda. Through straightforward messages, intensive promotional activities and reliance on activists and networking, it achieved that goal. When a policy window did open, those same activities were key factors in convincing New Zealanders to endorse MMP.

United Kingdom

Alternatives to SMP have been debated in the United Kingdom for more than a century (Seidle, 1995: 290-91). The Proportional Representation Society (now the Electoral Reform Society) was founded in 1884 and has consistently advocated adoption of the single transferable vote (STV). As the Liberal party slipped from second to third-party status in the inter-war years, it too became a staunch advocate of electoral reform. The issue has been studied by various bodies, most recently by a royal commission chaired by Lord Jenkins. Its report (United Kingdom, Independent Commission on the Voting System, 1998) proposed that 80 to 85 percent of MPs continue to be elected by SMP and 15 to 20 percent by PR in regional constituencies. Despite the efforts of various advocacy groups, including newer ones such as Make Votes Count, the Labour government has not yet acted on its promise to hold a referendum on the Westminster

electoral system. In the meantime, alternative electoral systems have been instituted for the legislatures established in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Even though civil society organizations played a limited role, it is worthwhile to review how the systems were chosen.

In Scotland, the Scottish Constitutional Convention (SCC) was established in 1989 to develop proposals for the reform of Scotland's government. The SCC comprised Labour and Liberal Democrat MPs, as well as representatives of trade unions, local government, churches and other bodies (Bogdanor, 1999: 196-197). The SCC appointed a committee, chaired by a leading journalist, Joyce McMillan, to develop an electoral system for a future Scottish Parliament. According to McMillan (interview), the Liberal Democrats, though initially in favour of STV, concluded they would have to "write down their position or the exercise would go into the sand." For their part, the Labour members reflected the view of Scottish opinion leaders that, partly due to the under-representation of their party under SMP, the Thatcher and Major Conservative governments had "marginalized" Scotland. The Scottish Trade Union Congress became a strong advocate of PR, and other organizations followed suit. The result, according to McMillan, was that "hardly anyone in civil society still supported first past the post."

The constitutional convention reached a compromise on an additional member system (AMS), similar to MMP. This proposal was in turn adopted by the Blair government. In a policy paper, the government stated: "A constituency link will be the essential foundation of the new Scottish Parliament. However, it is also important to provide for greater proportionality to build stability into the overall settlement" (United Kingdom, Scottish Office, 1997: 27). Legislation adopted in 1998 provided for a 129-seat Parliament, with 73 members elected under SMP and 56 members elected from party lists. As in New Zealand, the system is "compensatory": the additional members are elected from the party lists in order to secure a proportional outcome.

In Wales, where popular support for devolution was weaker, no civil society organization such as the SCC was formed. In developing its proposal for Welsh devolution, the Blair government "read across" from the electoral system for Scotland (Hazell interview). However, it changed the proportions somewhat: the Welsh National Assembly elected in 1999 has 60 members, 40 of whom are elected under SMP.

Finally, in Northern Ireland, the choice of STV for the new Assembly largely reflected familiarity with that system, which was first used following the province's creation in the 1920s. STV has been used for local elections since 1993, and was adopted for the 1999 European Parliament elections. According to Robin Wilson, director of the Northern Ireland research organization Democratic Dialogue (interview), there was no significant debate about the electoral system leading to the April 1998 Belfast Agreement. However, interest in improving women's representation has been growing; Democratic Dialogue has commissioned research on this issue (Ward, 2000).

2.2 Advocacy Organizations in Canada

As demonstrated in Part 1, the policy community interested in the electoral system has become broader, as has the range of representation and governance issues being linked to the current system and its possible reform. It now includes a number of recently formed organizations that advocate electoral reform. Although the four groups profiled in this section share some concerns and differ on others, they all endorse broad citizen involvement to advance the issue on the public agenda.

Fair Vote Canada

Fair Vote Canada (FVC) was launched in April 2001 as a “non-partisan citizens’ campaign for voting system reform” (FVC, 2001: 2). Its development was spearheaded in large part by Larry Gordon, a Toronto communications consultant who became its executive director. Gordon told the author (interview) he became interested in the electoral system because voting is “the most widely shared democratic exercise we have.” He subsequently wrote and circulated a discussion paper. FVC, which is governed by a 15-person National Council, was incorporated as a non-profit organization in August 2001. Individuals become voting members by paying annual dues, and other organizations are invited to endorse the FVC campaign. As of June 2002, FVC had chapters in Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Toronto and Ottawa.

FVC is concerned about majority governments elected by a minority of voters, wasted votes and the drop in turnout “when citizens conclude that their preferences don’t count”; it also claims that under PR, regional parties would no longer be over-represented (FVC, 2001: 5-6; FVC, 2002). Gordon mentioned that he has heard concerns about “fringe groups” winning seats under a PR system, but noted that “when you talk it through people see the argument about including smaller parties.” Some of the groups Gordon has spoken to are interested in improving women’s representation. Gordon (interview) believes people relate easily to the argument about “distorted results,” in particular the question of “exaggerated majorities.” Walter Robinson, a member of FVC’s National Advisory Board (see below) and Federal Director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, has carried the argument further: “After almost 30 years of majority government, I sincerely believe that a degree of uncertainty and instability would be a good thing for Canada. It would result in more compromise and accommodation” (quoted in Duffy, 2002).

FVC’s current strategy, centred on the theme “Make Every Vote Count,” is focused on the following elements:

- capture the attention of the public and the media;
- sustain a civic dialogue and an open, objective education process;
- create a climate where change is perceived as possible and desirable, then inevitable;
- conclude with a means for Canadians themselves to decide upon the appropriate reforms (FVC, 2001: 15-16).

The organization’s activities include community organizing and adult education techniques such as public forums, debates, seminars, contests, study groups and Web-based dialogues. The FVC

stresses the need for public involvement: “FVC ... must channel its activities and programs towards a culmination point where Canadian citizens can make a decision on the best voting system for Canada ... A national referendum is one clear means of culminating the process ...” (FVC, 2001: 16).

Fair Vote Canada has obtained support from across the political spectrum. Its president is Doris Anderson, a noted journalist and feminist; Troy Lanigan, national communications director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, serves as vice-president (the Federation has endorsed FVC). The National Advisory Board of FVC includes Claude Ryan, Ed Broadbent, Judy Rebick, Pierre Berton, Maude Barlow, Henry Milner and three MPs – Carolyn Bennett (Liberal), Lorne Nystrom (NDP) and Ted White (Canadian Alliance). At its June 2002 convention, the Canadian Labour Congress adopted a resolution endorsing FVC and encouraging union members to join the organization. It is too early to predict whether FVC will succeed in its goal of moving electoral system reform up the national political agenda. That said, a number of leading Canadians have become involved, and the task of building popular support is under way.

Mouvement pour une démocratie nouvelle

As noted in section 1.3, there has recently been a significant revival of interest in electoral reform in Quebec. The *Mouvement pour une démocratie nouvelle* (MDN) has tapped into that interest and is mobilizing a broad range of civil society organizations. Established as a non-partisan, non-profit organization in April 1999, the MDN’s mission is to promote a debate on electoral system reform, in order to improve the quality of democratic life in Quebec. However, it has no intention of proposing its own “solution” in advance. Its criticisms of the present system focus on the gap between the parties’ share of National Assembly seats and their popular vote. A document on the MDN’s Web site notes that, six times since 1960, the party that formed the government won a majority of seats with a plurality of votes; and that, on two occasions, the most recent being 1998, the party that formed the Official Opposition actually received more votes than the party that took office (MDN, 2002b). In that regard, MDN’s president, Paul-André Martineau (MDN, 2002a), has referred to the 1998 election result as the key factor that led to the organization’s founding.

Martineau mentioned to the author (interview) that previously those interested in the issue stayed in their own corners, each with their own proposal. In contrast, the MDN sees itself as inclusive (*rassembleur*) and is working to develop a network of partners. Its first major event (May 30, 2001) was a debate on electoral system reform with representatives of the three parties represented in the National Assembly and Paul Cliche of the *Union des forces progressistes*. In November 2001, 125 leading Quebecers from all political parties and a wide range of civil society organizations signed a petition calling on the government to name a commission to carry out consultations on the electoral system. The MDN is endorsed by various organizations, including the *Confédération des syndicats nationaux* and the *Fédération des femmes du Québec*.

In preparing for the hearings of the National Assembly’s *Commission des institutions* in autumn 2002, the MDN is devoting resources to public education. For example, its Web site will have an *à la carte* brief that organizations and individuals can use to prepare their own submissions to the committee; those using the tool will be able to choose from alternative electoral systems

described therein or develop their own. The MDN will also be participating in the process to address the broader reform agenda presented by Jean-Pierre Charbonneau in June 2002. However, Martineau (interview) believes there is a firmer consensus on changing the electoral system than on the other possible changes Charbonneau has proposed; Martineau is also of the view that action on the former should not be tied to movement on broader institutional reform.

Fair Voting BC

Fair Voting BC (FVBC), founded in 1997, advocates a process of citizen involvement leading to a referendum to change British Columbia's electoral system. The organization emphasizes the theme of wasted votes, with a particular focus on the over-representation of the winning party: "Government majorities are typically manufactured by our voting system, not by the will of the people. Elections do not result in representative government, but near dictatorships" (FVBC, n.d.) According to Nick Loenen (interview), one of FVBC's founders, this concern was particularly acute following the 1996 election when the NDP government was elected for a second term with 39 percent of the popular vote. Loenen believes the imbalance between the legislature and the executive is "a considerable risk to democracy" and sees electoral reform as an opportunity to effect parliamentary reform.

FVBC has a 12-member board of directors but no chapters or memberships. It aims to engage the public through the media – with news releases, letters to the editor, op-ed articles, participation in open-line programs and public meetings. FVBC maintains a Web site and an e-mail list; the latter reaches some 1300 to 1500 people. As noted in section 1.3, the British Columbia Liberal party, which formed the government in 2001, has promised to appoint a "Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform." FVBC had targeted the Liberals prior to the election. As Loenen put it, "our organization was instrumental in having that enshrined in the party platform."

Every Vote Counts (Prince Edward Island)

Every Vote Counts (EVC), launched in November 2001, is a non-partisan citizens' group committed to generating public discussion on the province's electoral system and serving as a catalyst for electoral reform. It is particularly concerned that, in three of the last four provincial elections, opposition parties have elected two or fewer members despite a reasonable level of popular support. For example, in the 1993 election the two opposition parties had 45 percent of the popular vote but won only three percent of seats. EVC is concerned about the implications for governance: "the opposition has quite simply not been strong enough to perform effectively its role in an increasingly complex society." EVC also favours "greater diversity in the legislature"; "avoiding a fragmentation of our political system"; and "retaining the best aspects of the present system" (EVC, 2002b). Jeannie Lea, a Liberal Cabinet minister from 1993 to 1996, was one of EVC's founders. While she believes it advisable to concentrate on concern about the opposition's effectiveness, she is also interested in women's representation (Lea interview).

EVC is a small, informal organization, with some 30 members (six of whom form a steering committee). It does not yet have a Web site but uses an electronic distribution list to share information and facilitate discussion. EVC has close links with the Institute of Island Studies at the University of Prince Edward Island. Its director, Harry Baglole, is one of EVC's founding members, and the Institute has commissioned research on electoral reform (Cousins, 2000).

Echoing the recommendations of a report tabled in the legislature in April 2002 (Elections Prince Edward Island, 2002), EVC has called for a royal commission to develop "the best possible 'made in Prince Edward Island system' of proportional representation," to be followed by a referendum (EVC, 2002a). Baglole's view (referring to the New Zealand experience), is that the process should not take 10 years; however, he believes that a model is needed (Baglole interview). Based on statements by Premier Binns (see section 1.3), it is possible that a commission or other public body will be established later in 2002; EVC will thus have achieved one of its main goals.

As with the recent work of Canadian academics and researchers, the objectives of the advocacy organizations surveyed above demonstrate a concern not only with fairness in party representation but also with government responsiveness. Some want to hear a greater range of voices within the legislature and are concerned about barriers to the election of women and newer parties. Others warn that governance suffers when opposition parties are under-represented relative to their votes. On another point, it is noteworthy that all the Canadian advocacy organizations call for a meaningful process of public involvement to educate citizens (Crocker, 2002: 11-12). They no doubt acknowledge that, as in New Zealand, mobilizing public opinion can have an impact on the positions of political parties, help move the issue up the political agenda and influence the circumstances that may lead to the opening of a policy window.

Part 3. Representation, Citizen Participation and Implications for Governance

As documented in Part 1, electoral system reform in Canada is being linked to a wider range of issues than when the question received some attention about 20 years ago. A number of researchers and commentators are concerned about weaknesses, even a *malaise*, in the country's democratic processes; they attribute this partly to the workings of the current electoral system. For some of them, legislative institutions elected by SMP are not sufficiently representative of various elements of Canadian society. Others link the under-representation of opposition parties to the decline in voter turnout and to what they see as the unresponsiveness of single-party majority governments. As we saw in Part 2, some of these concerns are also reflected in the discourse of the advocacy groups that have emerged in the past few years.

The purpose of this section is to explore the degree to which electoral system reform could be expected to improve this situation, notably on the questions of women's representation and civic participation. In addition, the implications of such a change for governance more broadly will be discussed, with a focus on government stability and effectiveness. Before doing so, however, it is worthwhile considering the likelihood of such reform. John Courtney (2002: 128; 2001: 19-21) has suggested the following conditions would be necessary: an opportunity (the opening

of a policy window), an agreed-upon alternative and political will. While it is difficult to imagine these conditions being met at the federal level in the foreseeable future, political commitments and the activities of advocacy groups in certain provinces are moving the issue up the public agenda in some parts of the country.

Should the conditions for reform be met, what model might emerge? There are several broad alternatives to SMP, as set out in Appendix A, and their elements, such as thresholds and the number of members for each electoral district, affect how they function. Based on proposals that have been put forward and the reaction to them (and setting aside more technical matters), the following is an assessment of the principal models:

- **Full proportional representation**, with all members elected in multi-member districts from party lists, would likely be rejected by most political actors because it would break completely with the tradition of single-member constituencies and “riding representation,” which seems entrenched in regimes derived from the Westminster system. The negative reaction of members of the Quebec National Assembly to the 1984 territorial PR proposal is instructive in this regard, as is the tendency of a number of researchers to set aside this option at the outset and focus on mixed systems.
- The **single transferable vote** has the advantage of allowing voters to rank candidates (within and sometimes across the parties’ slates). However, the complicated method of vote counting is often cited as a drawback. In addition, there is little assurance that parties’ decisions on the ranking of candidates to encourage the representation of women or minorities will actually be reflected in the results.
- The **alternative vote** (AV) and **run-off systems** would help ensure that winning candidates receive a clear majority of votes in electoral districts. However, neither would likely lead to improved representation for smaller parties or significantly correct skewed regional representation (Massicotte, 2001a: 42). Moreover, one study (Bilodeau, 1999) suggests that, so long as a single party dominates (in the case examined it was the federal Liberal party) the second choice of many electors, it might win even larger majorities under AV than under SMP.
- **Mixed systems** have been proposed by a number of academics and political activists, both during the earlier debate and more recently. If the German and New Zealand systems were followed, about half the members would continue to be elected in single-member constituencies. The remaining members would be elected from lists, allowing parties to further certain representational objectives by the ordering of candidates. Depending on district size and any threshold, smaller parties could be expected to elect more members.

Reform advocates attach varying weights to the objectives reflected in the current debate on electoral reform. For example, the concern about weak opposition party representation that has provided the impetus for Every Vote Counts on Prince Edward Island is not shared by the *Mouvement pour une démocratie nouvelle* in Quebec. Nevertheless, based on the documents reviewed for this paper, a mixed system (with about half the members elected from lists) would seem to respond to more of the objectives than other alternatives.

In the past, political actors often defended SMP as part of Canada's British heritage. Following the adoption of mixed systems in New Zealand and the United Kingdom, this argument is less resonant. In fact, the changes effected in these "culturally proximate" countries offer the opportunity for "institutional learning" (Kaiser, 1997: 439). In light of the above, the following examination of the possible impact of electoral system reform in Canada uses a mixed system as its focal point and includes references to the experience in New Zealand, Scotland and Wales. Returning to the main themes addressed in Part 1, this discussion focuses on implications for women's representation, civic participation, and government stability and effectiveness.

3.1 Women's Representation

A number of advocates who seek improved representation of women in legislatures claim that PR would help them meet their objective. A mixed electoral system also holds considerable potential, *provided* parties are committed to ensuring that more women are elected. That commitment can be expressed through the composition of a party's list. To take an example: a party decides to place women candidates in first and third places on its list for a given electoral district; based on its popular vote, it is entitled to three "list seats"; two women are thus elected for that electoral district. If such an approach is followed for a considerable proportion of the seats, women will be well represented.

In New Zealand, the proportion of women in the House of Representatives rose from 21 percent in the 1993 election to 29 percent in 1996 (the first election held under MMP). In 1999, the proportion rose slightly once again – to 31 percent. This increase is attributed in large measure to the ranking of women candidates on the party lists (Bolger, 2001: 27). However, it is also important to recognize that New Zealand has been promoting gender equality in public life in other ways. For example, at the time the 2002 election was called, seven of 20 Cabinet ministers, including the Prime Minister, Helen Clark, were women. Moreover, in 2002, this upward trend was broken: women accounted for only 28 percent of the MPs elected at that election.

In Scotland, 37 percent of the members elected to the new Parliament in 1999 were women (only 13 percent of the Scottish MPs elected to Westminster in 1997 were women); Labour elected 28 of the 47 women members (60 percent). This can be attributed largely to the party's decision to "twin" equally winnable single-member constituencies and have a male candidate selected in one and a female in the other. The policy was a response to pressure from women in Scotland but also reflected the desire of the party's senior leadership to treat the new Scottish institutions as "distinct and modern" (Russell *et al.*, forthcoming). Labour also made special efforts to favour women candidates in Wales, where 40 percent of the members elected in 1999 were women (only 13 percent of the Welsh MPs elected in 1997 were women) (Henderson, 2002). In contrast, Northern Ireland women have not fared nearly as well: in 1998, only 13 percent of those elected to the Assembly under STV were women. According to Robin Wilson (interview), this "very poor show" reflected cultural factors within certain parties (see also Ward, 2000).

This recent experience with mixed systems and STV confirms that the representation of women is related not only to the electoral rules but to the policies and practices of political parties. This means that if a mixed system were introduced in Canada, the parties' rules for candidate

selection would have a significant effect on gender representation. In the meantime, more robust party policies and recruitment campaigns could go some distance towards enhancing the representation of women under the current SMP system.

3.2 Civic Participation

As noted in section 1.2, the sharp drop in turnout in the 2000 Canadian federal election has prompted some academics and commentators to propose a PR system, in the hope this would revive voter participation. They contend that under SMP some electors, particularly those who support smaller and newer parties such as the Greens, do not have a strong incentive to go to the polls because their votes would be “wasted.” Some researchers have concluded that, other things being equal, countries that use a form of PR tend to have higher turnout; however there is disagreement as to how much of that difference is accounted for by PR (CRIC, 2001: 37). The experience in New Zealand is inconclusive: in the 1996 election, turnout (as a percentage of the estimated voting age population) rose by two points to 81 percent from the 1993 level. However, in 1999, turnout declined to 77 percent, where it remained in 2002. In other words, in New Zealand, the significant debate about reform as well as its successful implementation has not improved participation rates much beyond the 79 percent of 1993. This case merits attention in the context of debates on citizen engagement and electoral system reform.

In Canada, the adoption of a mixed system *could* lead to enhanced representation for smaller parties, and their supporters might be less inclined to feel that their views were excluded from legislative forums. However, fears of fragmentation could prompt demands for a threshold to exclude “fringe” parties. The five percent rule that applies in Germany and New Zealand might provide a benchmark. A threshold at that level for a provincial election would probably allow additional parties to enter the legislature – for example, the British Columbia Green party, which in 2001 won no seats but obtained 12 percent of the vote. However, a five percent national threshold for federal elections would be a considerable barrier to smaller parties, and their supporters would not necessarily have an added incentive to vote. Moreover, it might be challenged under the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. An alternative would be to establish a provincial threshold for federal elections, although concerns about opening the door to a range of regional parties could lead to pressure to set this above five percent.

The political process could well be enriched by the presence of a wider range of voices within Canada’s legislatures. However, the claim some researchers and commentators make about PR and the added incentives to vote does not take sufficient account of larger trends. First, voter participation has been dropping in a wide range of democracies, including countries with PR electoral systems such as the Netherlands, Ireland, Finland and Austria (CRIC, 2001: 6). Second, the decline in turnout in Canada needs to be seen in the context of a complex set of shifts in citizen-government relations occurring in many democracies. This includes changes in citizen values, disaffection with government, weakened partisan ties and the attractiveness of certain other forms of civic participation (Nevitte, 2002; Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000; Inglehart, 1999; Lloyd, 2001; Norris, 1999).

Changes in citizens' values may help explain why the drop in turnout in Canadian federal elections has been particularly sharp among youth. The 2000 Canadian Election Study observes that young people (those who came of voting age since 1988) "are less interested in electoral engagement than their elders, they pay less attention, and they are less well-informed" (Blais *et al.*, 2002: 60-61). Another study concluded that many young people "do not feel that voting is an empowering tool for change. They would rather put their energies into other forms of political engagement." (D-Code, 2001: 21). Research such as this suggests the need to take a broad perspective on the question of civic participation and consider a range of improvements to encourage participation in the political process. Electoral system reform could make some difference, but as Neil Nevitte (2002: 29) has observed, "the malaise lies deeper than the matter of electoral procedures."

3.3 Government Stability and Effectiveness

There is no disagreement that governance would be significantly affected by the adoption of a mixed electoral system (with about half the seats elected from lists). Only in the relatively rare circumstance of a political party winning a clear majority of votes – for example, the federal PCs in 1984, the BC Liberals in 2001 – would it obtain a majority of seats in the legislature. Research suggests that even a mixed system with fewer list than constituency members – for example, Bryan Schwartz's "20 percent model" (see section 1.3) – would significantly reduce the likelihood of majority governments at the federal level. In these circumstances, the winning party would be required either to invite one or more of the other parties to join a coalition government or to rule as a minority government, relying on other parties' support for its measures on a more or less *ad hoc* basis.

Possible Lessons from New Zealand and the United Kingdom

Some critics of PR, often with reference to Israel and Italy, contend that coalition government is unstable and ineffective. They ignore the experience in most European countries where multi-party coalitions frequently last for a full parliamentary term and govern effectively – including managing the economy. For example, Arend Lijphart (1994: 4-8) concluded that, in the period 1961-88, economic performance in nine countries with PR was stronger than in four countries with SMP (United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand).

The recent experience in Scotland, Wales and New Zealand casts further doubt on the generalizations about PR being incompatible with government stability and effectiveness. In both Scotland and Wales, there has been a coalition between Labour and the Liberal Democrats since the 1999 elections. Although the First Ministers have changed – in Scotland twice and Wales once – both governments are expected to remain in power until the end of their term in 2003. As to government effectiveness, a review of two years' experience with Scottish and Welsh devolution (Hazell, 2001: 271) concluded: "The new structures are bedding down and starting to deliver results. New policies are coming on stream which would not have been developed in the pre-devolution era."

The situation in New Zealand has been more dynamic. Following the 1996 election, the National party governed in a coalition with New Zealand First. It took two months to negotiate a

detailed pact between the two parties, and this delay fuelled criticism of MMP. When New Zealand First imploded in 1998, the government held power until the end of its term by relying on the votes of a number of minor-party and independent MPs. The Labour party won the most votes in the 1999 election and quickly negotiated an agreement and the composition of the ministry with the Alliance party (which split from Labour in the 1990s). After the Alliance party broke into two factions, Prime Minister Helen Clark claimed that governing had become difficult and called an election for July 27, 2002 – four months earlier than required. Critics suggested, however, that she was seeking to profit from her strong public opinion rating (Marks, 2002). Labour was re-elected with 53 of the 120 seats – an increase of three over 1999. By August 8, Clark had negotiated agreements with two centrist parties, United Future (eight MPs) and one of the factions that split from the Alliance, Jim Anderton’s Progressive Coalition (two MPs). With little delay, Clark’s centre-left government thus began its second term on relatively solid ground.

There is no doubt that governance has changed significantly in New Zealand. As Jonathan Boston (forthcoming) has observed: “the former two-party ‘majoritarian democracy’ has been replaced with a multi-party ‘negotiation democracy.’” However, this has not meant that government effectiveness has been sacrificed. According to Sir John Wallace, who chaired the Royal Commission on the Electoral System (and later served as President of the Court of Appeal), “government has been notably effective in the sense of achieving the passage into legislation of election policies and promises” (Wallace, 2002: 11).

It is also noteworthy that the electoral rules adopted in the 1990s, while criticized in some quarters, have a significant level of support. In surveys conducted in Scotland and Wales shortly after the 1999 elections, 58 and 56 percent of respondents, respectively, preferred to “keep the new way of voting” (Seyd, 2001). According to Lord Holme (interview), a leading Liberal Democrat and chair of the British Hansard Society, “no section of Scottish society wants to go back to first past the post.” In New Zealand, a parliamentary committee reviewed MMP but recommended no changes to the system (New Zealand, MMP Review Committee, 2001). A poll conducted shortly after the 2002 election showed that 54 percent of New Zealanders are satisfied with MMP, while 30 percent would like to revert to first past the post (Small, 2002).

What about Canada?

On questions of representation and government stability, the electoral reforms recently enacted in other Westminster systems are instructive. However, good governance for Canada means, among other things, seeking to reconcile a much greater range of linguistic, cultural and regional divisions than in New Zealand⁴ and the United Kingdom. Federalism adds further complexities to governance in Canada. Therefore, any assessment of the potential benefits of electoral system reform needs to take into account additional factors.

⁴ Representation of the Maori has been a significant issue in New Zealand. The Royal Commission on the Electoral System recommended that the four seats designated for the Maori, which dated from 1867, be abolished. This met with opposition from the Maori community and other actors – for example, the Electoral Reform Coalition, which promoted adoption of the commission’s MMP model but was opposed to its recommendation on the Maori seats. Prior to the 1993 referendum, the New Zealand government decided the Maori seats would remain and that the number of seats would increase or decrease according to the number registered on the Maori electoral roll. There were five seats in 1996, six in 1999 and seven in 2002.

If a mixed electoral system were adopted for the House of Commons, single-party governments would probably become the exception rather than the rule. However, marked government instability would not necessarily follow. The Scottish and Welsh cases, and that of Germany for most of the post-war period, suggest that an alliance between the leading party and one other can be relatively stable. Such an alliance could follow the pattern that obtained from 1972 to 1974, when the NDP supported the Liberal minority government. However, the situation would be more complicated if the party with the most votes and one other party could not command a majority. In light of the fragmentation of the federal party system – which could well endure – such a scenario is possible. The implications of this would be significant, but further speculation is unwise.

What is more certain is that adopting a mixed electoral system would probably lead to the attenuation of certain features of the majoritarian system of government. Whether or not formal coalitions became the order of the day, “negotiation” government could be expected to emerge. The Prime Minister (or a Premier elected without a clear majority) would face new constraints (Bakvis, 2000-2001: 71). The dynamics within the legislature would assume greater importance, and this could mean an enhanced role for elected members. However, for the federal government this need not necessarily lead to the results that Lijphart (1999: 31-41) associates favourably with “consensual” government. The party system could become more fragmented than at present, and it is possible that the federal government’s capacity to act decisively on behalf of all Canadians would suffer. Inter-party bargaining would become a key element of a political system in which extensive intergovernmental negotiations are already the norm. Coalition government or voting alliances might help bridge certain regional, linguistic and other differences. However, as John Courtney (1997: 28) has suggested, there is a risk of weakening “the institutional capacity demonstrated by Canada’s centrist, accommodative parties.” Moreover, criticisms about lack of openness and accountability, already addressed at intergovernmental processes, could multiply.

To sum up, it is fair to say that the adoption of an electoral system with a significant element of proportional representation could have positive impacts on the representation of women and opposition parties (including some smaller parties that have not elected members under SMP). This could, in turn, lead to more broadly-based governments that would be more reflective of the citizenry. However, it is unwise to expect too great an influence from such a change, if instituted on its own. As we have seen, the practices of political parties are important; and declining turnout is related to larger trends in civic participation. Moreover, any change of electoral system would be instituted within a much broader set of institutional dynamics. As Peter Aucoin and Jennifer Smith (1997: 32) have observed, “there is more to representative government within parliamentary institutions than the election of members of parliament, whatever electoral system is used.” As to the implications for governance, the diminished likelihood of single-party majority governments would place a premium on negotiation and inter-party bargaining. While inter-party agreements might be relatively solid, governments’ capacity to act decisively could be diminished. The task of accommodating divisions within a diverse society would also enter the inter-party arena, rather than being carried out largely within the governing party and a single-party Cabinet.

Part 4. Conclusion

The discourse about electoral system reform in Canada, both at the federal or provincial levels, no longer focuses almost solely on “fair” party representation. As this paper demonstrates, the critiques of the present system, and particularly the reform proposals put forward by researchers and advocacy groups, reflect additional objectives related to improved representation, citizen participation and governance. These objectives are rooted in citizen values that favour the reflection of diversity in public institutions, greater public involvement and enhanced government responsiveness. Those who defend the status quo have their own objectives; some of these, such as protecting governments’ capacity to “get things done,” also have considerable public support.

Electoral reform advocates make a number of claims about the potential impact of adopting a PR or mixed electoral system. It is reasonable to suggest that electoral rules that led to enhanced access to elected office, notably for women, would mean that legislatures would reflect more accurately the face of Canada. Greater representation for smaller and newer parties would bring new voices into political forums. This, in turn, could enrich public debate and improve the responsiveness of governments. However, a great deal would turn on the capacity to negotiate relatively solid inter-party agreements (or coalitions) that could secure effective government and accommodate divisions within society.

One of the principal conclusions of this paper, drawing on experience in other Westminster systems since the mid-1990s, is that the expected benefits of electoral reform, instituted on its own, may be somewhat over-stated. Proportional electoral systems can have a positive impact on gender representation. However, measures adopted by political parties are a key to ensuring that sufficient women are nominated in the first place. Similarly, the factors explaining disaffection with political institutions and the electoral process, reflected in part in declining election turnout, extend well beyond the impact of the current electoral rules. Electoral system reform could help bring a wider range of voices into the political process, but it would not, on its own, rectify other weaknesses in representative government that are part of the reason for that disaffection.

While it is difficult to imagine the conditions for electoral reform being met at the federal level in the foreseeable future, political commitments and the activities of advocacy groups could move the issue up the public agenda in one or more provinces. Whatever the prospects of reform, the renewed debate on electoral system reform is most welcome. Canada can certainly benefit from richer public debate on issues of representation and civic participation, and researchers, advocacy organizations and elected representatives all have a valuable role to play. Indeed, civil society organizations, such as those profiled in this paper, are already making a worthwhile contribution through activities to foster citizen understanding and by underlining the importance of inclusive processes to develop models that reflect their jurisdictions’ particular circumstances.

The electoral reform debate is also welcome because it raises significant issues for a larger agenda to improve democratic governance in Canada. There are some signs this is taking shape. For example, enhancing Canadians’ trust in public institutions is a central objective of the “action plan” on government ethics that Prime Minister Chrétien announced in June 2002

(Canada, Prime Minister, 2002). On civic participation, the potential benefits of civic literacy and citizenship education programs are being recognized (Milner, 2001: 20-26). For the past several years, the federal and a number of provincial governments have been attempting to build new relationships with the voluntary sector (Laforest and Phillips, 2001). At the same time, governments seem reluctant to provide greater opportunities for meaningful public involvement (Phillips and Orsini, 2002) or to strengthen the role of elected representatives through significant parliamentary reform.

All these areas and others deserve attention as part of a renewed dialogue on the means to enhance democratic processes in Canada – a dialogue that takes a broad perspective and recognizes the interplay of citizen values, channels for representation and the contribution of various public bodies to sound governance. The current debate on electoral system reform is laying the groundwork for such a dialogue. Whether or not such reform eventually takes place, Canadians are being challenged to come forward and help shape changes that will enhance citizen participation and confidence in political institutions.

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Appendix A. Overview of Alternative Electoral Systems

Various electoral systems have been proposed as an alternative to Canada's single-member plurality electoral system, often referred to as "first past the post." The following brief descriptions provide an overview of how the main alternatives function and their perceived strengths. Additional information, notably on rules for counting votes, can be found in the sources cited in the text.

Proportional list systems. Many countries that have adopted proportional representation (PR) use a party list system: political parties present lists of candidates, usually the same in number as seats to be filled and in the order set by the party organization. A mathematical calculation based on each party's number of votes determines which candidates are elected; various formulas and quotas are used for that purpose (Blais and Massicotte, 1996: 57-60). In most countries that use PR, this calculation takes place at the electoral district level. The number of members for each electoral districts varies (the higher the number, the greater the proportionality); in the Netherlands and Israel, there are no sub-national electoral districts. There are also differences in the threshold that a party must meet in order to have a proportion of its candidates elected. Finally, the range of voter choice can vary. Often, the party lists are closed or "blocked": voters select only a party and cannot express preferences among candidates (this is the case for the list (or additional) seats in New Zealand, Scotland and Wales). However, a smaller number of countries allow voters to express one or more preferences within or among the parties' lists (Seidle, 1995: 287-289).

Mixed systems. A number of countries use a hybrid system in which a proportion of the seats in the legislature is filled from party lists, while the rest of the members are elected in single-member districts (usually by plurality). The proportions are equal in Germany, which has used this system for the entire period since the republic was established following the Second World War. In New Zealand, where the system is called mixed member proportional, there were 120 seats for the 2002 election – 69 electorate (single-member constituency) seats and 51 list seats. In both Scotland and Wales, under the additional member system, the proportion of members elected from single-member districts is also higher than the number elected from party lists (see section 2.1). The German, New Zealand, Scottish and Welsh models are all "compensatory" or "corrective": the "list seats" are distributed to parties so as to produce an overall distribution of seats that reflects the percentage of votes cast for each party (Massicotte and Blais, 1999). In some cases, parties must meet a threshold in order to be entitled to have members elected from their lists.

Single transferable vote (STV). Under this system, electoral districts have at least three but usually more members. Voters indicate, by rank ordering, their preferences for the various candidates. Results are determined on the basis of a formula: first preferences are counted to select the initial winners; surplus votes cast for winning candidates are then transferred to the other remaining candidates on the basis of second preferences; the process continues until all seats are filled (see Bogdanor, 1981: 232-250). STV is used for elections to the first chamber of the Irish Parliament and the Australian Senate. Advocates of STV underline the merits of allowing voters to choose among parties' rival candidates. However, the influence of parties often remains significant (Bogdanor, 1983: 254).

Alternative vote (AV). AV is used to elect a single member from an electoral district. Voters rank their preferences numerically. If a candidate wins a majority of first preferences, he/she is elected. If not, the candidate with the fewest first preferences is eliminated and that candidate's preferences are distributed among the remaining candidates. The process continues until a candidate receives a majority of the original plus the transferred votes (Courtney, 1999: 10). The fact that members are elected by a clear majority, not just a plurality, is considered AV's principal strength.

Run-off systems. There are two variants of "run-off" or "double-ballot" systems. Under *majority-runoff* systems, if no candidate receives an absolute majority on the first ballot then a second ballot is held between the two leading candidates (this system is used for presidential elections in France and a number of other countries). Alternatively, in what are sometimes labelled *majority-plurality* systems, only candidates who meet a certain threshold on the first ballot are entitled to run at the second round (this system is used for elections to the French National Assembly, and a candidate requires 13 percent of the first round votes to be on the second ballot). The candidate who receives the most votes (plurality) on the second ballot is the winner (Blais and Massicotte, 1996: 56).

Appendix B. List of Interviews

All interviews were conducted by telephone, except the meeting with Larry Gordon. Interviewees responded to a series of questions about the objectives of their organization and their past or present role in its activities.

Baglole, Harry. Director, Institute of Island Studies, University of Prince Edward Island; member of Every Vote Counts. May 24, 2002.

Catt, Helena. Former Vice-President, Electoral Reform Coalition (New Zealand). May 15, 2002.

Gordon, Larry. Executive Director, Fair Vote Canada. May 30, 2002.

Hazell, Robert. Director, Constitution Unit, University College London. April 30, 2002.

Holme, Lord (Richard). Chairman, Hansard Society. June 5, 2002.

Lea, Jeannie. Founding Member, Every Vote Counts (Prince Edward Island). May 27, 2002.

Loenen, Nick. Founding Member, Fair Voting BC. May 24, 2002.

Martineau, Paul-André. President, *Mouvement pour une démocratie nouvelle*. June 27, 2002.

McMillan, Joyce. Journalist; Former Chair of Scottish Constitutional Convention Committee on the Electoral System. May 14, 2002.

Saxby, Phil. Founding Member, Electoral Reform Coalition (New Zealand). May 24, 2002.

Segal, Hugh. President, Institute for Research on Public Policy. June 20, 2002.

Wilson, Robin. Director, Democratic Dialogue (Northern Ireland). May 23, 2002.

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