

# THE SIMPLE VOTE PR ELECTORAL METHOD

## How it works + SVPR Outcomes

### What is the Simple Vote PR electoral method?

'Simple Vote PR' is an electoral method that achieves full proportional representation (PR) in a national or regional legislative body.

**SVPR is simple for voters**, and treats every vote equally. It achieves proportional representation without changing how Members of Parliament (MPs) in the House of Commons are elected, does not enlarge or change the nature of electoral districts, keeps the number of Members close to current levels, and maintains direct local accountability of almost all Members.

Proportional representation is achieved by adding votes in the House of Commons to MPs of parties that were 'short-changed' in an election based on their proportionate share of the national popular vote, so that a political party's share of votes in the House of Commons is the same as its share of the overall popular vote in an election. This is enabled by Section 49 in Canada's Constitution, which states that "Questions arising in the House of Commons shall be decided by a Majority of Voices". However, "Voices" is not defined, and could be defined in legislation as "the expression of the popular vote as represented by the number of parliamentary votes of each Member of Parliament, and that such parliamentary votes be determined in a manner that achieves voting power in proportion to the overall popular vote for political parties as occurred in the most recent general election, and as may be modified by subsequent by-elections", or other wording to the same effect.

Every vote cast for a voter's preferred local candidate of a political party counts towards parliamentary voting power of that party, whether the local candidate wins or loses. In contrast, in today's electoral system, if a candidate does not win, his/her vote is discarded by the system. The national popular vote does not count towards governing power.

(Access the SVPR Canada Interactive file at [www.makedemocracymore.com](http://www.makedemocracymore.com) to see how any election scenario outcome can be instantly determined.)

### How it works:

At the ballot box in each voting district, all registered political parties are listed, including those without a candidate in the district. All candidates for the district, including those without party affiliation, are listed.

1. Voters choose a single district candidate or party to represent them. The candidate receiving more votes than any other becomes the only Member of Parliament for the district.
2. Political parties receiving less than a pre-determined percentage of the popular vote (for example, 3%) are excluded from the Parliament, unless they elect a candidate to Parliament. As a respect to democracy, a low is threshold recommended.

3. If a district is not represented by a candidate and voters select a listed party that did not field a candidate in the district, the votes cast for that party are counted towards the total national popular vote.
4. Once all votes across the country are compiled, the voting power of parties represented in the House of Commons is then (electronically, instantly) brought into line with each party's share of the popular vote, by awarding additional parliamentary votes – rather than additional MPs – to MPs of parties that were ‘short-changed’ in the election, based on their proportionate share of the popular vote. This “Parliamentary Vote Entitlement” (PVE), rather than each MP having exactly one vote, is what is used for voting on items presented to parliament.

The Parliamentary Vote Entitlement for each party is determined in three steps :

- 1) Each party’s percent of all seats in the House of Commons is divided by its percent of the overall popular vote to determine the party with the highest ratio;
  - 2) The party with the highest ratio becomes the standard to which the number of votes in the House is determined; that party’s number of seats is divided by its percent of the overall popular vote to obtain the total Parliamentary Vote Entitlement in the House;
  - 3) The total Parliamentary Vote Entitlement in the House is then multiplied by each party’s share of the overall popular vote to determine its Parliamentary Vote Entitlement. This produces proportional representation in the House of Commons.
5. Additional MPs are awarded from party lists to the most under-represented parties, based on PR – for example, a party with 3% of all seats in the House of Commons but which should have 10% of all votes in the House receives a few additional MPs (seats). The awarded seats give those parties a human presence and a functional capability. A limit to the number of party list seats is established by legislation prior to any general election (for example, a number of seats equal to no more than 5% of the total number of elected MPs, and given only to parties with fewer than 5% of seats). This addition of MPs is enabled by Section 52 of Canada’s Constitution Act, which states that Parliament may from time to time increase the number of seats, provided that the proportionate representation of the Provinces is not disturbed.
  6. The average voting power of each Member of a political party in Parliament is then determined by dividing each party's total Parliamentary Voting Entitlement equally among the number of that party's Members. Alternatively, party leaders may allocate their PVE differently, to balance out inequities in gender, ethnicity, geography, or other inequities within their party. The end result is that the total number of votes in parliament exceeds the number of MPs. In no case should an MP have less than one full vote.
  7. Elected Members who have no party affiliation have a vote in Parliament equal to the overall average parliamentary vote per party Member.
  8. If a small party with less than the minimum pre-set threshold percent of the national popular vote necessary for representation in the House of Commons (for example, 3% of the national popular vote) elects an MP, that party achieves representation and is awarded its calculated Parliamentary Vote Entitlement.
  9. The number of Members of committees of the House of Commons would not be set in line with the composition of seats in the Parliament. The total voting power of each party in Committee is set to mirror the total vote entitlement of that party; any number of MPs per party can be represented.

## **Simple Vote PR Effects**

1. The tradition of exactly one vote in the House of Commons for each Member of Parliament is ended. Most Members are given additional votes, including fractions of a vote, to reflect the percentage of the popular vote received by their party. The number of votes in parliament will exceed the number of Members. Section 49 in Canada's Constitution states that "Questions arising in the House of Commons shall be decided by a Majority of Voices". However, "Voices" is not defined, and could be defined in legislation as "the expression of the popular vote as represented by the number of parliamentary votes of each Member of Parliament, and that such parliamentary votes be determined in a manner that achieves voting power in proportion to the overall popular vote for political parties as occurred in the most recent general election, and as may be modified by subsequent by-elections", or other wording to the same effect.
2. Parliamentary voting power is defined by the parliamentary votes carried by each party, rather than by the number of seats held by parties. All parties carry parliamentary votes in proportion to their party's overall share of the popular vote in the most recent election.
3. Voting power in the House of Commons replaces the strict need (as per Canada's Constitution Act) for proportionate distribution of MPs by Province and Territory.
4. Full proportional representation is achieved without changes to district boundaries or district magnitudes. One Member of Parliament is elected for each electoral district. Although many voters in a district will be represented by an MP not of their choosing, the voters will know that their vote counts towards voting power in the House of Commons.
5. Provinces and territories may be less frequently pejoratively categorized federally as right-wing or left-wing, because there would be greater recognition that every political party and political preference in the resident population has representation.
6. Every voter's first choice counts towards parliamentary power; strategic voting – compromising at the ballot box to elect the "least of evils" – is no longer useful (no more "I can't vote for her because she doesn't have a chance of winning").
7. An end of strategic voting would likely increase the diversity of representation. Voters have an effective choice in favour of parties that they see as being more representative of their views. New parties that may form around different segments of society (for example, a Women's party, a New Citizens party, a First Nations Party) have a better chance of representation. Some existing parties may diversify themselves into 'moderate', 'progressive' or other forms they see as useful to attract a desired segment of the voting public.
8. Voter participation is likely to increase (Less "What's the use? The system is rigged."), because every vote counts towards representation, subject only to pre-set minimum thresholds for representation in the House of Commons.
9. The number of seats in the Parliament are increased by a small percentage due to appointment of a few MPs from party lists for the most under-represented eligible parties.
10. In situation where a political party is under-represented by MPs in a Province even if it has been awarded Top-Up seats, the Party Leader may assign a higher parliamentary vote to those Members to ensure that the provincial concerns of those MPs are more adequately addressed.
11. Except for Top-Up Members, all Members are directly accountable to voters in their district, and no Member directly elected in a district has less than one full vote in parliament.

12. Representation by gender, ethnicity, culture or other component of society is indirectly supported by competition from new parties, and a recognition by existing parties that the votes of all parts of society count directly towards parliamentary power.
13. The party or coalition of parties which has the highest Parliamentary Vote Entitlement normally forms the government.
14. The Prime Minister is chosen by an electoral method set by legislation, normally elected from within the leading party or coalition of parties, or by all Members of the House.
15. Negotiation and compromise on legislation becomes common practice, as governments realize that with Simple Vote PR they are normally not likely to achieve 50% or more of the popular vote if they call an election when key legislation is defeated. Forcing contentious legislation to be passed or defeated using threats of non-confidence votes becomes relatively rare. In this way, Simple Vote PR creates more stability than minority governments under today's winner-take-all electoral system, where a shift of even a few percentage points in an election can give a party majority power to overturn existing policies and legislation, even if most voters did not vote for that party or parties.
16. Perceived fears of so-called 'fringe' or small parties that hold minority views having disproportionate power to force snap elections recede; their power in the House is limited by their share of the popular vote and by pre-set thresholds for representation (for example, a 2% popular vote or electing a candidate), and is not likely to change outcomes of elections. These small parties will have little power until their share of the national popular vote increases.
17. Members 'crossing the floor' or being removed from caucus have no effect on parliamentary vote standings; parliamentary votes remain with the party in accordance with its share of the popular vote in the most recent general election, as modified by by-elections. Members removed from a party caucus sit as Independents, and are given a parliamentary vote equal to the average for all party Members. A Member will not voluntarily leave his/her party caucus because he/she will have no vote in parliament.
18. If there is a by-election to fill a vacant seat, the popular vote results of the by-election replace those of the previous election, and the overall voting power in parliament is recalculated. Normally, the change would be very minor.
19. Unlike the Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) electoral system, Simple Vote PR assumes that there is no need to cast a party vote and a local/constituency vote; a candidate for a party will normally vote in parliament in adherence to party discipline. MMP also results in a high proportion of MPs appointed from unelected party lists (in Germany, this approaches 50% of seats).
20. Unlike some electoral systems, such as the Single Transferable Vote (STV) and the Alternative Vote (AV), in which voters rank sometimes long lists of unfamiliar candidates, Simple Vote PR has no ranking mechanism (N.B. The AV is not a PR system, and may produce very distorted outcomes). STV requires significant enlargements of voting districts, which SVPR does not. STV results in multiple MPs per voting district, which may confuse voters. Overall, ranked balloting does not produce results that voters want: elections in each district are a compromise, and most of the time the winner is the least disliked candidate rather than the best candidate. Simple Vote PR enables every voter's preferred choice of political party to be counted towards parliamentary voting power in the House of Commons. Compromising occurs in the House, not at the ballot box.

## **Some Idle Speculations**, based on recent political environments....

A change from Canada's current First-Past-The-Post Winner-Take-All electoral system will likely not come into use until there is a strong public desire for change that is also supported by increased influence of political parties that support proportional representation. It would likely never be supported by the Bloc Quebecois, because it would lose influence. The Conservative Party of Canada may support it only if it believes that their region-specific voting base will keep them from majority power under the current system, and they see that in some countries that use PR, right-wing parties have won power.

Simple Vote PR's change from exactly one vote per Member of Parliament, and the change to enable Top-Up MPs, would likely withstand a constitutional challenge (to some degree on desire for a more balanced and equitable political system for the benefit of Canadians overall), and be implementable via legislation only.

Simple Vote PR will encourage and enable groups of like-minded people to form new political parties that they feel have enough support by the public to be represented in parliament. The Conservative Party of Canada will likely split into a far-right (e.g. the Peoples Party) and moderately conservative parties (for example, one that wants action on climate change); the Liberal Party may split into Progressive and centrist parties, although the Progressive side may evolve into a stronger NDP. A party may form around regional issues (such as an Atlantic Canada party). An Indigenous Peoples Party will certainly form, and have representation in parliament. SVPR will likely have little effect on electability of 'Independent' candidates not affiliated with a political party.

Parties that depend on strength in specific electoral districts (such as the NDP) or in specific regions of Canada (such as the CPC in Alberta and Saskatchewan) would have to garner more votes more widely across Canada, or risk becoming a party with less representation in parliament.

All of this will enable voters to support a political party that is more reflective of their views. Voters will not have to accept the entirety of the policies of one 'big tent' party, even if they don't like some elements of it. (Note the extreme two-party system in the U.S.A., where 300 million voters must accept the totality of only two extremely opposite policy directions. The Americans sorely need PR.)