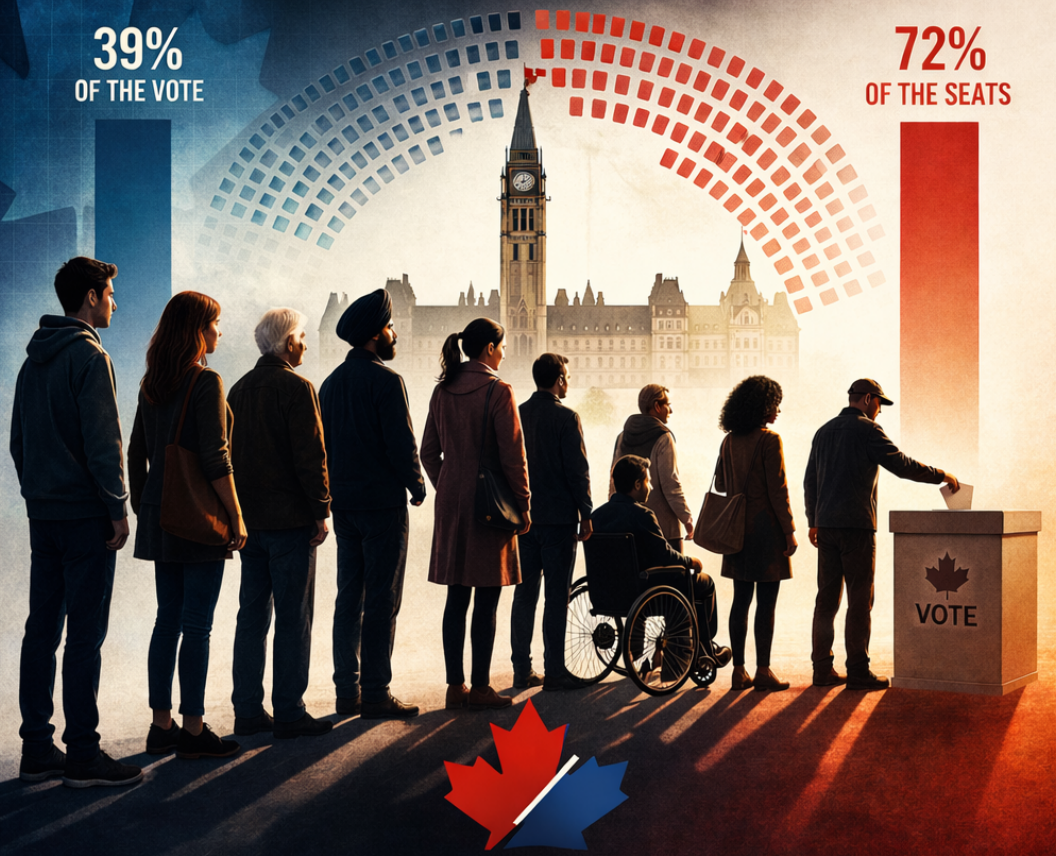
DEMOCRACY RENEWED

The Case for Electoral Reform in Canada



UNITED CANADIAN
CENTRISTS

CHRISTOPHER M. MICHAUD

Democracy Renewed

The Case for Electoral Reform in Canada

Christopher M. Michaud

Printed in Canada

First Edition

For my children.

May you inherit a country that continues to grow,
a democracy that continues to listen,
and a system that reflects the voices of all who call it home.

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PROLOGUE

A Quiet Distance

I didn't come to this topic as an academic or a political insider. I came to it the same way most Canadians do—by paying attention, forming opinions, and showing up to vote. For a long time, that felt like enough. You follow what's going on, you make your choice, and you accept the outcome, even when it doesn't go your way. That's part of living in a democracy.

But over time, I started to notice things that didn't quite line up.

It wasn't one election or one result that stood out. It was a pattern that kept repeating. Governments were being formed without anything close to majority support. Entire provinces would appear unified on election maps, even though anyone who lives there knows that isn't true. More and more, you'd hear people say their vote didn't matter, and they weren't saying it out of frustration—they were saying it like it was just the reality of how things work.

At first, I assumed this was just part of the system. No electoral model is perfect, and trade-offs are inevitable. But the more I paid attention, the harder it became to explain these outcomes as normal side effects. The issue wasn't just that people were disappointed with results. It was that the

results themselves didn't seem to fully reflect the range of views that were clearly there.

What struck me most was that nothing was actually broken in the traditional sense. The rules were being followed. Elections were fair. The system was doing exactly what it was designed to do. That's what made it difficult to ignore. When a system produces the same kinds of distortions over and over again, it raises a different kind of question—not whether it's failing, but whether it still fits the country it's meant to serve.

Canada today is not the Canada this system was built for. We're more connected to each other than ever before, and we have a clearer view of how diverse political perspectives really are across regions and communities. The idea that entire provinces think the same way doesn't hold up to even basic scrutiny, yet that's often the picture our election results present.

Over time, that disconnect starts to matter. It affects how people see the system, and it affects how seriously they believe their participation is taken. When people begin to feel like outcomes are only loosely tied to what they and others actually voted for, engagement changes. It becomes less about influencing direction and more about going through the motions.

That shift doesn't happen all at once. It builds gradually, and it often goes unnoticed until it becomes familiar.

This book comes out of that realization. Not from a belief that Canadian democracy is broken, but from a growing sense that it's no longer aligned as well as it could be. The system we have was built for a different time, and while it

still functions, it doesn't always capture the country as it exists today.

What follows is an attempt to look at that gap more closely. To understand how the current system works, where it falls short, and what it might look like to bring it back into step with the people it represents.

The goal isn't to tear anything down. It's to make sure that when Canadians take part in an election, the outcome reflects them in a way that feels accurate and complete.

Because that connection—between people and results—is what gives the system its meaning in the first place.

Chapter 1

A Country of Balance

Canada did not emerge all at once.

It began as a narrow band of settlement along the St. Lawrence River—what was once known as Upper and Lower Canada—shaped by geography, language, and the practical realities of survival in a vast and often unforgiving land. From those early foundations, the country expanded outward: east to the Atlantic provinces, west across the prairies toward the Pacific, and north into territories defined as much by distance as by identity.

At each stage, Canada was not simply growing. It was negotiating its own existence. Different regions developed different economies, and communities brought with them distinct traditions, expectations, and political instincts. The challenge wasn't only to build a country but to hold it together.

The system of government that emerged reflected that reality.

Canada adopted a parliamentary model rooted in the Westminster tradition—one designed to manage competing interests through representation, debate, and compromise. It offered a structure strong enough to govern a large and

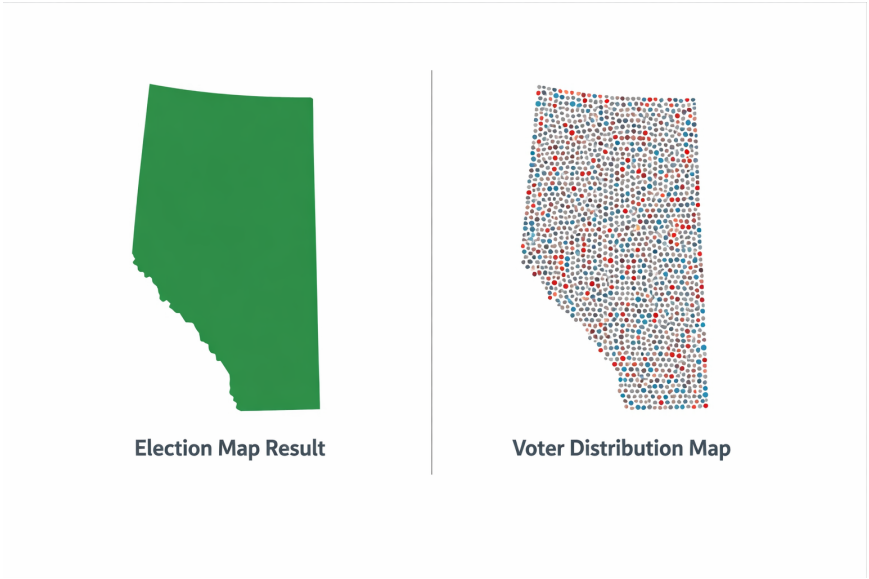
diverse country while remaining flexible enough to adapt as that country expanded.

For much of Canada's history, it worked as intended.

As new provinces joined Confederation and populations shifted, the system continued to function. Governments were formed, policies debated, and power changed hands. Through periods of growth, crisis, and transformation, the machinery of Parliament remained stable.

But the country it was built to serve has not stood still.

Canada today is larger, more diverse, and more politically complex than at any point in its history. Its regions are



Political views within regions are more varied than election results often suggest.

more distinct, its voters more varied, and expectations of representation have grown.

Yet the way Canadians choose their representatives has changed very little. The gap between the country and the system is becoming harder to ignore.

Canada has never been defined by a single way of thinking. Its diversity is not only cultural or regional; it is political. Different communities, industries, and experiences produce different views on how the country should be governed.

In that sense, Canada is not one voice, but many.

A representative Parliament, at its best, should reflect that reality, not by dividing Canadians, but by allowing those differences to exist within a shared national framework. In a country like Canada, you'd expect a Parliament that resembles a mosaic of perspectives: varied, sometimes competing, but collectively representative of the whole.

In practice, however, the choices presented to voters are often far narrower.

Federal politics has gradually consolidated around a small number of dominant parties. While others exist, the structure of the system tends to reward broad, catch-all platforms and makes it more difficult for more precise or distinct perspectives to gain traction.

The result is a kind of compression, where a wide range of views is forced into a limited set of options.

For many voters, this means choosing between general directions rather than selecting a position that closely reflects their own. It becomes less a matter of alignment and more a matter of approximation. In a country as varied

as Canada, that narrowing stands in contrast to the complexity of the society itself.

This narrowing does more than shape outcomes; it influences behaviour.

When voters are repeatedly presented with a limited set of viable options, the pressure isn't only to choose but also to conform. Over time, many begin to align themselves with one of the dominant political streams, even when their views don't fully fit within it.

That isn't always driven by agreement. Often, it's driven by necessity.

Voting becomes less about expressing a precise set of beliefs and more about selecting the closest available option, or, at times, the least objectionable one.

As this pattern repeats, political identity begins to harden around these limited choices. Nuanced differences get flattened, and positions become grouped into opposing camps.

What might otherwise exist as a spectrum is compressed into a smaller number of competing blocs.

In that environment, disagreement can take on a sharper edge—not necessarily because the country is more divided, but because the system offers fewer ways for those differences to be expressed.

The result is a form of division that is, at least in part, structural, shaped not only by what Canadians believe but also by how those beliefs are channelled through the system. The patterns that emerge in Canadian politics are not accidental. They're shaped, in large part, by how the system itself is designed.

Canada uses what's known as a first-past-the-post electoral system. The country is divided into individual ridings, and in each one, voters select a single candidate. The candidate with the most votes—regardless of whether they have majority support—wins the seat and represents that riding in Parliament.

At a glance, the system appears straightforward. It produces clear winners, defined outcomes, and is relatively simple to administer.

For a time, those qualities made it well suited to a growing country. When political competition was more limited and voter alignment more consistent, the system translated votes into governments in a way that felt stable and predictable.

As the country has become more diverse—politically as well as socially—its limitations have become more visible.

In each riding, only one outcome matters: who finishes first. All other votes, no matter how many are cast, don't contribute to representation. A candidate can win with far less than half the vote, even when a majority of voters supported someone else.

Repeated across the country, these outcomes begin to accumulate.

A party may receive a significant share of the national vote yet secure relatively few seats, while another may form government without majority support. Entire regions can appear politically uniform, even when large portions of the population voted differently.

The system doesn't measure the full range of support. It measures who comes out ahead in each individual contest.

In doing so, it reduces a complex electorate to a series of binary outcomes. This is where the earlier patterns begin to take shape.

If only the leading candidate matters, voters begin to think in terms of viability. Support tends to consolidate around those seen as most likely to win, which reinforces the dominance of a small number of parties and narrows the range of outcomes that seem possible.

What begins as a way of counting votes becomes a force that shapes how those votes are cast.

The system rewards concentration and penalizes dispersion. It favours broad, centralized support over more distributed or nuanced political expression, gradually compressing a wide range of perspectives into a smaller number of competitive channels.

The result isn't just a mismatch between votes and seats. It's a system that struggles to fully reflect the country it represents.

Chapter 2

What This Looks Like in Practice

The effects of Canada's electoral system are not abstract. They can be seen in every election.

Millions of Canadians take part in the democratic process with the expectation that their vote will contribute to the outcome—that it'll help shape the direction of the country and be reflected in the composition of Parliament.

But the translation from votes to seats doesn't always follow that expectation.

In election after election, the distribution of seats differs from the distribution of votes. Parties with substantial national support may find themselves with limited representation, while others are able to form government without the backing of a majority of voters.

These outcomes aren't anomalies. They're consistent features of how the system operates.

At the level of individual ridings, the same pattern repeats. A candidate may win with a plurality of the vote, even though most voters supported someone else. Those votes are counted, but they don't translate into representation.

When this is repeated across the country, the cumulative effect becomes clear.

The final composition of Parliament reflects the aggregation of riding victories rather than the full range of voter support.

That may seem like a subtle distinction, but it has real consequences. National outcomes end up being shaped less by how Canadians vote overall and more by how those votes are distributed across individual contests.

How votes are translated into seats under Canada's current electoral system.

The Illusion of Regional Unity

One of the most visible effects of Canada's electoral system is the way it shapes the political map.

After each election, the country is often presented in blocks of colour. Provinces appear overwhelmingly aligned with a single party, and entire regions are described as politically unified—solidly Conservative, solidly Liberal, or otherwise defined by a dominant result.

At a glance, these maps suggest a country divided into distinct political camps.

They don't tell the full story.

Within those same regions are large numbers of voters whose choices aren't reflected in the final outcome. In provinces that appear overwhelmingly aligned with one party, there are often substantial minorities—sometimes numbering in the hundreds of thousands—who supported different parties.

Their presence is real, but their representation isn't.

A province may appear politically uniform on a map while, in reality, it contains a wide range of perspectives. What looks like consensus is often the result of how seats are awarded, not how votes are distributed.

That creates a distortion that goes beyond seat counts and starts to shape how Canadians see one another.

Regions begin to be understood as politically fixed rather than internally diverse. Differences between provinces appear sharper than they are, while shared perspectives become less visible.

Over time, that can contribute to a sense of separation.

Voters in one region may come to see themselves as fundamentally different from those in another, even when there's significant overlap that simply isn't reflected in parliamentary representation.

In that sense, the electoral system does more than translate votes—it helps shape the narrative of the country itself. A system that consistently produces regionally uniform outcomes can make Canada appear more divided than it actually is.

The Voter Who Doesn't Count

Behind every election result are individual choices—millions of them—each made with the expectation of being heard.

For many Canadians, that expectation isn't met.

Consider a voter in downtown Toronto who supports a party with little chance of winning locally. Their vote is cast, counted, and recorded, but it doesn't contribute to representation. The outcome is determined by whoever finishes first, and the remaining votes fall away from the result.

Or consider a voter in rural Alberta who supports a different party than the one that consistently wins in that region. Election after election, their vote reflects a perspective that exists but is never translated into a seat in Parliament.

The same pattern applies to voters who support smaller parties across the country. Even when those parties receive a meaningful share of the national vote, their support may be too dispersed to produce victories in individual ridings. As a result, their presence in Parliament remains limited, or in some cases absent.

In each of these cases, the vote is real, but the representation isn't.

Over time, that creates a pattern.

Some voters come to expect that their participation won't affect the outcome. Others begin to adjust how they vote, shifting their support toward candidates they believe are more likely to win.

This is often described as strategic voting, but it reflects something deeper.

It's an adaptation to the system itself.

Instead of expressing what they believe, voters begin to anticipate how others will vote and position themselves accordingly. Voting becomes less about preference and more about prediction.

For some, that leads to disengagement. If the outcome feels predetermined, participation can start to feel symbolic rather than meaningful.

For others, it leads to compromise. Views are set aside in favour of choices that feel more viable, even if they're less representative.

In both cases, the connection between the voter and the outcome becomes weaker. And when that connection weakens, confidence in the system starts to weaken with it.

A democratic system depends not only on participation, but on the belief that participation has an effect.

When large numbers of voters can't see themselves reflected in the results, that belief becomes harder to sustain.

Over time, this produces more than frustration—it creates expectation. Voters begin to assume that their role is to take part, but not to influence.

A democratic system can't rely on participation alone. It depends on the sense that participation leads somewhere—that a vote contributes to a result.

When that connection is weakened, even partially, the system continues to function, but it does so with diminishing confidence.

Artificial Majorities

In a representative democracy, there's a general expectation that governments reflect the will of the majority.

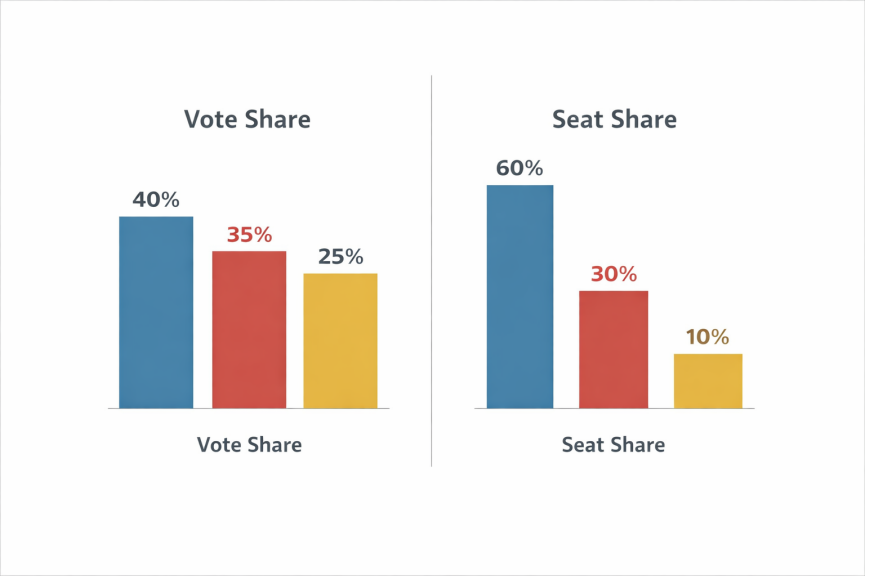
The assumption is simple: if a party forms government, it does so because it has earned the support of most voters.

Under Canada's current system, that isn't always the case.

A party can win a majority of seats without receiving a majority of the vote. In some cases, governments are formed with support from little more than one-third of voters, yet exercise authority as though they represent a broad consensus.

This isn't unusual. It's a recurring feature of the system.

Because elections are decided riding by riding, what matters isn't the total level of national support but how that



A candidate can be elected without majority support from voters in their riding.

support is distributed. A party whose vote is efficiently concentrated can secure a disproportionate number of seats, even if most voters chose other options.

The result is what can be described as an artificial majority–a majority of seats, but not a majority of voters.

That distinction matters.

A government formed under these conditions can act with the full authority of a parliamentary majority. It can pass legislation, set national direction, and exercise executive power with relatively few constraints.

Yet that authority may rest on a level of public support that's far from universal.

This creates a disconnect between power and representation.

Policies can be implemented with significant national impact, even when most voters supported alternatives. Over time, this can lead to sharp shifts in direction as governments change, without ever reflecting a broad consensus.

It can also reinforce the sense that the system doesn't reflect the electorate—particularly when decisive governments emerge from divided outcomes.

The issue isn't only that votes don't translate proportionally into seats.

It's that the system can amplify a plurality into something that appears to be consensus.

The National Consequences

Taken on their own, each of these effects might seem manageable.

There's the mismatch between votes and seats, regions that look more uniform than they really are, voters who don't see themselves reflected, and governments formed without majority support. None of those, on their own, necessarily feels decisive.

But taken together, they start to shape something larger. They affect how Canadians experience their democracy.

Over time, that experience begins to shift expectations as well as outcomes.

When participation doesn't seem to connect to results, engagement can start to decline. Voting feels less like a way

to influence what happens and more like something people do out of habit or obligation.

At the same time, perceptions of regional difference can deepen. When electoral maps repeatedly present provinces as politically uniform, it becomes easier to see those regions as fundamentally different from one another, even when there's more overlap than the results suggest.

That sense of distance can grow.

Political discussion can become more polarized, not necessarily because Canadians themselves are more divided, but because the system presents their differences in sharper, more simplified terms. With fewer ways for more nuanced views to show up, positions tend to cluster into opposing sides.

In that kind of environment, compromise becomes harder.

Governments formed without broad support may move in narrower directions, while opposition becomes more concentrated. Power shifts back and forth, but the underlying divisions don't really get resolved.

Over time, confidence in the system can start to wear down.

A democratic system depends not just on how it's structured but on whether people believe it produces outcomes that are fair and representative. When that belief weakens, the connection between citizens and the institutions that govern them weakens with it.

That change doesn't happen all at once. It builds gradually, through repeated experiences that don't line up with what people expect.

And eventually it raises a straightforward question: if the system keeps producing results that don't reflect the country as it is, what would it look like to have one that does?

Chapter 3

A Better Way Exists

There is nothing inevitable about the outcomes Canada produces.

The patterns described in the previous chapter—the mismatch between votes and seats, the appearance of regional uniformity, the pressure toward limited choices, and the formation of governments without majority support—aren't fixed features of democracy itself.

They're features of a particular system.

Other democratic countries, facing similar challenges of diversity, regional difference, and political complexity, have taken different approaches.

These systems begin from a simple premise: the composition of a legislature should reflect, as closely as possible, how people actually vote.

This idea isn't theoretical, and it isn't new or untested. It's already in practice.

In several countries, electoral systems have been designed to balance two objectives that are often treated as competing: maintaining local representation while ensuring that overall results reflect voter preferences.

The details vary, but the underlying principle is consistent.

Votes aren't treated as isolated, winner-take-all contests. They're understood as part of a broader national picture—one that should be reflected in the final composition of the legislature.

In this model, representation isn't determined solely by who comes first in individual districts. It's adjusted so that the overall result aligns more closely with the distribution of public support.

The effect is a system that preserves the local connection between voters and representatives while recognizing that a democratic outcome should reflect more than a series of individual victories. It should reflect the country as a whole.

For countries with diverse populations and multiple political perspectives, this approach has proven both stable and effective.

It doesn't eliminate disagreement or remove political competition. It changes how that competition is expressed and how its outcomes are translated into power.

Instead of compressing a wide range of views into a limited set of outcomes, it allows those views to be represented more directly.

The result is a legislature that more closely resembles the society it serves.

For a country like Canada—defined by regional diversity, varied political perspectives, and a long-standing effort to balance competing interests—this approach isn't unfamiliar. In many ways, it reflects the same principles that have shaped the country itself.

The Simple Idea Behind Fair Representation

A more representative system comes down to a simple idea: the share of seats in Parliament should reflect the share of votes people actually cast.

If a party receives a certain percentage of the vote, it should end up with a comparable share of representation.

That's what's meant by proportional representation.

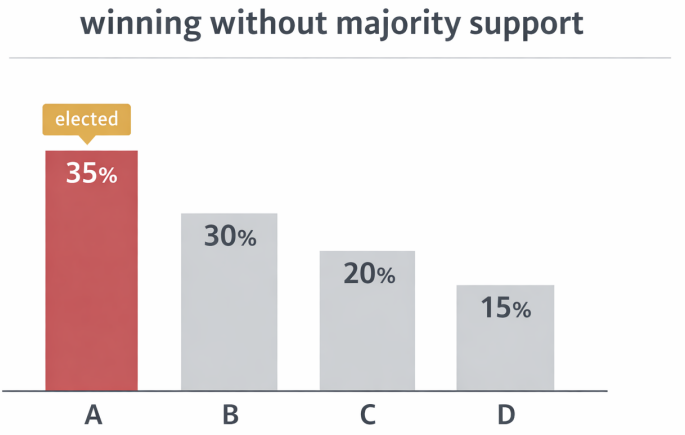
In practice, it doesn't require getting rid of what already works in Canada. Local representation stays in place, and voters still elect a Member of Parliament for their community. That connection remains a central part of how people engage with the system.

What changes is how the overall result is put together.

Each voter has two choices—one for a local candidate in their riding, and one for a political party that reflects their broader view of how the country should be governed. The local vote decides who represents the riding, while the party vote determines how seats are distributed overall.

When the final composition of Parliament is calculated, it's adjusted so that each party's representation reflects the level of support it received.

That allows the system to hold on to local accountability while making the overall outcome line up more closely with how people voted. Elections still work the way people expect. Parties campaign, candidates compete, and voters choose. What's different is how the result is understood. It's



The difference between vote share and seat share under the current system.

not just about who comes first in each riding. It's about how the country voted as a whole and making sure that's reflected in Parliament.

There's also a change that shows up more in experience than in structure.

In this kind of system, a vote doesn't disappear just because it didn't win locally. Even if a preferred candidate doesn't come first in a riding, that vote still contributes to the overall balance of representation. That makes participation feel more consistent.

Instead of being counted and then set aside, a vote carries through into the outcome in a way people can see. It might seem like a small shift, but it changes how people

relate to the system. The connection between how someone votes and what they see in Parliament becomes clearer, and over time that affects how people choose to participate.

Voting becomes less about trying to predict the result or settling for the closest viable option, and more about expressing what someone actually believes, knowing it will still have an effect.

For voters, the change isn't about complexity. It's about clarity. Instead of being limited to a single choice that has to do everything, they can express both a local preference and a broader political view. And when those choices are reflected more directly in the outcome, it becomes easier to see how participation connects to representation.

Where This Works

The idea of balancing local representation with proportional outcomes isn't new. It has been adopted and refined in countries facing many of the same challenges as Canada—diverse populations, regional differences, and evolving political landscapes.

The outcomes aren't marked by instability but by consistency.

Germany: Stability Through Cooperation

In the aftermath of the Second World War, Germany had to rebuild not just its economy, but its political system.

There was a broad understanding that whatever replaced it needed to reflect the full range of public support without concentrating power in a way that could create instability again.

The system that emerged was a mixed-member proportional model, designed to keep local representation while making the overall result more balanced.

Over time, that's led to governments that are usually formed through cooperation between parties.

Coalition governments are often described as unstable, but that hasn't really been the German experience. Agreements tend to be worked out in advance, often in detail, and they provide a clear foundation for governing.

What that produces isn't constant friction but a different kind of stability—one that comes from shared responsibility rather than one party holding all the authority.

Even without a single party dominating, the system has remained consistent, and working across parties has simply become part of how government operates.

New Zealand: A Deliberate Shift

New Zealand is a useful comparison because its starting point looked a lot like Canada's.

For most of its history, it used a similar system and saw many of the same outcomes—disproportionate results, majority governments without majority support, and a growing sense of frustration with how votes were being translated into seats.

Over time, that frustration built into a broader conversation about whether the system still made sense, and by the late twentieth century it led to a referendum and a shift to a mixed-member proportional model.

The change didn't happen all at once, but the direction became clear fairly quickly. Parliament began to reflect a wider range of political perspectives, and people could see more directly how their vote connected to the final result.

With that, trust in the process started to improve.

It didn't lead to instability. What it did was change how stability was produced, with more of it coming from negotiation and shared responsibility rather than one party holding all the power.

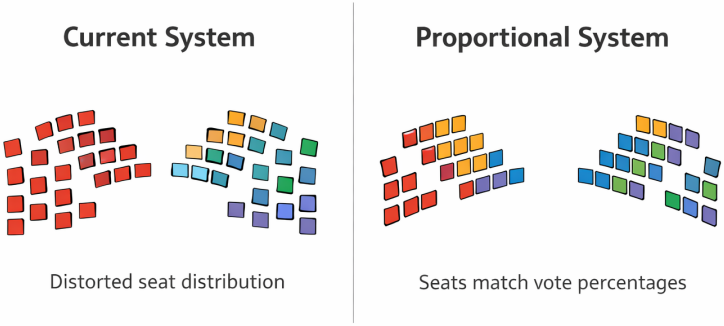
At a basic level, it re-established something simple: when people voted, their choice showed up in the outcome in a way they could recognize.

Scotland – Balance Within a Complex System

Scotland provides another example of how proportional principles can be applied within a parliamentary framework.

Using a similar structure, Scotland combines local representation with regional adjustments that ensure broader proportionality. The result is a Parliament that reflects both geographic and political diversity while continuing to function within a familiar system.

Debate remains active, political competition remains strong, and the outcomes more closely align with how voters cast their ballots.



A comparison of outcomes between the current system and a proportional model.

A Consistent Pattern

Across these examples, the details differ. The systems aren't identical, and the political contexts vary, but the overall pattern is still easy to recognize.

Representation tends to align more closely with how people actually vote, multiple perspectives are present within the legislature, and governments are formed through cooperation rather than one party dominating it.

What stands out over time is that these systems remain stable, and that participation connects to representation in a way people can see and understand.

This isn't theoretical. These are established outcomes that have been observed in practice.

What This Means for Canada

For a country like Canada, these examples aren't distant or incompatible—they're instructive.

Canada shares many of the same characteristics: regional diversity, a range of political perspectives, and a long-standing commitment to democratic governance within a parliamentary framework.

The question isn't whether such a system could work in Canada. It's whether Canada is prepared to adopt a system that more closely reflects the country it has become and

ensures that how Canadians vote is consistently reflected in how Canada is governed.

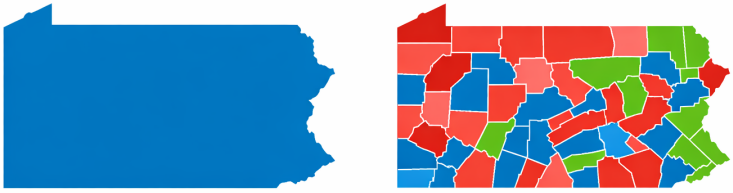
Chapter 4

What This Changes in Canada

The discussion of electoral systems can often feel abstract.
Different models, different countries, different outcomes.
For Canada, though, the question is more direct:
what would change if representation more closely reflected how Canadians actually vote?
The answer is not a single outcome but a series of shifts—some structural, others cultural—that would reshape how Canadians experience their democracy.

Rebalancing the Federation

Canada is a country defined by its regions.
From the Atlantic provinces to the Prairies, from Quebec to British Columbia, each part of the country brings its own economic realities, political priorities, and historical experiences.
These differences are not a weakness.
They are part of what defines Canada.



Election results can make regions appear more uniform than they are.

Under the current system, however, those differences are often exaggerated in ways that do not fully reflect how people within those regions actually think.

Entire provinces can appear politically uniform, even when a significant share of voters supported different parties. Over time, this can contribute to a sense that certain regions are consistently unheard or misrepresented at the national level.

A more proportional system would not eliminate regional differences.

It would change how they are reflected.

In regions where one party currently dominates, other perspectives would still be present in Parliament. Voters

who support different parties would be represented, even if they are not in the local majority.

This makes visible what already exists: no region is politically uniform.

Western Canada, often described as politically aligned in a single direction, contains a range of views that are not always reflected in Parliament. A more proportional system would bring those perspectives into the national conversation.

The same is true elsewhere. In Ontario and Quebec, where electoral outcomes can heavily influence national results, a more balanced system would reduce the extent to which any single region determines the overall composition of government.

This would not diminish regional influence. It would distribute representation more accurately across each region.

Ending the Feeling of Being Ignored

For many Canadians, the issue isn't only how governments are formed; it's whether they feel seen within the system.

When people keep voting and nothing changes in terms of representation, the experience starts to feel predictable. The outcome feels known in advance, and over time voting can feel disconnected from the result itself.

That's where the sense of being outside the system starts to come from.

A more proportional approach wouldn't guarantee that every voter's preferred candidate is elected, but it would make it much more likely that their broader political preference is reflected in Parliament, and that shift makes a difference.

Representation isn't just about outcomes. It's about inclusion—whether people can see their perspectives present in the institutions making decisions.

When that connection is there, participation starts to feel more meaningful again.

People aren't just casting a ballot out of habit. They can see that it carries through, even if it doesn't decide the local result.

That changes how voting is experienced.

It stops being about trying to predict what will happen or settling for the closest viable option and becomes a way of expressing what someone actually believes, with a clearer sense that it will matter in the final outcome.

A Broader Range of Voices

Canada's political landscape isn't limited to two dominant perspectives.

There are multiple parties, each representing different priorities and ways of looking at the country's needs, but under the current system a lot of those perspectives struggle to gain representation unless their support is concentrated in specific regions.

A more proportional system changes that by allowing a broader range of voices to show up in Parliament in a way that actually reflects their level of support.

That doesn't fragment the system. It makes it more recognizable.

Parties with meaningful public support would have a presence that reflects it, their ideas would be part of the debate, and their voters would be able to see themselves in the outcome instead of sitting outside of it.

That lines up more closely with how Canada actually is.

It's a country with a wide range of perspectives, so its institutions should reflect that range instead of compressing it into a narrower set of outcomes.

What matters isn't simply adding more voices for the sake of it, but making sure that when Canadians vote, those perspectives are present where decisions are made.

Once that becomes visible, participation starts to reinforce itself. People don't just vote out of habit or obligation—they engage because they can see where they fit in the result.

Governing Through Cooperation

One of the most significant changes wouldn't be in who is represented, but in how decisions are made.

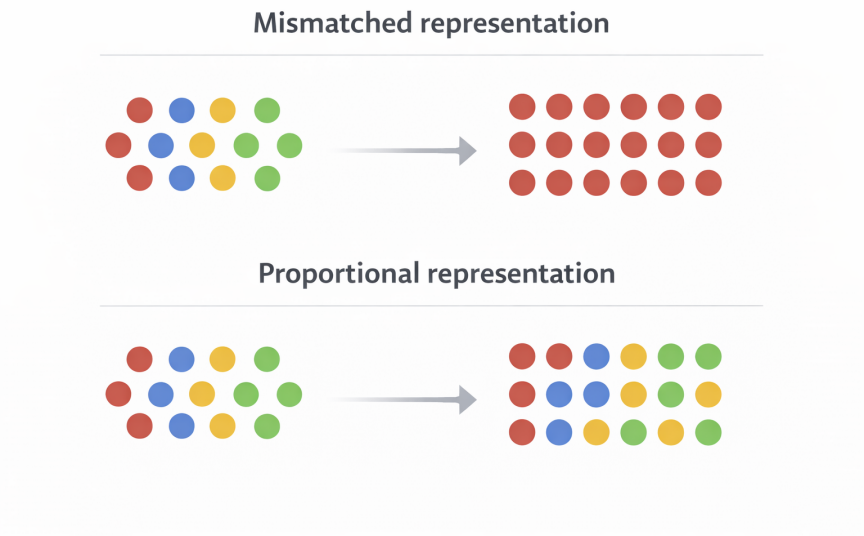
A more proportional Parliament is less likely to produce single-party majority governments without majority

support and more likely to produce governments that have to work across parties.

That's often described as coalition or minority governance, but in practice it simply means decisions are made with input from a broader range of perspectives.

Policies are negotiated, compromises become part of how things get done, and the results tend to reflect a wider base of support.

Disagreement doesn't disappear, but it's handled differently. Instead of being overridden by a single party with concentrated authority, it becomes part of the governing process itself.



Representation can either distort or reflect the diversity of voter preferences.

In that sense, cooperation isn't a constraint. It reflects how the country already operates.

A System That Reflects the Country

The cumulative effect of these changes isn't disruption; it's alignment.

You end up with a Parliament that reflects the range of political perspectives that already exist, a system that narrows the gap between votes and representation, and a political culture that puts more emphasis on cooperation than dominance.

It also creates something more consistent for voters. Participation leads to representation in a way people can actually see, where votes don't just get counted and set aside but carry through into the outcome.

For Canada, that isn't a departure from its identity. It's an extension of it.

Chapter 5

Addressing Common Concerns

Any proposal to change how a country elects its government will raise questions.

That's expected, and it should happen.

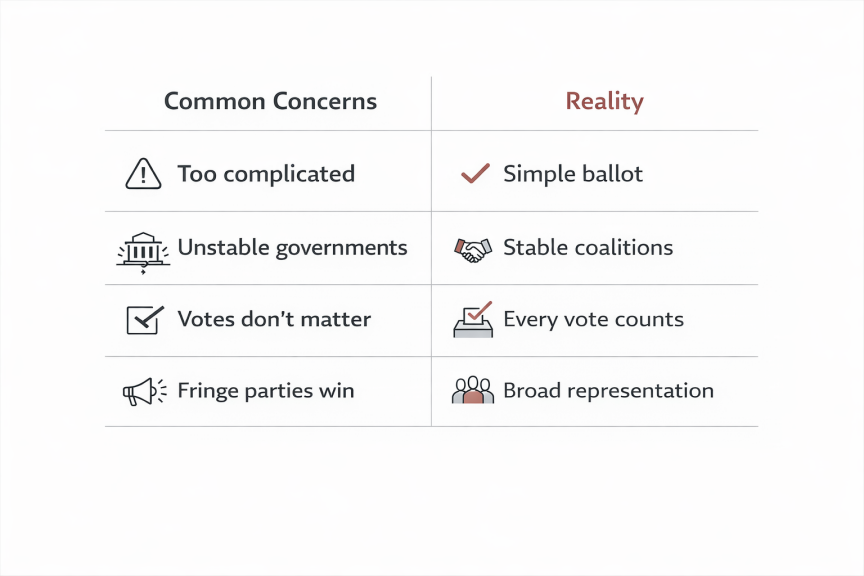
Electoral systems shape how power is distributed, how decisions are made, and how people relate to their institutions. Changing something that foundational requires careful attention, not just to what it might improve, but to what risks it could introduce.

The concerns that come up around more proportional systems tend to follow a familiar pattern, and they're worth working through directly.

"Coalition Governments Are Unstable"

A common concern is that a more proportional system would lead to unstable governments.

The assumption is that if no single party holds a majority, the need to cooperate will produce fragile arrangements that don't last.



Common concerns about electoral reform compared with likely outcomes.

In practice, that isn't how these systems tend to function.

In countries that use proportional representation, coalition governments are a normal part of the process. Agreements between parties are worked out in advance, often in detail, and provide a clear basis for governing.

That process requires compromise, but it also creates continuity, with decisions supported by more than one perspective and often holding up better over time.

What changes isn't whether negotiation happens, but how it's built into the system. Stability comes from having a structure that can absorb disagreement without breaking down.

“The System Is Too Complex”

Another concern is that a more proportional system would be difficult for voters to understand.

That concern usually reflects how the system works behind the scenes rather than what the voter actually experiences.

From the voter’s perspective, the process remains simple. There are two choices: one for a local representative and one for a political party.

People adapt to that quickly, and in countries that use similar systems, participation remains strong while the process becomes familiar over time.

Complexity exists in any system of governance, but the question is where it sits.

In this case, it sits within the system itself, not at the ballot.

What matters to voters is whether their vote contributes to something they can see, whether their choice is reflected, and whether participation leads to a result that makes sense.

Those aren’t technical questions. They’re practical ones.

“Local Representation Will Be Lost”

There is also concern that adding a proportional element would weaken the connection between voters and their local representatives.

That concern reflects something real. The local relationship matters.

In a mixed-member system, it isn't removed. Voters still elect a Member of Parliament for their riding, constituency offices remain, and local issues are still represented.

What changes is that this local representation is no longer the only layer.

In some cases, voters would have access to more than one representative: a local MP and others who reflect their broader political preference.

Instead of reducing representation, the system adds to it.

"Small Parties Will Have Too Much Power"

Another concern is that smaller parties could gain disproportionate influence in a system that depends on cooperation.

That risk is addressed through how the system is structured.

Most proportional systems include a threshold, a minimum level of support required before a party gains representation, which ensures that only parties with meaningful backing are included.

Within that framework, smaller parties can play a role, but they do so alongside others. Decisions depend on

agreement across multiple groups rather than the leverage of a single actor.

What changes is the distribution of influence, not the presence of limits.

Power is shared more broadly instead of concentrated.

A Different Kind of Stability

Underlying many of these concerns is a more basic question about what stability actually means.

In the current system, stability is often associated with single-party majority governments, where authority is clear and decisions can be made without negotiation.

A more proportional system works differently.

It relies more on agreement between parties, which can involve more discussion and more negotiation, but the outcomes tend to reflect a wider base of support.

That creates a different kind of stability–less about control and more about alignment with how people have voted.

When outcomes reflect participation more closely, they're often easier for people to accept, even when they don't fully agree with them.

Moving from Assumption to Experience

For countries that have adopted more proportional systems, these concerns weren't theoretical.

They were debated, tested, and worked through in practice.

Over time, the results have become clear. These systems can function effectively, remain stable, and produce outcomes that reflect voter support more accurately.

For Canada, the question isn't whether concerns exist.

It's whether those concerns match how these systems actually operate and whether a system in which votes continue to matter beyond a single local result better reflects what Canadians expect from their democracy.

Chapter 6

Governing in a Crisis

One of the most important questions in any system of government is how it responds in moments of crisis.

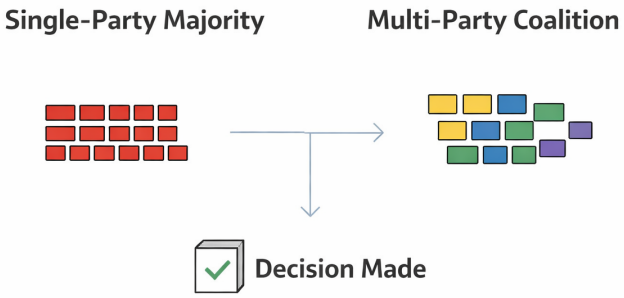
Economic shocks, public health emergencies, natural disasters, and national security threats all require timely and decisive action. In those situations, speed isn't optional –it's necessary.

That leads to a reasonable concern. If a system places more emphasis on cooperation and shared decision-making, does that come at the cost of responsiveness when urgency matters most?

In practice, it doesn't have to. The ability to act quickly isn't determined by how representative a system is, but by how authority is structured within it.

The Need for Immediate Action

In a crisis, governments have to act before every step can be debated. Conditions change quickly, information is incomplete, and decisions often have to be made in real time.



Different government structures can both produce decisive action.

Canada's current system already accounts for this through executive authority, which allows governments to respond immediately when needed.

That doesn't change under a more proportional model. The government would still be able to act through the executive, just as it does now, and the difference isn't in the initial response so much as in what happens afterward.

The Role of Parliamentary Review

Acting quickly doesn't remove the need for accountability.

Measures introduced in a crisis would still be brought before Parliament within a defined period, where they could be examined, debated, and either maintained or withdrawn, with that review reflecting a broader range of voices within the system.

The point isn't to slow decisions down, but to make sure they don't remain in place without scrutiny.

Time-Limited Authority

Emergency powers are meant to be temporary. They exist to deal with specific circumstances, not to extend beyond them.

Under this approach, those measures would carry clear limits and would expire unless Parliament chose to renew them, keeping authority tied to ongoing support rather than allowing it to continue automatically.

That creates a natural boundary. Governments can act when necessary, but they can't extend those powers indefinitely without review.

Transparency and Public Confidence

In a crisis, public trust becomes more fragile and more important at the same time.

Decisions that affect people's daily lives—how they work, move, or access services—need to be understood as well as implemented.

When governments act, explain those actions, and then bring them before Parliament for review, the process becomes visible. People can see not only what is being done, but how those decisions are being evaluated.

That visibility matters, because it helps maintain confidence at the point where it's most likely to erode.

Balancing Speed and Responsibility

The idea that governments must choose between acting quickly and being accountable doesn't really hold up.

Both can exist within the same system.

Immediate action can take place when it's needed, while review follows once there's time to examine those decisions properly, and what matters most is that each part of the process has a clear role.

A System Designed for Both Stability and Action

For Canada, the goal isn't to trade one for the other but to make sure responsiveness and accountability work together.

A more representative electoral system doesn't prevent governments from acting in a crisis. It ensures that those actions are examined within a broader and more representative Parliament.

That doesn't slow the system down. It grounds it, and in moments when governments are exercising their greatest authority, that grounding becomes especially important.

Chapter 7

The Path Forward

Recognizing the limitations of the current system is only the first step.

The more difficult question is how to move from understanding the problem to actually implementing a solution.

Electoral reform isn't simply a technical adjustment. It's a structural change that affects how governments are formed, how representation is distributed, and how people engage with the democratic process. Because of that, it has to be approached carefully, deliberately, and in a way that maintains public confidence.

A Measured Transition

Change of this nature doesn't happen overnight.

Moving to a more representative electoral system would require a defined implementation period, long enough to allow for preparation, public education, and institutional adjustment.

That means establishing the structure of the new system, defining electoral boundaries where needed, preparing the

administrative side to manage the process, and making sure voters understand how to participate.

None of this is unusual, but it does take time.

Allowing for roughly one electoral cycle provides the space needed to complete that transition without disruption.

The Role of Public Understanding

For any reform to succeed, it has to be understood. Voters need to know not just that change is happening but what it means for them in practice.

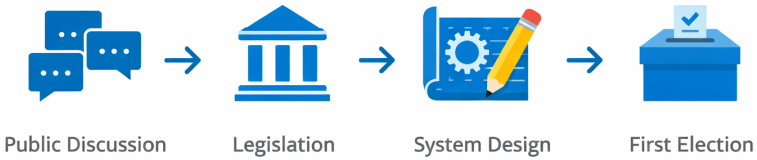
That requires a clear and sustained effort to explain the system in straightforward terms, to communicate why the change is being made, and to address questions as they come up. The goal isn't to persuade through complexity. It's to build confidence through clarity.

Legitimacy Through Process

How the change happens matters just as much as the change itself.

Electoral reform has to be grounded in legitimacy. That can come through a transparent legislative process, public consultation, or, where appropriate, a direct vote.

Different approaches are possible, but the principle stays the same.



A possible phased approach to transitioning to a new electoral system.

If the goal is to strengthen democratic representation, the process used to introduce it should reflect that same standard. It has to be open enough for people to follow and fair enough that the outcome is accepted, even by those who may not agree with it.

Designing the System for Canada

The general principles behind proportional systems are well established, but the details have to fit Canada.

That means maintaining local representation through constituencies while adding a proportional layer that reflects broader support. It also means setting thresholds so that representation reflects meaningful levels of support and making sure the system works across a country with large geographic and regional differences.

There's no need to copy another country exactly.

The system can be designed to reflect Canada's own structure, values, and political culture.

Institutional Readiness

Canada isn't starting from scratch.

The institutions needed to support a change like this are already in place. Elections Canada has the capacity to manage complex electoral processes, parliamentary procedures are well established, and the broader framework of governance remains stable.

A new electoral system would build on that foundation, not replace it.

The Westminster model stays intact. What changes is how representation is translated into seats.

A Gradual Shift in Political Culture

The technical side is only part of the change.

Over time, political behaviour would shift as well. Parties would adapt to a system where broader representation matters, campaign strategies would evolve, and voters would gradually move away from strategic calculation toward expressing what they actually believe.

This wouldn't happen immediately, but it wouldn't be unpredictable either.

As people begin to see their choices reflected more accurately in outcomes, expectations change. Participation starts to feel more direct, and political engagement becomes less about working around the system and more about using it.

From Possibility to Reality

None of this happens without effort.

Change at this scale requires leadership, coordination, and public trust, and it takes time to move from discussion to implementation in a way that people understand and accept.

At the same time, it isn't uncharted territory. Other countries have made similar transitions, and the principles and mechanisms involved are already well understood.

For Canada, the question is no longer whether reform is possible. It comes down to whether there is a willingness to move forward and to follow through on a process that can carry it from idea into reality.

Chapter 8

The Canada We Can Reflect

Canada has never been a finished project.

From the beginning, it's been shaped through negotiation and adjustment, with different regions and communities finding ways to coexist within the same structure. That's always been the country's defining trait. It isn't uniform, and it never has been.

Over time, that way of holding things together has shaped what people expect from the system itself.

Canadians don't expect perfect alignment, but they do expect to recognize themselves in how the country is governed. They expect differences to exist without turning into hard divisions, and they expect disagreement to be part of the system, not something that breaks it.

What's changed is the gap between those expectations and how the system actually behaves.

The country has moved. It's more diverse, more regionally distinct, and less politically predictable than it used to be. The system that translates those differences into representation hasn't changed in the same way, and that's where the tension comes from.

It doesn't show up all at once. It builds gradually.

You see it in the difference between how people vote and what Parliament ends up looking like and in how complex

the country is compared to how simple the outcomes often appear. And you see it in the disconnect between what people think their vote should do and what it actually does. That isn't a failure of the system as it was originally designed. It's what happens when the country evolves and the system doesn't keep pace.

So the question isn't whether the system worked at one point. It did.

The question is whether it still reflects the country as it is now.

A more representative system doesn't replace what's already there. It builds on it, so Parliament stays, local representation stays, and the basic structure of government doesn't change.

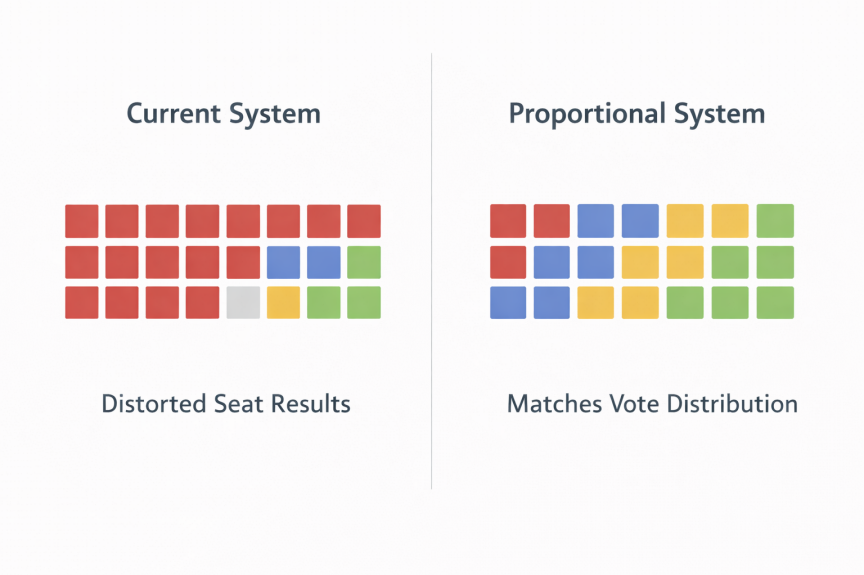
What does change is how votes actually move through the system and show up in the result. When that starts to line up more closely with how people voted, Parliament stops looking like a simplified version of the country and starts to resemble it more closely.

That doesn't create division. Those differences are already there. The difference is that they're visible, and they're present where decisions are made.

Canada has never moved in a single direction. It's always been a mix of perspectives, and the question is whether those perspectives actually show up in Parliament or get filtered out along the way.

When people can see where they fit in the outcome, even if they don't agree with everything, the system starts to feel more recognizable to them.

At the centre of this is a pretty basic expectation. When someone votes, that choice should carry through in a way



Comparing how different systems translate votes into representation.

they can see. It shouldn't disappear just because it didn't decide the local result.

If that connection isn't there, voting starts to feel disconnected from the outcome. When it is there, even imperfectly, it gives the whole process its meaning back.

No system is going to line everything up perfectly, and that's not really the point. What matters is getting closer to something where participation consistently leads somewhere, where differences aren't stripped out, and where the result actually reflects how people voted.

For Canada, that isn't a break from how the country has developed. It's the same pattern; adjusting institutions as

the country changes and making sure they still match the people they're supposed to represent.

The path forward isn't complicated. It comes down to having a system that reflects the country as it is, a Parliament that looks more like the range of views within it, and a democracy where taking part actually carries through to the result.

Canada doesn't need to become something different.

It needs a system that reflects what it already is.

Epilogue

What Comes Next

By the time you reach this point, the structure of the system, its effects, and its limitations have all been laid out. The case for reconsidering how representation works in Canada has been made as clearly as possible. What matters now is not the argument itself, but what happens with it.

This isn't an abstract issue. The way we translate votes into representation shapes every decision that follows. It influences who holds power, how broadly that power reflects the country, and how people see their role within the process. When that connection is strong, participation feels meaningful. When it weakens, even slightly, the effects tend to build over time.

Canada is not facing a democratic crisis. Our institutions remain stable, elections are conducted fairly, and governments continue to change through established processes. That foundation is important, and it should not be taken for granted. At the same time, stability on its own does not guarantee that a system is keeping pace with the country it serves.

The system we use today was designed in a different context. It continues to function, but it does not always reflect the range of perspectives that exist across the country as clearly as it could. That gap is not the result of

failure so much as age. Like any long-standing structure, it carries assumptions that no longer fully match present realities.

Whether that gap is worth addressing is ultimately a public question. Electoral reform is not something that can or should be imposed quickly. It requires understanding, discussion, and a willingness to look past short-term advantage. Disagreement is part of that process, and it should be expected.

What has been missing at times is not debate, but continuity. The issue surfaces, fades, and then returns again without much progress in between. Treating it as a recurring topic rather than an ongoing conversation makes it easier to set aside. But the system itself does not pause. It continues to shape outcomes in the background, regardless of whether attention is focused on it.

If there is a path forward, it begins with recognizing that the system is not fixed. It was designed at a particular moment, and it can be reconsidered in another. That does not require rejecting what exists, only being willing to examine whether it still fits as well as it once did.

The purpose of this book has been to make that examination easier to approach. Not to prescribe a single answer, but to clarify the question. If enough people come to see the same gap, and decide it is worth closing, then change becomes possible in a way that is measured and deliberate.

In the end, the goal is straightforward. When Canadians take part in an election, the result should reflect the country in a way that feels accurate and complete. It does

not need to be perfect, but it should be close enough that people can recognize their place within it.

That is a standard that can be worked toward. Whether it is reached will depend on what happens next.