

Proportional Representation through Fractional Voting Power of Representatives

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Abstract

A new electoral system, in which the winning candidates receive the fractional voting powers equal to the share of electorates supporting their party, is presented within the Canadian context. With a minor increase in the number of elected representatives, the proposed system guarantees perfect proportionality, preserves local constituency representation, respects every single cast ballot, suppresses strategic voting, political regionalism, and possibility of gerrymandering, without the need for any change in the voting process. Every single valid vote cast in the election to any party or candidate influences the outcome of the election in this system. The details of the proposed electoral system are discussed, and its unique characteristics are explored. Possible variations of the proposed system are also presented. The notion of governing instability resulted from proportionality is specifically discussed in the Canadian context. The 2021 Canadian federal election is analysed in detail applying the proposed system.

Keywords

Proportional representation, electoral system, electoral reform, governing instability, fractional voting power

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1. Introduction

The democratic challenges and shortcomings resulted from the current Canadian electoral system, i.e., plurality or First-Past-The-Post (FPTP), in which the candidate receiving the highest number of votes in a riding wins the seat, are well demonstrated and analysed in the related abundant literature (e.g., Fadakar 2014; Glashan 1951; Harrison 2008; Leonen 1997; Milner 1999, 2004; Phillips 1976; Pilon 2005; Ring 2014); these studies confirm that majority of the votes are wasted, and, political, racial, ethnic, and religious minorities and women are under-represented. Also, emerging and small parties face significant obstacles, political regionalism and demographic divisions are encouraged, and voter turnout is declined.

The deficiencies of FPTP system have long been known and alternative methods have been proposed, ironically even before the creation of House of Commons of Canada. Thomas Hare's 1857 proposal for electoral reform of British Parliamentary elections, supported by John Stuart Mill, was believed to ameliorate democratic values through proportional representation (Harrison 2008): "In a really equal democracy," Mill stated, "every or any section would be represented, not disproportionality, but proportionately". In FPTP-like systems, he added, "there is not equal government, but a government of inequality and privilege" (Glashan 1951).

The debates on shifting from FPTP system to proportional representation (PR) in Canadian House of Commons go back to 1877 (Glashan 1951), and various municipalities and west provinces have examined some type of proportional representation, mainly in the first half of twentieth century, only to be rejected after limited trials. The call for electoral reform is, however, still fervently supported; Liberal, NDP, and Green parties all campaigned against FPTP in the last Ontario provincial election (Thompson 2022). Likewise, a strong majority of

Canadian electorates have expressed their support for electoral reform in numerous polls (Ring 2014). However, *le bon Dieu est dans le detail!*

Surveying the literature, the electoral reform seems to face three types of obstacles: political barrier, PR drawbacks, and FPTP benefits. These three obstacles are briefly reviewed in the following. A new electoral system, based on fractional voting power of representatives, is then introduced; keeping the benefits of both PR and FPTP, this system brings unique qualities, not obtainable by any other electoral system, which are discussed. As a concrete contextual example, the 2021 Canadian federal election is analysed using the proposed electoral system. The notion of minority government and governing instability in any proportional representation system is specifically discussed in Canadian context.

2. Electoral reform obstacles

2.1 Political barrier

It has been discussed in the literature that previous attempts towards electoral reform were mainly motivated by political pragmatism; the parties essentially advertise and implement electoral reforms, if they merely help maximize their seat counts (Harrison 2008). The first major discussion in twentieth century on electoral reform was initiated by Quebec conservative representative, Frederick Monk, as a means towards equality of representation. In Manitoba, proportional representation was introduced in twenties to control the social unrest (Glashan 1951, Harrison 2008). FPTP was, basically, weakening the non-socialist parties against the emerging left-wing parties. Alternative voting was adopted in 1952 provincial election in British Columbia by Liberals and Conservatives to keep CCF away from power (Harrison 2008). Along with political parties, the media were also not neutral in discussing the costs and benefits of electoral systems (Fenlon 2007, Fadakar 2014, Glashan 1951, Harrison 2008).

In essence, parties in power are normally not interested to change the electoral system unless they believe it will improve their seat share in the next election. The survey of politicians has also shown that winners of previous elections are more hesitant to electoral reforms than the losing candidates (Bowler et al. 2006). Both Canadian prime ministers during the last two decades, Stephen Harper and Justin Trudeau, were strong proponents of proportional representation before their premierships (Harper and Flanagan 1996, Trudeau 2013), yet no meaningful step towards electoral reform in federal level has been proposed while taking office. Ironically, Harper's party was directly affected from FPTP deficiencies in the following elections, and, most probably, similar outcome is waiting for Trudeau's party in the upcoming elections.

As a political problem, this obstacle needs a political solution through grassroots activism and political pressure by minority and small parties. It is obviously outside and beyond the scope of this paper; thus, it will not be considered further in the following.

2.2 PR drawbacks

The criticisms of PR nearly started with Hare's proposal itself. Bagehot (1867) stated that PR system leads to anarchy. While Bagehot's critiques were mainly resolved through later modifications of Hare's proposal (Glashan 1951), it is certainly true that PR system increases the chance for coalition and minority governments, as it has been the case in countries employing such electoral systems (Fadakar 2014). This point will be further discussed in the Canadian context in Section 5.

The Conservatives, back in 1920s, found PR system "un-British" (Glashan 1951, Harrison 2008). In 2004, the Law Commission of Canada opined that (at least list-PR) is "a significant departure from our Parliamentary tradition" (Ring 2014). It has been claimed that PR system diminishes clear accountability, shifts a significant part of power to party leaders (Fadakar

2014), and makes it impossible to represent one's constituents; the constituencies become too large and the cost of campaigning too great. It is specifically not suitable for Canada since it is a large, too sparsely populated country (Glashan 1951). The cases of by-elections and absentee votes also need specific considerations (Harrison 2008).

Some of these concerns are more specifically related to certain PR systems and are not accurate for other PR types. Clearly, various modifications have also been presented to rectify these concerns (e.g., Antweiler 2019, Fadakar 2014, Ring 2014). On the other hand, more detailed issues have been reported for particular PR systems.

Mixed-member PR, in which the proportionality is obtained by adding extra representatives from party lists to the already-elected candidates from single-member districts, distinctively increases the power of party leaders in arranging the party lists and also through dual candidacy; it is a relatively complicated system, as Fadakar (2014) confirms, whilst is prone to logistical problems due to large size of the ballots required, according to Ring (2014); and it has an inherent loophole which, if employed strategically, could lead to over-representation of the parties (Ring 2014).

Single-Transferrable vote, in which the voters rank the candidates based on their preferences, is particularly prone to technical issues. It has a complicated counting system, leading to a significant increase in the number of invalid votes, and a lengthy vote counting process. Interestingly, this system is quasi-chaotic (Dummett 1997), which brings an element of chance into the counting process. It also lacks monotonicity, meaning that, at least theoretically, a candidate could lose the election by getting more votes (Fadakar 2014, Ring 2014). NO-STV campaign in British Columbia summarized this system as "STV is complicated, confusing, prone to errors and delay, it reduces local accountability, increases the size of ridings, ... increases party control and allows special interests to dominate party

nominations” (Ring 2014). It has also been historically criticized by politicians and the mainstream media of only being a waste of time compared to FPTP system (Glashan 1951).

Alternative vote, in which the winner is the first candidate reaching to majority of votes in the successive removal of least-voted candidates, if even could be considered a PR system, is again prone to non-monotonicity. It has been introduced by electoral reform activists as “phoney reform”, “fake reform”, and even “worse” than FPTP (Ring 2014). On the other hand, the experience of British Columbia suggests that by encouraging the voters to plump, i.e., voting for only a single candidate, the politicians and the public, accustomed to FPTP, would effectively convert this system back to FPTP (Harrison 2008).

In summary, conventional PR systems are normally more complicated, more difficult to explain and analyse, more easily demonizable by opponent media and politicians, and need significantly more preparation and knowledge from the voters. It is a pivotal step towards a democratic society, but with a considerable discomfort.

2.3 FPTP benefits

The proponents of FPTP system will not face much hurdle to defend this system: It is simple, efficient, often leads to stable government and higher accountability (Fadakar 2014); it is prompt and predictable, results in clear constituency representation, leads to less proportionality, but more governability, and as one MLA put it “any deviation from this [British] tradition [is] likely to be short lived, confusing, expensive to administrate and of demonstrable benefit to no one” (Harrison 2008). After all, this system has been employed from the beginning of confederation.

In short, it seems the electoral reform is not fully supported by the voters because they are worried of losing what they have (direct contact with representatives, local constituency representation, clear and predictable elections, simplicity, and Manichean winning-losing

approach to elections), without reaching to what they like (a clear, simple, proportional but stable, flawless system, with minimum or no change on their side). It is clear that proposed electoral systems have, at least so far, not been able to answer these concerns.

3.The proposed electoral system

A new electoral system, based on fractional voting power of the representatives, is proposed in this paper which covers the benefits of both FPTP and PR systems, while diminishing the drawbacks of these systems. The system is introduced in detail in this section and its specific characteristics will be discussed in the following section. The election results of Newfoundland and Labrador province in the 2021 Canadian federal election are analysed in this section to explain the details of the proposed electoral system, while this specific federal election will be completely re-evaluated employing the proposed electoral system. Since the proposed system requires no changes in the election process or ridings, the raw data of this federal election can be directly employed for the analysis. Under the proposed electoral system, the following steps need to be followed:

1. The voters will choose their preferred candidates in the same single-member districts as FPTP. No change is applied to the voting process, ballots, or districts for voters. The voters will only vote to one candidate, following the traditional ‘X’ system.
2. The votes for each candidate/party in each district are counted, and the candidate receiving the most votes will be selected in the first round (Step 1 in Table 1). Instead of having equal voting powers on the bills, the representative’s voting power in the House is determined according to the ratio of votes obtained by the candidate to the total number of valid ballots in the candidate’s district. As an example, the elected Liberal representative from district number 10001 has received 18608 votes, out of 37144 valid ballots. This representative, therefore, will have the voting power equal to

$18608/37144 = 0.500969$. Similarly, the elected Liberal representatives from district numbers 10004 and 10007 will have the voting powers of 0.426707 and 0.561714 in the House, respectively, as shown in Table 1. Even receiving one more vote increases the voting powers of the representatives in this system. For example, if these two latter Liberal candidates could have received one more vote in the election, they could have increased their voting powers to 0.426810 and 0.561743, respectively. Similarly, if one more voter had participated in the election in these two districts and had voted for any other candidate or party, the voting powers of these two representatives would have been dropped to 0.426663 and 0.561698, respectively. In other words, every single vote counts and changes the outcome of the election.

3. The voting power resulted from the votes received by unelected candidates in the first round are transferred to the elected candidates from the same party in the closest district. As an example, since a Conservative candidate has been elected from district number 10003 in the first round, the voting power resulted from Liberal votes in this district is transferred to the elected Liberal candidate of the closest district, district number 10002. As a result, the voting power of this representative increases from 0.465873 to 0.925947 (Step 2 in Table 1). Similarly, since only one Conservative candidate has been elected in this province, all the voting powers resulted from Conservative votes of the province are transferred to this representative which increases the voting power of this representative from 0.468901 to 2.29074.
4. The voting powers received by other parties are summed in the provincial level. If the overall voting power of a party is higher than the average voting powers of the candidates elected up to Step 2, the candidate receiving the highest voting power from that party is added to the elected candidates. As an example, since the sum of voting powers received by NDP in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador (1.22664) is

higher than the average of voting powers of elected candidates up to Step 2 (0.800225), the NDP candidate receiving the highest voting power, i.e., the NDP candidate of district number 10006, is elected in this step (Step 3 in Table 1) with the voting power equal to the overall NDP voting power in the entire province (1.22664). On the other hand, if the sum of voting powers of a party is less than the average of voting powers of the elected candidates in the province, the party's voting power is transferred to the next (neighbor) province. As an example, the voting power received by People's Party in this province (0.171771) is transferred to the next province (Prince Edward Island, see the Appendix). Since the overall voting powers received by this party is still less than the average of the voting powers of elected representatives in these provinces, the overall voting power is transferred to the next province (Nova Scotia). The party's voting power is finally summed in the election of People's Party's candidate in district number 12004 in the province of Nova Scotia. Clearly, the winning candidate of this party is the candidate receiving the highest voting power in all the districts in the provinces of Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, and Nova Scotia, receiving the overall voting power won by the party in all the districts in these three provinces (1.36182).

5. If the sum of voting powers received by a party in the entire country is less than the average of voting powers of elected representatives in all the provinces with candidates of that party, no candidate from that party is elected. As an example, the Christian Heritage Party has received the overall voting power of 0.174506 in the entire country (see the Appendix) which is less than the average in all the provinces with candidates from Christian Heritage Party, and therefore, no candidate from this party is elected. Similarly, no candidate is elected from other minor parties.

Table 1. The process of determining the elected representatives and their voting powers in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador in the 2021 Canadian federal election, based on the proposed electoral system

Electoral District Number	Representative's Party	Representative's Voting Power		
		Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
10001	Liberal	0.500969	0.500969	0.500969
10002	Liberal	0.465873	0.925947	0.925947
10003	Conservative	0.468901	2.29074	2.29074
10004	Liberal	0.426707	0.426707	0.426707
10005	Liberal	0.443877	0.443877	0.443877
10006	Liberal	0.451626	0.451626	0.451626
10006	NDP	-	-	1.22664
10007	Liberal	0.561714	0.561714	0.561714

Average: 0.800225 0.853529

The 2021 Canadian federal election has been completely analysed employing the proposed electoral system, and the outcome is reported in the Appendix. Using the system in the presented form, 18 new representatives will be added to 333 representatives elected through FPTP system (about 5% increase). From 17,034,243 valid ballots, it was only 4,682,461 votes (about 27%) that were not wasted (Gallagher and Mitchell 2005) in this election using FPTP system, while as explained before, every single vote is counted using the proposed system.

For instance, People's party, receiving votes equivalent to more than 16 representatives, has won no seats, while any vote other than Conservative has been wasted in the province of Saskatchewan. All these under-representations are resolved in the proposed system to the accuracy level of a single valid vote.

4. The specific characteristics of the proposed system

As mentioned before, the proposed system compiles the advantages of both FPTP and PR systems, while their shortcomings are diminished. It also provides unique features not attainable by any other electoral system. The characteristics of this system can be listed as follows:

- **Every single vote counts:** It is the only proposed electoral system in which every single vote cast in the election influences the outcome, and no vote is wasted. As discussed through an example in previous section, any voter participating in the election and casting a valid ballot, regardless of the party or candidate they is voting for, impacts the voting power of the representative of their district, and therefore, the outcome of the overall election. Any voter's vote increases the overall voting power of their party in the House and, at the same time, decreases the voting powers of other parties, unless the voter supports losing independent candidates or minor parties, such as Libertarian or Communist parties in Canada, in which case the voter's vote influences the outcome of the election only by reducing the voting powers of other elected representatives.
- **The local constituency representation is preserved.** Similar to FPTP, each district will have its local representative in the House, and the direct contact of the constituents with the representatives will be preserved. On the other hand, those constituents voted for any party other than the winning party of their district, will have an additional representative in the House from their own party, elected in another district (mainly, a neighbor district).

- **No change in the voting process is needed.** The voters cast ballots, exactly identical to the FPTP system, for one candidate in single-member districts. It, therefore, eliminates any chance of confusion, misunderstanding, or increase in the number of invalid votes. The voting process is straightforward, without any further complexity.
- **Perfect proportionality is guaranteed.** It is the only voting system in which the proportionality of representation is guaranteed down to single vote level.
- **All valid ballots are effective.** No vote is disregarded because of being excess vote. No vote is wasted because of voting to losing candidates. Any valid ballot is as effective in the overall outcome of the election as any other valid ballot.
- **No difficulty arises due to by-elections.** Contrary to most PR systems, by-elections and absentee votes are not problematic in the proposed system. By-elections are held similar to the plurality system, and the voting powers of the representatives are updated accordingly. Absentee votes are also counted and implemented similarly.
- **No strategic voting is needed.** Since any single vote is effective and finally increases the voting power of the elected parties, strategic voting becomes pointless.
- **No gerrymandering is possible.** As no vote is wasted in the election process, the votes received by any party are respected and implemented, either in the ballot district or in a neighbor district in which the party's candidate is elected.
- **Political regionalism is suppressed.** The votes of the historically repressed minorities on all sides of political arena, e.g., minority right-wingers in left-wingers-dominated ridings, Liberals in prairies, Conservatives in Quebec, and Greens everywhere, are respected. It would be a significant step against political regionalism and demographic divisions.
- **Democratic values are promoted.** It encourages political discourse, coalition, and merge between minor parties as the voting powers received by losing independent candidates and minor parties could lead to representation in the national level in this way.

- **No arbitrary threshold for proportionality is required.** Contrary to PR systems, there is no need in the proposed system to define an arbitrary threshold for proportionality, as small local parties with limited voting base would be automatically defeated by major parties. In 2021 federal election analysed in previous section, except one representative from Free Party Canada, no representative is elected from any small party, without applying any arbitrary threshold during the analysis.

5. Proportionality and governing instability

Similar to any other PR system, the proposed system, if employed according to the conventional government formation norms, has the potential to lead to minority and potentially unstable governments. In essence, any system trying to respect the diversity of the opinions of the voters will result in a colorful spectrum of representatives, as it is the voters' opinions which are divergent and potentially contrasting, and political parties ideally only reflect this diversity of perspectives. The stable, majority governments are, therefore, only the outcome of repression of the voters' ideals, either through oppressive electoral systems specifically FPTP, or through pushing the voters towards strategic voting. Even with the modest estimations of strategic voting statistics in Canada (Stephenson et al. 2018), there has not been a single federal election during the last 100 years in Canada in which the majority government has enjoyed the support of the majority of popular votes (see Heard 2023).

On the other hand, stability of the government has apparently been the prime concern of Canadian voters and sits, it seems, far above their interest in fixing the proportionality issue in Canadian electoral system, as one can speculate from the outcome of various rejected proposals on electoral reform in recent years in Canada. To resolve this conflict, one should not forget that the government stability and proportionality do not necessarily need to be intertwined. As an example, an electoral system in which the majority government is formed

based on plurality, and not the majority, of votes will lead to a “stable” government, while proportionality can also be fully respected. One can argue that such government enjoys the support of majority of voters only fictitiously, but that has also been the case in federal elections in Canada in the last 100 years, as mentioned before. As another example from the other end of this spectrum of possible electoral systems, one can suggest that “majority” government formation should need the support of well above 50%+1 of elected representatives (e.g., 60% or even higher) to properly represent the diverse perspectives of the voters, like supermajority required in U.S. constitution for specific cases. Considering the complexities of political arena in modern life, the threshold of 50%+1 votes for majority government formation should, in essence, be considered more as a convention rather than a fair and sound tradition. It is, therefore, a matter of national attitudes and priorities that how government stability and proportionality are reconciled.

To have the smoothest transition from current FPTP to a proportional system, one could consider the results of recent Canadian federal elections as a compass to evaluate the national political orientations and expectations. The estimations of strategic voting in Canada vary between different party supporters, in different provinces, and in different elections (see Stephenson et al. 2018); nevertheless, an estimation of about 6-7% of strategic voting in federal elections seems to be a reasonable guess. Employing this assumption, one can find that the leading parties in recent elections were able to form a majority government when they had received more than one third of popular votes (33.3%, which leads to 39-40% when strategic voting is also considered). In other words, the majority governments in most federal elections in recent Canadian history have enjoyed the support of more than one third of the voters (see Heard 2023). The minority governments, on the other hand, had only received less than 39-40% of popular votes. It is, therefore, proposed that the same approach is employed for the electoral system discussed here.

In other words, as it is expected that strategic voting starts to disappear, or at least diminish, in the elections conducted based on the proposed electoral system, the popular votes of the major parties are slightly reduced, and small parties are expected to emerge in the political spectrum. Nevertheless, any leading party receiving more than one third of the overall voting power of representatives of the House can form, it is proposed, a majority government, while a leading party with less than one third of the overall voting power needs to form a coalition. In this way, clearly, the majority government will not necessarily have the majority of the votes in the House and needs to negotiate with other parties in the House to pass the bills. The government, in this way, remains stable, while it gains limited power proportional to its voting base, at least in passing the bills.

6. Possible variations of the proposed electoral system

As shown in the Appendix, if 2021 Canadian federal election had been analysed according to the proposed electoral system in its presented form, 18 new representatives would have been added to the House: 7 from People's Party, 5 from NDP, 2 from Green Party, 2 from Conservative Party, 1 from Liberal Party, and 1 from Free Party Canada. Any representative from each party who had been able to win their district in the middle of many districts electing other parties would have been able to receive significant voting power: NDP (district number 35035, Ontario, voting power of 12.3008), Conservative (35104, Ontario, 6.67184), People's Party (35017, Ontario, 6.33601), Green (59027, British Columbia, 2.81326), Liberal (48013, Alberta, 2.81151), Bloc Québécois (24033, Quebec, 1.79899), and Free Party Canada (13005, New Brunswick, 0.903726).

Various variations of the proposed electoral system can be imagined, which can modify these details. These variations are listed in the following. It should be emphasized that specific

characteristics of the system, discussed in Section 4, will all be still preserved by using any of the following variations.

- a) An upper-limit for the voting powers of the representatives can be defined. In this variation, the voting powers received by losing parties in any district are transferred to neighbor elected representatives from the same party up to the defined limit, and any excess voting power is added to the next closest representative from the same party. This variation has the potential to increase the number of representatives being elected from parties, while keeping the overall voting powers received by each party unaffected.
- b) Instead of using the average voting powers of the candidates in the provincial level in Step 4, the minimum or maximum voting power received in the province can be considered. This variation can also slightly increase or decrease the number of elected representatives in the election. As an example, using minimum voting power in the province instead of average in Step 4 results in the election of one representative from Maverick Party with the voting power of 0.702306, too.
- c) At least one representative is elected from each party receiving the overall voting power in the entire country more than the minimum voting power of elected representatives. In this variation, again, one representative from Maverick Party should be elected, as the party has received more overall voting power (0.702306) than the minimum voting power received by an elected representative (0.288315).

7. Conclusion

A new electoral system, based on fractional voting power of representatives, was presented in this paper. The proposed method, it was claimed, covers the benefits of both First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) and standard proportional representation (PR) systems, while the shortcomings

of both systems are diminished. Each elected representative in this electoral system receives the voting power equal to their share of votes obtained in the overall valid ballots in their district, while the votes received by losing candidates are transferred to the winning candidates from the same party in neighbor districts. The proposed system provides unique characteristics that are not achievable by any other electoral system, including: every single vote counts and is as valuable and effective as any other vote; perfect proportionality is guaranteed; the local constituency representation is preserved; no change in the voting process is required; no difficulties arise because of by-elections and absentee votes; no strategic voting is needed; no gerrymandering is possible; political regionalism is suppressed, and democratic values are promoted. The details of the proposed system were discussed, and 2021 Canadian federal election was re-evaluated using this system. The notion of governing instability in PR systems was specifically discussed in Canadian context, and it was proposed, based on the outcome of recent federal elections in Canada, that a threshold of one third of overall voting power of representatives is employed for majority government formation. Finally, possible variations of the proposed system were presented and discussed.

Appendix

The Appendix can be downloaded via [this link](#).

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