



British Columbia's advisory poll on replacing its single-member system

In October 2018, electors in British Columbia will receive postal ballots for an advisory poll with two questions. The first question will be:

Which system should British Columbia use for provincial elections? (Vote for only one.)

- **The current First Past the Post voting system**
- **A proportional representation voting system**

The second question will be:

If British Columbia adopts a proportional representation voting system, which of the following voting systems do you prefer?

(Rank in order of preference. You may choose to support one, two or all three of the systems.)

- **Dual Member Proportional (DMP)**
- **Mixed Member Proportional (MMP)**
- **Rural-Urban Proportional (RUP)**

Unlike the Province's first poll on [PR-STV](#) as the electoral system for its unicameral legislature, in 2005, this third poll has no super-majority hurdles to cross before it is officially regarded as having provided a decisive answer to the questions, as each question requires only a bare majority for such an answer.

The answer to the second question will be decided by a transferable vote system. The 2005 poll showed strong support for PR-STV, but it was disregarded because it fell just short of the two high hurdles imposed. A second poll in 2009 showed that support for PR-STV had fallen below a bare majority, so it simply failed.

Unfortunately, this third poll, instigated by the coalition government of the New Democratic Party and the Greens Party, is a poll where the first question has one defined alternative - the existing [plurality](#) system in single-member electoral districts - whereas the other alternative is not predictable, as it depends on which of the three alternative systems in the second question achieves a majority after transfer of preferences.

That asymmetry could deter some voters that require an unmodified PR-STV system, as the two earlier polls did offer, because each of the three options in the second question includes aspects that either modify the use of PR-STV, such as the RUP option, or avoid it altogether, as the DMP and MMP options do.

Many voters might take the view that understanding the details of the three options is too demanding, and thus reluctantly accept the simpler, flawed, [plurality](#) system.

The RUP option is the closest to PR-STV. With it, PR-STV would apply in all urban areas, which include nearly all of the Province's voters. MMP would apply for the few voters in vast, thinly-populated rural areas.

The MMP option is fairly conventional MMP, which is a hybrid of single-member plurality districts and an [indirect](#) closed party list, so it is definitely not PR-STV.

The DMP option has never been used for parliamentary elections anywhere in the world and, having 2-member electoral districts, it would normally only give, in terms of political stance, either a winner-take-all result, or a [stalemate](#). It is a long way from PR-STV.

Victoria's Local Government Bill 2018

The PRSA's Victoria-Tasmania Branch made [two submissions](#) to the Government's welcome invitation for online comments on the above Bill.

Victoria's Andrews Labor Government introduced the Bill as a revision of Victoria's Local Government Act 1989, and as a consolidation of that Act's many subsequent amendments. It was passed by the Legislative Assembly, with a few amendments.

After the amended Bill reached the Legislative Council, debate was adjourned after the second reading speech had been delivered by the Minister representing the Minister for Local Government. The Bill will thus lapse when the Legislative Council expires before Victoria's election in November 2018. The Branch's submissions covered several parts of the Bill, which the Branch President and Secretary expect to discuss when they meet the Liberal Shadow Minister, David Morris MLA, in October.

Casual vacancies: One main concern was the Bill's proposal to replace the [countback](#) procedure that Victoria has used for filling casual vacancies since the Bracks ALP Government introduced PR-STV for elections in all multi-councillor wards [in 2003](#).

That [countback](#) procedure has been in force for filling casual vacancies in Tasmania's House of Assembly since 1918, and for Tasmania's municipal elections since the Groom Liberal Government introduced [Hare-Clark](#) PR-STV for all of Tasmania's municipal elections in 1993.

The 1992 advisory poll that resulted in Hare-Clark PR-STV being introduced for the elections for the Legislative Assembly of the [Australian Capital Territory](#) included a provision for Tasmanian-style *countback*. Hare-Clark in the ACT was entrenched by a 1995 referendum.

Tasmania's *countback* is based on the rationale of filling the seat of a vacating councillor by a re-examination of the quota of votes that elected that vacating councillor, and on no other votes.

The proposed replacement for that sound and well-proven *countback* is that the votes in the [Droop](#) near-quota that were insufficient to elect a councillor be added to the quota of votes that elected the vacating councillor. Unfortunately that concept departs from the fundamental rationale of *countback*, which is to maintain the preferred choice of the voters that elected the vacating councillor, and of no other voters.

The [submission](#) by the Victorian Electoral Commission agreed with that concern. It noted that was also the view of the Proportional Representation Society of Australia.

Group representation constituencies predominate in Singapore's parliament

Until 1988, elections to Singapore's unicameral Parliament were held entirely in single-member electoral districts, using a [plurality](#) (first-past-the-post) electoral system in which the MP was directly elected, and was the candidate that had gained the largest number of votes in that district.

The electoral districts in the small island State, with just over 5 million inhabitants, were each fairly similar in character, so its *winner-take-all* system at most elections resulted in all of the seats being won by a single political party, the People's Action Party, as it routinely gained a plurality of the vote.

In 1998, the law was changed to elect most of Singapore's MPs from multi-member electoral districts called [group representation constituencies](#). There are now 16 of those, returning 74 of the 87 elected MPs.

Candidates must stand as a party group of between four and six, or as a group, or groups, of independent candidates. Most voters can thus only vote for a group, and not for individual candidates, so most of Singapore's MPs, although popularly elected, are no longer directly elected by the voters.

The electoral system for those MPs is a [plurality winner-take-all](#) system, like that used in 48 US States to elect a State's slate of electors to be the members of the electoral college that elects the President and the Vice-President.

The group with the largest vote in the multi-member Singapore constituency - even if that is not an absolute majority of votes - wins all the seats in that multi-member constituency.

There must be at least one candidate in each group nomination that is a member of a Malayan, Indian or other minority community by descent, to ensure that some MPs will be people from those communities, but those candidates need not be nominated by those communities, or even preferred by them to other candidates.

That aspect is akin to concepts for gender quotas in some Australian party pre-selection rules for particular single-member electorates, where a candidate of the mandated gender must take precedence over those not of that gender.

The only majority community in Singapore is its community of Chinese descent, but there is a considerable number of minority communities.

Another reason given for this type of *winner-take-all* electoral system is that the larger electoral districts used need far fewer changes in electoral boundaries, which are relatively difficult with Singapore's great extent of [public housing](#) in numerous flats in large high-rise buildings.

The group representation constituencies are not inherently candidate-based, so they cannot result in the [direct election](#) of candidates. They are thus even less representative than the [multiple plurality system](#) that was used to elect Australian senators until 1919, which was at least a system of direct election, where voters were required to vote for individual candidates.

This undemocratic type of group nomination was unfortunately introduced into Australia by Victoria's Bracks ALP Government when it provided in [2001](#) for such a system to elect Melbourne City Council's Lord Mayor and Deputy Lord Mayor jointly.

The centenary of transferable voting for every House of Representatives seat

The transferable vote now used for every House of Representatives seat became federal law only when the original [Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918](#) received royal assent on 21 November 1918. Its [only opponent](#) in the Senate was its only Labor senator, Albert Gardiner.

In his record 12-hour speech on 13 November 1918, only two days after Armistice Day, he said the Bill should not have been introduced after the Governor-General had issued the writs for the [Corangamite by-election](#).

The impetus for the Bill was Labor's victory in the [Swan by-election](#), in WA, the month before, with only 34.4% of the vote. Labor would also have won Corangamite, in Victoria, under the then [plurality system](#), but it was won by one of the non-Labor candidates after the transfer of preferences. The 100-year old Act has had many changes since, and in its [consolidated](#) form remains the principal Act governing elections for both federal houses.