

Battle of the ballots: Two alternate voting systems seen as competitive to First Past the Post

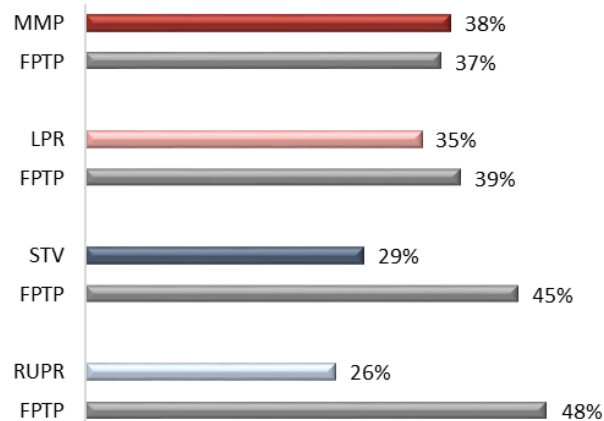
Canadians like proportionality of MMP and LPR; prefer STV and RUPR less

November 29, 2016 – Even as Democratic Institutions Minister Maryam Monsef [appears to be stepping back](#) from her party's own campaign vow that the October 2015 federal election would be the last under the First Past the Post (FPTP) system, Canadians see a strengthened vote for both themselves and their communities as key benefits to changing the voting system in this country.

A House of Commons committee [created in June](#) to study this country's voting system will present its final recommendations [Dec. 1](#), and a new study from the Angus Reid Institute indicates two alternative systems – Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) and List Proportional Representation (LPR) – are almost as preferred by Canadians as FPTP.

The survey, self-commissioned and self-funded by ARI, showed respondents sample FPTP ballots – as well as sample ballots from systems that have either been proposed to the Commons committee, or are in use in other countries.

Suppose you had to choose between _____ and FPTP, which of the two systems would you prefer?



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from November 22 – 25, 2016, among a representative randomized sample of 1516 Canadian adults who are members of the [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

Among other things, the poll asked respondents to interact with voting system ballots and answer questions as to the clarity of each, as well as their views about the systems represented by each ballot. Respondents were asked about four alternative voting systems: Mixed Member Proportional (MMP), Single Transferable Vote (STV), List Proportional Representation (LPR) and Rural-Urban Representation (RUPR), as well as the current, First Past the Post system.

Key Findings:

- Asked to pick between FPTP and each alternative system, MMP and LPR are nearly as preferred as FPTP

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- All alternative systems except RUPR are seen to “strengthen” respondents’ own votes and those of their communities when compared to FPTP
- Canadians overwhelmingly find the FPTP ballot clear (86% do), they’re more divided on other systems’ ballots. Majorities find MMP and STV ballots confusing
- Three-quarters (75%) of Canadians would like to see a referendum on any major changes to the electoral system, and two-thirds (66%) see changing the system as a low priority

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PART 1 – Opinions of the voting systems

As previously mentioned, this survey asked Canadians to interact with – and answer questions about – ballots for four proportional electoral systems: Mixed-Member Proportional (MMP), Single Transferrable Vote (STV), Open-List Proportional (LPR), and Rural-Urban Proportional (RUPR).

Respondents were shown an example of each ballot (including FPTP), and asked to interact with it by casting a “vote.”

They were then asked to weigh in on the clarity of the ballot and the effect they thought each system might have on the strength of their own vote and those of their community, as well as to indicate whether they would prefer each system when compared head-to-head with FPTP.

Why these ballots?

Ballots were chosen based on the Angus Reid Institute’s monitoring of the discussions of the electoral reform debate in Canada, as well as consideration of alternatives to first-past-the-post currently in use in other countries.

The ballots, and the descriptions that accompanied them, can be seen below.

FPTP:

*The **First Past the Post** or **FPTP** system, is the electoral system currently used in Canadian federal elections.*

*In a **FPTP** system, political parties run a candidate in each riding. The candidate who receives the most votes wins the riding and the party that wins the most ridings forms the government.*

In the FPTP system the parties' seats in the House of Commons are not strictly proportional. This means it's possible for a party to form a majority government even though it didn't get the majority of votes. Smaller parties usually win fewer seats compared to their share of the popular vote.

FIRST PAST THE POST (FPTP) / SYSTÈME MAJORITAIRE UNINOMINAL À UN TOUR

Place an X in the circle next to the candidate of your choice.

Veuillez inscrire un X dans le cercle en regard du candidat de votre choix.

- ☐ CANDIDATE A / CANDIDAT A
PARTY 1 / PARTI 1
- ☐ CANDIDATE B / CANDIDAT B
PARTY 2 / PARTI 2
- ☐ CANDIDATE C / CANDIDAT C
PARTY 3 / PARTI 3
- ☐ CANDIDATE D / CANDIDAT D
PARTY 4 / PARTI 4
- ☐ CANDIDATE E / CANDIDAT E
PARTY 5 / PARTI 5

MMP:

Another electoral system is called: **Mixed Member Proportional or MMP**. This system has a few variations. We'll be looking at an open-list MMP system.

Briefly, under an open-list MMP electoral system, people have two votes:

- One for a candidate in your riding – same as FPTP
- Another vote for a regional candidate: you can vote either for a party in general or for one of the parties' candidates

After the votes are counted under the MMP system, House of Commons seats are then split between:

- Local MPs – same as FPTP
- Regional seats that are assigned based on the parties' and candidates' share of the regional vote

MMP is a proportional electoral system which means that, compared to the current system, the number of seats each party gets is closer to their actual share of the popular vote.

Smaller parties may win more seats, and the bigger parties would need a higher percentage of the popular vote to win a majority government. This type of system generally results in more minority and coalition governments.

You have two votes:

1 Please mark an "X" beside one candidate for **LOCAL MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT**

☐ Candidate 1
Party X

☐ Candidate 2
Party Y

☐ Candidate 3
Party Z

☐ Candidate 4
Party V

2 Please mark an "X" beside **EITHER one party OR one candidate for REGIONAL MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT.**

A vote for a candidate counts as a vote for that candidate's party. This vote helps elect regional MPs, topping-up the numbers of MPs from your region so the total is proportional to the votes for each party.

<input type="checkbox"/> Party X	<input type="checkbox"/> Party Y	<input type="checkbox"/> Party Z	<input type="checkbox"/> Party V
<input type="checkbox"/> Candidate A Party X	<input type="checkbox"/> Candidate A Party Y	<input type="checkbox"/> Candidate A Party Z	<input type="checkbox"/> Candidate A Party V
<input type="checkbox"/> Candidate B Party X	<input type="checkbox"/> Candidate B Party Y	<input type="checkbox"/> Candidate B Party Z	<input type="checkbox"/> Candidate B Party V
<input type="checkbox"/> Candidate C Party X	<input type="checkbox"/> Candidate C Party Y	<input type="checkbox"/> Candidate C Party Z	<input type="checkbox"/> Candidate C Party V
<input type="checkbox"/> Candidate D Party X	<input type="checkbox"/> Candidate D Party Y	<input type="checkbox"/> Candidate D Party Z	<input type="checkbox"/> Candidate D Party V

STV:

Another electoral system that might be considered for Canada is called: **Single Transferable Vote or STV.**

Briefly, under STV:

- Ridings are larger and have multiple MPs (the number would vary depending on population)
- Parties run multiple candidates in each riding
- Voters rank their candidate choices in order of preference.

When the votes are counted in an STV system, seats are filled in each riding using a formula based on how voters ranked candidates on their ballots.

STV is a proportional electoral system which means that, compared to the current system, the number of seats each party gets is closer to their actual share of the popular vote.

Smaller parties may win more seats, and the bigger parties would need a higher percentage of the popular vote to win a majority government. This type of system generally results in more minority and coalition governments.

SINGLE TRANSFERABLE VOTE / VOTE UNIQUE TRANSFÉRABLE

There are three members to be elected in this riding.
Place a 1 in the circle next to your first choice candidate,
and number as many other candidates as you wish in
order of preference.

Il y a trois députés à élire dans cette circonscription.
Veuillez inscrire un 1 dans le cercle en regard du candidat
qui est votre premier choix et numéroté par ordre de
préférence tous les autres candidats que vous désirez.

PARTY X / PARTI X	PARTY Y / PARTI Y	PARTY Z / PARTI Z	INDEPENDENT INDÉPENDANT
<input type="checkbox"/> CANDIDATE A CANDIDAT A	<input type="checkbox"/> CANDIDATE A CANDIDAT A	<input type="checkbox"/> CANDIDATE A CANDIDAT A	<input type="checkbox"/> CANDIDATE A CANDIDAT A
<input type="checkbox"/> CANDIDATE B CANDIDAT B	<input type="checkbox"/> CANDIDATE B CANDIDAT B	<input type="checkbox"/> CANDIDATE B CANDIDAT B	
<input type="checkbox"/> CANDIDATE C CANDIDAT C	<input type="checkbox"/> CANDIDATE C CANDIDAT C		

LPR:

Another electoral system that might be considered for Canada is called: **Open List Proportional Representation or LPR.**

Briefly, under an Open List LPR electoral system:

- *The electoral ridings are larger and have multiple MPs (the number would vary depending on population)*
- *Parties run multiple candidates in each riding*
- *Voters select one candidate from the list offered*

When the votes are being counted in an LPR system:

- Riding seats are distributed according to the parties' share of the vote in that riding.
- Successful candidates who fill those party seats are chosen based on how many votes they specifically received.

LPR is a proportional electoral system which means that, compared to the current system, the number of seats each party gets is closer to their actual share of the popular vote.

Smaller parties may win more seats, and the bigger parties would need a higher percentage of the popular vote to win a majority government. This generally results in more minority and coalition governments.

**LIST PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION / SCRUTIN DE LISTE
(OPEN LIST)**

Place an X in the circle next to the candidate of your choice.
(Your vote counts for both the candidate and the party.)

Veuillez inscrire un X dans le cercle en regard du candidat de
votre choix. (Votre vote compte pour le candidat et le parti.)

PARTY W / PARTI W	PARTY X / PARTI X	PARTY Y / PARTI Y	PARTY Z / PARTI Z
<input type="radio"/> CANDIDATE A CANDIDAT A	<input type="radio"/> CANDIDATE A CANDIDAT A	<input type="radio"/> CANDIDATE A CANDIDAT A	<input type="radio"/> CANDIDATE A CANDIDAT A
<input type="radio"/> CANDIDATE B CANDIDAT B	<input type="radio"/> CANDIDATE B CANDIDAT B	<input type="radio"/> CANDIDATE B CANDIDAT B	<input type="radio"/> CANDIDATE B CANDIDAT B
<input type="radio"/> CANDIDATE C CANDIDAT C	<input type="radio"/> CANDIDATE C CANDIDAT C	<input type="radio"/> CANDIDATE C CANDIDAT C	
<input type="radio"/> CANDIDATE D CANDIDAT D		<input type="radio"/> CANDIDATE D CANDIDAT D	

RUPR:

And one other electoral system that might be considered for Canada is called: Rural-Urban Proportional Representation or RUPR.

Briefly, under a RUPR electoral system:

- Ridings are divided into two groups: rural ridings have smaller populations (under 100,000 residents), and urban ridings are bigger (over 100,000 residents)
- In rural ridings, a single MP is elected and parties run a single candidate

- In urban ridings, there would be multiple MPs (depending on population) and parties run multiple candidates.
- In both rural and urban ridings, voters rank their candidate choices in order of preference

When the votes are being counted in a RUPR system:

- Individual riding MPs are selected based on voters' ranked preferences
- Some 'top-up' seats are awarded based on a party's share of the regional popular vote

RUPR is a proportional electoral system which means that, compared to the current system, the number of seats each party gets is closer to their actual share of the popular vote.

Smaller parties may win more seats, and the bigger parties would need a higher percentage of the popular vote to win a majority government. This type of system generally results in more minority and coalition governments.

The RUPR urban ballot is identical to the STV ballot seen above. What follows is an RUPR ballot for a rural riding:

**Rural-Urban Proportional Representation (RUPR) /
représentation proportionnelle rurale-urbaine**

Place a 1 in the circle next to your first choice candidate, and number
as many other candidates as you wish in order of preference.

Veuillez inscrire un 1 dans le cercle en regard du candidat qui est votre
premier choix et numéroté par ordre de préférence tous les autres
candidats que vous désirez.

<input type="radio"/>	CANDIDATE A / CANDIDAT A PARTY V / PARTI V
<input type="radio"/>	CANDIDATE B / CANDIDAT B PARTY W / PARTI W
<input type="radio"/>	CANDIDATE C / CANDIDAT C PARTY X / PARTI X
<input type="radio"/>	CANDIDATE D / CANDIDAT D PARTY Y / PARTI Y
<input type="radio"/>	CANDIDATE E / CANDIDAT E PARTY Z / PARTI Z

After interacting with each ballot, respondents were asked a series of questions about it and the system it represents. These questions assessed the clarity of the ballot, the effect the system would have on one's vote, and whether respondents would prefer the system over FPTP.

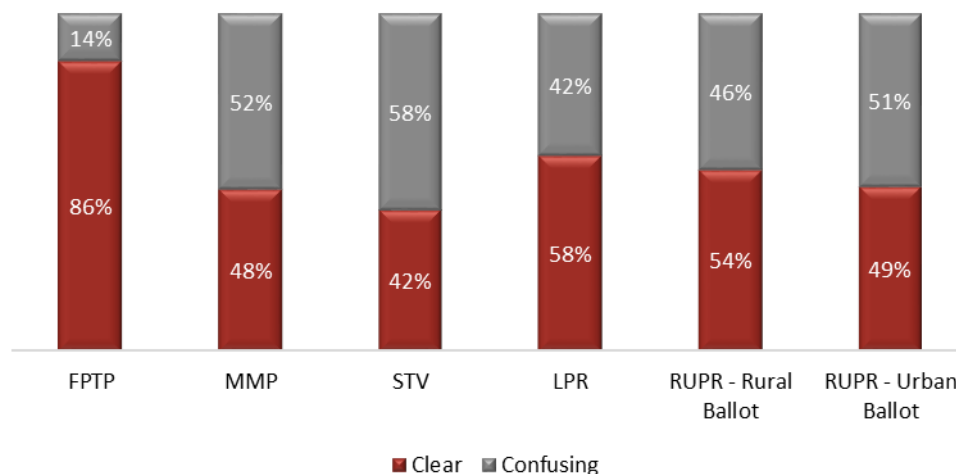
Clarity of the Ballots:

On clarity, FPTP is the winner. Almost nine-in-ten Canadians (86%) say they find the ballot for the current system clear, including a full majority (55%) who say it is “very clear, easy to fill out.”

No other system comes close to FPTP for clarity. Open List Proportional Representation – the ballot that looks most similar to FPTP – is next-clearest, with 58 per cent of Canadians saying it is easy to understand, while RUPR was deemed to be clear by just over half of respondents.

Fewer than half say the sample Mixed-Member Proportional and Single Transferrable Vote ballots are clear, as seen in the graph that follows.

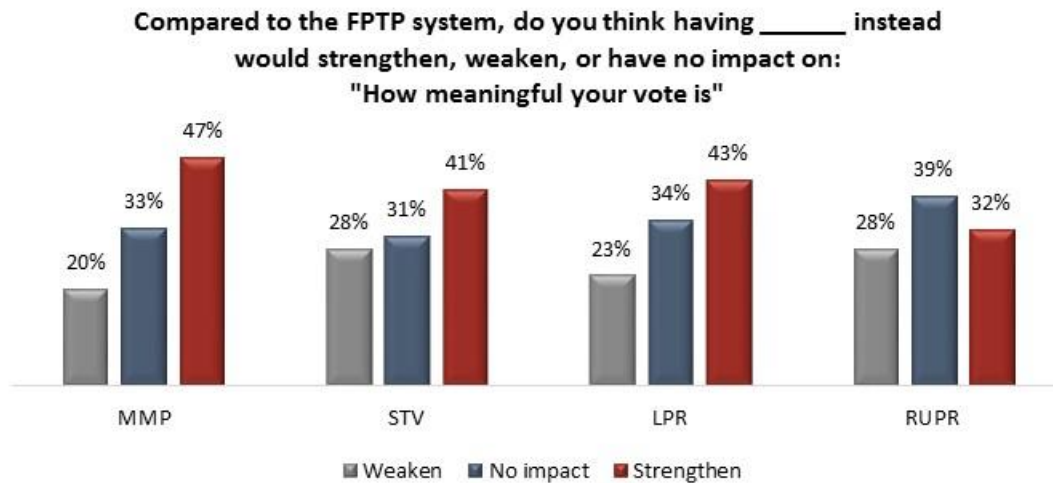
**Would you say the average Canadian voter filling out this ballot
would find it clear or confusing?**



Meaningful Vote:

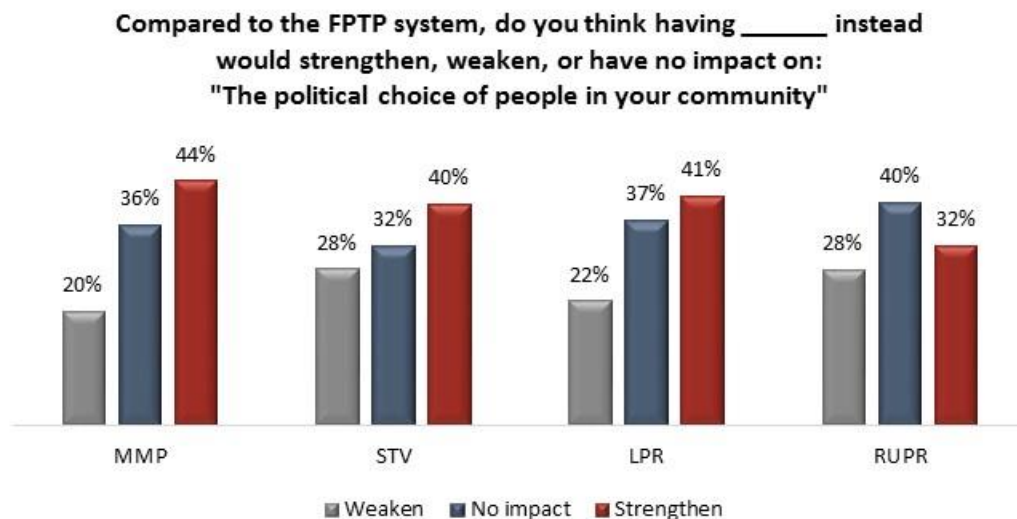
Alternative voting systems canvassed in this survey fare better in comparison to FPTP when it comes to their perceived impact on how meaningful one's vote is. Nearly half (47%) of all Canadians say an MMP system would strengthen the meaningfulness of their vote, and LPR and STV systems are not far behind.

“Strengthen” is the most-held view of the effect of each system except RUPR, as seen in the following graph:



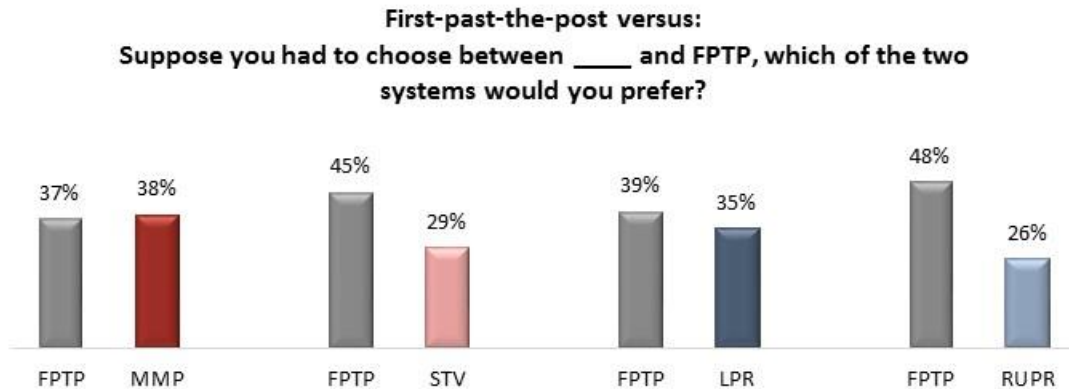
Political choice:

Canadians feel similarly about the effect each proportional system would have on their communities' political choices:



Alternate systems versus FPTP:

As seen in the graph that follows, roughly equal numbers of Canadians choose MMP and FPTP in a face-off between the two, as is the case when comparing FPTP and LPR. The other two systems lag behind the current one in a head-to-head, though it should be noted that in each case, roughly one-in-four Canadians say they are unsure.



PART 2 – The Case for Change: Most like the concept of proportionality

This survey also finds that many Canadians see the current system as unfair, and believe a more proportional system would increase voter participation.

The Trudeau government's promise to change the system had its roots in a common criticism of FPTP: That it gives disproportionate power to the winning party – often granting a majority government to a party that received less than 50 per cent of votes cast, as happened with the Liberal Party itself in 2015.

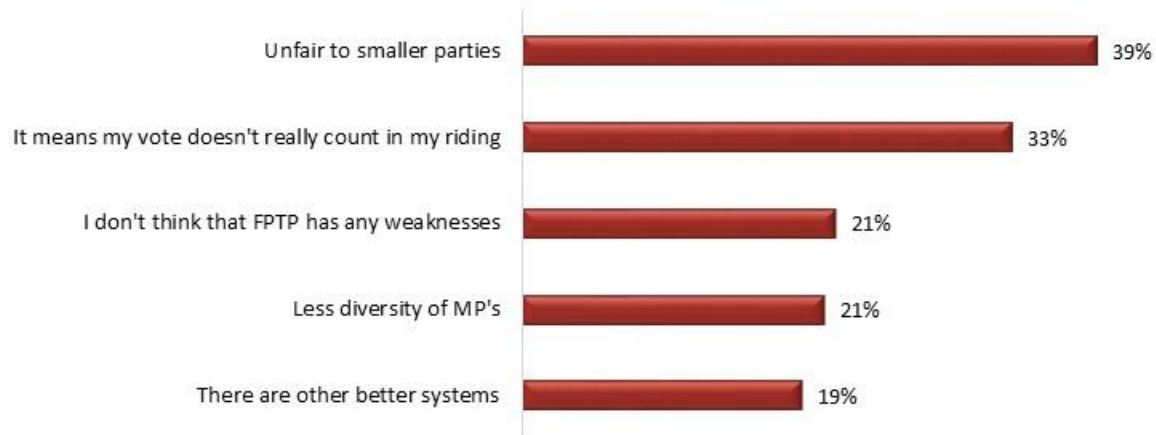
While supporters of FPTP say the system provides for greater stability, critics counter by suggesting that proportional voting systems would better reflect the electorate's voice, and ultimately strengthen the democratic process by forcing parties to work for common interests in case of coalition or minority governments.

Canadians tend to view the idea of proportionality favourably and are more likely to view each of the proportional systems canvassed in this survey as making their own votes more meaningful, rather than less so.

Further, some seven-in-ten respondents (72%) agree with the statement “a system that more closely reflects the parties' actual popular support would increase voter turnout.”

Indeed, when asked about the weaknesses of the current system, Canadians are most likely to cite the disenfranchisement of smaller parties and their supporters:

What do you think are the FPTP system's weaknesses? Pick up to two from this list.



On the question of majority governments, Canadians are split. Roughly half (51%) agree with the statement "I don't like the idea of Canada having more minority or coalition governments," while the rest disagree.

Coupled with the fact that fewer than one-in-four (22%) cite the tendency to yield majority governments as a strength of FPTP, this suggests that even if Canadians would prefer to keep the current system, that preference is likely not primarily driven by a fear of minority or coalition governments.

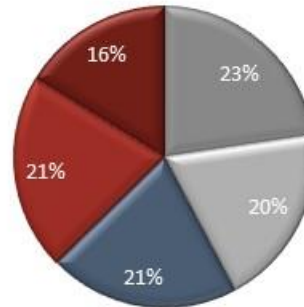
PART 3 – The Case for the Status Quo: Little appetite to change voting system

During the 2015 election, Justin Trudeau and the Liberal Party **promised to replace** the first-past-the-post system, though they did not specify what kind of system they would introduce in its place. As the electoral reform committee prepares to release its recommendations on that question, the Angus Reid Institute finds relatively little enthusiasm among Canadians for changing the system in the first place.

Roughly one-in-five Canadians (21%) say they "don't care either way," while the rest are split between a desire to keep the current system and wanting to change to something different:

Let's consider the overall voting or electoral system in Canada. By "electoral system" we're referring to things like the ballot, how votes are counted, etc. What are your overall views on this?

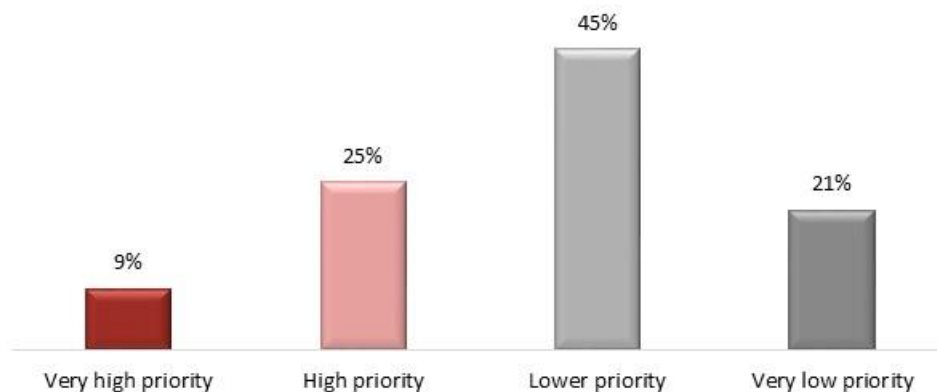
- Strongly favor keeping the current system
- Moderately favor keeping the current system
- Undecided/Don't really care either way
- Moderately favor changing to a different system
- Strongly favor changing to a different system



And while Canadians may be divided about a change, they're largely united the opinion that switching to a different electoral system is a low priority.

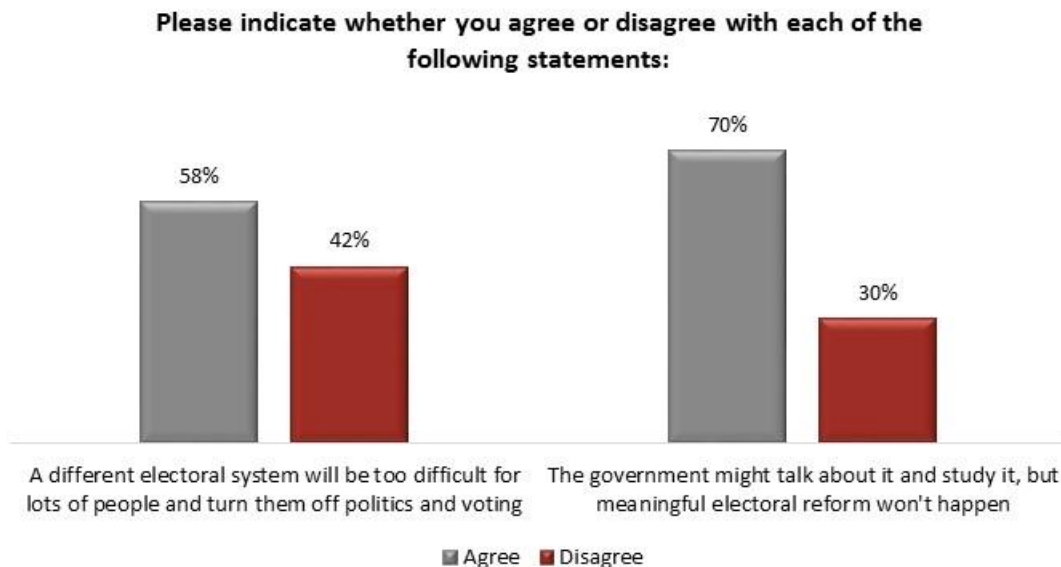
Two-in-three Canadians (66%) say they see changing the way the country casts its ballots as either a "lower priority" or a "very low priority." Fewer than one-in-ten say changing the voting system is a "very high priority" for them, as seen in the following graph:

Putting this another way, how much of a priority do you personally consider changing Canada's electoral system to be?
Would you say this is a:

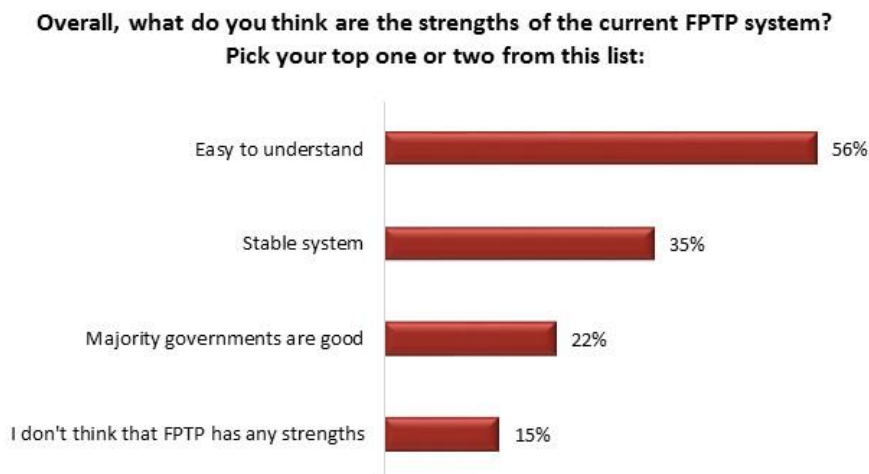


Other factors driving opinion against a change in the way Canadians vote include skepticism that the federal government will ultimately enact meaningful reforms, and the belief that a new voting system would be more confusing than FPTP: almost six-in-ten (58%) say a different system would lead to voter confusion and decreased engagement and turnout.

Likewise, most have low expectations that the process the government has initiated will lead to significant change, as seen in the following graph:



The first-past-the-post system is not only seen as easy to understand, this clarity is also seen as the system's biggest strength:

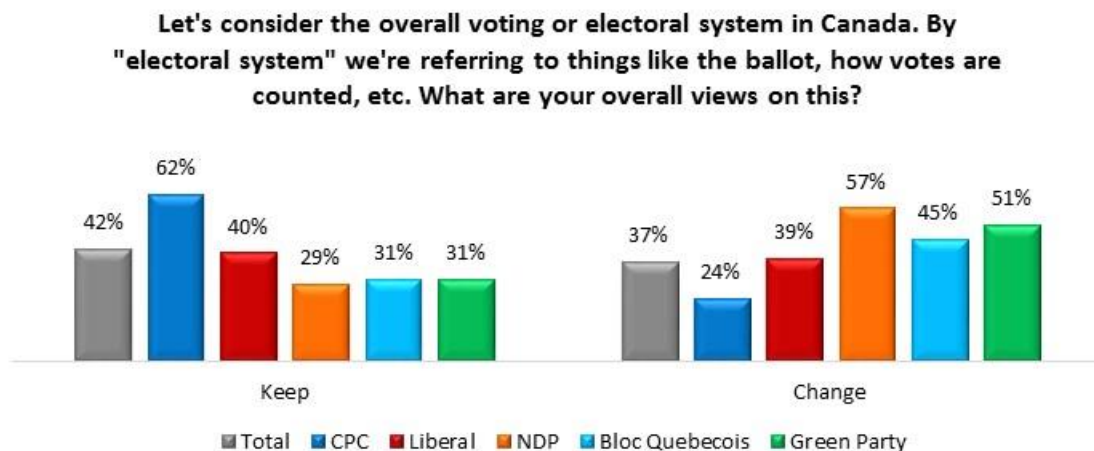


Given these findings – the fact that three-quarters of Canadians (75%) are in favour of a referendum before any major change is made to the electoral system is perhaps unsurprising.

PART 4 – What's driving these opinions?

The clearest driver of opinion on these questions is political partisanship. Canadians who voted for the Conservative Party in the 2015 election favour keeping the current system by more than a two-to-one margin, while those who supported the New Democratic Party are almost as strongly in favour of changing systems, as seen in the graph that follows.

Notably, past voters for the governing Liberal Party are roughly evenly split between a desire for change and a desire to maintain the system that granted them a parliamentary majority last year.



This pattern holds on other questions as well. Past CPC voters are more likely to say that each alternative system's ballot is unclear, that each option would weaken their vote, and that they would choose FPTP in a face-off between it and each alternative.

Past NDP voters, on the other hand, are more likely to say each alternative system's ballot *is* clear, would strengthen their vote, and would be preferable to FPTP in a direct contest between the two.

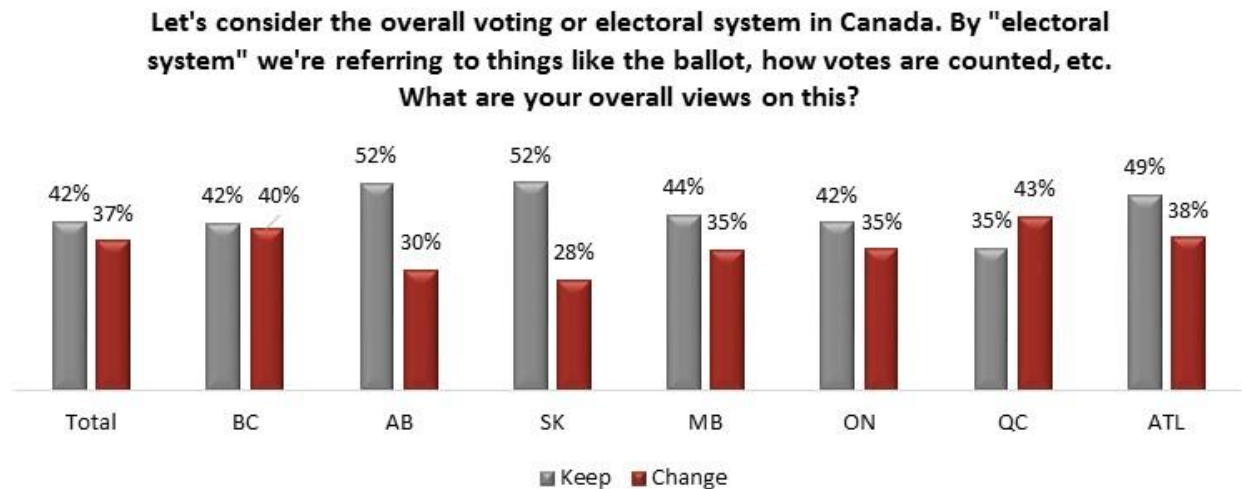
Liberals tend to be in the middle, with their responses most closely resembling the views of the general population. For greater detail, [see past vote tables](#).

Political preferences also influence other demographic views on this topic.

Regionally, for example, Alberta and Saskatchewan – two regions the Tories dominated in 2015 despite losing their majority in parliament – come out most strongly in favour of maintaining the status quo.

That said, there are clearly other factors at work in the regional responses. As the following graph indicates, Atlantic Canadians – who live in a region where the Liberals swept all of the ridings en route to their majority in 2015 – are also more strongly supportive of FPTP.

Quebecers – who have a history of supporting parties other than the Liberals and Conservatives – are the only regional subgroup who are more inclined to favour a change:

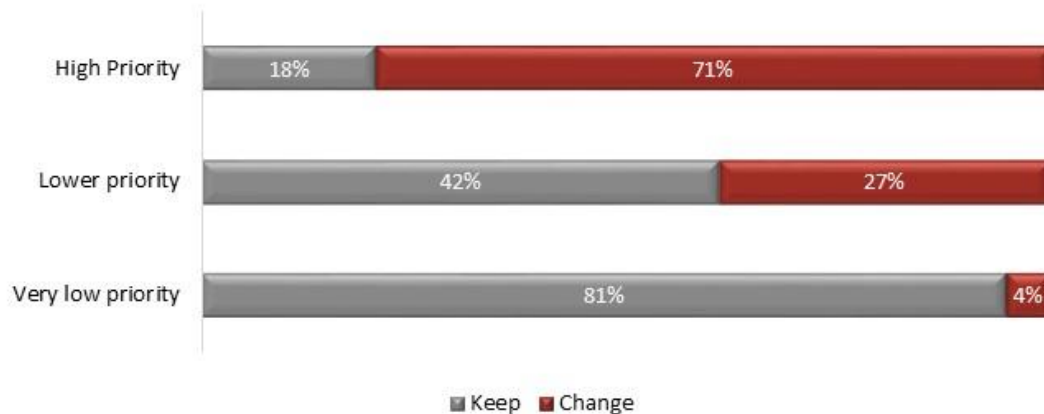


The influence of political preferences can also be seen in responses by age, with Canadians ages 55 and older more likely to favour keeping the FPTP system ([see comprehensive tables](#)).

There is one other notable driver of opinion on this file: views on whether switching to a new voting system is a priority.

As might be expected, those who view changing the system as a high priority overwhelmingly favour making a change, while those who view it as a "lower" or "very low" priority favour leaving things the way they are.

Let's consider the overall voting or electoral system in Canada. By "electoral system" we're referring to things like the ballot, how votes are counted, etc. What are your overall views on this?



PART 5 – Other proposed changes

The deadline for the special committee on electoral reform to recommend changes is December 1. Following the presentation of results, the government says it will provide its own web-based survey for the participation of all Canadians, so they may weigh in on what they expect from democracy and voting systems in Canada. With this in mind, the Angus Reid Institute also canvassed Canadians on a couple of other electoral changes:

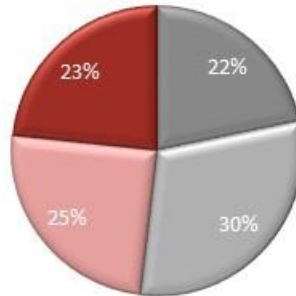
- Mandatory voting (required by law)
- Lowering the voting age to 16

Mandatory Voting

The electoral committee is said to be researching the pros and cons of requiring all citizens of voting age to cast a ballot in federal elections. This is the practice in a number of countries, including Brazil, Australia and Belgium, among others. In Canada, where voter participation has trended downward since the mid-1960's and reached historic lows in 2008 (58.8%), this idea has gained traction in some circles.

Canadians themselves are split on the issue. Half (52%) say they would support it, 22 per cent strongly, while half (48%) oppose it, 23 per cent strongly.

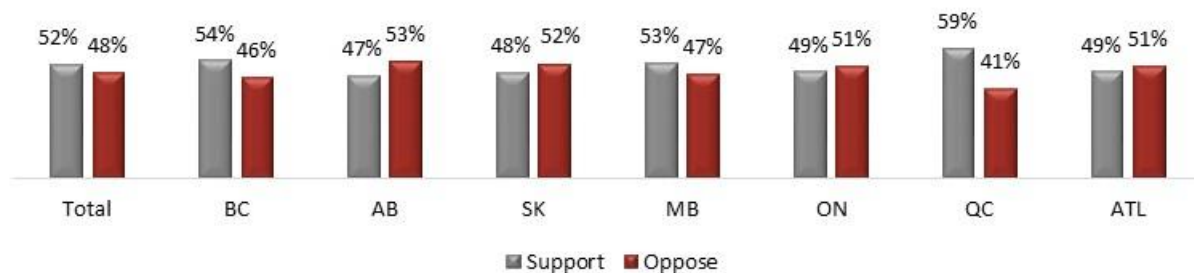
Some other proposals have been made regarding voting in Canada. Do you support or oppose each of the following:
Mandatory voting (required by law)



■ Strongly Support ■ Moderately Support ■ Moderately Oppose ■ Strongly Oppose

This split opinion is fairly steady across age and gender ([see comprehensive tables](#)), though regionally, Quebecers, British Columbians and Manitobans show the most support for mandating participation in elections.

Some other proposals have been made regarding voting in Canada. Do you support or oppose each of the following:
Mandatory voting (required by law)

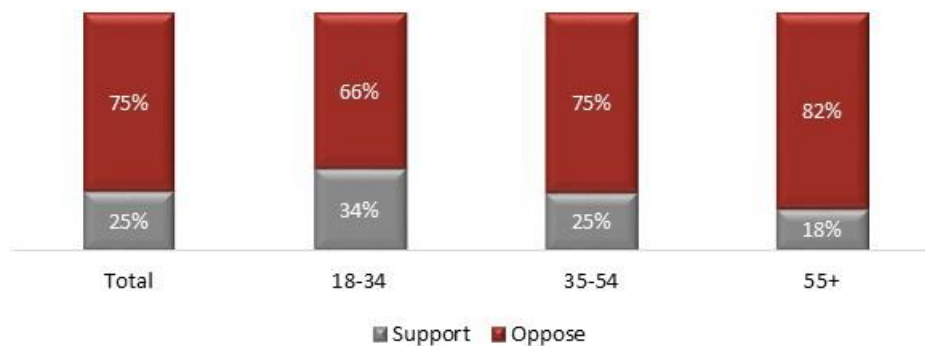


Lowering voting age to 16

Another proposal, presented in the House by NDP MP [Don Davies early in 2016](#), is to lower the voting age federally from 18 to 16. Only six nations, Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua, allow voting for citizens this young, but proponents argue that it would help to invigorate the electoral system.

It would not be the first time Canada has tinkered with voting age. Until 1970 voters had to be 21 years of age to participate. Canadians however, are not supportive of another move to lower the age. Three-quarters of respondents say that they oppose lowering the age to 16. Younger Canadians, age 18-34, are most supportive, though two-thirds (66%) of them also oppose such a measure:

Some other proposals have been made regarding voting in Canada. Do you support or oppose each of the following:
(Lower the voting age to 16)



The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research organization established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.

Summary tables follow. For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

For detailed results by past vote, [click here](#).

How the systems compare to each other:				
	Electoral system			
	Mixed Member Proportional	Single Transferable Vote	List Proportional	Rural-Urban Proportional
Would you say the average Canadian voter filling out this ballot would find it clear or confusing?				
Clear	52%	42%	42%	46%
Confusing	48%	58%	58%	54%
Compared to the FPTP system, do you think this system would strengthen, weaken, or have no impact on how meaningful your vote is?				
Weaken	20%	28%	23%	28%
No impact	33%	31%	34%	39%
Strengthen	47%	41%	43%	32%
Compared to the FPTP system, do you think this system would strengthen, weaken, or have no impact on the political choice of people in your community?				
Weaken	20%	28%	22%	28%
No impact	36%	32%	37%	40%
Strengthen	44%	40%	41%	32%
Suppose you had to choose between MMP and the currently used First Past the Post system. Which of the two systems would you prefer?				
FPTP	37%	45%	39%	48%
The other system	38%	29%	35%	26%
Not sure/Can't choose	24%	26%	26%	26%

Let's consider the overall voting or electoral system in Canada. By 'electoral system' we're referring to things like the ballot, how votes are counted, etc. What are your overall views on this?

	Total (1516)	Changing the voting system is a ...		
		High/Very high Priority (519)	Lower priority (679)	Very low priority (317)
Strongly favor keeping the current system	23%	7%	12%	70%
Moderately favor keeping the current system	20%	11%	30%	11%
Undecided/Don't really care either way	21%	11%	31%	14%
Moderately favor changing to a different system	21%	26%	25%	4%
Strongly favor changing to a different system	16%	45%	2%	1%