

Electoral Reform

1. Changing our Electoral System

Our mandate: we must examine and propose a model of proportional representation best suited for our province. It must result in fairer representation, greater equality of votes, an effective government and legislature, and a continued role for directly-elected MLAs representing specific geographic boundaries.

An electoral or voting system is the way votes are translated into seats. It is how we elect our MLAs and determine who represents us in the legislature.

Electoral System Families

The Commission is looking at two main types or families of electoral systems: our current plurality system and a possible new proportional representation system.

Plurality – candidates are elected with a plurality of the votes cast (the most votes). It is not necessary to receive a majority of votes (ie. more than 50%) to win. The party winning the greatest number of seats in the legislature forms the government. Parties routinely win a majority of seats and form the government with less than a majority of the total popular vote.

There are two main kinds of plurality systems: single-member and multi-member. New Brunswick currently has a single-member plurality (SMP) system where one candidate is elected in each riding and each voter has one vote; until 1974, it had a multi-member plurality system. Canada, Britain, India, and the U.S. all have SMP systems. They are often known as first-past-the-post electoral systems.

Proportional Representation (PR) – the number of seats won by each political party in the legislature is based on the percentage of popular vote won by that party in the election. There are three main forms or models of PR voting systems: list, mixed member proportional (MMP), and single transferable vote (STV).

List PR

Under a pure **list PR** model, seats are allocated in the legislature from lists of candidates offered by each party in a multi-member riding. There are two types of lists: closed or open. Under closed lists, voters cast their ballot for the party of their choice based on a list of candidates drawn up by the party.



Did you know
that all 18 new
democracies in
post-Communist
Europe have
chosen proportional
representation
electoral systems?

Candidates at the top of the list get elected first, over those further down on the list. Under open lists, voters are able to indicate a preference for one candidate over another on the lists drawn up by the parties.

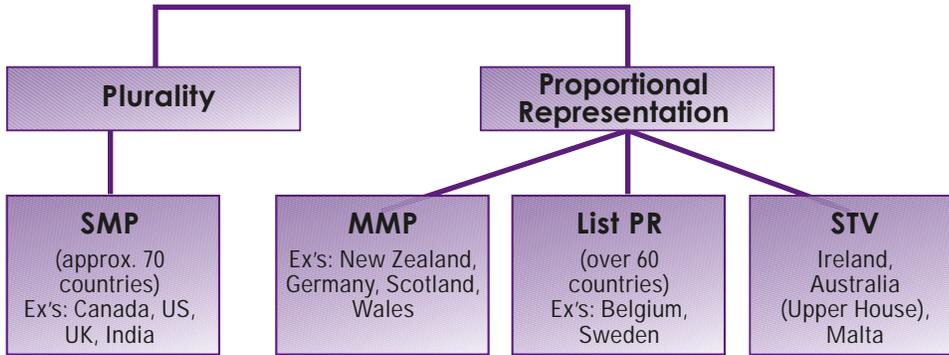
Mixed Member Proportional (MMP)

Under a **mixed member proportional (MMP)** model, some seats are allocated from a party list (open or closed), while others are won by individual candidates running in single member ridings, as in a plurality system. Parties are awarded seats based on the total proportion of votes received, through the party vote, and based on the single member ridings they have won. The aim of a mixed system is to combine - or mix - the benefits of local representation found in a SMP system with the proportionality of a PR system. MMP is sometimes referred to as the "two vote system" since voters get two votes – one for their party of choice and one for their local candidate of choice. It is also called the "additional member system" since parties can gain additional members in the legislature – on top of their single member riding seats – through the party list vote to ensure that they reach, but not exceed, the total proportion of votes cast for them.

Single Transferable Vote (STV)

Under the **single transferable vote (STV)** model, voters in multi-member ridings are able to indicate a preference for more than one candidate on a ballot by rank-ordering them. Instead of voting for a party as is done under a list PR model, or voting just for one candidate and party under the single member plurality model, voters place one, two or three next to each candidate's name (depending upon the number of candidates) to indicate their first, second, third or other choice. Candidates must receive a certain threshold of votes in their particular riding to win. Candidates receiving the least number of votes are dropped off the ballot and the second, third, and other preferences marked on their ballots are re-distributed to the remaining candidates until all seats are filled. Proportional results are obtained by using preferential voting in multi-member ridings.

Electoral System Families



Key Parts of an Electoral System

There are three key parts to any electoral system:

1. **Electoral Formula** – *the method of counting votes to elect a member.* This could be plurality, majority, or proportional. New Brunswick uses a plurality method.
2. **District Magnitude** – *the number of members elected from each riding or district.* Electoral districts can be single member (as we have now in New Brunswick) or multi-member (as we had prior to 1974).
3. **Ballot Structure** – *the types or preferences of votes cast by each voter on the ballot paper.* Plurality systems allow one vote, as do closed list PR models. MMP models allow voters two votes: one for the candidate and one for the party. STV systems allow voters to rank-order candidates on the ballot.

Each of these parts of our electoral system will have to be considered in examining and proposing a model of proportional representation best suited to New Brunswick.

The table below presents each of the main proportional representation models based on these three parts to an electoral system:

	Ballot Structure	District Magnitude	Electoral Formula
List	1 vote – closed list 2 or more votes – open list	Multi-member	Seats won by each party are proportional to percentage of total votes cast for each party
MMP	2 votes – 1 for party list and 1 for single member riding	Single member and multi-member	Combined party list seats and single member riding seats on by each party are proportional to percentage of total votes cast for each party
STV	2 or more vote preferences	Multi-member	Voter preferences are allocated until number of candidates meeting electoral threshold equals number of seats

Electoral System Trade-Offs

It is important to remember that no electoral system is perfect. There are trade-offs between systems. Each has unique characteristics that some people may think are a strength, while others may consider a weakness.

For example, stable single-party majority governments able to implement unpopular but necessary policies may be a strength for some people, while others might prefer multi-party coalition governments that govern by consensus. A two-vote or more preference under a mixed member or STV model might seem overly complex to some people, while others could see it as giving voters more choice at election time.

Countries choose a particular electoral system to best reflect the democratic values or goals that matter most to them. Many systems are based on long historical traditions and practices built up over many years. Others have been chosen or adapted to meet changing political and social circumstances.

Any new model of proportional representation for New Brunswick must be evaluated and considered on the basis of four main criteria set out in our mandate:

- **Fairer representation** – of parties and society in the legislature.
- **Greater equality of votes** – so votes cast are reflected in seat results.
- **An effective government and legislature** – able to govern on behalf of all New Brunswickers.
- **A continued role for directly-elected MLAs representing specific geographic boundaries** – so voters continue to have a local MLA representing them.

Electoral System Features and Considerations

Here are some general, basic features usually found under single-member plurality and proportional representation electoral systems:

Basic Features of SMP and PR Electoral Systems	
Single-Member Plurality	Proportional Representation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single-party majority government • Two-party system • Strong executive (Premier/Cabinet) dominance • Majoritarian approach • Single member ridings • One-vote ballot 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi-party coalition government • Multi-party system • Executive-legislative balance • Consensus approach • Multi-member ridings (list PR or STV); Mix of single and multi-member ridings (MMP) • Two or more votes preferences on the ballot

Because each electoral system works a certain way, it produces different results. As noted earlier, this may be considered an advantage or strength for some people, or a disadvantage or weakness to others.

To help you consider the advantages and disadvantages of both the current single member plurality system and a new proportional representation model, the next section sets out “the case for” and “the case against” each one.

Our Current Single-Member Plurality System

The Case For SMP – keywords: effective and accountable.

The SMP voting system delivers strong, stable, single-party majority governments able to act decisively over their mandates. Governments and MLAs are directly accountable to voters at election time with direct links through the single member ridings. Voters can pass judgment on the effectiveness of their local member and the government as a whole by voting for or against their local member and, therefore, the government. Parties forming government are usually broad-based and centrist in their approach in order to attract as many voters as possible. Voting is straightforward and counting results is simple and fast.

The Case Against SMP – keywords: distorted and unrepresentative

Under the SMP voting system parties generally win a majority of seats with a minority of votes. Its “winner-takes-all” effect distorts election results by giving exaggerated majorities to winning parties. Voters are aware of this and may cast votes in favour of the candidate most likely to win. This can result in too small an opposition to perform an effective accountability function. Strong executive power is concentrated with the premier and cabinet. Results are often not representative since smaller parties are penalized and cannot win many seats even with a significant minority of votes. Not as many women and minorities are elected under SMP systems.

Here is a summary of the main features often found in our current SMP system.

Main Features

- Stable, majority governments
- “Winner-takes-all” creates majority government with minority of votes
- Small oppositions can result
- Voters directly elect their local member
- Simple to vote and understand
- Local members represent local ridings
- Voters can hold government and local member directly accountable
- Familiar to voters
- Broad, centrist parties hold power
- “Wasted” votes that may not count
- Smaller parties don’t win seats
- Fewer women, minorities elected
- Strong executive power with Premier/Cabinet

A New Proportional Representation Voting System

The Case for PR – keywords: representative and choice

PR voting systems elect a legislature with a generally representative cross-section of society as reflected in the number and type of political parties. Since every vote counts towards the party’s total percentage of popular vote (which is the basis of awarding seats), PR systems result in fewer “wasted” votes. This results in more parties gaining seats in the legislature. Voters can, in some PR models, cast ballots for parties as well as candidates giving them more choice. Governments are often coalitions containing more than one party, which can result in more consensual decision-making. Representation of women and

minority legislators is higher under PR systems. Voter turnout is also higher under PR systems.

The Case Against PR – keywords: unstable and complex

PR voting systems typically lead to coalition or minority governments, which can be less stable than a single-party majority government. There are more parties represented in the legislature, which can make governing more difficult. Candidate lists are mainly drawn up by the parties, giving them more influence in deciding who voters can choose. Two votes, one for the party and one for the candidate, is more complex for voters to understand. With two or more parties in a coalition government, PR governments are less accountable since voters may not know which party is primarily responsible for policies and decisions they do not like.

Here is a summary of the main features often found in a proportional representation voting system.

Main Features

- % of seats won correspond to % of votes cast
- Fewer “wasted” votes
- Coalition or minority governments
- More parties represented in legislature
- Members chosen from lists prepared by parties
- Multi-member ridings
- Party influence increases
- More women, minorities elected
- Governments less directly accountable
- Mix of single member and multi-member ridings

The following table sets out a comparison of actual election results in New Brunswick under the current single-member plurality electoral system and possible election results under a proportional representation electoral system.

Selected NB Election Results under SMP and PR - A Comparison					
Election Year	Popular vote Percentage & number of seats under SMP and PR	PC	LIB	NDP	OTHER
1999	% popular vote	53%	37.3%	8.8%	0.9%
	SMP seats	44	10	1	0
	PR seats	29	21	5	0
1987	% popular vote	28.4%	60%	10.5%	0.5%
	SMP seats	0	58	0	0
	PR seats	17	35	6	0
1974	% popular vote	46.5%	47.2%	3%	3%
	SMP seats	33	25	0	0
	PR seats	27	28	2	1

(SMP results are actual. PR results are representative only, based on a pure PR system. It could vary under a different model of PR.)

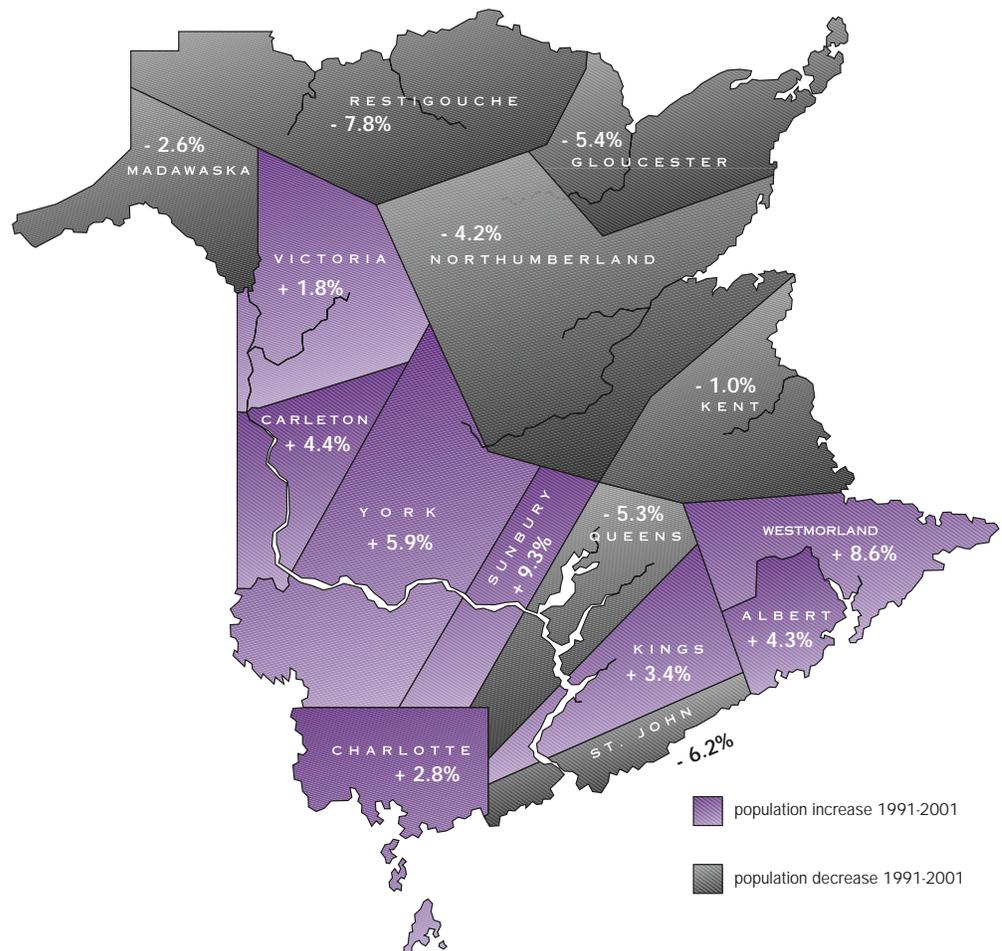
2. Drawing New Electoral Boundaries

Our mandate: we must set out the principles and procedures to guide future changes to New Brunswick's electoral boundaries, including the number of constituencies to be represented in the Legislative Assembly.

The last time New Brunswick's electoral boundaries were changed was just prior to the 1995 election – almost 10 years ago. At that time, the number of MLAs was reduced from 58 to 55. This took place following the 1991 Canadian census.

Since then, there has been another census in 2001 and the province's overall population has declined. Where people live in New Brunswick has also changed. Some parts of New Brunswick now have more people than before, others less, as the following map shows:

New Brunswick population trends 1991-2001, by county



Current Process to Draw Boundaries

Unlike most other provinces and the Parliament of Canada, New Brunswick has no independent, regular method, or timetable set out in law to change the number of MLAs or the electoral boundaries for each constituency.

New Brunswick's electoral boundaries are set out in the *Elections Act*. The current boundaries were established in 1994. Previously, in 1973 and 1991, the government established a Representation and Boundaries Commission to review current boundaries, consult the public, and recommend changes. A Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly then reviewed the Commission's recommendations. Finally, amendments to the *Elections Act* were introduced to make the boundary changes official. While this last process was successful in reducing deviations in constituency sizes as they then existed, it was not independent of the legislature or political input.

Number of MLAs

New Brunswick elects its MLAs based on the principle of "representation by population". That means that each MLA should generally represent the same number of voters. This is also important to ensure that all votes count as equally as possible from one constituency to another when electing an MLA. It helps ensure equitable access by voters to their MLA.

The number of MLAs is important for a variety of reasons. More MLAs means smaller constituencies and fewer people represented by each MLA. That can lead to greater access and familiarity with your local MLA.

More MLAs can result in competition and conflict between broader provincial interests, as represented by all MLAs together, and more narrow local interests as represented by individual MLAs. As well, there is an additional cost, although not necessarily large, to have more MLAs.

Electoral Boundary Principles

Based on the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Supreme Court of Canada has established certain principles around drawing electoral boundaries. These have been reinforced and clarified by various provincial and federal boundary-drawing processes over the years. Together, these principles should contribute to the right of "effective representation".

The main principles include:

- **Population** – all constituencies should generally contain the same population while allowing for some deviation between constituencies.
- **Independent** – the process for drawing boundaries should be independent of the political parties and elected officials.

Did you know
that today in New Brunswick, we have 55 MLAs representing 750,000 people? By contrast, Nova Scotia has 52 MLAs to represent 936,000 people.

Did you know
that constituency
sizes in New
Brunswick range
from 16,718 voters
in Dieppe-
Memramcook to
4,057 voters in
Fundy Isles?

- **Transparent** – the process and rules for future boundary changes should be set out in law and passed in open debate in the legislature.
- **Community of Interest** – unique communities of interest around the province should be taken into account when drawing boundaries.
- **Accessible** – citizens should have the right to make representations and be heard during the boundary drawing process.
- **Appeal** – citizens should have a right to appeal proposed boundary changes before they are finalized.

When it comes to drawing boundaries in our own province, New Brunswick's unique heritage and legal recognition of both official linguistic communities is a primary consideration. As well, our rural population and distribution of communities and local service districts is an important factor.

A further consideration is addressing representation from New Brunswick's Aboriginal communities in the legislature. There are no formal designated "Aboriginal seats" or sufficiently concentrated First Nations populations to constitute a majority in a current provincial seat.

Changes to Number of MLAs and Districts

Years	Number of MLAs	Electoral Districts
1967 – 1970	58	22, mostly all multi-member
1974 – 1991	58	58 single-member
1995 - present	55	55 single-member

Did you know
the average
constituency size in
New Brunswick is
10,238 voters?