

BC's current electoral system

Single Member Plurality system

BC has used the Plurality system in all provincial elections, with the exceptions of 1952 and 1953 when the province experimented with a version of the *Majority system* called the *Alternative Vote*. Currently, all electoral districts in BC elect one MLA – so our system is called Single Member Plurality (SMP). This system is also used throughout Canada.

Plurality systems with single-member districts are often compared to a race in which the winner is the one who crosses the finish line first – which is why it is often called First Past the Post (FPTP). The winner is the most popular candidate – the one who receives more votes than any other candidate, even if the winner is supported by less than a majority of voters in that riding.

The SMP system is based on geographic representation. The contestants in a plurality system election are individual candidates – usually aligned with a political party – who want to represent a riding.

SMP is used in Britain, India and Canada.

Electoral districts

British Columbia is currently divided into 79 electoral districts. Each of BC's 79 MLAs is elected from and represents one of these districts.

At the polling booth

Voters each have one vote which they can cast for any one candidate on the ballot in their electoral district. Since one MLA is elected from each electoral district, parties put forward one candidate in each riding. Independent candidates – who are not affiliated with a party – often run for election as well.

The ballot lists the candidates with their party affiliation, if any. Voters place a mark (X) beside the candidate of their choice.

Sample SMP ballot

| | |
|--|--------------------------|
| Ballot – one MLA to be elected | |
| Instructions: Indicate your choice by placing an "X" in the box to the right of your preferred candidate's name. | |
| Smith, Diana - Apple party | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Jang, Paul - Pear party | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Gill, Julie - Peach party | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Roberts, Wendy - Plum party | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Sidhu, David - Apricot party | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Chernoff, Andrei - Independent | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Votes are counted on a district-by-district basis for individual candidates. There is no minimum number of votes a candidate needs to be elected, since winning candidates are those with the most votes.

Implications of SMP

- Generally produces stable one-party majority governments able to dominate parliament
- Identifiable local representatives are chosen in and for each area
- Governments and members are accountable through electoral contests
- The system is familiar, easy to use and easy to understand
- Voters mark one choice on the ballot
- A party's share of seat in the legislature often does not mirror its share of votes
- Minority interests and small voices are often not represented in the legislature
- When compared to their vote share province-wide, large parties tend to get more than their share of seats, while small parties tend to get less than their share of seats
- Winning parties can get a majority of seats without a majority of votes – sometimes called an “artificial majority”
- Many votes do not contribute to electing anyone, so can be considered “wasted”
- The party with the most votes may not win the election

NOTE: See the Assembly's website for detailed information on the Assembly process, electoral systems and the Assembly's recommended system, BC-STV.

Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform

www.citizensassembly.bc.ca