

Glossary of Terms Relating to Elections, Representation and Government in British Columbia

This list gives brief definitions of terms used to describe the governmental and electoral process in British Columbia. Many of the terms are included because they help to explain the overall system of government in the Province. Others provide background information for the role which elections play in our system of representative parliamentary democracy. In the explanation of a term, words which are in bold are further explained elsewhere in the glossary.

act of parliament See **legislation**

additional member Some **electoral systems** permit the election of additional members to a representative **assembly** as a way of increasing the proportionality of an electoral system or to give an opportunity for the representation of small parties; see **mixed systems**.

adversarial An adversarial political system is one dominated by a struggle for power between two rival party groupings. Politics is seen as highly competitive with little room for compromise. Actions by the governing party are always opposed by the opposition party. See also **consensus**; **majoritarian**.

assembly This term is sometimes used as an abbreviation for **legislative assembly**, the representative body which British Columbians elect as their parliament. More generally, it can refer to an elected body which forms part of the **legislature**, or to any group which claims to represent a political community; the Citizens' Assembly uses the term in this latter sense.

at large election An election held 'at large' is one in which the whole body of voters vote as one **electoral district** for the election of all the members of a representative **assembly**. At large elections are currently used for the election of members to the City Council of Vancouver. See also **multimember district**, **single member district**.

alternative vote (AV) The alternative vote is a preferential electoral system (see **preferential voting**) which requires a voter to number the names of the candidates on the ballot paper in the order of the voter's preference (that is, to rank the candidates by putting 1, 2, 3, etc. next to their names). If no candidate gains a **majority** of votes on the first count, the second preference listed on the ballots of the least successful candidate are distributed among the remaining candidates. This process continues until one candidate has a majority of votes. The alternative vote

system can be supplemented by electing **additional members** to provide an opportunity for the representation of small parties; see **mixed systems**.

British Columbia used the alternative vote to elect members to the legislative assembly at the 1952 and 1953 general elections.

AV See **alternative vote**

back bench In British derived **parliamentary systems**, the members of parliament who are **ministers** sit in the front row of the seats or benches assigned to the governing party. As a consequence, those who sit on the back benches are members of the governing party who are not ministers. These members are known collectively as the back bench. The opposition back bench are those members of the **opposition party** who are not senior members of the party or do not hold a position as **shadow minister** or parliamentary spokesperson for a particular area of policy for the opposition party.

ballot Ballots are the papers on which votes are recorded. A vote can be a single mark, or one or more marks or numbers to elect one or more candidates or parties (see **electoral system**). The term ballot can also be used to refer to the process of casting votes.

BC-STV See **single transferable vote** and the relevant sections elsewhere in this Report

bicameralism A bicameral **parliament** is one which has two **chambers**, a lower house and an upper house. The lower house is often called the legislative assembly or house of assembly and, in **parliamentary systems**, is the house where the **government** is formed. The Canadian parliament is bicameral with the non-elected Senate as the upper house, the House of Commons as the lower house.

British Columbia has always had a unicameral parliament, with its single chamber known as the **legislative assembly**. Some provinces joined confederation with upper houses but all of these have since been abolished, the last being Quebec's Legislative Council in 1968.

bill See **legislation**

BNA Act See **Constitution Act, 1867 (Canada)**

British North America Act 1867 See **Constitution Act, 1867 (Canada)**

by-election The death, resignation or disqualification of a **member of parliament** creates a **casual vacancy** in the chamber. At present, such vacancies in the **legislative assembly** can be filled by holding a special election called a by-election in the **electoral district** whose seat has become vacant. Some electoral systems do not

require by-elections to fill vacancies but use some other procedure specified by the **constitution** or the **electoral system**.

cabinet The cabinet is a meeting of the **premier** and the **ministers** who together make key decisions about government administration and policy. Even though the cabinet plays a central role in the operation of **parliamentary government** in British Columbia, the responsibilities and operation of the cabinet are not written down in any formal constitutional document (see **constitution**; **executive council**; **government**).

candidate A candidate is someone who runs for office at an election. In British Columbia, a candidate is a person who is eligible to stand for election to the **legislative assembly** and who has fulfilled the requirements for **nomination** set out in the **Election Act (British Columbia)** (part 5, division 1). These include being supported by 25 voters in the electoral district in which the candidate intends to run, and making a deposit of \$100.

Almost all successful candidates are members of political **parties** and parties themselves have procedures for choosing candidates. The process of nominating candidates is a vital one for a political party; by choosing a candidate, it permits that candidate to use the party label and to contest the election in the name of the party. See also **nomination**; **party discipline**.

casual vacancy A casual vacancy is the technical term used for a vacancy in the membership of the **legislative assembly** which occurs between **general elections**. Such vacancies can occur because of the death, resignation or disqualification of a member of the legislative assembly. Such vacancies can be filled by holding a **by-election** or through some other procedure specified by the **constitution** or the **electoral system**.

caucus Caucus is a meeting of the **members of parliament** who belong to a particular **party** (as in, the Liberal caucus, the NDP caucus). Meetings of caucus—which are usually held in private—may discuss a wide range of topics of concern to party members, including the policies to be followed by the party and parliamentary tactics. Caucus meetings are an important forum for the exchange of information between the party leaders, ministers (if the party is in government), and the **back bench**. In the past, voting at a meeting of the party caucus was used in Canada as a common way of choosing the **party leader**. Today, leaders are usually chosen at a party convention, or by direct **ballot** of all the party members.

chamber The room in which an **assembly** meets is often called the assembly chamber. By extension, it can refer to a meeting of the assembly or the assembly itself. Bicameral means ‘having two chambers’ so a bicameral parliament is one with two chambers; see **bicameralism**.

coalition A coalition is a grouping of two (and occasionally more than two) **political parties** which work together to win **government** or to increase their influence in a representative **assembly**. The coalition parties may indicate before an election that they intend to work together if they win office, or coalition agreements may be formed after the election when it is clear that no single party has a majority of seats. See also **majority government**.

commission The formal authority given to someone to hold a senior position in government is called a commission. A commission can be issued by the **lieutenant governor** alone or by the **lieutenant governor in council**. **Ministers**, senior public servants and judges are all issued commissions when they are appointed; see **order in council**.

When the party in government is defeated at an election, or loses the support of a majority of members in the **legislative assembly**, the lieutenant governor invites the leader of the party which has the support of a majority of members to form a new **government** by offering to commission the leader as **premier**. Once other ministers have been chosen by the premier, they are given commissions for their departmental responsibilities (sometimes called portfolios).

consensus (system) In contrast to a **majoritarian** or **adversarial** system, a consensus system aims to disperse power among a number of political institutions, actors and parties so that government policy requires compromise and the accommodation of a range of views before action can be taken. Consensus systems do not regard bare majority support as sufficient to legitimize government action—broader support is required so that as many groups as possible can be persuaded of the merits of the action. Electoral systems with **proportional representation** are seen as consensus systems because they are more likely to produce **coalition** governments and the need for parties to compromise over their policies.

constituency This term is often used interchangeably with **riding** to refer to an **electoral district** of the legislative assembly. It can also refer to the audience, interested public, or interest group which is the concern of a particular **member of parliament**.

constitution A constitution is a set of rules which describes the key institutions of **government**—particularly the composition of the **legislature** and the **executive**—and specifies the procedures which government institutions must follow if their actions are to be authoritative. A constitution can be thought of as a higher law because it limits what governments can do.

Constitutional documents vary in what they contain and how much detail they provide about the day-to-day operation of government. British derived constitutional documents typically say little about the institutions of executive government, especially the role of the **premier**, **ministers**, the **cabinet** and the relationship between these institutions and **parliament**.

Many of the constitutional rules establishing the government of the Province of British Columbia can be found in the **Constitution Act (British Columbia)**.

Constitution Act (British Columbia) This provincial constitutional document sets out many of the rules relating to the operation of the **legislative assembly** and executive **government** in British Columbia, but it is far from a complete specification of the operation of government in the Province. Some of the rules relating to the conduct of government can be found in other provincial acts of parliament or official documents; others rely on accepted practices which are not set out in formal constitutional documents. These unwritten rules are sometimes called **constitutional conventions**. (A copy of the Act can be found on the Queen's Printer website (<http://www.qp.gov.bc.ca/statreg/default.htm>). Note that the web version of the Act may not include the most recent amendments.)

Constitution Act, 1867 (Canada) This Act (known before 1982 as the *British North America Act* or simply the *BNA Act*) is a component of the Canadian Constitution together with the *Constitution Act 1982* which includes the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The 1867 Act established the confederation of Canada by setting up a new national government and dividing law-making power between the national government and the provinces. One of its provisions sets out the procedures for appointing and removing the **lieutenant governors** of the provinces. (A copy of the Act can be found on the web (<http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/const/>).)

constitutional conventions Constitutional conventions are accepted practices which supplement or modify the provisions of formal constitutional documents. It is a constitutional convention, for example, that the **premier** of British Columbia is a member of the **legislative assembly**, and that the **lieutenant governor** only **dissolves** parliament on the advice of the premier. See **Constitution Act (British Columbia)**.

Crown The formal exercise of power by **government** in Canada is carried out by the governor general and provincial **lieutenant governors** in the name of the Crown. The Crown is symbolic **head of state** of the Canadian federation and its provincial components, and reflects the fact that Canada is a monarchy under Queen Elizabeth II.

democracy Democracy has become an imprecise term but, at its core, it refers to the belief that **governments** should be responsive to the wishes of the majority of citizens. This explains why elections and democracy are often thought of as being closely related; elections provide a means of choosing a government acceptable to the majority of voters and, by electing a representative **assembly**, creating a body which can make governments accountable. But what we think of as democratic government needs more than just elections; it requires a constitutional structure (see **constitution**) and a set of rules which protect minorities and individuals as well as majorities. See also **representative democracy**.

direct democracy Direct democracy refers to procedures which enable citizens to decide questions directly through their vote rather than indirectly through the election of representatives or through other procedures. The referendum is an example of direct democracy; voters, not elected politicians, decide whether a proposal is accepted or rejected. Other examples include the recall (a procedure for forcing members of parliament to recontest their seats after a specified number of citizens petition for a new election) and the initiative (a procedure for requiring the **legislature** to consider proposals for legislation once the proposal has the required number of supporters). All three of these modes of direct democracy are available in British Columbia (*Recall and Initiative Act*; *Referendum Act*). See also **representative democracy**.

dissolution (legislative assembly) The **legislative assembly** is said to be dissolved when the **lieutenant governor** ends a session of the legislative assembly and starts the process for holding a **general election**. In this matter, the lieutenant governor acts on the advice of the **premier**.

Until 2002, members of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia held their seat for five years from the date of the previous general election but, since 2002, provision has been made for the legislative assembly to have a **fixed term** of four years.

district magnitude (DM) This term refers to the number of representatives to be elected from an **electoral district**. See also **at large election**; **multimember district**; **single member district**.

Droop quota (formula) In counting votes for electing candidates under a **single transferable** vote electoral system, the minimum number of votes needed for a candidate to be elected (the quota) can be calculated by using the Droop quota formula. The quota is calculated as follows: first, the total valid vote in the electoral district is divided by one plus the number of members to be elected; then, one is added to the total (fractions are ignored).

The Droop quota is the smallest number of votes to elect enough candidates to fill all the seats being contested in an electoral district, while being just big enough to prevent any more being elected. If the Droop formula is applied to a single member district, the quota is the total votes (100 percent) divided by 1 plus the number of members to be elected (1); the result is 100 divided by 2 which gives 50 percent plus one vote—a share of the vote that only one candidate can get.

H R Droop was an English lawyer who suggested this formula in 1868 as a component of an electoral system.

election, timing of See **dissolution**

Election Act (British Columbia) The *Election Act* sets out the administrative machinery for running elections in the Province. In 2004, it has 283 sections dealing with the many aspects of organizing an election including the appointment and duties of electoral officials, the qualifications and registration of voters, the procedures for calling an election, the procedures for the nomination of candidates, the arrangements for voting, the scrutiny and counting of votes, the registration of parties, the monitoring of election expenditure and political advertising, and the penalties for breaching the rules laid out in the Act. (A copy of the Act can be found on the Queen's Printer website (<http://www.qp.gov.bc.ca/statreg/default.htm>). Note that the text may not include the most recent amendments.)

electoral district The geographical area from which one or more representatives is chosen at an election is called an electoral district. Electoral districts are also called ridings or constituencies. The number of members to be chosen from an electoral district is often called its **district magnitude**. At present the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia is composed of 79 members each elected from one of 79 single member electoral districts (district magnitude of 1); see also **at large election**; **district magnitude**; **multimember district**; **single member district**; **SMP**.

electoral formula The electoral formula is the rule which governs the translation of votes into seats. The electoral formula for the current electoral system in British Columbia is a simple one: the candidate who wins more votes than any other in each electoral district is elected.

There are many different kinds of electoral formulas, but they can be grouped into a number of families: **plurality** systems where seats are won by the candidate with the most votes even if the candidate does not get a majority of votes; **majority systems** where candidates must get a majority of votes to be elected (see **alternative vote**; and **second ballot**); proportional systems (see **proportional representation**) where the parties fielding candidates are represented in proportion to the votes won by each party or candidate; and **mixed systems** which combine two of these systems.

electoral rules The whole body of rules regulating all aspects of an election; see **Election Act (British Columbia)**; **electoral system**.

electoral system The simplest definition of an electoral system is that it is the set of rules for translating votes cast at an election into seats for a representative **assembly** according to a specified **electoral formula**. Another way of defining an electoral system is to say that it comprises the **electoral formula**, the **ballot** structure, and the number of members in each **electoral district** (the **district magnitude**).

electorate The electorate is the whole body of electors. The term is also used occasionally to mean a single **electoral district**.

endorsed (candidate), endorsement See **candidate**; **nomination**; **party**; **party discipline**

executive The institutions of **government** have traditionally been classified under three heads: the **legislature** which makes laws; the **judiciary** which interprets laws and applies them to particular cases; and the executive which administers laws made by the legislature. The biggest of these components is the executive because it includes most of the activities we associate with government—all government departments and public servants as well as the **premier**, the **cabinet** and **ministers** are part of the executive.

It can be helpful to subdivide the executive into three components: the formal executive, the **head of state** which, in British Columbia is the **lieutenant governor** acting in the name of the **Crown**; the political executive which is the premier, ministers and the cabinet acting as the key decision makers for steering government; and the public service and government agencies which administer the laws of the Province.

Executive Council The Executive Council is a formal meeting of the **premier** and one or more **ministers** to prepare documentation for authorization by the **lieutenant governor**.

federal The term federal is used in two ways: ‘the federal government’ refers to the national government in Ottawa. But as an adjective derived from federalism, federal government is a way of dividing government so that there are two spheres of government activity, a national one with responsibility for services which relate to for the whole country, and several regional governments called states or provinces to look after regional concerns.

first past the post (FPTP) A first past the post electoral system is one in which the candidate with a **plurality** of votes wins the **seat** in a **single member district**. British Columbia currently uses a FPTP electoral system for electing members to the **legislative assembly**. See **majority**.

fixed term Representative **assemblies** can be elected for a fixed term (the United States House of Representatives has a fixed term of two years), or for a maximum term with the provision for an early election.

British derived parliaments have usually had maximum terms which, depending on the parliamentary system, have varied between three to seven years. Few parliaments run their full term and are dissolved earlier at a time when the **government of the day** considers it appropriate to hold a **general election** (see **dissolution**).

In British Columbia, as in all Canadian provinces, the discretion to advise the calling of an election has been a powerful weapon in the armoury of the premier to use for partisan advantage. But, since 2002 and the bringing into force of the *Constitution (Fixed Election Dates) Amendment Act* of 2001, the timing of general

elections in British Columbia has been fixed for ‘...May 17, 2005 and thereafter on the second Tuesday in May in the fourth calendar year following the general voting day for the most recently held general election’ (**Constitution Act (British Columbia)** section 23(2)). Note that the **lieutenant governor** can still dissolve the **legislative assembly** before that date (see section 23(1)) but the circumstances required for this to occur would have to be either that the **parliament** had become unworkable because of split in the governing party or **coalition**, or that a strong willed premier was willing to call a general election notwithstanding the ‘fixed’ date.

FPTP see **first past the post**

general election A general election is an election for all the seats in the **legislative assembly**. Vacancies which occur as a result of the death, resignation or disqualification of a member of parliament in between general elections can be filled at a **by-election**. See also **casual vacancy**; **dissolution**.

government In everyday language, the government is the label given to the whole structure of public sector activities but the term also has narrower meanings (see **executive**). Where there is a distinction made between the government and the parliament, government refers to the **ministers** and public officials who steer the day-to-day operation of departments and agencies, as opposed to the debating, scrutinizing and law making activities which occur in parliament. The **premier** and other ministers, as members of parliament, are politically responsible for government policy and collectively form what is sometimes called the **government of the day** (see also **cabinet**). In this narrow sense, the government is the premier and the body of ministers **commissioned** to implement the policies of the party or coalition which has the support of a majority of the members of the legislative assembly. See also **parliamentary system**.

government of the day See **executive**; **government**

governor general See **lieutenant governor**

Gregory (method) In counting votes under a **single transferable vote** system, if a candidate has more than the minimum number of votes needed to be elected (see **Droop quota**), a procedure is needed to allocate the surplus votes to other candidates. This may be done by taking a number of ballots equal to the surplus at random from the ballots of the successful candidate and assigning votes to the next available preference shown on the ballot (that is, to candidates who have not already been elected or excluded)..

In 1880, J B Gregory contended that this process of random selection could produce varying results depending on the choice of the randomly selected ballots used for making the transfers to other candidates. He suggested that all the relevant ballots should be recounted, assigned to other candidates according to the preferences of

the voters, but at a reduced value called the transfer value. The transfer value is calculated by dividing the surplus votes by the total number of relevant votes.

There are three variations of the Gregory method which differ as to the definition of 'relevant votes' for calculating the transfer value. Gregory's original suggestion was that only the ballots that last contributed to the creation of the surplus votes should be counted (the Gregory last parcel method). Some Australian elections use a second method, the Inclusive Gregory method, where relevant votes are defined as all the votes that contributed to a candidate's surplus. The BC-STV system recommended by the Citizen's Assembly uses the Weighted Inclusive Gregory method under which all votes are counted and assigned to other candidates still in the count according to the voters' preferences, but the ballots are given separate transfer values depending on their origin (that is, whether they are first preferences, or transfers from one or more other candidates).

The Citizens' Assembly decided that the Weighted Inclusive Gregory method was most in keeping with the goals of proportional representation by the single transferable vote, was fairer to the voters than the other options, and did not add significantly to task of counting (or recounting) ballots.

head of government See **premier**; **parliamentary system**

head of state The head of state is the name given to the office which exercises the formal **executive** power of the government and, on official occasions, represents the whole political community. While British Columbia is nominally monarchical in form, the powers of the **Crown** as head of state are exercised by the **lieutenant governor** of the Province. The head of state in parliamentary systems is an office which is seen to be above politics, in contrast to the head of government who is the prime minister or **premier**.

Note that the distinctive characteristic of the United States presidential system is that the roles of head of state and head of government are combined in the office of an elected President. In **parliamentary systems**, the offices of head of state and head of government are kept separate.

House of Commons The House of Commons is the name given to the lower house of the Canadian and British parliaments (see **bicameralism**). Parliament in British Columbia has only one **chamber** called the **legislative assembly**.

independent An independent candidate or member of parliament is one who is not a member of a political **party**. Independents have been elected to the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, the last being in 1949. A member elected to the legislative assembly as a member of a party may subsequently decide to leave the party and sit as an independent.

judiciary The judiciary is the collective term for courts and judges; the judicial branch of government. See also **executive; legislature**.

legislation Laws and government regulations are collectively known as legislation. A bill (a proposal for a law) which has been passed by the **Legislative Assembly of British Columbia** and has been assented to by the **lieutenant governor**, becomes law as an act of parliament. Such an act of parliament can also be referred to as a statute of British Columbia.

legislative assembly The Legislative Assembly of British Columbia has been the elected component of the Province's **parliamentary system** of government since the establishment of self-government in the Province in 1871. It is currently a representative body of 79 members elected from **single member districts** for a term of four years unless dissolved earlier (see **fixed term; dissolution**). The government must maintain the support of a majority of the members of the Assembly to stay in office. The functions of the legislative assembly include passing legislation, authorizing the raising and expenditure of public money, scrutinizing the activities of **government**, raising issues of public concern, investigating matters of public interest, and acting as a forum for publicizing the concerns of individuals and groups throughout British Columbia.

All Canadian provinces have a representative **assembly** which discharges similar functions. All but three provincial assemblies are called the legislative assembly; Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador each have a house of assembly, and Quebec has a national assembly.

legislature The legislature is the law making component of government (see **executive**). In the case of British Columbia, the legislature is the **legislative assembly**, although it should be noted that legislation which has passed through the legislative assembly does not become law until it is assented to by the **lieutenant governor**. To this extent, the legislature of British Columbia is the legislative assembly and the lieutenant governor acting in the name of the Crown. See also **assembly; bicameralism; parliamentary system; representative democracy**.

lieutenant governor All the functions of **head of state** for the Province of British Columbia are performed by the lieutenant governor of British Columbia in the name of the **Crown**. The lieutenant governor is appointed (and can be removed) by the **Governor General** of Canada (see *The Constitution Act, 1867* (Canada) section 59). The appointment (or removal) is made on the advice of the prime minister.

The formal powers of the lieutenant governor are very extensive and include the power to **commission** governments, to appoint all important **executive** and judicial officers in the province, to initiate legislation, to endorse all laws passed by the provincial **legislature**, and to summon and dissolve parliaments (see **dissolution**; note the **Constitution Act (British Columbia)**, sections 7, 9, 13, 21, 23, 46, 48). These powers are, on almost all occasions, exercised on the advice of the **premier**

or the **Executive Council** (a formal meeting of the premier and one or more **ministers**). The current role of the lieutenant governor is to perform official governmental duties as the representative of the Crown, and to represent the Province at a wide range of community functions throughout British Columbia.

The relationships between the lieutenant governor, the premier, the Executive Council, ministers and **parliament** are not well specified in provincial constitutional documents and rely heavily on customary practices (often called **constitutional conventions**) rather than constitutional law (see **constitution; Constitution Act (British Columbia)**).

In relation to the electoral process, the lieutenant governor has a formal role in setting in process the procedures for holding legislative assembly elections, but is not otherwise involved. If, after an election, no party gains a majority of **seats** in the assembly, the lieutenant governor may play an important role in the selection of the premier and the formation of a **government** (see **commission**). The lieutenant governor may also play a role in the choice of premier if a premier resigns in mid-term.

lieutenant governor in council This refers to a formal meeting of the **lieutenant governor** and the members of the **Executive Council** to ratify decisions made by the **premier** and **cabinet**. In practice, this formal ratification usually takes place through an exchange of documents rather than a meeting.

list system (of proportional representation) List systems are one of two families of electoral systems using **proportional representation**. Proportional representation by the list system is based on the voter choosing between lists of **candidates** provided by political **parties**. While there are many ways of counting votes under a list system, and some versions permit voters to select their preferred candidate from a party list (open list or flexible list systems), list systems are based on the representation of parties as organizations rather than individual candidates.

In the simplest list systems, an elector votes for a party list, and the share of votes gained by each party list is matched by a similar proportion of seats in the assembly. If a party wins 30 percent of the votes for an assembly of 100 members, the party is assigned 30 seats, the members being the top 30 of a list of candidates provided by the party before the election.

local member Under the current **single member plurality** electoral system used in British Columbia, each electoral district has one member. This member is often described as the local member. Many British Columbians value having a local member as someone who is aware of local issues and can help constituents in their dealings with government departments.

lower house See **bicameralism**

majoritarian This term is used in a general sense to refer to a system of government where power is concentrated in a single governing party which controls a parliamentary executive having broad constitutional powers to act in the name in the majority. See also **adversarial**; **consensus**.

A majoritarian electoral system is one which privileges parties which win a **majority** of parliamentary seats even if they do not gain a majority of votes. **Single member plurality systems**, and the **alternative vote** and **second ballot** systems are all seen as majoritarian electoral systems.

majority A majority of votes or seats is one more than half the total number of votes or seats; fifty percent plus one. See also **plurality**.

majority system A majority electoral system is one which requires candidates to gain a **majority** of votes before they are elected. The two most common majority systems are the **alternative vote** and the **second ballot**. See also **plurality**.

majority government A majority government is one which is supported by a majority of members of the **legislative assembly**, all of whom are members of the same political party. This is in contrast with a **coalition** government where a parliamentary majority is composed of the members of two (and occasionally more than two) political parties, both of whom have **ministers** in the government. It can also be contrasted with a **minority government** where the governing party does not hold a majority of seats but is kept in office by the support of one or more parties or **independent** members who do not contribute ministers in the government.

While British Columbia has experienced only majority governments since 1953, there were coalition governments between 1941 and 1952 (Liberal and Conservative parties), and a minority government (Social Credit) from 1952 to 1953.

member of the legislative assembly (MLA) This is the title of someone who is elected to the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia. The abbreviation MLA can be used as shorthand for a member of the legislative assembly.

Members of other provincial parliaments usually have titles to suit the name of their legislatures: MLA for a member of the legislative assemblies of Alberta, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Saskatchewan; MHA for a member of the houses of assembly of Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nova Scotia; and MNA for a member of the National Assembly of Quebec (Député de l'assemblée nationale de Québec). Ontario is unusual in that members of its legislative assembly are called MPP—member of provincial parliament. Members of the Canadian House of Commons are called MP—member of parliament.

member of parliament A member of parliament is a member of any representative **assembly** which is part of a **parliamentary system**. See also **Member of the legislative assembly**

minister A government minister in British Columbia is (almost always) a member of the legislative assembly who is **commissioned** by the **lieutenant governor** on the advice of the **premier** to be responsible for one or more government departments or areas of government activity. These responsibilities comprise the minister's portfolio or portfolios. All the ministers in a government, including the premier, are known collectively as the ministry and meet as the **cabinet** to make decisions about government policy and administration. The lieutenant governor, acting on the advice of the premier, can terminate a minister's commission. The resignation or termination of the commission of a premier terminates the commissions of all the ministers in that government.

It is assumed that ministers will be, or will become, members of **parliament** but this is not specified in the Province's constitutional documents; see **Constitution Act (British Columbia)**.

ministerialist See **party**

ministry see **minister**

minority government A minority government is one where the governing **party** does not control a majority of seats in the **assembly**, and has not formed a **coalition** agreement with another party in the assembly to establish a parliamentary majority and to share ministerial posts. A minority government is kept in power by an understanding that the **government** will gain the support of another party (or one or more **independent** members) who will vote to support the government. This support does not involve the party becoming part of the government's ministerial team, and the support may not extend to supporting all of the government's legislative program.

The essence of a minority government is that the support keeping the government in office can be withdrawn at any time, triggering the loss of the government's majority in the assembly. Loss of majority support in the assembly gives the **premier** two choices: the premier can resign in favour of another member of the assembly who can form a government which has the support of a majority of assembly members; or—and this will be the usual outcome—the premier can recommend to the lieutenant-governor that parliament is dissolved and a **general election** is held.

Minority governments are not necessarily unstable or short lived if they can come to an agreement with another party to support the government—the Liberal minority government in Ontario from 1985 to 1987, for example, entered into a formal accord with the Ontario New Democratic Party. Even with this support, the government must work continually to gain support beyond its own partisan supporters for every piece of legislation. Such a situation makes governments

extremely responsive to the views of members of parliament, and open to parliamentary scrutiny in ways which rarely occur under **majority governments**.

mixed member proportional (MMP) The mixed member proportional (MMP) system is a **mixed system** of representation which usually combines a **single member plurality** electoral system with a **list system of proportional representation** to achieve an assembly whose party composition reflects the proportion of votes cast for each party. Voters are required to vote for both a local member and a preferred party (sometimes this is combined into a single choice for a candidate and party), and the assembly is made up of members who are elected from single member electoral districts and members who are elected from party lists. This system has been adopted for the German lower house (the Bundestag) and, more recently, by New Zealand's House of Representatives. This mixed system aims to combine the advantages of geographical representation (the local member) with the proportional representation of parties.

mixed systems It has become common over the last decade for electoral systems to combine two **electoral formulas** for the choice of candidates for a representative **assembly** (see **additional member**). New Zealand, for example, has adopted a system which combines a **single member plurality system** with a **list system of proportional representation** (see **mixed member proportional (MMP)**). While most mixed systems aim to achieve proportional outcomes—the vote share of a party is matched by a similar share of seats in the assembly—this is not always the case. Some mixed systems such as that used for the Japanese House of Representatives produce outcomes which favour large parties. These systems are sometimes called mixed member majority systems (MMM).

MLA See **member of the legislative assembly**

MMM See **mixed systems**

MMP See **mixed member proportional**

multimember district A multimember district is an **electoral district** which returns more than one member to a representative **assembly**. The number of members returned from an electoral district is called the **district magnitude**. Multimember districts have district magnitudes greater than one.

British Columbia has a long history of using multimember districts for the **legislative assembly**. From the first election for the legislative assembly in 1871 until 1986, multimember districts were used to elect a substantial proportion of the members. Two, three, four, five and six member districts have been used, with multimember districts of three or more sometimes being used for the urban areas of Vancouver and Victoria.

The Citizens' Assembly has recommended that British Columbia adopt multimember districts as a component of the BC-STV electoral system. Sparsely settled and remote areas of the province may have electoral districts with as few as two members, while densely populated regions may have electoral districts with from 5 to 7 members.

nomination Nomination is the process of fulfilling the requirements for becoming a **candidate** at an election. It has two components: an official component requiring the candidate to fulfil the formal requirements specified under the **Election Act (British Columbia)**, and a partisan component requiring a candidate who wants to run under a party label to gain the endorsement of a **party** (see **candidate**).

official opposition In a **parliamentary system**, the members of parliament who do not support the **government** are known collectively as the opposition. The largest party grouping of these members is often given formal recognition as the official opposition, with its leader known as the leader of the opposition. This recognizes the opposition as a potential alternative government, and the leader of the opposition as the **party leader** who may become the **premier** after the next **general election**. The office of leader of the official opposition is mentioned in the **Constitution Act (British Columbia)** (section 1), but no role is specified for the office.

opposition See **official opposition**

order in council This is an official document issued by the **lieutenant governor in council** under the authority of an act of the **legislative assembly** appointing someone to an official office or authorizing action by a specified person, office or body. The Citizens' Assembly was established by an order in council.

parliament Parliament is the general name given to representative **assemblies** in Canada. In British Columbia it refers to the **legislative assembly**. These bodies make the laws which regulate our social and economic life and provide the authority for government action. Note that the Parliament of British Columbia comprises the legislative assembly and the **lieutenant governor** acting in the name of the **Crown**; laws cannot be made without the assent of the lieutenant governor. The **executive** can also delay or defer the date on which **legislation** comes into force. This arrangement strengthens the already considerable power of the **government of the day** to control the process of law making. See **parliamentary government**; **parliamentary system**.

parliamentary government Parliamentary government is a system of **representative democracy** in which the most important **executive** officials are chosen from among the members of an elected assembly; see **parliamentary system**.

parliamentary system A parliamentary system of government is one of the two basic forms of **representative democracy**. The distinguishing characteristic of

parliamentary government is that the **government of the day** is chosen from representatives who have been elected to a parliamentary **assembly**. That is, the most important elected offices of government—the **premier** or prime minister and the other ministers who together with the premier form the **government**—are not elected directly but indirectly through parliamentary elections. Since the emergence of **parties** with strong party discipline, parliamentary government has meant that governments in Canada usually have control over stable parliamentary majorities (see **majority government**). This greatly reduces the ability of parliamentary assemblies to challenge the wishes of the government of the day in parliament.

Parliamentary systems make a distinction between the **head of government** (the premier or prime minister) who is the chief elected official in the government, and the **head of state** who represents the formal exercise of executive power (see **lieutenant governor**).

The other system of representative democracy is presidential government. In this system, the president who is both head of government and head of state, is elected separately from a representative **assembly**. Ministers are not usually permitted to be members of the assembly but are appointed by the president. Presidential systems combine the offices of head of government and head of state in the president, but aim to check the power of the government of the day by separating power between the president and a powerful legislature (see **executive**).

parliamentary term See **dissolution**

party The **Constitution Act (British Columbia)** provides a definition of a party as ‘...an affiliation of electors comprised in a political organization whose prime purpose is the fielding of candidates for election to the **legislative assembly**...’ (section 1). For a party’s name to appear on the ballot paper at an election for the legislative assembly, and for a party to gain tax and other financial benefits, the party must be registered under the **Election Act** (Part 9).

Parties as we know them today first contested elections in British Columbia in 1903. Before that date, government majorities were maintained by loose groups of members of the **legislature** united by a general stance on public policy, by loyalty to a particular leader, or by the hope of advancement. The label ‘ministerialist’ is often given to governments which operated in such a system. See also **caucus**; **party discipline**; **party leader**; **independent**.

party convention See **party leader**

party discipline Modern parties are disciplined in the sense that, once elected to a representative **assembly** under the label of a **party**, it is expected that the member will adhere to the general principles and platform of the party and will vote with his or her colleagues in the **assembly**. If the member does not conform to the decisions of the party, he or she may be threatened with expulsion from the party **caucus** and

the withdrawal of the party's **endorsement** at the next election (see **nomination**). This is a powerful inducement for members to conform to the party line. It is the price that members must pay for using the party label to gain election, and to gain the benefits of party membership.

party leader The leader of a political **party** is a person chosen to speak for the party, to be the focus of election campaigns, and to take responsibility for the party's performance in **parliament**. If the party wins enough seats to win **government**, the party leader becomes premier or prime minister. Party leaders in Canada are now chosen by leadership conventions organized by the party, or by a **ballot** of all party members. See also **caucus**.

In British Columbia, the leader of a political party which has four or more members in the **legislative assembly** is recognized by the **Constitution Act (British Columbia)** as being "leader of a recognized political party" (section 1).

plurality A party which gains a plurality of votes or seats is one which has more votes than any other party, but does not have a **majority** of votes or seats.

plurality (electoral) system A plurality electoral system is one which permits candidates to win seats even though they do not gain a **majority** of votes; see **first past the post**; **single member plurality system**.

political party See **party**

portfolio See **minister**

PR See **proportional representation**

preferential voting Any **electoral system** which requires voters to rank candidates on a ballot paper by numbering them in the order of the voter's preference, is a preferential voting system. The **alternative vote** and **proportional representation** by the **single transferable vote** method require voters to number their ballots under a system of preferential voting.

British Columbia used preferential voting with the alternative vote for the 1952 and 1953 general elections in the Province.

The BC-STV electoral system recommended by the Citizens' Assembly uses preferential voting.

premier The premier is the name given to the **head of government** of the Province of British Columbia and is the Province's chief elected **executive** official. The premier is **commissioned** by the **lieutenant governor** to form a government which has the support of a majority of members of the **legislative assembly**. The premier is usually the leader of the political party which has won a majority of seats in the

legislative assembly. See also **coalition; government; head of state; majority government; minority government; minister; parliamentary system.**

Although the premier is mentioned in the **Constitution Act (British Columbia)** as president of the **Executive Council** (section 9(1)), the position and role of the premier in the governmental system is not well specified in provincial constitutional documents. Even though the premier is the most important political office in the province, the functions and responsibilities of the premier as head of government are left to customary practices rather than constitutional law (see **Constitution Act (British Columbia)**).

primary An election to decide which of a party's members will be nominated by the party to contest an election as the party's candidate is called a primary election, or simply a primary. Primaries can be organized by a party to select its candidates, or primaries can be run as part of the official election process and regulated by legislation. This is the case for presidential elections in many states of the United States.

proportionality The view that a party's share of votes should be matched by a similar share of seats in the legislative assembly rests on an idea of representation which stresses the importance of proportionality. Those who argue that fairness—in the sense of producing proportional outcomes—is the most important component of an electoral system, favour **proportional representation.**

proportional representation (PR) Proportional representation refers to a family of **electoral systems** which stress the importance of ensuring that the proportion of **seats** won by a party in a representative **assembly** reflects as closely as possible the proportion of votes won by the party. These systems often use more complicated procedures than other electoral systems for counting votes and allocating seats, but the basic principle on which they are based is straightforward—a representative assembly should reflect the distribution of opinion in the political community as closely as possible. There are two broad ways in which proportional representation can be achieved: the **list system** and the **single transferable vote (STV)** system. Proportional outcomes can also be achieved by mixing proportional representation with a non-proportional system; see **mixed member proportional (MMP)** systems. See also **mixed systems; seat share; vote share.**

The single transferable vote system of proportional representation is sometimes called a quota preferential systems because it uses **quotas** for working out which candidates are to be elected.

All systems of proportional representation require **multimember districts** or **at large elections.**

quota Under the **single transferable vote system of proportional representation,** the quota is the minimum number of votes required for a candidate to be elected. The

quota will vary according to the number of members to be elected from the electoral district (**district magnitude**) and the formula used. See **Droop quota**

recall See **direct democracy**

recognized party See **party**

referendum See **direct democracy**

register of voters See **voters list**

representation The notion of representation is a complex one but at its core is the idea that one thing can stand for another. Parliamentary **democracy** is based on the premise that an elected **assembly** can represent the interests of the political community as a whole. Electoral laws are components of this system of representation. What is to be represented and how the representation is to be accomplished are key questions for the design of an electoral system for a parliamentary assembly.

representative assembly See **assembly**

representative democracy A democratic political system is now assumed to be one in which periodic elections are held to choose key **executive** and legislative office holders and to keep the **government** responsive and accountable to citizen voters. That is, popular control of government is achieved indirectly through the election of representatives to act on behalf of the political community. It is now usually taken for granted that **democracy** means representative democracy rather than **direct democracy**.

responsible government The term responsible government is often used to describe the relationship between the **government**—the **premier** and other **ministers**—and the legislative **assembly** in British style **parliamentary systems**. It refers to the fact that the political executive—the premier and ministers—are chosen from and accountable to an elected parliament. In this respect it is a synonym for **parliamentary government**.

Responsible government also suggests that ministers are individually and collectively responsible to parliament for the actions of government. This is true in a broad sense—the government will be held accountable for its actions at the next **general election**—but it is less true if it implies that ministers will be held to account for their actions by parliament. The existence of disciplined political **parties** has meant that ministers can usually escape punishment for reckless or incompetent actions by themselves or their departments by blaming an advisor or a public servant. Punishment is only meted out to ministers if the premier (or prime minister) assesses that the minister has become a political liability to the government as a whole.

riding See **electoral district**

run off See **second ballot**

seat A seat is shorthand for a member of a representative **assembly**. The **Legislative Assembly of British Columbia** has 79 seats, that is, it is made up of 79 members.

seat share The seat share of a **party** is the proportion of **seats** it has won at a **general election** for a representative **assembly**. It can be compared with the party's **vote share** to see if the seat share is proportional to the votes cast; see **proportional representation**.

second ballot The second ballot electoral system is a **majority system** which requires elections to be run in two stages. At the first stage, electors vote using a **first past the post** system. Candidates winning a **majority** of votes are declared elected. In **electoral districts** where no candidate wins a majority of votes, a second election is held where the contest is restricted to the two candidates who won the most votes at the first stage, or only those candidates with more than a certain share of the vote. At the second election, the candidate with the most votes wins. The second ballot system is a majority system because it ensures that all or most successful candidates have majority support.

The second ballot is used in France for the election of the president (an election at large across the whole country). If no presidential candidate wins a majority of votes on the first round, only the top two candidates take part in the runoff election held two weeks later. For the election of the 577 members of the French National Assembly (from 577 single member districts), only those candidates with more than 12.5 percent of the first round vote can participate in the runoff elections held one week later in those electoral districts where no candidate won a majority at the first election. At the 2002 elections for the French National Assembly, only 58 members were elected with majorities on the first round.

Senate (Canadian) See **bicameralism**

shadow minister In some parliamentary systems, the **opposition** party assigns members of the party to take special note of the policy areas dealt with by particular **ministers**. These opposition members who are 'shadow' ministers have no official status but may, as a matter of courtesy, be given more access to government information than other opposition members. Some opposition parties may not choose to create shadow ministers or parliamentary spokespersons for particular policy areas, but may give all opposition members responsibility for monitoring an area of government activity. See also **back bench**.

single member district This is an **electoral district** which is represented by a single member of a representative **assembly**. See also **district magnitude**; **local member**.

single member plurality system (SMP) This electoral system is the system currently used in British Columbia for the **legislative assembly**. See **first past the post**; **local member**; **majority**; **plurality**; **single member district**.

single non-transferable vote (SNTV) The non-transferable vote (SNTV) is an **electoral system** which gives voters a single vote in an **electoral district** which is represented by two or more members of an **assembly** (see **multimember district**). The candidates with the most votes are elected. The implications of this system are that, in order to maximize its representation, a large party must discipline its supporters so that their votes are allocated between the party's candidates. It also means that candidates of the same party are, to some extent, running against each other as much as opposition candidates. The electoral system produces semi-proportional results and has been used in Japan, Korea and Taiwan.

single transferable vote (STV) Single transferable vote (STV) systems are one of two families of **proportional representation**. Proportional representation by the single transferable vote method is based on the idea that the range of opinion in the community should be mirrored in the composition of the representative assembly. While there are many ways in which STV can be modified, it rests on the assumption that voters can choose between candidates rather than parties. Voters are required to rank candidates in the voters' order of preference by numbering the candidates on the ballot (see **preferential voting**). The ballots are then counted in a way which ensures that as many ballots as possible contribute to the election of a candidate of the voters' choice. The procedures for doing this can be complicated, but the principle is straightforward—that a variety of minority as well as majority opinions are represented in the assembly, provided that the minorities have a large enough proportion of votes to cross the **threshold** for representation. This threshold is set by the **quota** of votes needed for representation and can vary depending on the details of the STV system to be used; see **Droop quota**.

The details of the BC-STV recommended for British Columbia by the Citizens' Assembly can be found elsewhere in this Report. See also **Gregory method**.

SMP See **single member plurality system**

SNTV See **single non-transferable vote**

spoiled ballot A spoiled ballot (or vote) is a ballot paper which cannot be counted towards a candidate's or party's total vote because the ballot is incorrectly filled in or has marks or writing on it which break electoral rules for the validity of the ballot. The more complicated the ballot, the higher the likelihood of spoiled ballots.

statute See **legislation**

STV See **single transferable vote**

threshold In its narrow sense, this term refers to the minimum proportion of the vote required to gain representation under any given **electoral formula**. This is particularly important in proportional systems because the threshold affects the number of small parties which can gain representation (see **proportional representation**).

It can also be used more broadly to indicate the minimum proportion of votes, or the minimum number of seats, which must be won before a party can gain representation under an electoral system. Under the German **MMP** system, for example, a party must win 5 percent of the votes or three electoral districts before its vote share can be matched by the appropriate proportion of seats. These rules are designed to prevent the representation of very small parties.

transfer value See **Gregory method**

turnout The proportion of voters on the **voters list** who go to a polling place on election day and cast a vote, is called the turnout. The turnout for the British Columbia provincial general election held in 2001 was 71.0 percent.

vote share The vote share of a party is the proportion (expressed as a percentage) of the total valid votes won by a party at a general election. It can be compared with the party's **seat share** to see if the seat share is proportional to the votes cast. See **proportional representation**.

voters list This is the official list of all persons eligible and registered to vote at an election. See also **turnout**.

Weighted Inclusive Gregory (method) See **Gregory method**

Westminster system This term is often used to describe the British variant of **parliamentary government**. While the term and the British parliamentary tradition are frequently applied to describe the Canadian parliamentary system, Canadian parliamentary institutions differ significantly from the British system, most notably in the limitations on parliamentary government imposed by the federal system and the entrenchment of key sections of the Canadian Constitution, judicial review of government action and legislation, and the existence of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The most important common factor between the British and Canadian parliamentary traditions is a monarchical executive and the failure of constitutional documents to specify the roles, functions and responsibilities of the **head of state**, **head of government** and the relationship between the **premier**, **ministers** and parliament.