

BC-STV electoral system

A made-in-BC electoral system

After months of studying alternative electoral systems, listening to British Columbians' views and reading formal submissions, members of the Citizens' Assembly have recommended our province adopt a new voting system—a system that is fair, easy to use and gives more power to voters.

This system, which members custom-designed to meet British Columbia's specific needs, is a variation of the Proportional Representation by the Single Transferable Vote system – abbreviated PR-STV or STV. This made-in-BC electoral system was selected over all competitors because it best addresses three over-riding values: proportionality, local representation and voter choice.

STV is used in several countries to elect various levels of government. In Ireland, where it has been used since 1922, government attempts to change the system have been steadfastly rejected by voters.

How BC-STV works

BC-STV retains some important features of our current system:

- The number of MLAs is unchanged province-wide and for each region. All are elected by local ridings.
- The ratio of voters to MLA is the same.

However, BC-STV differs from our current, first-past-the-post system in several crucial ways:

- Fewer ridings will each elect several MLAs – between two and seven, depending on riding population.
- The voter ranks candidates on the ballot paper in the order of the voter's preference.

BC-STV is designed to make every vote count and to reflect voters' support for candidates and parties as closely as possible. It achieves this by ensuring that the share of votes for candidates and parties is reflected in the share of seats won in the Legislature. And it allows voters' second and third (and subsequent) preferences to come into play, if their first choice isn't elected.

Designed to make votes count

BC-STV is **fair** because it is proportional. Each party's share of seats in the legislature reflects its share of voter support. This proportionality means voters' views are fairly represented.

BC-STV is **easy to use** and gives voters more choice. Voters rank candidates in the order of their preference (1, 2, 3, etc.) – picking and choosing among candidates from the same party or from several different parties, including independents. Candidates are elected based on voters' choices.

BC-STV gives more **power to voters**. Voters can select and rank candidates from any or all parties – including independents. Since voters choose which candidates from any one party are elected, no party or candidate can count on a "safe seat". So, all candidates must work hard to earn voter support. This ensures effective local representation.

Example – STV ballot

(5 MLAs are to be elected from the riding)

Ballot - Instructions: Rank candidates in the order of your preference by placing a number in the box to the right of each candidate's name. "1" shows your first choice, "2" your second choice, "3" your third choice, and so on. You may rank as many candidates as you wish, from as many parties as you wish, but you must rank at least one.

Independent	Rempel, Anna	2
Apple Party	Smith, Chris	6
	Gill, Sarah	1
	Lepage, Pierre	3
Pear party	Wong, Arthur	5
	Lewis, Cheryl	
Peach Party	Chernoff, Sara	
	Jang, Paul	
	Roberts, Jean	
	Brown, Brooke	
Independent	Sidhu, Stan	4

At the polling booth

Because voters are electing more than one MLA in a riding, the ballot could list several candidates for each party, as well as independent candidates. Voters can rank as many or as few candidates as they wish. If a voter's first-choice candidate is not elected, that voter's second or third choice candidate could be.

MLAs are elected based on voter support. After the polls close, ballots are counted according to the voters' preferences, thus ensuring the most preferred candidates are elected. Elections BC – a non-partisan office of the Legislature – would continue to supervise elections, and scrutineers would continue to ensure ballots are counted accurately.

The Assembly carefully designed BC-STV to use paper ballots which could be counted by hand or by computer. If a recount were required, election results could be accurately checked.

Ridings

Under BC-STV, ridings are larger and each riding elects more than one MLA. This allows for proportional representation and gives independent candidates and those from smaller parties more chance of being elected.

The Assembly's BC-STV system would allow the size of ridings and the number of MLAs elected per riding to vary across the province to reflect local and regional conditions. In sparsely populated areas, districts could comprise as few as 2 or 3 MLAs and, in denser urban districts, as many as seven. For example, if five current ridings were combined, the new riding would elect five MLAs. In order to achieve proportionality, the Assembly favours larger ridings of 5-7 MLAs, where appropriate.

Ridings with two MLAs, such as those anticipated in sparsely populated regions of northern BC, likely would be about the same size as current federal ridings which have only one MP.

An independent electoral boundaries commission would draw the new electoral districts after holding hearings in all parts of the province and taking into account community interests.

Implications of BC-STV for British Columbia

- All MLAs are elected from local ridings. Since ridings each elect more than one MLA, constituents have a choice of MLAs to approach for assistance or information.
- Election results are proportional – a party's share of legislative seats mirrors its share of the vote.
- Independents and candidates from smaller parties are more likely to be elected, resulting in more diversity in the legislature.
- Voters are given considerable choice in selecting candidates.
- Party discipline may be weakened since voters control which candidates from each party are elected.
- Candidates tend to focus on local and regional issues, as well as province-wide issues.
- Elections reflect voters' choices, so may produce majority, minority or coalition governments.

The choice is yours

At the next provincial election, on May 17, 2005, voters in BC will decide on this referendum question: *Should British Columbia change to the BC-STV electoral system as recommended by the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform? Yes/No*

The choice is yours. Be sure to vote!

NOTE: For an explanation of how votes are counted under STV, see the Assembly website. The website also offers information on the Assembly process and on electoral systems.

Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform

www.citizensassembly.bc.ca