



# NEWS RELEASE

## B.C. requires more than one referendum on electoral reform; questions must be unbiased

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For immediate release

**VANCOUVER**—The British Columbia government shouldn't hold a single referendum on electoral reform—it should hold two, like New Zealand, finds a new study released today by the Fraser Institute, an independent, non-partisan Canadian public policy think-tank.

B.C. voters have until today (Feb. 28) to comment online on the government's plans to hold a referendum this fall—the third in 15 years.

“How governments get elected is perhaps the most important part of any democracy, and efforts to change the electoral system require very careful consideration,” said Lydia Miljan, Fraser Institute senior fellow, associate professor of political science at the University of Windsor and co-author of *Designing a Referendum Question for British Columbia*.

The study highlights best practices from Canada and the world for referenda on electoral reform.

For example, before their government changed their electoral system, voters in New Zealand participated in two referenda. The first gauged the appetite to change the voting system, and also asked which alternative electoral process should replace the existing one. Following this referendum, a legislative committee designed an alternative electoral system, complete with new riding boundaries and rules for coalitions and minority governments.

Only after this initial public consultation and education process, which clearly explained the consequences of change, did a second referendum ask New Zealanders whether they wanted to adopt the new alternative or maintain the status quo.

In addition, given B.C.'s size and unique population distribution, the study also urges that broad support be garnered from different parts of the province.

“Getting a legitimate mandate to fundamentally change the way citizens elect their governments is no easy task, and it requires buy-in from people across B.C.—not just in a few heavily-populated ridings in the Lower Mainland,” Miljan said.

“If the B.C. government wants to properly and fairly pursue electoral reform, it should hold two referenda that allow voters to truly understand the consequences of change.”

*The Fraser Institute will release several essays on electoral reform in B.C. over the next few months.*

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