

NEWS RELEASE

Proportional representation would give rise to smaller single-issue parties, increase uncertainty

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For immediate release

VANCOUVER—Changing British Columbia’s voting system to a form of “proportional representation” would give rise to smaller, single-issue parties and increase uncertainty in Victoria, finds a new study released today by the Fraser Institute, an independent, non-partisan Canadian public policy think-tank.

This fall, B.C. will hold a referendum on electoral reform—the third in 15 years—with voters to choose whether or not B.C. should switch from its current “first-past-the-post” voting system to a proportional representation system.

“Proportional representation voting systems lead to more single-issue parties, more unstable coalition governments and more uncertainty, which is bad for voters and the economy,” said Lydia Miljan, Fraser Institute senior fellow, associate professor of political science at the University of Windsor and co-author of *The Impact of Proportional Representation on British Columbia’s Legislature and Voters*.

Based on election data from 30 countries between 2000 and 2017, the study highlights several ways the B.C. legislature could change if the province adopts a form of proportional representation (PR).

- **More parties in the legislature:** Jurisdictions that use first-past-the-post, like B.C., elect an average of 2.5 parties each election, compared to 4.6 parties, on average, in countries with PR systems.
- **More coalition governments:** Only 23 per cent of first-past-the-post elections result in coalition governments, compared to 87 per cent in PR systems.
- **More uncertainty after the vote:** In countries with PR, it takes 50 days, on average, after elections before a coalition government forms. The average for mixed PR systems is 32 days. Recently, Northern Ireland set a record at 590 days—and counting—without a government.

“Voters should be aware of the trade-offs of each electoral system before making such an important choice that could fundamentally change the way governments are elected and run,” Miljan said.

“Moving to a form of PR would fracture the provincial legislature and lead to increased uncertainty, not only for voters but also potential investors who may look for more stable jurisdictions.”


(30)

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