Single Member, Party Proportional (SMPP):
A simple, fair, proportional electoral system for British Columbia

by Don Giberson

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Summary

Single Member, Party Proportional (SMPP) is a simple, fair, electoral system that achieves proportional representation (PR) with minimal change to our existing electoral process. SMPP is a proportional voting system that adds "top-up votes" in the legislature to achieve proportional representation among the parties. It is a system in which "every vote counts". It does not require redrawing electoral districts, ranking candidates or complex formulae for determining who gets elected. Since it does not make any changes to existing ridings and does not change how, or how many, MLAs are elected it is far less threatening to political parties than other PR options. Since it is a simple, fair system that produces highly proportional results with minimal change to our existing voting system, it is an electoral system that could succeed in the upcoming referendum. Finally, SMPP requires only one small change to our existing ballot so it can easily be implemented for the 2021 election, as promised by the government.

There are two ways Single Member Party Proportional (SMPP) can be designed:
- with top-up votes
- without top-up votes

SMPP with top-up votes is presented below and SMPP without top-up votes is covered in Appendix A.

Here is how Single Member, Party Proportional (SMPP) with "top-up votes" would work:

- Electoral districts remain unchanged and voters still elect a single member to represent them
- Voters cast 2 ballots: one for their preferred party and one for their preferred candidate
  (This is the only change that SMPP makes to our existing electoral system)
- The "candidate ballot" is used to determine who wins the riding: the candidate with the most votes is elected MLA (same as now)
- The "party ballot" is used to determine how many House Votes (HV) each party gets in the legislature: if a party gets 30% of the vote in the election, it gets 30% of the House Votes (HV) in the legislature
- Under SMPP, the number of House Votes (HV) is increased by 50%
- BC currently has 87 MLAs/votes; so, under SMPP, BC would have 87 + 50% = 131 House Votes

- Note that these are votes, not MLAs; the legislature would still have 87 MLAs but those 87 MLAs would have 131 votes divided among the MLAs based on each party's share of the vote
- A party's House Votes (HV) are divided into two parts:
  - Member Votes (MV): equal to the number of MLAs the party elected
  - Top-Up Votes (TUV): the remaining House Votes that are not MLA votes (TUV = HV – MV)
- Let's look at an example
- The table below shows the 2017 election results for B.C. under SMPP (with "top-up votes"):

Party	%	Adj. %	House Votes	MLAs (Member Votes)	Top-Up Votes
Liberal	40.36	41.40	54	43	11
NDP	40.28	41.32	54	41	13
Green	16.84	17.28	23	3	20
TOTAL	97.48	100.0	131	87	44

- B.C. MLAs currently have 87 votes in the legislature so, under SMPP, this increases to 131 House Votes
- The Liberal Party got 40.36% of the vote in B.C. and elected 43 MLAs (49.4% of the 87 MLAs/votes)
- Notice that the Liberals, NDP and Green Party combined got 97.48% of the votes. The remaining 2.52% of votes were cast for independents that did not get elected or for minor parties that did not elect any MLAs. SMPP includes an adjustment for these votes, otherwise 2.52% of the House Votes will not be assigned to any party's MLAs.
- The Liberal Party's vote is adjusted to 41.40% (40.36 of 97.48 = 41.40%)
- So the Liberal Party would get 131 x 41.40% = 54 House Votes (HV)
- The Liberals elected 43 MLAs so they get 43 Member Votes (MV) and 54 – 43 = 11 Top-Up Votes
- The NDP got 40.28% of the vote (41.32% adjusted) and elected 41 MLAs (47.1% of 87)
- So they would get 131 x 41.32% = 54 House Votes: 41 Member Votes (MV) and 13 Top-Up Votes (TUV)
- The Green Party got 16.84% of the vote (17.28% adjusted) and elected 3 MLAs (3.4% of 87)
- So the Green Party gets 131 x 17.28% = 23 House Votes: 3 Member Votes and 20 Top-Up Votes
- The table below compares the 2017 election results under First-Past-The-Post and under SMPP
- Notice that SMPP with "top-up votes" produces results that are nearly perfectly proportional:
  - Liberals: 40.36% of the vote and 41.2% (54 of 131) of the votes in the legislature
  - NDP: 40.28% of the vote and 41.2% (54 of 131) of the votes in the legislature
  - Green Party: 16.84% of the vote and 17.6% (23 of 131) of the votes in the legislature

	2017 B.C. election under FPTP			2017 B.C. election under SMPP		
	% of vote	MLAs	% of seats	% of vote	MLAs	% of House Votes
Liberal Party	40.36	43	49.43	40.36	43	41.2
NDP	40.28	41	47.13	40.28	41	41.2
Green Party	16.84	3	3.44	16.84	3	17.6
TOTAL	97.48	87	100.00	97.48	87	100.0

- The only remaining item is to explain how the Member Votes and Top-Up Votes get cast
- It is fairly straight forward but let's use an example to illustrate how this would work
- The Liberal MLAs have 54 House Votes (HV): 43 MLAs (MV) and 11 Top-Up Votes (TUV)
- Let's say 34 Liberal MLAs support a bill and 9 Liberal MLAs are against it
- Then, 79.1% of the Liberal MLAs are for the bill (34 of 43) and 20.9% are against (9 of 43)
- So 79.1% of their Top-Up Votes (11 x 79.1% = 8.7 TUV (rounded to 9)) are cast for the bill and 20.9% of their Top-Up Votes (11 x 20.9% = 2.3 TUV (rounded to 2)) are cast against the bill
- So the Liberal Party MLAs would cast 43 House Votes for the bill (34 MV + 9 TUV) and 11 House Votes against the bill (9 MV + 2 TUV)
- The House Votes for MLAs of the other parties for/against the bill would be calculated in the same way
- A bill would need a total of 66 House Votes (of 131) to pass (50%+, same as now)

Benefits of Single Member, Party Proportional (SMPP):

- it is simple: voters cast 2 ballots - one for their preferred party and one for their preferred candidate
- there is no need to rank candidates or parties
- electoral districts remain unchanged (no need to redraw boundaries)
- MLAs are elected in the same way they are now (no complex formulae required to determine winners)
- other than a slight change to the ballot, the electoral process stays exactly the same as now
- it is fair: if a party gets 30% of the vote, they get roughly 30% of the votes in the legislature
- nearly every vote counts (in determining how many votes each party gets in the legislature)
- voters elect a single, local MP from their riding, same as now (no need to select multiple members)
- SMPP produces results that are closely aligned with how voters voted
  (SMPP produces the most proportional results of any electoral system except for pure PR)
- it provides for regional representation: Top-Up Votes ensure every party receives votes in the legislature from every region in which they received votes, even if they did not elect any MLAs from that region
- it eliminates the need for strategic voting
- SMPP is likely to increase civility and collaboration between parties since, unless it wins a majority of the vote, the government will need the support of other parties to pass its legislation
- SMPP prevents fringe or single-issue parties from getting votes in the legislature since a party needs to elect at least 1 MP in order to get votes in the legislature
- SMPP could easily be implemented for the 2021 election
- SMPP achieves the 3 main things that many people appearing before the ERRE Committee said they want from their electoral system: that it be simple, that it be fair, that it retain local representation
- SMPP is an electoral system that could increase voter participation and political engagement
- SMPP does make any changes to existing ridings and does not change how, or how many MLAs, get elected, so it is far less threatening to political parties/candidates than other PR options

- since SMPP is fair, produces highly proportional results, ensures nearly every vote counts and involves minimal change to our existing electoral system, it could succeed in the upcoming referendum
- SMPP is a uniquely "made in Canada" system that reflects our values of equality and fairness

What are the drawbacks to Single Member, Party Proportional (SMPP)?

- Single Member, Party Proportional (SMPP) is an electoral system with very few drawbacks
- Under SMPP voters still elect only 1 MP (despite certain advantages to multi-member systems)
- SMPP does not directly address electing more women or groups currently under-represented in the legislature
- However, this can be addressed in other ways: improving the nomination process, providing incentives to parties that achieve gender equity in their nominations, other diversity initiatives, etc. One of the quickest and easiest ways to ensure more women are elected to office is to require political parties to nominate more women in ridings that are considered "safe"
- Introducing "top-up votes" could be considered a change to our "constitutional architecture" and thus require a constitutional amendment. The government could ask the Supreme Court for an opinion on this question. This could take up to a year, which would still allow time to implement SMPP for 2021
- SMPP's main drawback is that, if a party elects fewer MLAs than they should have based on their share of the vote, SMPP compensates for this by awarding the party more Top-Up Votes but not more MLAs
- For instance, the Green Party received 16.8% of the vote in 2017
- With 87 MLAs being elected, under a proportional system, the Green Party should get 14-15 MLAs instead of the 3 they elected
- Having 14-15 MLAs would make it easier for the Green Party to assign MLAs to various committees and perform other legislative functions
- Under SMPP, the Green Party would still elect only 3 MLAs, but those 3 MLAs would control 23 House Votes or 17.6% of the votes in the legislature
- While this ensures the Green Party has a proportional share of the votes in the legislature, the party still only has 3 MLAs instead of the 14-15 they deserved to elect
- Appendix A provides an alternative way to design SMPP, without "top-up votes". However, the "top-up votes" approach is considered more appealing; since the alternate approach results in some MLAs having more than 1 vote each and some MLAs having less than 1 vote each

Where did the idea for Single Member, Party Proportional (SMPP) come from?

- One of the main criticisms of our current First-Past-The-Post system is that is not fair: parties can get less than 50% of the vote but win more than 50% of the seats, giving them 100% control in the House of Commons
- So nearly all proponents of electoral system want to see a system that is fair/proportional: if a party gets 30% of the vote during the election, it should get 30% of the votes in the House of Commons
- Most proposals for electoral reform try to achieve fairness and proportionality through changes to the electoral process: under these systems, if a party gets 30% of the vote it elects about 30% of the seats
- But there is a simpler solution: leave the electoral process as is and create greater fairness and proportionality through changes to the voting process in the House of Commons
- Several years ago I came up with a system I called Proportional Parliament Voting System (PPVS)
- It uses the "top-up votes" approach described above
- I submitted a proposal to the Special Committee on Electoral Reform that recommended PPVS, as well as Multi-Member, Personal and Proportional (M2P2), as alternates to our First-Past-The-Post system
- Then I read the transcript of the ERRE's consultation town hall held in Toronto on Sept. 21st, 2016
- A man named Grant Orchard recommended the Direct Party and Representative (DPR) system
- I checked out their website (www.dprvoting.org) and was surprised to see that DPR was very similar to the Proportional Parliament Voting System (PPVS) I had come up with
- I did an analysis of how DPR/PPVS would work in Canada
- I discovered a few problems with DPR, but all were easily addressed with some modifications to DPR
- The result was a modified version of DPR for Canada that I decided to call Single Member, Party Proportional (SMPP); this term distinguishes it from DPR/PPVS and succinctly describes the system
- Initially, SMPP was designed as described in Appendix A (without "top-up votes"); this approach results in some MPs having less than 1 vote each (if their party is over-represented in the House of Commons) and some MPs having more than 1 vote each (if their party is under-represented)
- However, after getting feedback from several MPs who expressed concern about MPs having differing numbers of votes, SMPP was further modified to add "top-up votes" (as envisioned in PPVS)
- I did a detailed analysis of both forms of SMPP for the 2015 federal election
- This analysis found that both design options produce results that are highly proportional and very closely reflect how voters voted in each province and nationally
- This proposal looks at how SMPP could work for provincial elections in British Columbia
- To see how SMPP could work for federal elections, please visit http://pr2019.com

How does SMPP compare to other proportional representation (PR) options under consideration?

- Single Member Party Proportional (SMPP) is not a "perfect" system, no system is
- However, it is simple, fair and produces highly proportional results with minimal change to our existing electoral system

- Three other systems that have been proposed are:
  - Mixed Member Proportional (MMP)
  - Single Transferable Vote (STV) or a variation called Local PR
  - Rural-Urban PR (RU-PR)
- I would be quite happy to see any of these systems replace First-Past-The-Post (FPTP)
- However, these systems all face some serious challenges:
  - Political opposition: all of these systems require redrawing ridings and redesigning our electoral system and pose serious re-election risks to Liberal and NDP MLAs (under a system of PR, the Liberals would lose 8 MLAs (43 to 35 with the same 40.4% of the vote) and the NDP would lose 6 MLAs (41 to 35 with the same 40.3% of the vote); also many MLAs are likely to resist these systems because they would require the MLAs to campaign in larger and/or redrawn ridings
  - Time constraints: it would take time to redraw the ridings, redesign the electoral system and produce educational materials and the government has committed to holding a referendum by November 30th so time is quickly running out to do all this
  - Potential to fail in the referendum: each of these options involve considerable change to what voters are accustomed to; this increases the chances that these PR options could be defeated in a referendum (human nature being what it is, the more different an electoral system is from what people are accustomed to, the greater the chance they will reject it)
- Single Member Party Proportional (SMPP) is better positioned to face these challenges:
  - Under SMPP, each party would still elect the same number of MLAs as under First-Past-The-Post
  - There would be no change to existing ridings or to the current electoral system and consequently, SMPP does not pose the re-election risks to MLAs that other systems do; which makes it far more attractive to current MLAs
  - This makes SMPP far less threatening to the Liberal Party and the NDP and to their MLAs
  - Since SMPP does not make any changes to existing ridings and involves only a slight change to the ballot, educational materials could be produced quickly and easily for the referendum
  - Since SMPP is simple, fair, produces highly proportional results and involves minimal change to our existing electoral system, it is more likely to succeed in the upcoming referendum
  - If it were to succeed in the referendum, SMPP could easily be adopted in time for the 2021 election
- For these reasons, I feel Single Member Party Proportional (SMPP) is a more attractive option both for the political parties/MLAs as well as for the general public and, consequently, has a better chance of being adopted in the upcoming referendum than these other options
- In summary, Single Member Party Proportional (SMPP) is a simple, fair electoral system that produces highly proportional results with minimal change to our existing voting system; it can easily be implemented for 2021 and it is likely to face far less political and public opposition than MMP, STV or Rural-Urban PR (for the reasons mentioned)

Appendices

Appendix A: 2017 B.C. Election results under SMPP without "top-up votes"
Appendix B: Other design ideas for Single Member Party Proportional (SMPP)

2017 B.C. election results under Single Member Party Proportional (SMPP) without "top-up votes"

As mentioned at the start of this proposal, there are 2 ways that SMPP can be designed:
• With "top-up votes"
• Without "top-up votes"

We have explored what the 2017 B.C. election results would look like under SMPP with "top-up votes".

Now let's see what the 2017 B.C. election results would look like under SMPP without "top-up votes".

SMPP without "top-up votes" uses weighted voting to adjust for distortions in seat totals under FPTP:
• If a party is over-represented in the legislature (their party won more seats than they should have based on their share of the vote), then each of that party's MLAs will have less than 1 vote in the legislature to correct for this distortion
• If a party is under-represented in the legislature (their party won fewer seats than they should have based on their share of the votes), then each of that party's MLAs will have more than 1 vote in the legislature to correct for this distortion

The table below shows what this would look like for the 2017 B.C. election:

	Liberal Party	NDP	Green Party	Total
% of vote	40.36 %	40.28 %	16.84 %	97.48 %
Adjusted %[1]	41.40 %	41.32 %	17.28 %	100.00 %
Votes earned	36.02	35.95	15.03	87
MLAs elected	43	41	3	87
Votes per MLA (VPM)	0.84	0.88	5.01	

[1] See explanation of "Adjusted %" on page 2

Here's how SMPP without "top-up votes" would work:
• The B.C. legislature currently has 87 MLAs (or 87 legislative votes)
• The Liberal Party got 41.40% of the votes (adjusted), so they get 41.40 % of the legislative votes
• So the Liberal Party gets 87 x 41.40 % = 36.02 legislative votes in the legislature
• However, the Liberals elected 43 MLAs; more than they deserved based on their share of the vote
• To correct for this, each Liberal MLA will have 36.02 / 43 = 0.84 votes in the legislature

- The NDP got 41.32% of the vote (adjusted), so they get 41.32% of the legislative votes
- So the NDP gets 87 x 41.32 % = 35.95 legislative votes in the legislature
- However, the NDP elected 41 MLAs; more than they deserved based on their share of the vote
- To correct for this, each NDP MLA will have 35.95 / 41 = 0.88 votes in the legislature
- The Green Party got 17.28% of the votes (adjusted), so they get 17.28% of the legislative votes
- So the Green Party gets 87 x 17.28 % = 15.03 votes in the legislature
- But the Green Party only elected 3 MLAs; less than they deserved based on their share of the vote
- To correct for this, each Green party MLA gets 15.03 / 3 = 5.01 votes in the legislature
- By weighting the vote for each party's MLAs, each party's share of the legislative votes is nearly identical to their party's share of the vote in the election
- SMPP without "top-up votes" achieves nearly perfect proportional representation between the parties by weighting the votes for each party's MLAs based on the party's share of the vote
- SMPP with "top-up votes" achieves nearly perfect proportional representation between the parties by adding "top-up votes" to correct for each party's under-representation or over-representation in MLAs

Other Ideas for Designing a Single Member, Party Proportional (SMPP) Electoral System for Canada

There are several other design features that could be considered with SMPP:

- If a candidate runs as an Independent or without any party affiliation and is elected as an MLA, he/she would receive 1 vote in the legislature (same as now)
- In the event of a by-election, the Top-Up Votes for each party would remain unchanged; even if a different party were to win the by-election. However, the winning party would have one more Member Vote (MLA) and the losing party would have 1 less Member Vote (MLA) than before
- Since voters vote for their candidate and party separately, a party should not need to run candidates in every electoral district to have their party listed on the party portion of a ballot
- It is recommended that, if a party runs candidates in at least 20% of the electoral districts in a province, the party be listed on the party portion of all ballots in that province
- SMPP could also allow for the election of leaders from minor parties: if a minor party receives at least 3% of the vote province-wide, the Party Leader is awarded 1 vote in the legislature
- 3% of the vote may not seem like much, but with 1,974,014 votes cast in the 2017 B.C. election, a party would need 59,220 votes to qualify for a vote in the legislature
- This threshold is high enough to prevent fringe parties from qualifying for a vote
- For instance, in the 2017 election, the Libertarian Party got 7,838 votes, the most of any minor party; but still well shy of the 3% threshold. All the other minor parties combined received only 41,911 votes, still well shy of the 3% threshold
- On the other hand, consider the Green Party: in 2001, 2005 and 2009 they got 8.2% - 12.4% of the provincial vote but did not elect any MLAs. This level of support is well above the 3% threshold so, under SMPP, the Green Party Leader would have earned a vote in the legislature
- A maximum of 2 votes in the legislature can be awarded to Party Leaders who do not elect any MLAs (this is to prevent diluting the voting power of those parties that did elect MLAs)
- If more than 2 minor parties each get more than 3% of the vote province-wide, the 2 Party Leaders with the highest share of the vote would be elected and get 1 vote each in the legislature
- One of the criticisms of FPTP is "wasted votes": votes for losing candidate are basically "wasted"
- However, the same happens when votes are cast in the legislature
- Suppose 60% of an MLA's constituents support a proposed bill and 40% oppose it (This could be determined through a survey, opinion poll, constituent assembly or other method)
- If the MLA votes for the bill, the 40% of constituents opposed are not represented in that vote
- If the MLA votes against the bill (possibly due to a whipped vote by the Party), the 40% opposed are represented but the 60% majority who support the bill are not
- An MLA is elected to represent all constituents; but how is that possible with a Yes or No vote?
- One way to better represent the wishes of constituents is with fractional voting
- SMPP could easily allow for fractional voting: if 60% of an MLA's constituents support a bill and 40% oppose it, the MLA could cast 60% of their vote for the bill and 40% of their vote against
- Fractional voting would allow MLAs to better represent diversity of opinion on proposed bills
- Another design possibility: add a certain number of additional seats specifically for First Nation MLAs