

Perspectives on Democracy

| The Case Against Referendums on Electoral Reform

Ryan Campbell

Keywords: *Electoral reform, referendums, direct democracy, liberal democracy, Canadian democracy*

What are the consequences of applying direct democracy to the issue of electoral reform, particularly in a Canadian context? This paper reviews academic literature and historical precedents both in Canada and abroad to evaluate the merits of using direct democracy as a tool to enact electoral reform. While referendums are often perceived as more democratic and as a safeguard against self-interested politicians, they exhibit critical flaws: susceptibility to misinformation, status quo bias, and a lack of accountability. These flaws are particularly pronounced in complex, low-salience issues like electoral reform.

By contrast, historical and international examples suggest that successful and enduring electoral reforms are most often the result of multiparty consensus within representative frameworks. Referendums on questions of electoral reform risk ossifying outdated institutions and excluding minority voices—undermining the democratic growth necessary to maintain legitimacy in an evolving society.

Introduction

Since the start of the 21st century, there has been a shift in deciding questions of democratic reform in Canada by direct democracy and referendum, rather than the legislative process of representative democracy. Which of these two approaches is better for Canadian democracy?

Canada's institutions at Confederation contained many intentional non-democratic elements (Pilon, 2017). By expanding the franchise, strengthening independent oversight of elections and electoral boundary delimitation, and providing voters with the protection of the secret ballot, Canada's institutions grew and evolved into a liberal democracy. This comes with only one exception; These reforms occurred through representative democratic institutions, rather than direct democracy, and international examples of electoral reform by referendum are quite rare.

Proponents of referendums argue this approach has advantages on issues such as politicians' self-interest and democratic legitimacy, but evidence for this is mixed. At the same time, referendums bring their own deficits on minority rights and by entrenching the status quo. Overall, shifting the process of reform to direct democracy risks halting or stalling the democratic growth that has contributed to Canada's success.

Canada's Historical Background

Canada was not a full democracy at the time of Confederation, and this design was deliberate (Pilon, 2016). Fathers of Confederation were opposed to what they viewed as mob rule of too much democracy, particularly in the forms of a broader franchise and the generally more

populist institutions prevailing in the United States (Underhill, 2008). Democracy, in their view, required management by trustworthy elites.

Management of democracy took several forms. By excluding women, Indigenous people, renters and others from voting, and by putting themselves in charge of redistricting, politicians were able to choose their voters as much as voters were able to choose their politicians (Perrault, 2021). Canada's first elections were administered at a local and level, and when complaints of electoral fraud were made these were adjudicated not by courts but by elected officials themselves. Without a secret ballot, voters could be bribed or threatened with professional reprisals or violence to induce them to vote a specific way (Perrault, 2021).

Gradually, each of these impediments to what are now recognized as democratic norms was removed, through adopting the secret ballot and providing for judicial review of election results in 1874, by expanding suffrage in 1918, 1948, 1955 and 1960, establishing Elections Canada in 1920, and by introducing independent redistricting commissions in 1964, Canada gradually became more democratic in nature (Goldberg, 1988). These democratic reforms were made through the delegated decision making of representative democracy, with BC's successful referendum on women's suffrage in 1916 as the only exception (Goldberg, 1988). Changes were not always consistently for the better, as there are many instances of politicians revoking the right to vote from unpopular minorities as late as the 1940s. Still, more improvements were made, leading to Canada adopting the norms of liberal democracy and culminating in 1982 with the inclusion of democratic rights in Section 3 of the *Charter*.

Since the early 20th century, there have been debates on switching electoral systems, often from a single-member-plurality (or first-past-the-post) electoral system to proportional representation. Prime Minister Mackenzie King had promised to introduce proportional

representation in both the 1920s and 1930s, and Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau had made a similar pledge in 1979 and 1980 (Fair Vote Canada, 2025). In the 1920s Liberal and United Farmers governments in Manitoba, Alberta and Ontario had promised to adopt proportional representation (Jansen, 2004). In Manitoba and Alberta this led to the adoption of proportional representation electing MLAs from the major cities and single-winner preferential electoral system in more rural areas. British Columbia eventually adopted a single-winner preferential electoral system for its 1952 and 1953 elections. By the mid 1950s, all three of these provinces had returned to single-member-plurality (and in the case of British Columbia, plurality-at-large) voting as their electoral system (Jansen, 2004).

British Columbia, Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick had also used plurality-at-large voting for some or all of their electoral districts before switching to single-member plurality after courts found their district boundaries violated Section 3 of the Charter with respect to equality of population (*Dixon v. Attorney-General of British Columbia*, 1989, *Harvey v. New Brunswick*, 1993, *MacKinnon v. Government of PEI*, 1993). None of these proposed changes had involved any form of direct democracy such as a referendum.

Beginning in the early 21st century, multiple provinces began holding referendums on replacing their single-member-plurality (or first-past-the-post) electoral systems with a form of proportional representation. Seven referendums have been held in the provinces of British Columbia, Ontario and Prince Edward Island since 2005. Majorities voted in favour of electoral reform in two of those instances. Despite this, the reforms were not implemented due to failing to meet a supermajority requirement in British Columbia in 2005 (B.C. to Hold Second Referendum on Electoral Reform 2005) (Boegman, 2018) and due to low turnout in PEI in 2016 (Sinclair, 2016).

Referendums on Electoral Reform in an International Context

Only two OECD countries owe their electoral systems to the results of a referendum: Switzerland and New Zealand (Pilon, 2023). In all other instances, countries legislated reforms as part of a multiparty agreement on electoral reform, or had their electoral system imposed by a foreign power. Despite both Switzerland and New Zealand having strong, robust democracies, the circumstances of their reform may not be applicable to the Canadian context.

The most applicable example is New Zealand (New Zealand History, 2021). The state first held a referendum in 1992 asking voters to state a preference for changing the voting system or not, with a second question asking voters to choose between four different alternatives to single-member plurality. 84.7% of those who voted supported changing the electoral system, whereas 70.5% of whom preferred a mixed member proportional option, constituting an outright majority. Still, the government declined to respect the results of the referendum, and held a new referendum to coincide with the 1993 election. The legislation for this referendum was structured such that a majority vote would be binding, and ultimately it passed with 53.9% in favour and 46.1% against, a margin of 7.8% (New Zealand History, 2021).

In the case of both unsuccessful referendums in British Columbia in 2005 and Prince Edward Island in 2016, the margin of support for proportional representation exceeded the support for proportional representation that saw it successfully implemented in New Zealand in 1993. This reform has withstood a subsequent referendum on its repeal in 2011, winning by a larger margin than 1993, but again by a lower margin than proportional representation had in British Columbia in 2005.

In Switzerland, proportional representation was adopted in 1918 by means of a popular initiative, an institution whereby citizens rather than politicians set the terms of a binding vote. Even in the Swiss case, proportional representation had been rejected by parliament by a vote of 120-14 that same year and had failed two previous referendums (Lutz, 2004).. In those previous referendums, opponents had argued that by virtue of giving no party overall control of the parliament, it would lead to chaos and anarchy. By 1918, with Switzerland amid general strikes, food shortages and martial law, those arguments may have understandably been less effective (Lutz, 2004). Referendums on women's suffrage were less successful, with the last failed referendum being held in 1959 before finally succeeding in 1971 (The Swiss Confederation, 2025).

If international precedent is to be cited, then electoral reform by referendum is exceedingly rare, as often as part of a dire crisis with food shortages and riots as not. This does not seem desirable in a Canadian context. Even in the singular New Zealand case, it requires Canadian politicians to respect a positive vote for reform to a greater degree than they have to date.

Politicians' Self-Interest and Status Quo Biases

One argument made for a referendum is that if electoral reform is left in the hands of politicians, they will reform the electoral system out of self-interest rather than the public's interest (Thompson, 2022). If the informal convention of governing parties not unilaterally changing the electoral system is broken, the concern is politicians will use this power to exclude their opponents. As was seen in Canada's early history, politicians may undermine democratic principles when presented with the opportunity and the assurance of an advantage.

However, this concern can as easily be applied to incumbent politicians, perpetuating an unjust status quo to promote their chances of re-election. Politicians may also set the terms of a referendum in a self-serving way, either designing it to promote their preferred reform, or to kill reforms they oppose. It also does not follow that because politicians may do the wrong thing, that they must do the wrong thing, or that political self-interest will always align with a regression in democratic norms (Thompson, 2022).

Referendums have a known status quo bias. This is a well-studied problem, with scholars such as Leduc (2009), and Lupia and Johnston (2001) arguing that for any referendum on any subject, support for change typically declines by an average of 20% over the course of the campaign. Opponents of change have an inherent advantage through a combination of disinformation and fearmongering worst case scenarios that may not be realistically expected to come to pass. This is further reinforced by firms that specialise in running referendum campaigns refusing to take on initiatives polling below 70% support (The Campaign Workshop, 2024). For a contentious issue, a referendum gives supporters of the status quo a significant advantage.

Politicians elected by the status quo have a stake within the norm, this being particularly acute for politicians from the largest parties (Arnesen et al., 2021). Any impactful change to how we count votes will change who is elected and who is not. Politicians who come out ahead under the current process may not necessarily come out ahead in an alternate process. This is true at the aggregate level, where a party that is overrepresented compared to their vote share thanks to single-member plurality voting might see its seat totals cut by proportional representation. This issue is worse in the localized versions of proportional representation often proposed in Canada. Due to geographic polarisation, parties will win an oversized share of their seats in their strongholds, with these oversized wins offset by other parties' own strongholds (Arnesen et al.,

2021). For example, in 2017, the BC NDP won 4 of 4 Burnaby seats with slightly less than 50% of the city-wide vote (Elections BC, 2017). Under proportional representation, they would win 2 of 4 seats, halving their seat total in Burnaby.

Politicians' direct stake in electoral reform creates a situation where even within parties that ostensibly support electoral reform, there will be large segments of the caucus with strong incentives to undermine or otherwise block reform. Party leadership that may have seen an advantage in electoral reform which would benefit them in opposition may find their enthusiasm wane once in government. A generous view of referendums in this context is that they present a chance at advancing electoral reform while managing internal caucus divisions. A more cynical interpretation is that these mechanisms allow parties to block reforms that no longer serve their interests while avoiding the appearance of doing so.

Politicians control the terms of the referendum. Politicians interested in the status quo have imposed additional supermajority requirements (Office of the Premier, 2005). They have the ability to determine the referendum question wording, restrict the campaign activities of opponents (Yarr, 2018), and ultimately structure the referendum in such a way to achieve a desired outcome. This propensity to try to engineer a specific result by setting the terms of the referendum can cut both ways, as Miljan (2019) argued in that the 2018 BC referendum, the government had intended to bias the results in favour of change but had unintentionally shifted the result for the status quo.

There is validity to the concern that politicians may regress democracy when given the chance. This concern is particularly acute under the present single-member plurality electoral system, where a party may control a majority of a legislature's seats with far less than a majority of the popular vote. As an alternative, most countries have looked towards broad, multiparty

agreements to ensure reforms are made based on public interest. Ultimately, these agreements have stood the test of time (Pilon, 2023).

The Democratic Process

Another argument in favour of referendums on electoral reform is that referendums are inherently democratic (Setälä, 1999). This brings in deeper questions of what democracy is and why citizens value it. Misak and Talisse (2004, 2021) put forth a pragmatic argument that the deliberative nature of democracy is more likely to lead to decisions that are broadly (and morally) ‘correct.’ Other scholars like Dahl (1998), perceive democracy through the principles of equality and majority rule.

Smith (2009) and Altman (2010) both argue that referendums are desirable on both points. Referendums encourage and provide an opportunity for public debate, fostering the deliberative process valued by Misak and Talisse (2004, 2021). While a vote for a representative could be cast for a variety of reasons and issues, referendums directly measure popular support, and by this standard, a majority vote in a referendum is inherently democratic. Despite these arguments, the practicality of how referendums unfold in practice limit their applicability.

Inherent in the deliberative process is the thoughtful discussion and consideration of diverse points of view before arriving at a collective decision. Contentious referendums can have deficits both in the quality of the debate and the degree to which citizens engage in that debate prior to voting (LeDuc, 2011). The quality of debate suffers when proponents and opponents engage in deceitful or dishonest messaging, resulting in a less informed public. This problem is inherent to all referendums and contributes to an estimated status-quo bias of 20% in the process

no matter the topic of the referendum, however it is especially acute on the issue of electoral reform, where polls suggest the public has very low levels of pre-existing knowledge (LeDuc, 2011).

Because there are hardly any regulations against spreading disinformation or misinformation about a referendum, there is also little to no means by which to hold bad faith actors to account (Lupia, 2016). Additionally, since electoral reform is typically a low-salience, low-information subject for voters, there is a strong likelihood that voters will not participate in the referendum discourse at all (LeDuc, Bastedo, & Baquero, 2008). This is extremely exemplified by polls from the 2009 BC referendum that showed only 40% of voters were even aware the referendum was occurring just three weeks prior to receiving their ballot at the polling station (Ipsos, 2009). With large swaths of the public voting based on their initial reaction to the wording of the referendum or a vaguely heard advertisement, the referendum process shifted from a process of deliberation to a game of crafting the right question to elicit the government's desired response.

The issue of uninformed voting can be partially averted by shifting the referendum timing from one simultaneous to an election to a stand-alone vote. That shift itself creates new problems however with biased turnout and low participation. As mentioned earlier, low participation has also been used as a justification to ignore a positive result from the vote, creating an additional barrier to reform.

The problem of voter education may not be so dire in the case of referendums on other issues. As an example, the *Venice Commission Code of Good Practice on Referendums* states that in any referendum, the consequences of a vote should be clear to the voter (Alivizatos et al., 2020). If the referendum question involves a decision on raising neighbourhood property taxes

to pay for a new community centre, the consequences are straightforward: a ‘yes’ vote means property taxes increase and a community centre is built, and a ‘no’ vote means taxes stay the same and no new community amenities are built. Electoral reform does not lend itself to this simplicity. The body of research on the consequences of electoral system design is vast, and voters lack familiarity with even the consequences of the current electoral system (Fair Vote Canada, 2025).

Legitimacy Concerns

Perhaps the strongest argument in favour of referendums is made by Butler et. al (1994), who argue that the outcome of a referendum will be viewed as legitimate by the public, whereas contentious reforms may risk undermining confidence in democracy without such a mandate. This argument is predicated on political actors and the public ‘buying in’ to the referendum process to give it legitimacy. This assumption may not necessarily be true, especially in the Canadian context where referendums are less common and more novel. It also fails to consider the slow erosion of public support for democracy occurring under the status quo.

Democracy can be fragile, and many democracies including Canada are currently experiencing a decline in democratic satisfaction (Wike & Fetterolf, 2024). In this context, changing the electoral system comes with risk. While most Canadians are satisfied with our current democracy, this satisfaction continues to decline. Mishandling electoral reform risks undermining public support and accelerating this trend of decline. Reforms that do not have sufficient popular support may also face reversal from subsequent governments. At the same time, support for democracy has eroded faster in countries with majoritarian electoral systems

like Canada's than in those with proportional electoral systems, so simply doing nothing carries its own risks (Wike & Fetterolf, 2024).

Referendums may be appealing for their ability to resolve differences between elites by turning to a direct mandate from voters. However, this presupposes that a mandate from voters will be broadly viewed as legitimate by society and its various political actors. This is not necessarily the case. As seen in British Columbia in 2018, opponents of reform devoted a significant amount of time and energy to attacking the process itself as a 'stacked deck in a rigged game' in part due to its use of a simple majority threshold (McElroy, 2018). Majority votes in 2005 in British Columbia and 2016 in Prince Edward Island were not viewed as sufficiently legitimate to be binding, with governments in each case choosing to set aside the results and run a new vote under new terms. For Canadian opponents of reform, it seems that while a majority vote referendum is a legitimate means to block electoral reform, it is not enough to enact it (McElroy, 2018). In that context, referendums are only a tool to solidify the status quo.

Legitimacy of Multiparty Agreements

Most countries reform their electoral systems by means of a multiparty agreement on a specific package of reforms (Pilon, 2023). Under this model, either a constellation of political parties runs on a common program of electoral reform or otherwise agrees to a package of reforms after the election (Pilon, 2023).

Dawood (2016) suggests that for reforms to be legitimate, they should follow the norms of political neutrality, consultation, and deliberation. By including both government and opposition parties, ideally with a combined majority or supermajority of the popular vote, Dawood (2016) argues a multiparty agreement on reform gives legitimacy by guarding against

the perception that reforms are being made in the partisan self-interest of a governing party. Many of the strongest democracies in the world arrived at their electoral system precisely in this manner without negative repercussions, suggesting that such an approach could work in Canada as well.

While it remains to be seen if the Canadian public would accept such an approach, Quebec's attempt at reform shows promise. Quebec's multiparty agreement built on the work of an earlier all-party committee that operated alongside an eight member citizens' committee (Barnes, 2009). This process added legitimacy to the electoral reform through the values of consultation and deliberation as well as political neutrality (Barnes, 2009). While the recommendation of this committee to adopt a mixed-member proportional electoral system was not immediately acted upon, results came through the lead up of the 2018 provincial election in Quebec. Four of the five largest parties signed an agreement to reform Quebec's elections to a system of mixed-member proportional representation as previously recommended, with only the Quebec Liberals dissenting (Tyrrell, 2018).

The Coalition Avenir Québec party won the election in 2018, initially beginning the work on such reforms. While the Coalition Avenir Québec eventually reneged on this promise, mainly by proposing a referendum and then by scrapping the project entirely, that was not done in the face of widespread public opposition.

Minority Rights

The concepts of democracy and majority rule are inherently linked; however, an important distinction can be made between the issue-by-issue majority decisions of direct democracy, versus the horse-trading and coalition building of representative democracy (Strom,

1997; Zimmermann & Just, 2000). Whereas the process of building a sufficiently large coalition of voters to win an election and govern gives the opportunity for minorities to bargain and advance issues of concern and salience to them, direct democracy does not facilitate such bargaining. Under direct democracy, voters do not typically organise themselves into blocs that exchange support on one issue for support on another issue of importance to them. Instead they are expected to vote on an issue-to-issue and voter-to-voter basis, with the minority viewpoint losing on each policy question.

Referendums offer no such protection to minorities (Qvortrup, 2014). This ‘tyranny of the majority’ is particularly concerning given that the subject in question is whether or not political minorities should have a right to representation (Gamble, 1997). Majoritarian systems such as single-member-plurality exclude minority viewpoints by design, whereas proportional representation guarantees representation to minorities that reach a specified (either de facto or de jure) threshold of support. Supporters of the largest parties can conspire to magnify their own representation in the legislature by maintaining rules that underrepresent or completely exclude smaller parties from winning representation.

Political minorities are often by their nature unpopular, meaning this fear of pitting the majority against the minority is realised in practice. For example, in the United Kingdom’s 2011 referendum on adopting a single-winner preferential electoral system (‘alternative vote’), the new system was expected to boost representation for the smaller Liberal Democrats (Helm, 2011). Opponents fixated not on the merits of the system, but on the unpopularity of this smaller party and their leader. This process of oversimplification of complex issues while marginalising minority voices has been highlighted by Clark (1998) as a particular concern with direct democracy.

Representative democracy accommodates minority interests through bargaining, while direct democracy promotes the interests of the median voter; this dynamic is acknowledged by both supporters and detractors of each (Knight & Schwartzberg, 2020). While critics of this bargaining dynamic such as Cooter (2002) argue that this process can lead to instability and corruption, they acknowledge the inherent efficiency with respect to advancing minority interests. Ultimately for an issue as fundamental as democracy itself, this protection of minorities is essential.

Importance of Democratic Renewal

Overall, democratic institutions reflect the values of the time when they were created. Canadian institutions were created at a time where democracy and inclusion were not valued as they are today. Scholars such as Dahl (1988) argue that because democratic institutions derive their legitimacy from the consent of the governed, as society evolves, institutions must adapt to reflect the current values and expectations of the populace to maintain this legitimacy. Canada has been successful at managing that process in many regards; few would argue that achieving universal suffrage was damaging. If society continues to evolve, as seems likely, then it follows that institutions will need to continue to evolve (Dahl, 1988).

Additionally, society continues to evolve. Global migration and changes in communication technology are creating a more diverse world. When Canada was founded, a Member of Parliament would find himself representing constituents who spoke one or two languages, and who potentially practiced a faith. Today, on each of these measures, politicians are expected to represent constituents from dozens if not hundreds of backgrounds. That greater

diversity will naturally seek expression politically, calling into question whether majoritarian institutions are adequately expressing and reflecting those diverse views.

If institutions do not evolve with society, then public trust in those institutions may erode. When democratic institutions function well, they mediate conflict, promote social cohesion, and generally promote the wellbeing of society. Outdated institutions risk undermining these functions and reverting to autocracy (Sandberg & Lundberg, 2012). An extreme version of the risk of static institutions continues to progress in the United States. Drutman (2020) describes that situation as a ‘two-party doom-loop,’ where entrenched institutions create a cycle of negative polarisation and partisanship, ultimately creating an increasingly dysfunctional political and societal landscape.

As in the Swiss example, a crisis can lead to positive change, however it can also lead to authoritarianism and other breakdowns as extreme as civil war. While Canada may not be in such a dire situation, avoiding such a scenario in the future will require a critical view of existing institutions and how they may be improved.

Conclusion

The simplest and most direct argument for or against a referendum on electoral reform is expedience. Proponents of a given electoral reform should want a referendum when it is more likely to succeed than an alternative approach, and oppose holding a referendum when there are other, better means to achieve it. By the same token, opponents of said electoral reform may filter their views through a lens of whether that favours or hinders their side. To some extent this linking the question of the merits of electoral reform to the question of how to accomplish electoral reform is unavoidable. Moving away from the merits of a specific reform brings in

broader issues of democracy and democratic renewal, and what process is best to undertake such work.

Has democracy been perfected in Canada? Should our present system be set in stone, unlikely to change without a major crisis? Or should it be allowed to evolve and grow with time? If Canadian democracy is perfect, then the only utility of referendums on democracy is as a means to legitimise the status quo. If Canadian democracy is imperfect, as seems likely, then referendums will only impede that evolution, freezing out minority voices that should be more fully expressed and risking regression and reversal of democratic progress.

That is not to say referendums are wholly without merit. On issues where the consequences of a decision are clear and minority rights are not impacted, or when change may have irreversible consequences, then they may be an appropriate tool. The question of electoral reform satisfies none of these criteria.

REFERENCES

- Alivizatos, N., Castella Andrew, J., Kask, O., Kiener, R., Maiani, F., Vermeulen, B. (2020). *Revised guidelines on the holding of referendums*. European Commission for Democracy through Law.
[https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2020\)031-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2020)031-e)
- Altman, D. (2010). *Direct democracy worldwide*. Cambridge University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511933950>
- Arnesen, S., Bergh, J., Christensen, D. A., & Aardal, B. (2021). Support for electoral system reform among voters and politicians: Studying information effects through survey experiments. *Electoral Studies*, 71. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2021.102313>
- Barnes, A. (2009). *Les projets de réforme électorale dans diverses provinces du Canada : Electoral reform initiatives in Canadian Provinces*. Parliamentary Information and Research Service. 20.500.12592/gtxwns.
- Boegman, A. (2018). *Referendum on electoral reform*. Elections BC.
<https://elections.bc.ca/docs/rpt/2018-CEO-2018-Referendum-Report.pdf>
- Butler, R., Butler, D., & Ranney, A. (1994). *Referendums around the world : the growing use of democracy?*. AEI Press.
- Canseco, M. (2018). *Confusion influenced referendum voters in British Columbia*. Research Co.
<https://researchco.ca/2018/12/21/referendum-exitpoll/>
- Clark, S. J. (1998). A Populist Critique of Direct Democracy. *Harvard Law Review*, 112(2), 434–482. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1342426>
- Cooter, R. (2002). Constitutional Consequentialism: Bargain Democracy versus Median

- Democracy. *Theoretical Inquiries in Law*, 3(1), 1.
<https://doi.org/10.2202/1565-3404.1040>.
- Dahl, R. (1998). *On Democracy*. Yale University Press.
- Dawood, Y. (2016). The Process of Electoral Reform in Canada: Democratic and Constitutional Constraints. *Supreme Court Law Review*. <https://doi.org/10.60082/2563-8505.1341>
- Dixon v. Attorney General of British Columbia*, 1986 7 CCLR 174. (CanLII).
- Drutman, L. (2020). *Breaking the two-party doom loop : the case for multiparty democracy in America*. Oxford University Press.
- Elections BC. (2017). *2017 provincial election results*.
<https://elections.bc.ca/docs/rpt/2017-election-report/statement-of-votes.html>
- Fair Vote Canada. (2024). *Submission to the Yukon citizens' assembly on electoral reform*.
<https://www.yukoncitizensassembly.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Fair-Vote-Canada-submission-to-the-Yukon-Citizens-Assembly-on-Electoral-Reform.pdf>
- Fair Vote Canada. (accessed in 2025, May 13). *100 years of broken promises on electoral reform*.
<https://www.fairvote.ca/100-years-of-broken-promises/>
- Gamble, Barbara S. 1997. "Putting Civil Rights to a Popular Vote." *American Journal of Political Science*, 41(1). doi:10.2307/2111715.
- Goldberg, H. (1988). *Electoral history of British Columbia, 1871-1986*. Elections BC. .
https://elections.bc.ca/docs/rpt/1871-1986_ElectoralHistoryofBC.pdf
- Harvey v. New Brunswick (Attorney General)*, 1996 2 SCR 876.
- Held, D. (2006). *Models of democracy* (3rd ed.). Stanford University Press.
- Helm, T. (2011). *Nick Clegg targeted as anti-AV campaign links him to broken promises*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2011/feb/05/av-get-clegg-campaign>.

Ipsos. (2009, April 22). *Survey on BC electoral reform referendum*.

<https://www.ipsos.com/en-ca/survey-bc-electoral-reform-referendum>

Jansen, H. J. (2004). The political consequences of the alternative vote: Lessons from Western Canada. *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 37(3), 647–669.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423904030227>

Knight, J., & Schwartzberg, M. (2020). Institutional bargaining for democratic theorists (or how we learned to stop worrying and love haggling). *Annual Review of Political Science*, 23(1), 259–276. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-060118-102113>.

LeDuc, L., Schiller, T., & Setälä, M. (2009). Campaign tactics and outcomes in referendums: A comparative analysis. In *Referendums and Representative Democracy* (1st ed., pp. 139–161). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203873427-11>

LeDuc, L. (2011). Electoral reform and direct democracy in Canada: When citizens become involved. *West European Politics*, 34(3), 551–567.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2011.555983>

LeDuc, L., Bastedo, H., Baquero, C. (2008). The quiet referendum: Why electoral reform failed in Ontario. *Canadian Political Science Association, Annual 2008 Conference*.

Lupia, A. (2016). *Uninformed : why people know so little about politics and what we can do about it* (1st ed.). Oxford University Press.

Lupia, A., Johnston, R. (2001). Are Voters to Blame? Voter Competence and Elite Maneuvers in Referendums. In: Mendelsohn, M., Parkin, A. (eds), *Referendum Democracy*. Palgrave Macmillan, London. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781403900968_10

- Lutz, G. (2004). Switzerland: Introducing Proportional Representation from Below. In: Colomer, J.M. (eds), *The Handbook of Electoral System Choice*. Palgrave Macmillan, London.
https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230522749_15.
- MacKinnion v. Government of Prince Edward Island*, 1993 2000 PESCTD 87 (vLex).
- McElroy, J. (2018, December 20). *3 strikes and you're out: Decisive referendum sounds death knell for electoral reform in BC*. CBC News.
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/electoral-reform-referendum-result-1.4955171>
- Miljan, L. (2019). *Referendum blues: The third attempt at electoral reform in British Columbia*. Canadian Political Science Association.
<https://www.cpsa-acsp.ca/documents/conference/2019/185.Miljan.pdf>
- Misak, C. (2004). Making Disagreement Matter: Pragmatism and Deliberative Democracy. *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 18(1), 9–22. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jsp.2004.0008>
- Misak, C., & Talisse, R. (2021). Pragmatism, truth, and democracy. *Raisons Politiques*, 81(1). 11-27. [10.3917/rai.081.0011](https://doi.org/10.3917/rai.081.0011).
- New Zealand History. (2021). *The road to MMP*. <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/page/road-mmp>
- Office of the Premier. (2005). *BC to hold second referendum on electoral reform*.
https://archive.news.gov.bc.ca/releases/news_releases_2005-2009/2005OTP0105-000812.htm
- Perrault, S. (2020). *A history of the vote in Canada*. Chief Electoral Office of Canada.
https://www.elections.ca/res/his/WEB_EC%2091135%20History%20of%20the%20Vote_Third%20edition_EN.pdf
- Pilon, D. (2016). Canadian confederation and democracy. *Canada Watch*.

<https://doi.org/10.25071/0j7ygp92>.

Pilon, D. (2017). The contested origins of Canadian democracy. *Studies in Political Economy*, 98(2), 105-23. 10.1080/07078552.2017.1342990.

Pilon, D. (2023). Multi-party collaboration on voting system reform. *Fair Vote Canada*.

<https://www.fairvote.ca/dennis-pilon-multi-party-collaboration-on-voting-system-reform>

Qvortrup, M. (2014). *Referendums and ethnic conflict*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

10.9783/9780812209327

Sandberg, M., & Lundberg, P. (2012). Political Institutions and Their Historical Dynamics. *Plos One*, 7(10), e45838. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0045838>

Setälä, M. L. (1999). *Referendums and democratic government : normative theory and the analysis of institutions*. St. Martin's Press.

Sinclair, J. (2016, November 8). *Premier calls plebiscite results 'debatable,' cites low turnout*.

CBC News.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/prince-edward-island/pei-premier-plebiscite-results-1.3842107>

Smith, G. (2009). *Democratic innovations : designing institutions for citizen participation*. Cambridge University Press.

Strom, K. (1997). Democracy, accountability, and coalition bargaining: The 1996 Stein Rokkan Lecture. *European Journal of Political Research*, 31(1), 47–62.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.00303>

The Campaign Workshop, (2024, January 22). *Qualifying ballot measures*.

<https://www.thecampaignworkshop.com/blog/Campaign-Tactics/qualifying-ballot-measures>

The Swiss Confederation. (2025). *The Swiss confederation- A brief guide 2025*.

<https://www.bk.admin.ch/bk/en/home/dokumentation/Swiss-Confederation-brief-guide-2025.html>

Thompson, D. (2022). Why representative democracy requires referendums. In Gardener, J., (eds), *Comparative election law*. 193-211. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781788119023.00020>

Tyrrell, A. (2018). *Alex Tyrrell signs historic agreement on proportional representation with opposition parties*. Parti Vert du Quebec.

<https://www.pvq.qc.ca/en/2018/05/09/alex-tyrrell-signs-historic-agreement-on-proportional-representation-with-opposition-parties/>

Underhill, F. (2008). The image of confederation. In Ward, B., (eds), *More lost Massey lectures: Recovered classics from five great thinkers*. Publishers Group West.

Wike, R., & Fetterolf, J. (2024). *Satisfaction with democracy has declined in recent years in high income nations*. Pew Research Center.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/06/18/satisfaction-with-democracy-has-declined-in-recent-years-in-high-income-nations/>

Yar, K. (2018, May 28). *'Repressive rules' prompt disbanding of PEI coalition for proportional representation*. CBC News.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/prince-edward-island/pei-pr-coalition-closing-1.4680634>

Zimmermann, K. W., & Just, T. (2000). Interest Groups, Referenda, and the Political Process: On the Efficiency of Direct Democracy. *Constitutional Political Economy*, 11(2), 147–163.

<https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1009081600350>