

Rural-Urban Proportional

Fair Vote Canada

Overview

Electoral reformers in Canada have often focused on one of two main approaches to a more proportional result: multi-member ridings (e.g. STV/Single Transferable Vote) and top-up seats (e.g. MMP/Mixed Member Proportional). Advocates of STV appreciate the multi-member local districts and greater voter choice that it offers. Advocates of MMP value retaining single-member local constituencies. Both systems produce proportional results.

Sweden uses a system that combines the best features of small multi-member systems and top-up seats into a hybrid model. Proportionality gained from top-up seats allow smaller multi-member ridings and fewer top-up seats. The Rural-Urban Proportional (RUP) model extends these systems to include single-member ridings in rural areas where population density is particularly low while still achieving excellent proportionality.

We can place electoral systems on a chart (see Figure 1), categorized by their use of multi-member ridings (the vertical axis) and top-up seats (the horizontal axis). The Rural-Urban Proportional (RUP) model occupies a space in the centre that builds on the other models but is a unique combination of features. Simulations and real-world experience show that electoral models within the shaded area of the chart are all highly proportional to the popular vote.

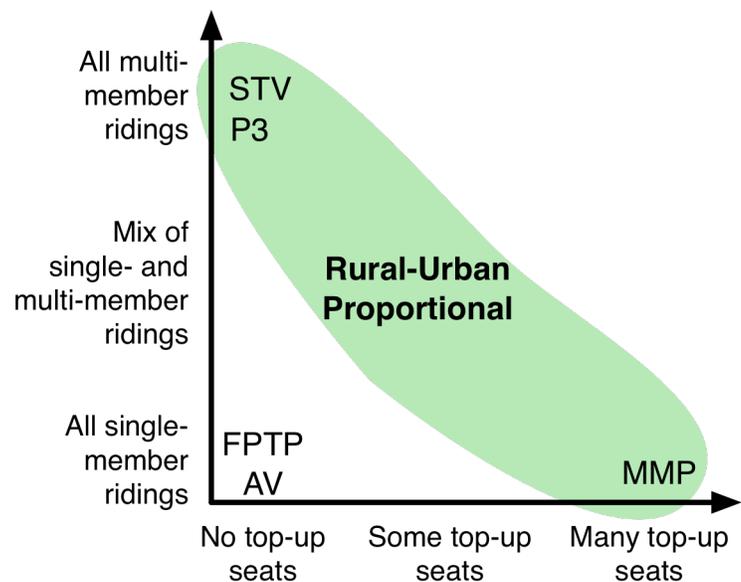


Figure 1

The Rural-Urban Proportional (RUP) model presented here is inspired by both Sweden and Canada's former

Chief Electoral Officer, Jean-Pierre Kingsley, who suggested that we "leave rural and remote ridings alone. For the others, relatively urban, gather them in clumps of 3s, 4s or 5s." The RUP model leaves the largest 25% of the rural and small urban ridings as single-member ridings.

The advantages of this system include:

- Single-member ridings in rural areas where population density is low.
- The benefits of multi-member ridings where population density is higher.
- All voters use the same ranked ballot design.
- Full proportionality can be achieved by either increasing the size of the House by 15% or by increasing the size of each riding by 15%.

Example

Alberta currently has 34 ridings. In a Rural-Urban Proportional system, 9 of the most sparsely populated areas would remain single member ridings. The 21 ridings in urban areas would be gathered into multi-member ridings of 5 or 6 MPs. Four more less densely populated areas could combine to form two multi-member ridings with 2 MPs each.

The multi-member ridings give some proportionality, but to be truly proportional an additional six regional MPs would be needed.

Variations

There are a number of choices to make when implementing RUP.

- We could either enlarge Parliament by 15% (about 50 MPs) or enlarge the ridings by about 15%.
- The regional or top-up MPs could be elected using a best runner-up system or an open list system.
- The size of each region, the number of multi-member ridings, and the number of MPs in each multi-member riding can all be fine-tuned to suit the natural communities within each region.

Summary

MMP and STV use different approaches to give each voter an effective voice. The two approaches can be effectively combined to provide a made-in-Canada solution that provides excellent proportionality while still managing the differences in riding sizes between rural and urban areas.

