**First Past the Post Fact Sheet**

First past the post (FPTP) means that the person who receives the most votes wins; therefore a candidate could win by one vote.

The foundation of FPTP is that the country is divided into geographic regions called constituencies where political parties can run one candidate in each. The candidate who receives the most votes in the constituency wins and becomes the representative on Member of Parliament. Consequently, the party that has the most representatives elected will form the government. In Canada there are 308 constituencies and therefore 308 Members of Parliament.

**Advantages**

Traditionally it provides a clear choice for votes between two main parties.

Provides a greater opportunity for majority governments to be formed, add a strong cabinet (laws will be passed because they have control); as a result coalition governments are rare.

It is argued that it provides for a reflective opposition role.

Political parties become “umbrella groups” creating the environment where a variety of ethnic and/or regionally divided groups can come together under one party. This also increases the diversity of candidates that might run in an election.

Traditionally, it prevents extremist parties from gaining power, unless they are concentrated in one geographic area.

Provides a link between the Member of Parliament and their constituents (the approximate 100,000 people in a defined geographic region). The Member is accountable to the constituents which ensures a higher standard of representation as the M.P. could be re-elected or votes out.

Provides the opportunity to vote for individual candidates not just a party thereby giving the voter more control.

**Disadvantages**

Minority parties do not receive an equitable or “fair” distribution of the seats after an election. ie. If a party receives 10% of the popular vote, they would not receive 10% of the seats in parliament.

Due to the “umbrella” function of political parties it can be more difficult for a visible minority candidate to be run in an election. The party will pick the candidate most widely accepted in a constituency which may in turn alienate a group of voters.

The “umbrella” function also limits the success of women candidates as they are often less likely to be selected as a candidate in male-dominated party structures.

It is possible for regionally or ethnically based parties to develop and not need to seek support outside of their own, narrowly defined goals. These regional or ethnic parties can increase division within a country due to feelings of loyalties defined by where you live, instead of what you believe (ie. Bloc Quebecois)

Feelings the votes are wasted on the “second place candidate”. The voters may begin to feel that they do not stand a chance of electing the candidate of their choice and may result in low voter turnout.

FPTP is not responsive to changes in public opinion meaning that although a party may drop significantly in the popular vote, the corresponding drop in representation is not equal.

In order to win, the highest number of representatives, electoral boundaries can be manipulated (gerrymandering) for the benefit of a particular political party.

**Proportional Representation**

Proportional representation (PR) is an electoral system in which political parties receive seats in proportion to their share of the national vote.

For example, if the Liberal Party received 37% of the national vote, it would receive 37% of the seats in the House of Commons.

Each political party presents a list of candidates to the electorate during the election.

Winning candidates are taken from the lists in order of their position on the list.

**Advantages**

Faithfully Translates Votes Cast Into Seats Won

* PR systems avoid some of the unfair results of the First Past The Post electoral system.
* “Seat bonuses” for the larger parties are reduced and small parties can gain access to parliament without polling huge amounts of votes.

Create Few Wasted Votes

* Votes cast in PR systems go toward electing a candidate of choice.
* This increases the voters perception that it is worth making the trip to the polling booth at election time as they can be confident that their vote will make a difference to the election outcome.

Facilitate Minority Parties`Access To Representation

* Any political party with even a few percent electoral support should gain some representation in parliament.
* This fulfills the principle of inclusion which can be crucial for divided societies.

Allow Parties To Present Diverse List of Candidates

* Since the political party decides the candidates on its list, it can easily include appropriate numbers of women and visible minorities.

Restrict The Growth of “Regional Fiefdoms”

* Since the political party receives equal credit for votes cast all across the country, it encourages the party to campaign nationally and not to concentrate all its efforts in one region of the country.

**Disadvantages**

Weakening of The Link Between MP`s And Their Constituents

* In proportional representation, seats are allocated on a nationwide basis. The system is often criticized for destroying the link between voters and their member of parliament.
* Voters have no ability to determine the identity of the persons who will represent them and no identifiable representative for their town village or district.

Provides Too Much Power To Political Parties

* A candidate`s position on the list and therefore likelihood of success is dependent on carrying favour with party bosses, whose relationship to the electorate is of secondary importance.

The Need For Coalitions Can Lead To Legislative Grid Lock

* Since it is very difficult for one political party to receive more than 50% of the national vote, coalition governments are necessary.
* If coalitions are difficult to form, it can result in very little legislation being passed.
* Numerous elections will occur as parties try to find a winning coalition.

Fragmentation of Party System

* Under PR, many political parties are able to elect representatives to parliament.
* It is possible that such polarized pluralism can allow tiny minority parties to hold larger parties to ransom in coalition negotiations.
* In this respect the inclusiveness of PR is cited as a disadvantage.

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| Criteria Name: | Winner  | Justification |
| Encourages stable and effective government: Does the system produce a stable government that is capable of implementing its policies *effectively.* Majority governments are more secure and capable of passing legislation as they *have* the majority of seats in the House. However, a majority government is less accountable to the opposition as they are not required to compromise and can therefore force legislation through the House at will.  |  |  |
| Simplicity and transparency: Is the system easy to understand and use? Are the results easily understood as well?  |  |  |
| Favours fair representation: does the system reflect the choices of the voters and allow all voters, parties and regions to be represented fairly in government? Are all *voices* equal?  |  |  |
| Guarantees equality of the vote: do all *votes* cast "count" or are many **"wasted"?**  |  |  |
| Inclusive: does the system encourage diversity in candidates, in choice of parties, in government? Are minorities and women fairly represented?  |  |  |
| Encourages participation: The system encourages *voters* to cast their ballots and participate in the electoral process. Voter turnout remains stable or increases.  |  |  |
| Degree of choice: A political system may be simple but may encourage the *voter* to *vote* not for individual candidates but for the party they represent. This limits the degree of choice. Alternate systems can allow people to *vote* for individual candidates, parties, multiple members from the same party or multiple candidates from varying candidates.  |  |  |
| Accountability: does the system produce a government that is accountable for its decisions? Such a government would require an *effective* opposition as found with coalition or minority governments. Minority governments are more likely to compromise and allow input from other parties represented in the House. Minority governments are, however, less stable. |  |  |

**Justifying My Decision**

I have decided that the

* First Past The Post
* Proportional Representation

is the most effective electoral system.

I believe this because ...
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The decision was difficult as the other electoral system does have some benefits. These include the following:
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But I believe these are not as important as the features of the force of electoral system I have chosen because ...
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