

# BETTER CHOICES

Voting System Alternatives for Nova Scotia





**Written by**  
Mark Coffin  
Matt Risser  
Marla MacLeod  
Angela Hersey



# **BETTER CHOICES**

Voting System Alternatives  
for Nova Scotia

# BETTER CHOICES

## VOTING SYSTEM ALTERNATIVES FOR NOVA SCOTIA

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
I) INTRODUCTION	12
II) CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION	16
III) FIVE VOTING SYSTEM OPTIONS FOR NOVA SCOTIA	18
FIRST-PAST-THE-POST (FPTP)	18
ALTERNATIVE VOTE (AV)	19
PARTY LIST PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION (LIST PR)	22
MIXED MEMBER PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION (MMP)	23
SINGLE TRANSFERABLE VOTE (STV)	26
IV) CRITERIA ASSESSMENTS	34
1) VOTE FAIRNESS and ACCOUNTABILITY	34
2) STRONG LEGISLATURE	39
3) COLLABORATIVE POLITICS	40
4) EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT	42
5) VOTER PARTICIPATION	46
6) GEOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATION	49
7) WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION	51
8) SIMPLICITY	55
V) SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS	58
VI) GLOSSARY	61

*Recommended Citation:*

Coffin, M. Risser, M., Hersey, A. & MacLeod M. (2016). *Better choices: voting system alternatives for Nova Scotia*. Springtide Collective. Halifax, NS.

Financial support for the production of this paper comes from the Democracy 250 Youth Engagement Legacy Trust.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### *INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT*

- This paper models how five different voting systems could work in Nova Scotia. The paper supports a public engagement process that will ask Nova Scotians to help identify the best voting system for the province in the Spring of 2016.
- This paper is part of the Springtide Collective's Make Democracy Better project where, in its first phase, over 350 Nova Scotians shared their views on how to improve politics in Nova Scotia, and chose 'improving the voting system' as a top priority for further exploration.
- Voting systems are the foundation of our public institutions and influence what the legislature looks like, the quality and brand of executive government, and the quality of laws, government services and programs that affect every Nova Scotian.
- In the paper, we offer a model for how five voting systems would look in Nova Scotia (including electoral maps and sample ballots). Then we evaluate each system's performance against eight criteria:
  - (1) Vote fairness and accountability; (2) Voter participation; (3) Simplicity, (4) A strong legislature; (5) Collaborative politics; (6) Effective government; (7) Geographic representation; (8) Women's representation

### *VOTING SYSTEM OPTIONS FOR NOVA SCOTIA*

- There are two main families of voting systems used throughout the world and modeled in this paper: **winner-take-all** systems, and **proportional representation (PR)** systems. For each system presented here, we offer a specific model for consideration for Nova Scotia. This includes the number of seats elected by various methods, and the general size of single and multi-member districts.

The **winner-take-all systems** modeled in this paper are characterized by single-member districts where the winner is the candidate who receives the most votes - a **plurality** in the case of the **first-past-the-post system** or a majority in the case of the **alternative vote system**.

#### *Winner-Take-All Systems*

- **First-Past-the-Post (FPTP):** In the FPTP system (Nova Scotia's voting system) voters mark their ballots for one candidate only, and the candidate with more votes than any other candidate wins, regardless of whether or not they have a majority. In the model illustrated in this paper, there are 50 districts with each electing one member to the legislature.
- **Alternative Vote (AV):** In the AV system voters rank the candidates on the ballot in order of preference. If one candidate receives a majority of first choice votes, they are elected. If no candidate receives a majority of first preference votes, the candidate with the

fewest votes is eliminated, and a second round of counting occurs, where the lowest ranking candidate's votes are redistributed to the second choice marked on each ballot. The process repeats itself until one candidate receives a majority of votes. In the model illustrated here, the same 50 districts as in FPTP are used, and each district elects one member to the legislature.

### *Proportional Representation Systems*

In **proportional representation** systems the share of the popular votes a party and its candidates earn are reflected in the number of seats the party holds in the legislatures generated by these systems. In the systems modeled in this paper, this is done through the use of large multi-member districts.

- **List Proportional Representation (List PR):** In list PR systems voters cast one vote for either the party (if the system uses a **closed list**) or a candidate from that party (if the system uses an **open list**). In both cases the vote counts towards the total share of seats awarded to that party. In the model illustrated here, eight members are elected from each of the five multi-member districts using open lists, and ten "**adjustment seats**" are allocated at the province-wide level to improve proportionality of the final results, for a total of 50 seats.
- **Mixed Member Proportional (MMP):** The mixed member proportional (MMP) system combines elements of FPTP and List PR. Voters cast two votes: one for a local candidate; another for their preferred party. After the local district candidates are elected, the **party votes** are considered, and candidates from a party's list are elected as necessary to ensure that the total number of seats held by each party are roughly proportional to the party vote for each party. In the MMP model illustrated here, there are 25 single-member local districts and one province-wide multi-member district with 25 party list seats, and closed list voting.
- **Single Transferable Vote (STV):** In the STV system, voters rank candidates in multi-member districts in order of preference. A formula based on the number of votes cast, and seats available is used to calculate a winning quota or threshold of votes required to win. Candidates who reach or exceed the quota are elected, and surplus votes (votes for a winning candidate that exceed the quota) are transferred and redistributed in subsequent rounds, until enough candidates reach the quota required to fill the available seats. Votes for last placed candidates are considered and redistributed once surplus votes are redistributed in each round, if no candidate reaches the quota. In the STV model illustrated here, five members are elected from each of the 10 districts.

Despite popular misconceptions, in both winner-take-all and PR voting systems, party members can influence what candidates represent each party in an election, and in each system modelled here voters have influence over which candidates from each party get elected. Independent candidates can also seek election in each system.

## FINDINGS: SYSTEM PERFORMANCE AGAINST CRITERIA

Based on the research reviewed for this paper, our evaluation of each of the voting systems against the criteria noted above is summarized below.

	Winner-Take-All Systems		Proportional Representation Systems		
	<b>First-Past-the-Post (NS-FPTP)</b> 50 Districts: One member elected per district via FPTP ballot	<b>Alternative Vote (NS-AV)</b> 50 Districts: One member elected per district via ranked ballot	<b>List Proportional Representation (NS-List PR)</b> - 8 members elected from each of 5 districts via open list voting - 10 adjustment seats	<b>Mixed Member Proportional (NS-MMP)</b> - 25 single member local districts elected via FPTP ballot - 25 province-wide members elected via closed list voting	<b>Single Transferable Vote (NS-STV)</b> - 5 members elected from each 10 districts via a ranked ballot
<b>VOTE FAIRNESS &amp; ACCOUNTABILITY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Disproportionate results</li> <li>- High number of wasted votes</li> <li>- Low vote equality</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Difficult for voters to hold parties and governments to account</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Results are proportionate 95 - 99% of the time.</li> <li>- Low number of wasted votes</li> <li>- High vote equality: generally separate from party preference, or voter's district.</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Easy for voters to hold parties to account</li> <li>- Governing coalitions are formed without direct consent of voters</li> </ul>		
Accountability of Representatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Vote-splitting means a candidate can be opposed by a majority of voters and still be <i>elected, and re-elected</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- If a majority of voters oppose a candidate, they can prevent that candidate's election or re-election</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Individual candidates held to account by constituents through open list voting.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Local representatives are held to account as with FPTP</li> <li>- Voters have no influence over candidates elected via the closed party list.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All candidates held accountable by their district and must earn the support of voters</li> </ul>
<b>VOTER PARTICIPATION</b>	Winner-take-all systems have lower voter participation than proportional ones		Proportional systems have higher voter participation than winner-take-all systems		
30 Year Voter Turnout Average (1986-2016)	59.9%	- <i>No available data</i>	68.3 %	76.6%	70.4%
<b>SIMPLICITY CASTING VOTES</b>	Simple	Casting votes is more complicated than in FPTP, but simple to explain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More complicated ballot with open list voting, still relatively simple to vote</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The two-vote, one-ballot system is simple to explain and use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ballot is complicated of involving ranked voting and large numbers of candidates</li> </ul>
<b>UNDERSTANDING THE RESULTS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Easy to understand district results</li> <li>- Can be difficult to understand disproportionate election results</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Easy to understand district results</li> <li>- Can be difficult to understand disproportionate election results</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The allocation of adjustment seats can make the results in this system harder to understand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The use of adjustment seats can make it hard to understand how proportionality is achieved</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Voters must understand how fractional vote transfers, quotas, and surplus votes work to understand election results</li> </ul>
<b>STRONG LEGISLATURE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The single governing party most often holds a majority of seats in the legislature, preventing meaningful exploration of policy alternatives, amendments to legislation or the adoption of opposition legislation</li> <li>- Filibustering frequently used by opposition to delay and inconvenience the government</li> <li>- Large parties dominate the legislature; few small parties are represented</li> <li>- Minority governments are less common, and when present, increase the relevance of the legislature</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Single-party-majority governments are rare, so governments face a stronger test when meeting a legislature that can easily <i>'make or break'</i> a government through confidence votes</li> <li>- Opposition members can propose alternative legislation and propose amendments to government legislation, and see meaningful consideration and debate on those proposals</li> <li>- Large parties play a dominant role in the legislature and in government; Small parties win more seats in PR systems and are sometimes junior partners in coalitions</li> </ul>		

	Winner-Take-All Systems		Proportional Representation Systems		
	First-Past-the-Post	Alternative Vote	List Proportional Representation	Mixed Member Proportional	Single Transferable Vote
		- More small parties field candidates in AV elections, but can be even less likely to be elected than in FPTP			
<b>COLLABORATIVE POLITICS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Single-party-majority governments are most common, and there is little need for coalition government or supply and confidence agreements.</li> <li>- Large parties tend to adopt a pattern of adversarial dialogue that exaggerates the differences between parties, rather than finding areas of common agreement</li> <li>- In minority governments, there are short term incentives to collaborate, and supply and confidence agreements are common,</li> <li>- There are no long-term incentives for collaboration in minority or majority government</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Coalition governments are most common form of government, requiring collaboration between member parties,</li> <li>- Single party majority governments are rare, while coalition governments are the most common and negotiate supply and confidence agreements as needed</li> </ul>		
<b>EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Single-party majority governments do not have to negotiate with other parties and can quickly make decisions and implement election promises</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Coalition governments may take longer to reach decisions as negotiations between governing parties (and potentially with the legislature) is required</li> </ul>		
Strength					
Leadership Stability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Elections occur on average every 3.2 years</li> <li>- Minority governments are more unstable than majority ones, holding office for shorter periods of time</li> <li>- Change in governments typically involve power moving from one party to its opponent party</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Elections occur on average every 3.3 years</li> <li>- Strong continuity of parties that form government, where at least one party in a governing coalition finds itself in the coalition formed after the subsequent election, leading to a relay-race-like pattern of policy continuance</li> </ul>		
Policy Stability & Responsiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Policy stability in majority and minority governments is often only lasts as long as the governing party holds power</li> <li>- Many policies and laws are often scrapped, or reversed completely when the governing party changes</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Policies are more stable over time</li> <li>- Government policies align more closely with the views and values of the 'median voter'</li> <li>- Policies outperform winner-take-all systems in various areas including: economic growth, human development, environmental sustainability, and reductions in income inequality</li> </ul>		
<b>GEOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Local representation via single-member-districts only</li> <li>- Local issues from swing ridings, and ridings represented by members of the governing party carry disproportionate weight on the statewide agenda</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Every elected representative is accountable to the voters in a specific region of the province</li> <li>- Multiple members representing each district mean that no single politician or party can claim to be the voice for the entire district</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strong balance between local interests and statewide interests due to local and statewide representation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Every elected representative is accountable to the voters in a specific area of the province</li> <li>- Multiple members represent each district, no single candidate or party can claim to be the voice for the entire district</li> </ul>
<b>WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION</b>	Fewer women represented in legislatures		More women represented in legislatures		
Seats held by women: (1996-2016)	17.6%	25.0 %	28.8%	30.2%	30.1%
Seats held by women in 2016	21.8%	26.7%	33.7%	33.6%	34.2%

### ***NEXT STEPS***

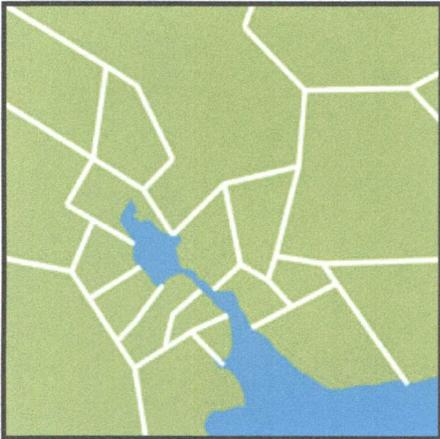
The findings of this paper are meant to feed a discussion on voting system reform in Nova Scotia. The Springtide Collective and community partners are inviting Nova Scotians to join us in identifying the best voting system for the province. We invite you to join us at events in the Spring of 2016 to explore these questions and more:

- Which criteria are most important and should be prioritized when selecting and adapting the best voting system for Nova Scotia?
- At a practical level - which of these systems best meets the needs of Nova Scotians and fits the political and cultural context of Nova Scotia?
- What might a better voting system mean for Nova Scotia?

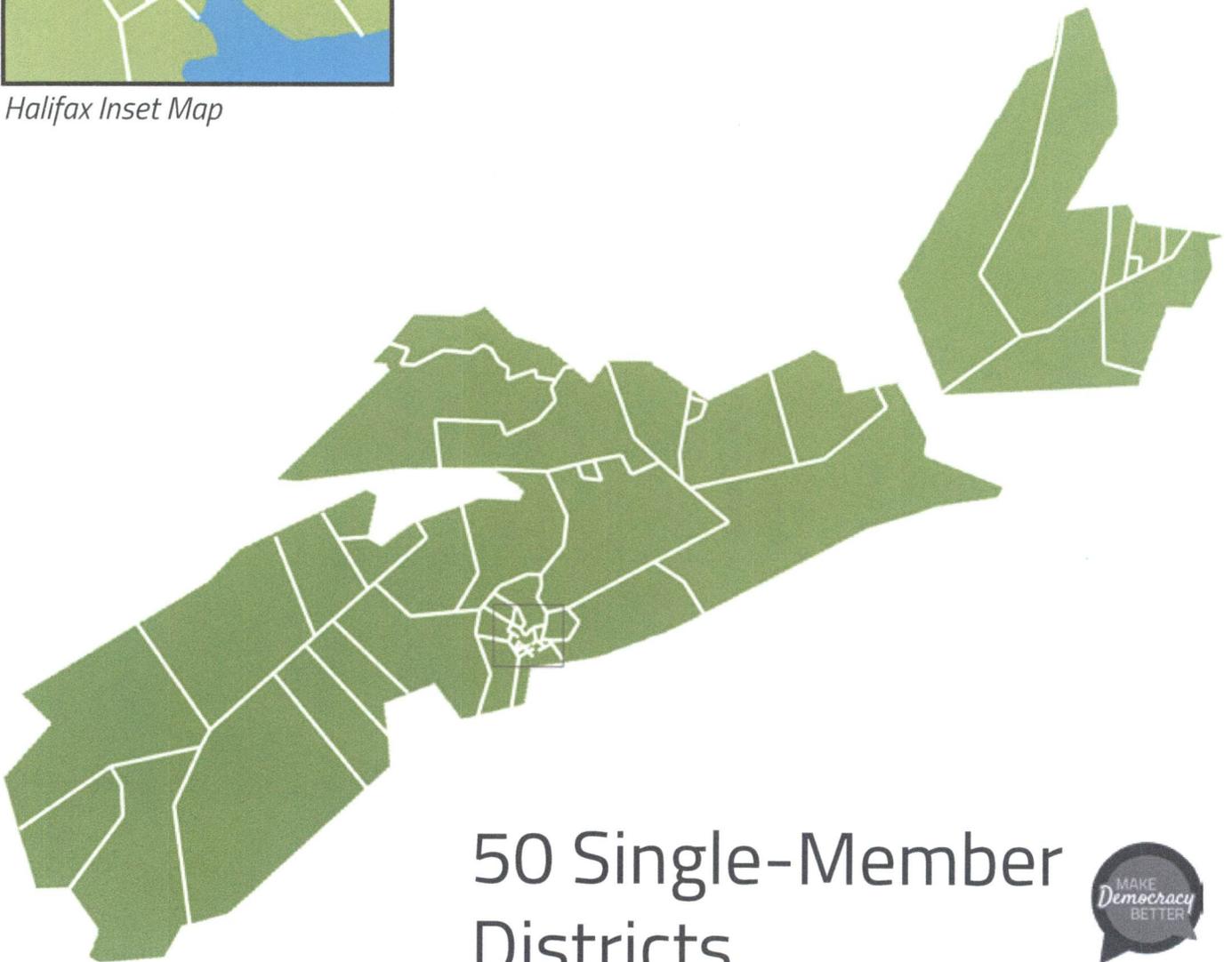
To join the conversation and find a public engagement event near you, visit [SpringtideCollective.ca](http://SpringtideCollective.ca)

# I) INTRODUCTION

# First-Past-the-Post & Alternative Vote *Electoral Districts Map*



*Halifax Inset Map*



50 Single-Member  
Districts



# First Past the Post *Ballot & Instructions*

First Past the Post

*You have one vote.*

*Vote by placing an X in the space next to the candidate you choose.*

Viola DESMOND  
Robin Party

Joel PLASKETT  
Blue Jay Party

Anne MURRAY  
Canary Party

Bruce FRISKO  
Flamingo Party

*Where this system is used:  
Canada, United States, United Kingdom, India.*

*How it works:*

*One candidate will be elected for your district.  
To win, a candidate must earn more votes than  
all other candidates.*

# Alternative Vote *Ballot & Instructions*

Alternative Vote

*This is a preferential ballot.*

*Place the number "1" in the space next to the candidate who is your first choice, and rank any additional preferences you wish to make in the order of your preference starting with the number "2".*

2 Viola DESMOND  
Robin Party

3 Joel PLASKETT  
Blue Jay Party

4 Anne MURRAY  
Canary Party

1 Bruce FRISKO  
Flamingo Party

*Where this voting system is used:*

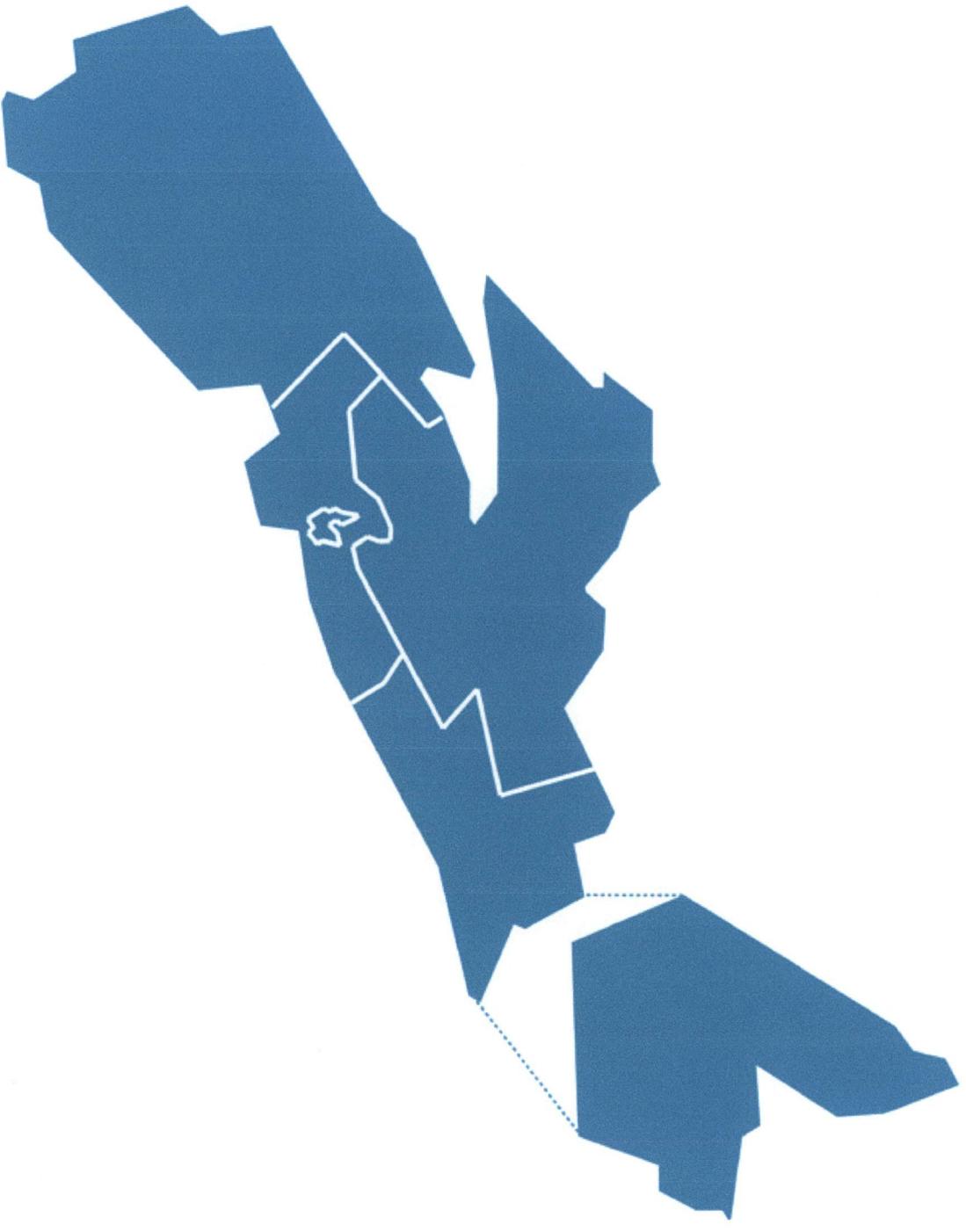
*Australian House of Representatives, Political  
Party Leadership Races, Academy Awards Voting*

*How it works:*

*One candidate will be elected for your district. To  
win, a candidate must earn more than 50% of the  
vote. If no candidate receives more than 50% of the  
vote after first preferences are counted, the second  
choices of the candidate with the fewest votes  
will be redistributed and so on until a candidate  
receives 50% of the remaining votes.*



# List Proportional Representation *Electoral Districts Map*



5 DISTRICTS



# List Proportional Representation

## Ballot & Instructions

### Open List Proportional Representation

*You have one vote.*

*Place an X in the space next to the candidate for whom you wish to vote.*

*Your vote counts for both your candidate and the party they belong to.*

Robin Party	Blue Jay Party	Canary Party	Flamingo Party	Independent Candidate
<input type="checkbox"/> Viola Desmond	<input type="checkbox"/> Joel Plaskett	<input type="checkbox"/> Bruce Guthro	<input type="checkbox"/> Rita MacNeil	<input type="checkbox"/> Sidney Crosby
<input type="checkbox"/> Joseph Howe	<input type="checkbox"/> Lawrence Hill	<input type="checkbox"/> Anne Murray	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Portia White	<input type="checkbox"/> Eliza Ritchie
<input type="checkbox"/> Rocky Jones	<input type="checkbox"/> Ellen Page	<input type="checkbox"/> George Elliot Clarke	<input type="checkbox"/> George Dixon	
<input type="checkbox"/> Steve Murphy	<input type="checkbox"/> Natalie MacMaster	<input type="checkbox"/> Cookie Rankin	<input type="checkbox"/> Daurene Lewis	

*Countries that use this system:*

*Sweden, Netherlands*

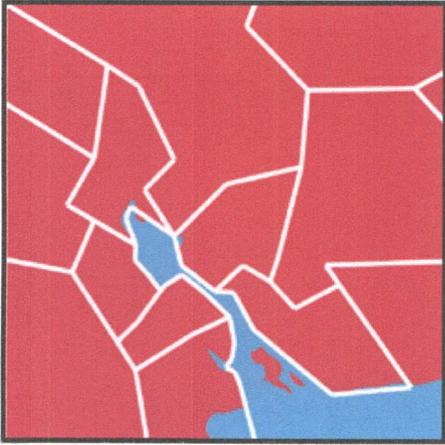
*How it works:*

*The number of votes received by each party will determine the share of seats they hold in the legislature.*

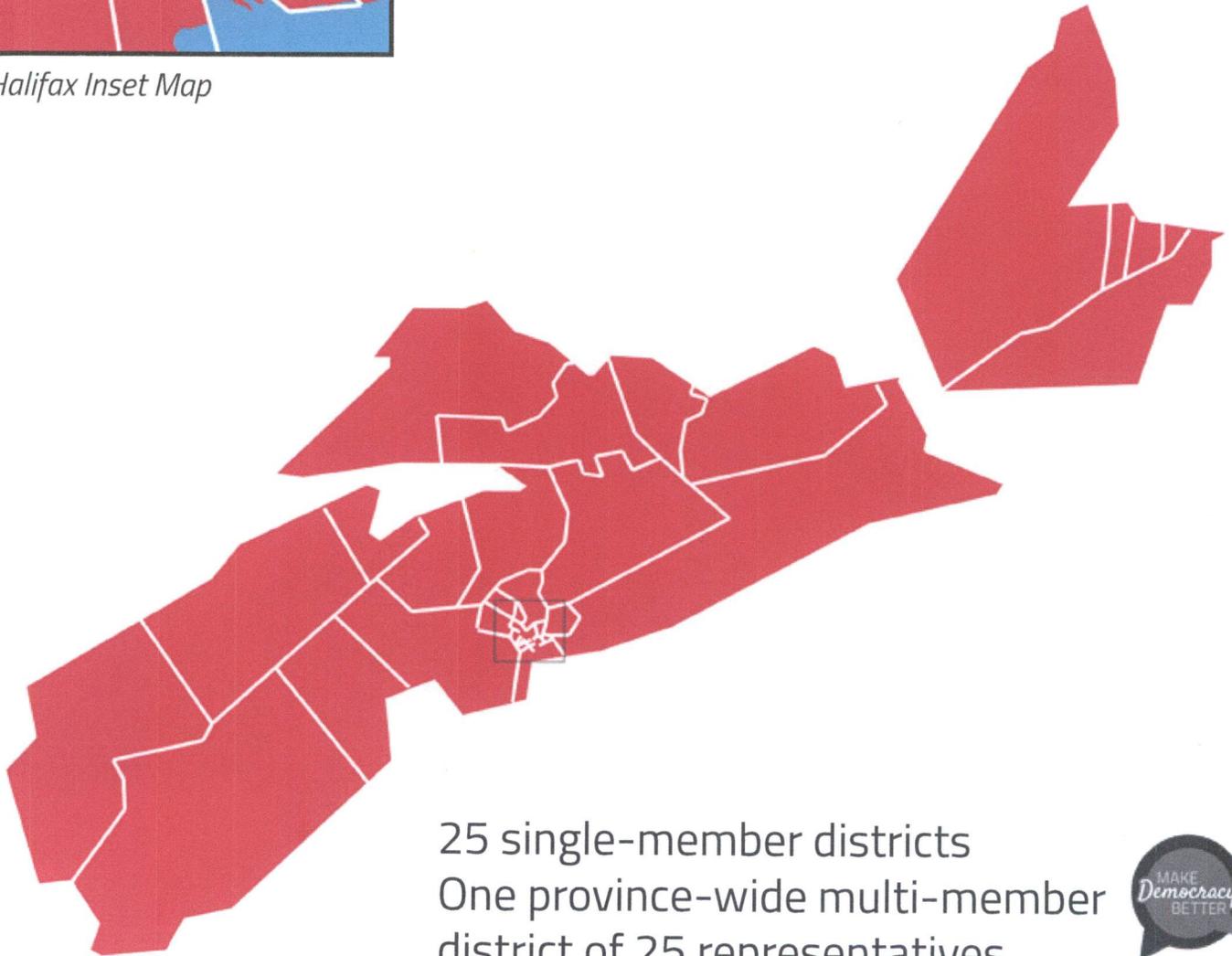
*The candidates who receive the most votes within each party will rank higher on their party lists, and be the first to receive a seat in the legislature when their party has earned enough votes. If you cast your vote for the party you endorse its ranking of candidates.*



# Mixed Member Proportional Representation *Electoral Districts Map*



*Halifax Inset Map*



25 single-member districts  
One province-wide multi-member  
district of 25 representatives



# Mixed Member Proportional Representation *Ballot & Instructions*

Mixed Member Proportional Representation - Closed List			
You have two votes			
 Vote here	<b>Party vote</b> <i>This vote determines the share of seats each party will hold in the legislature.</i> <i>Place an X in the space next to the party you support.</i>	<b>District Vote</b> <i>This vote determines who will be elected to the legislature from your district.</i> <i>Vote by placing an X in the space next to the candidate you choose.</i>	 Vote here
<input type="radio"/>	Blue Jay Party	Cookie Rankin - Canary Party	<input type="radio"/>
<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Canary Party	Sidney CROSBY - Independent	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	Flamingo Party	Bruce FRISKO - Flamingo Party	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	Eliza RITCHIE - Independent	Joel PLASKETT - Blue Jay Party	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	Robin Party	Anne MURRAY - Canary Party	<input type="radio"/>

*Countries that use this system:*

*New Zealand, Germany, Lesotho,*

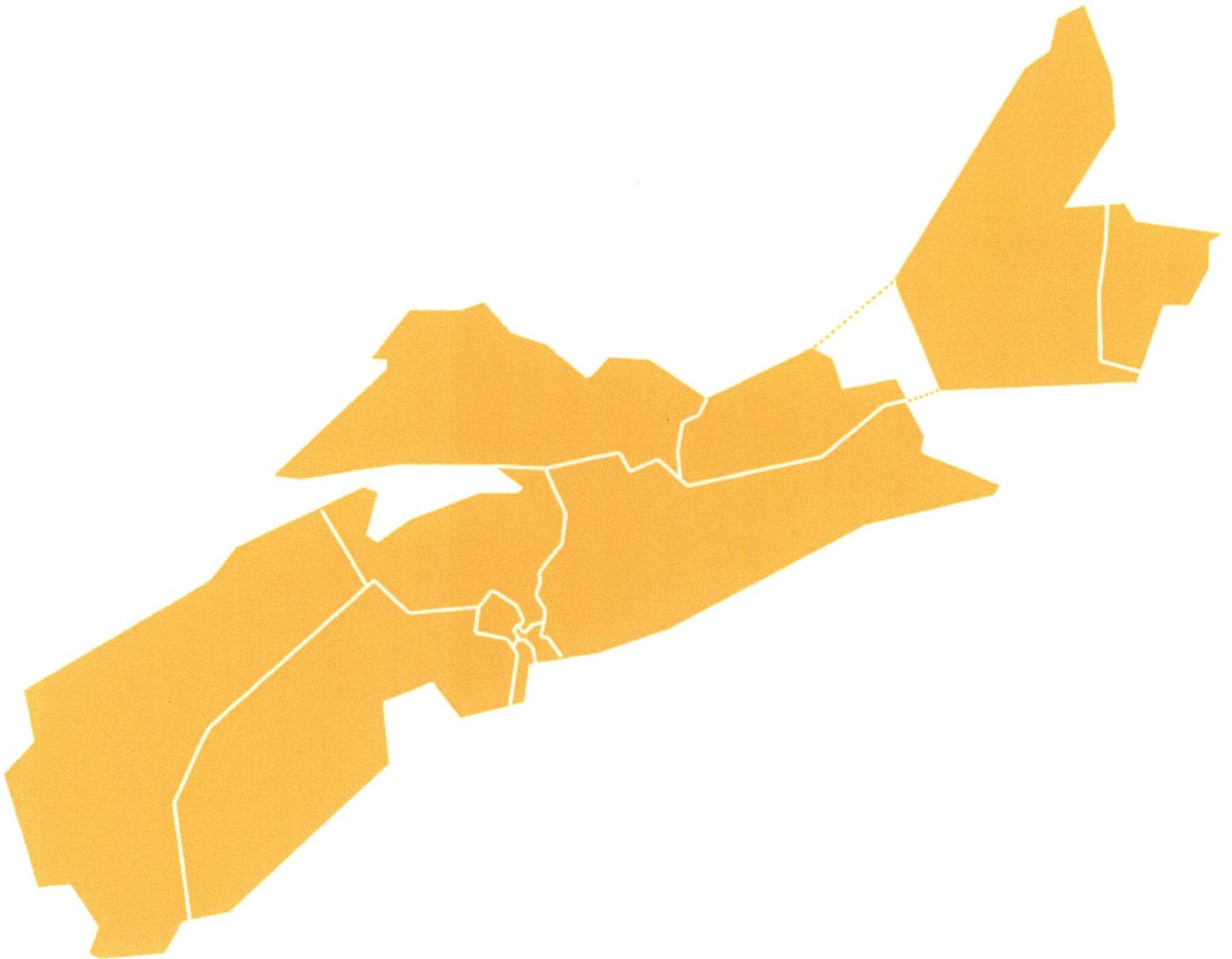
*How it works:*

*District Vote: To win a candidate must earn more votes than all other candidates.*

*Party Vote: After the winners of the local district elections are known, the party vote will be used to ensure that the total share of seats each party holds in the legislature, roughly matches the total share of party votes they received. The candidates who appear highest on the list provided by each party will be the first to receive a seat in the legislature when their party has earned enough votes.*



# Single Transferable Vote *Electoral Districts Map*



10 multi-member districts,  
five members each.





# Single Transferable Vote

## Ballot & Instructions

### Single Transferable Vote

You may vote in one of two ways.

**Option 1:** By placing an X in one and only one of the spaces next to the party of your choice. A vote for a party means you endorse the rankings of the candidates made by that party.

- Roblin Party
- Blue Jay Party
- Canary Party
- Flamingo Party

**Option 2:** By placing the numbers in the space next to the candidates of your choice 1 to n in order of your preference. You may vote for as many candidates as you wish, including candidates from different parties.

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Viola Desmond     | <input type="checkbox"/> Roblin Party   | <input type="checkbox"/> Blue Jay Party | <input type="checkbox"/> Rick Mercer          | <input type="checkbox"/> Rita MacNeil   | <input type="checkbox"/> Flamingo Party | <input type="checkbox"/> Sidney Crosby  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Joseph Howe       | <input type="checkbox"/> Roblin Party   | <input type="checkbox"/> Lawrance Hill  | <input type="checkbox"/> Anne Murray          | <input type="checkbox"/> Portia White   | <input type="checkbox"/> Flamingo Party | <input type="checkbox"/> Eliza Ritchie  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Roblin Party      | <input type="checkbox"/> Roblin Party   | <input type="checkbox"/> Blue Jay Party | <input type="checkbox"/> Canary Party         | <input type="checkbox"/> George Dixon   | <input type="checkbox"/> Flamingo Party | <input type="checkbox"/> Independent    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Steve Murphy      | <input type="checkbox"/> Roblin Party   | <input type="checkbox"/> Rita Joe       | <input type="checkbox"/> George Elliot Clarke | <input type="checkbox"/> George Dixon   | <input type="checkbox"/> Flamingo Party | <input type="checkbox"/> Alice Azure    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Natalie MacMaster | <input type="checkbox"/> Blue Jay Party | <input type="checkbox"/> Blue Jay Party | <input type="checkbox"/> Canary Party         | <input type="checkbox"/> Canary Party   | <input type="checkbox"/> Flamingo Party | <input type="checkbox"/> Canary Party   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blue Jay Party    | <input type="checkbox"/> Blue Jay Party | <input type="checkbox"/> Blue Jay Party | <input type="checkbox"/> Blue Jay Party       | <input type="checkbox"/> Blue Jay Party | <input type="checkbox"/> Blue Jay Party | <input type="checkbox"/> Blue Jay Party |

Countries that use this system:

Ireland, Australian Senate, Malta

How it works:

Five candidates will be elected. To win, candidates must reach a threshold of support among voters.

If less than five candidates meet the threshold required to win initially, votes will be transferred based on the rankings provided, as many times as necessary until five candidates have reached the threshold. The threshold is calculated as follows:

$$\left( \frac{\text{Total Votes Cast}}{\text{Seat} + 1} \right) + 1$$



# BETTER CHOICES

Voting System Alternatives for Nova Scotia



Springtide  
COLLECTIVE

