



Press Release

PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION IN BC? MAYBE, BUT NOT WITHOUT A REFERENDUM

54% Support Change to PR System (20% Oppose, 26% Undecided)

**Strong Majority Support for a Referendum Among BC Liberal (81%),
Green (76%) and NDP (70%) Voters**

Vancouver, BC, May 26, 2017 — Green Party leader and potential kingmaker Andrew Weaver has said that moving toward a proportional representation electoral system is a key component of any negotiation with the BC Liberals or New Democrats. A new online Ipsos poll shows that a slim majority of British Columbians support the idea of proportional representation. However, most British Columbians also believe that any change from the current electoral system should be approved in a province-wide referendum.

Support for Proportional Representation

A narrow majority (54%) of British Columbians say they support BC changing from our current first-past-the-post electoral system to some type of proportional representation system (23% strongly, 30% somewhat). Only two-in-ten (20%) oppose this idea (9% strongly, 11% somewhat), while one-quarter (26%) are undecided.

Two-thirds of both recent NDP (68%) and Green Party voters (67%) say they support a change to some type of proportional representation system. Recent BC Liberal voters are also more likely to support (49%) than oppose (33%) the idea.

Support for a change to proportional representation is higher in Metro Vancouver (57%) and Vancouver Island (58%) than in the Southern Interior/North (47%) of BC. Men are both more likely than women to support the idea (58% vs. 50% of women) and oppose the idea (27% vs. 14% of women). Women are much more likely to be undecided (36% vs. 16% of men).

Desire for a Referendum

A majority of British Columbians may be supportive of changing to some type of proportional representation system, but not without a referendum. Seven-in-ten (69%) British Columbians agree that “Any change from our current first-past-the-post electoral system should be approved in a province-wide referendum” (41% strongly, 29% somewhat). Only 13% disagree that a referendum is needed (4% strongly, 9% somewhat), while two-in-ten (18%) are undecided.

Recent voters from all three main parties agree that any change should be approved in a province-wide referendum including 81% of BC Liberal voters, 76% of Green Party voters and 70% of NDP voters. Non-voters are 45% agree, 10% disagree and 45% undecided.

Agreement that any change should be approved in a referendum is higher among older British Columbians (78% among 55+ years vs. 69% among 35-54 years, 60% among 18-34 years).

Address: 1285 West Pender Street, Suite 200
Vancouver, BC V6E 4B1
Tel: +1 778 373-5000

Contact: **Kyle Braid**
Senior Vice President, Canada, Ipsos Public Affairs
Email: kyle.braid@ipsos.com
Tel: +1 778 373-5130



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Agreement that a referendum is needed is similar to a May 2016 Ipsos survey of Canadians, where 73% agreed that “The Liberals should not make major changes to Canada’s election system without holding a national referendum to get the public’s approval for the changes.”

Other Views on Changing Way MLAs are Elected

British Columbians have some other beliefs about changing the way that MLAs are elected in BC, including the importance of local representation, the need for public hearings, and not increasing the total number of MLAs.

- 82% agree that “It is important that any change to how MLAs are elected ensures that citizens continue to have access to a Member of the Legislature representing their local area” (5% disagree, 13% undecided).
- 74% agree that “There should be extensive public hearings prior to the government making a firm recommendation about changes to how MLAs are elected in BC” (12% disagree, 14% undecided).
- 60% agree that “Any change to the way we elect MLAs should not increase the number of MLAs, which currently stands at 87” (14% disagree, 25% undecided).

Familiarity with Proportional Representation

Current support for proportional representation is not based on a solid understanding of how proportional representation actually works. Only 10% of British Columbians say they are ‘very familiar’ with how proportional representation voting systems work (including just 9% of BC Liberal voters, 14% of NDP voters and 12% of Green Party voters). A further 44% say they are at least ‘somewhat familiar’. Nearly half (46%) of British Columbians say they are ‘not very familiar’ (29%) or ‘not at all familiar’ (17%) with how proportional representation voting systems work.

Men, as is typical in survey questions about awareness/knowledge, claim more familiarity than women (63% of men say they are very/somewhat familiar vs. 46% of women). Older residents also claim a higher familiarity (60% of 55+ years say they are very/somewhat familiar vs. 51% of 18-34 years, 51% of 18-34 years).

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About the Study

These are the findings of an Ipsos poll of 801 British Columbians conducted May 19 to 22, 2017. The poll was conducted online via the Ipsos I-Say Panel. These data were statistically weighted by region, age, gender, education and 2017 party vote to ensure the sample composition reflects that of the actual BC population according to Census data and 2017 election results. The precision of Ipsos polls containing online data is measured using a credibility interval. In this case, the overall poll is accurate to within +/- 3.9 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, had all eligible voters been polled. The credibility interval will be wider among subsets of the population. All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error, and measurement error.

For more information on this news release, please contact:

Kyle Braid
Senior Vice President, Canada
Ipsos Public Affairs
+1 778 373-5130
kyle.braid@ipsos.com

Address: 1285 West Pender Street, Suite 200
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www.ipsos.com

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