The Council of Canadians has long supported electoral reform, specifically proportional representation.

Proportional representation is more democratic than the current first-past-the-post electoral system. It ensures a fairer representation of votes cast and prevents a governing party from holding total power after gaining only a small percentage of the popular vote.

The day after the 2011 federal election, our ally Fair Vote Canada stated, “The Conservatives have won 54.22 per cent of the seats with only 39.62 per cent of the votes…. If the seats were won in proportion to the votes that were cast, the numbers would look like this: Conservatives 122 (45 fewer seats than they won under our current electoral system and less than the 155 seats required for a majority government), NDP 95 (7 fewer seats), Liberals 59 (25 more than what they now hold), Bloc Québécois 19 (15 more), Greens 13 (12 more).”
NDP leader Thomas Mulcair has stated, “We’ve been clear for a long time on the importance of bringing in proportional representation in our country – we believe in it. We think that it’s more fair, and that’s why we are going to fight hard for it.” In 2014, the New Democrats tabled a motion in Parliament calling on the House to introduce a proportional representation system after the next election.

While Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau has previously stated, “Too many people don’t understand the polarization and the micro issues that come through proportional representation.” this past June he pledged this election would be the last held under the first-past-the-

Pundits have speculated that a low voter turnout will likely mean another Harper majority government.

Since our current electoral system produces an unfair reflection of the overall vote, many people feel their vote doesn’t count and opt not to vote. Pundits have speculated that a low voter turnout will likely mean another Harper majority government.

Elections Canada says there were 23.9 million eligible voters in 2011 and that 14.7 million – or 61.4 per cent – of them voted in that federal election. The Harper Conservatives received their “majority” with just 5.8 million of those votes, or about 24.2 per cent of all eligible voters. More than 9 million Canadians did not vote at all and 8.8 million voted for other parties.

Writer and educator Duncan Cameron has stated, “The 25/60 rule says when only 60 per cent of Canadian citizens go out to vote, 25 per cent of the voters can deliver a majority government. In 2011, the Conservatives received 39 per cent of the vote, and won 55 per cent of the seats because only 61 per cent of Canadians made the effort to vote. The disengagement from the electoral process is the key to the success of the Conservatives in Canada and of right-wing politics elsewhere.”

With the October 19 federal election just days away it’s instructive to know where the parties stand on the issue of proportional representation.

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We are also supporting Fair Vote Canada’s Declaration of Voters’ Rights. The Declaration calls on federal parties and candidates to commit to conducting a citizen-led consultation process immediately following the next federal election and implementing a suitable form of proportional representation in time for the following election.

Brent Patterson is the Political Director of the Council of Canadians.