

HOW DUAL MEMBER PROPORTIONAL COULD WORK IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Dual Member Proportional (DMP) is a compelling alternative to the Single Member Plurality (SMP) electoral system. It was developed with funding from the University of Alberta and was intended to address the shortcomings of SMP while satisfying Canada's unique needs. The result was a voting system that retains the simple ballot design and highly localized representation of SMP while ensuring that all members of the electorate are given an effective vote.

Before 2016, Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) and Single Transferable Vote (STV) were the only proportional electoral systems governments across Canada had chosen to put to a public vote. Reform has arguably remained elusive because of the shortcomings of these two options. Many dislike the party lists required by MMP and oppose the large, multi-member districts needed to implement STV. DMP avoids these features and, as a result, has garnered significant support.

In 2016, DMP was chosen by the Government of PEI for their plebiscite on electoral reform, making it the third proportional electoral system to be subject to a formal public vote in Canada. Despite being almost completely unheard of at the beginning of the year, DMP garnered over 40% of the votes cast in favour of proportional representation. DMP also secured the most second choice votes of all five voting systems in the plebiscite, which included SMP and MMP, and received more combined first and second choice votes than the status quo.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, DMP received the support of some conservative MLAs and the endorsement of *The Guardian*.<sup>2</sup> The PEI experience has proven DMP to be a credible proportional alternative to SMP. Its ability to acquire broad partisan and public support, along with its principled design, make it a worthy alternative for all governments in Canada to consider.

This submission will provide an overview of how DMP could work in BC. Section 2 will discuss the basic mechanics of DMP and how it improves upon the most prominent alternatives. In Section 3, it will be shown how DMP addresses common concerns people have with electoral system reform. Finally, Section 4 will demonstrate the efficacy of DMP with a simulation based on the last BC election.

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<sup>1</sup> For the complete results of the 2016 PEI plebiscite, see the *Interim Report of the Chief Electoral Officer for the 2016 Plebiscite on Democratic Renewal*: [http://www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/elec\\_demrefpleb.pdf](http://www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/elec_demrefpleb.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> *The Guardian*, "EDITORIAL: We endorse DMP option in plebiscite", published October 29, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.pe.ca/opinion/editorials/editorial-we-endorse-dmp-option-in-plebiscite-111292/>.

## 2 DUAL MEMBER PROPORTIONAL

Stated briefly, DMP works by creating two-member districts where the first seat is filled by plurality (this ensures that the first place candidate always wins a seat) and the second by a process that ensures proportionality of the results.<sup>3</sup> More specifically, proportionality is achieved by using the provincial voting results to determine the number of seats each party deserves and the individual district results to determine where each party will win its seats. In other words, DMP optimizes election results by simultaneously working to give each district its most preferred representation and each party its deserved number of seats. As a result, DMP would provide MLAs with a strong incentive to focus on both the good of the entire province and that of their local communities.

By electing all candidates within dual-member districts, two complaints made against MMP are eliminated: that it requires the use of long party lists, which hinder the electorate's ability to hold candidates accountable, and that it creates two tiers of representatives. Since every MLA would belong to a two-member district, DMP would not introduce a second tier of representatives. Neither would long party lists be a feature of DMP. As Figure 1 shows, the DMP ballot would retain the simplicity of the current ballot design.

The two-member district structure of DMP would also allow it to bring the benefits of reform to all British Columbians. Unlike STV, which struggles to deal with large geographical areas, DMP would be able to accommodate rural communities while providing them with the full advantages of electoral system reform. Furthermore, DMP is not beleaguered by the practical constraints that limit MMP. With MMP, the number of candidates required to be listed on the ballot increases with region magnitude. This makes it impractical to have large regions, since, at a certain point, there are simply too many candidates that need to be listed on the ballot. With DMP, however, the ballot is completely independent from region magnitude. This would allow DMP to be implemented with a single region for the entire province, thereby minimizing the number of ineffective votes and making every vote truly equal.

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<sup>3</sup> A thorough explanation of this process is contained in Section 6.1 of the DMP report, which can be found at [DMPforCanada.com](http://DMPforCanada.com) on the "How it Works" page under "More Details".

### 3 DMP AND COMMON CONCERNS ABOUT PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

#### 3.1 Proportional electoral systems force voters to choose a party

In addition to ensuring that parties receive the representation they deserve, DMP also respects votes cast for independent candidates. Unlike some proportional alternatives, independent candidates are able to effectively compete for all seats under DMP. Indeed, if an independent candidate places first or second within their district, they are declared elected. As a result, DMP does not require voters to ever select a party in order to fully participate in the election process.

#### 3.2 Proportional electoral systems make voting difficult and the meaning of votes unclear

DMP utilizes one of the most simple ballot designs possible. As can be seen by the sample ballot shown in Figure 1, it is nearly identical to an SMP ballot. The only difference is the addition of a second candidate for each party that decides to nominate one. Since the experience of voting under DMP would be nearly identical to voting under the current system, British Columbians would be knowledgeable enough to vote under DMP before receiving education about the change in voting system.

This simple ballot design, along with the principled process that is used to translate votes into election outcomes, would provide the electorate with a clear and easy to understand vote. A vote cast under DMP would have two simple meanings, which are easily understood through an example. Consider a voter who marks their “X” beside the Red Party in Figure 1. This vote would help elect the Red Party’s two candidates, in the order they appear on the ballot. Additionally, this vote would contribute to the Red Party’s seat allocation in the Legislative Assembly. Therefore, even if the Red Party’s candidates in this district receive insufficient local support to be elected, the vote would still have an effect on the overall composition of the Legislative Assembly.

#### 3.3 Proportional electoral systems are unfair to rural voters

Many proportional electoral systems leave the public wanting when it comes to the matter of rural inclusion. STV and MMP force decision makers to choose between geographically expansive rural districts, which would produce a high degree of voter equality, and moderate increases to existing districts, which would yield low quality results. Given this reality, it isn’t surprising that many are concerned about the effects of electoral reform on rural communities.

DMP presents a solution to this dilemma through its innovative design. Since it would be applied at the provincial level in BC, there would be more flexibility to create districts with below average populations. In extreme circumstances, such as Peace River North, DMP would provide the option of leaving the district with one MLA while still ensuring that each of its residents' votes counts towards overall election outcomes. Most importantly, rural voters would have the same voting power as their urban neighbours, regardless of the size of their district.

### **3.4 Proportional electoral systems reduce local control and accountability**

Under DMP, every MLA would belong to and represent a two-member district.<sup>4</sup> Importantly, MLAs would remain accountable to their local constituents and would rely on their support for re-election. Furthermore, the use of two-member districts would allow BC to retain the close relationship all MLAs have with their communities. However, DMP would not merely retain the status quo. Instead, it offers to improve upon this relationship. Simulations of past elections demonstrate that approximately 80% of districts could be expected to be represented by two different parties in future elections. This would significantly increase the number of British Columbians who are represented by a candidate they voted for and provide a large majority with a choice between two MLAs from different parties to approach with their concerns.

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<sup>4</sup> Unless, of course, a few single-member districts are created for the purpose mentioned in Section 3.3.

#### 4 SIMULATION OF THE 2017 BC ELECTION

This section will show how DMP could have improved the outcome of the 2017 BC election in concrete terms. Using voting data from May 2017, a simulation of the last BC election under DMP was produced. The results of this simulation are displayed in figures 2 through 8.

To simulate election results under DMP for BC's last election, several assumptions and choices had to be made. First, the district threshold and reserve factor were set at 5% and 10%, respectively.<sup>5</sup> Second, it was assumed that each single-member district was a two-member district. Of course, if DMP is used for future elections, the number of districts would decrease so that the number of seats would not increase. However, the effect of reducing the number of districts on the simulation results would not be significant. Finally, BC was treated as one region.

Figures 2 through 5 display the distribution of the popular vote and the distribution of seats under DMP and SMP for the province and its three regions.<sup>6</sup> These charts show that DMP would have given each party the share of seats they deserved at the provincial level and created more balanced representation at the regional level.

According to Figure 6, 87% of the elected candidates under DMP would have placed first or second within their districts. Stated differently, 87% of the seats would have been assigned to the same candidates as under a plurality formula. Some object to the remaining 13% by saying that second place candidates should not lose to lower place candidates. The crux of this argument is that these candidates do not have a legitimate claim to a seat. However, this argument is made within the single-dimensional context of SMP and ignores the multi-faceted approach DMP takes to determining which candidates have sufficient democratic legitimacy to be elected. DMP requires candidates to have a mandate based not just on the local district vote, but on the overall provincial vote as well. When a second place candidate belongs to a party that doesn't have a mandate for more seats based on the provincial vote, the candidate is denied the seat and it is given to the next best performing candidate whose party has such a provincial mandate. Thus, these candidates would be elected because they possess the strongest local mandate of the parties that have yet to receive their deserved share of seats in the Legislative Assembly.

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<sup>5</sup> For an explanation of thresholds and the reserve factor, see the "How it Works" page of [DMPforCanada.com](http://DMPforCanada.com).

<sup>6</sup> Note that votes cast for independents and parties that received less than 3% of the vote are grouped into the "Other" category.

Figures 7 and 8 quantify how local and regional representation would change under DMP. Figure 7 shows that 89% of the districts would have been represented by two different parties. This effect would improve how British Columbians are represented by increasing the number of voters in each district who are represented by a party they support. Figure 8 reveals that parties would see the regional diversity of their caucuses increase. For example, the Liberal, New Democratic, and Green parties would have obtained representation in 78%, 77%, and 31% of BC's districts, respectively. This would have been a 29, 30, and 28 percentage point improvement for these parties over the result obtained with SMP, respectively. By broadening the regional representation of political parties and introducing political diversity at the local level, DMP would foster greater civility and collaboration in BC's politics.

## 5 CONCLUSION

DMP would make many significant improvements to election outcomes in BC. It would distribute each party's seats more evenly across the province, ensuring better regional representation within party caucuses. It would improve how voters are represented at the local level by electing candidates from two different parties in a majority of districts. Most importantly, replacing SMP with Dual Member Proportional would ensure that the choices of all voters are accurately reflected in the Legislative Assembly. This would be accomplished by making sure that every vote has a meaningful effect on election outcomes. In brief, DMP would allow BC to retain local representation, promote collaboration between parties, achieve proportionality, and preserve the SMP voting experience.

*For more information about DMP, visit [DMPforCanada.com](http://DMPforCanada.com).*

FIGURES

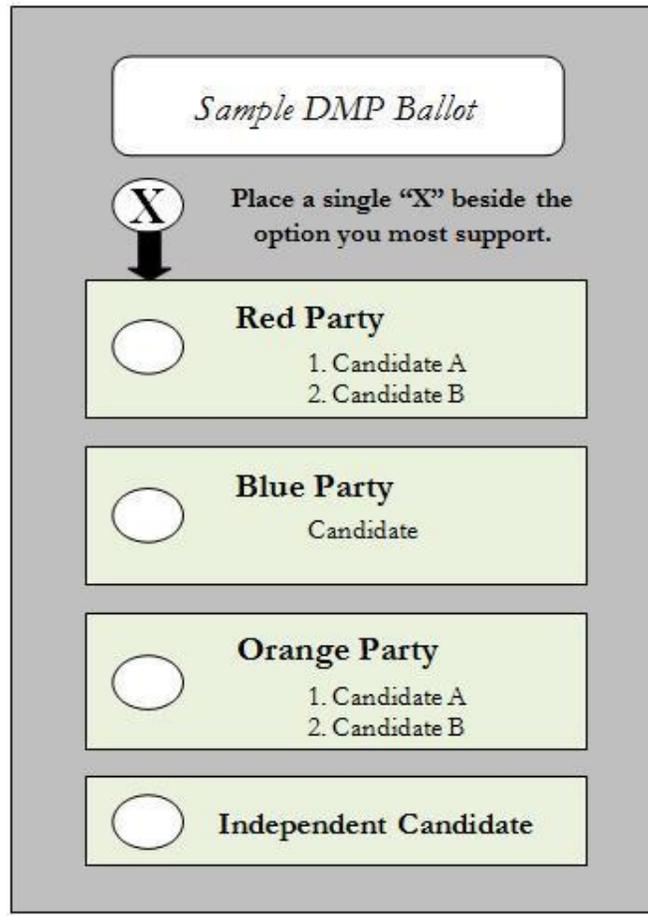


Figure 1

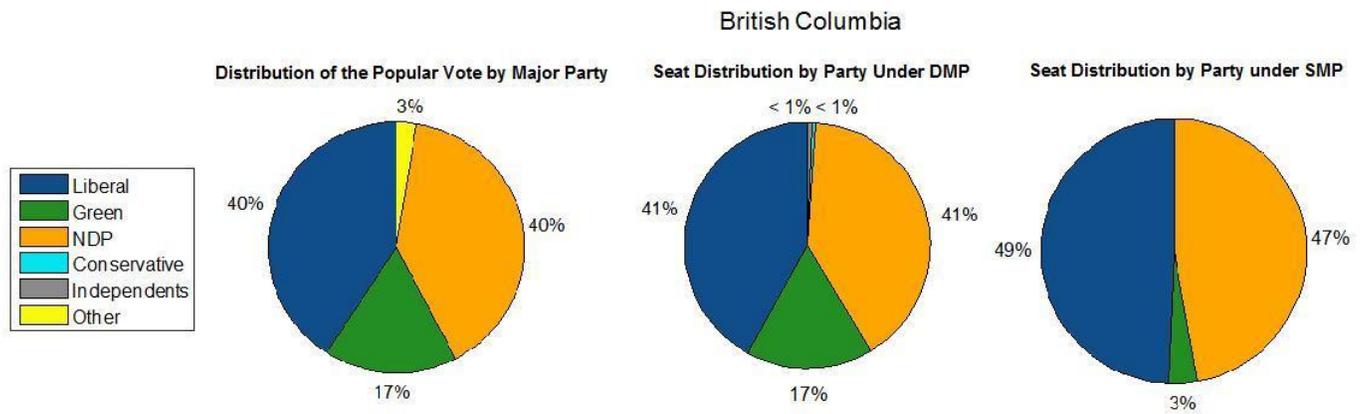


Figure 2

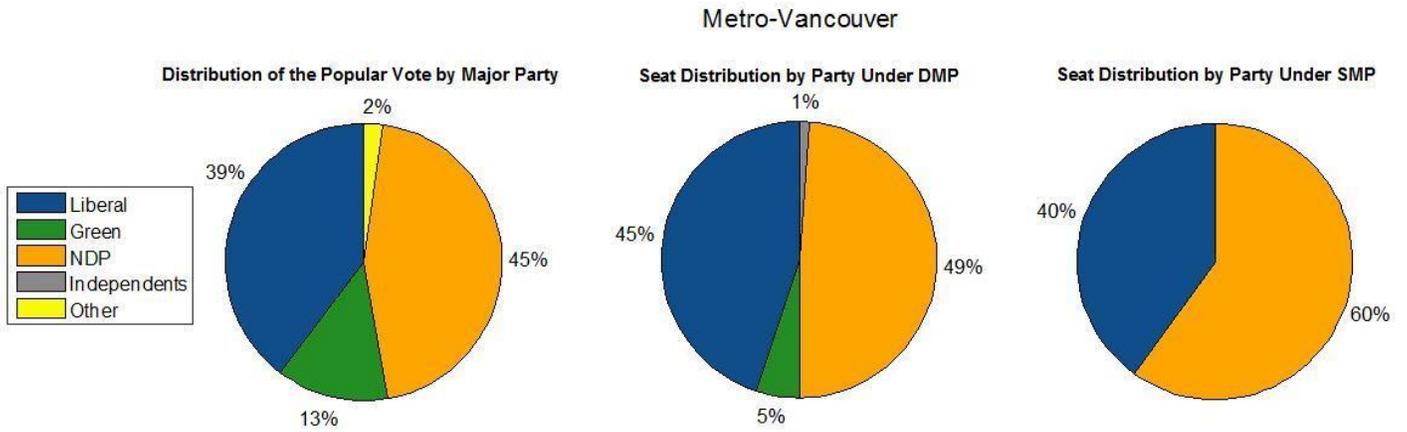


Figure 3

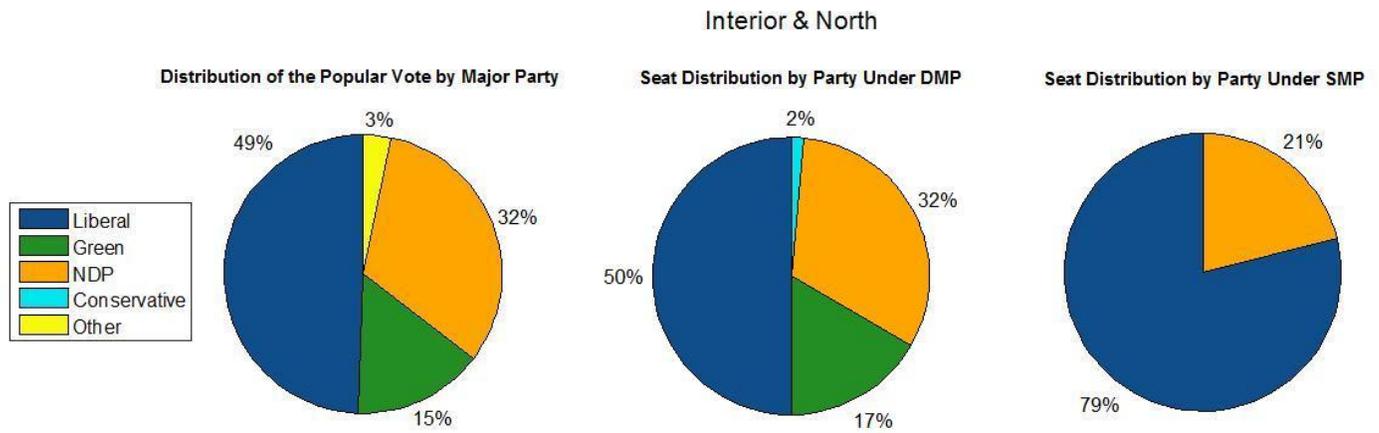


Figure 4

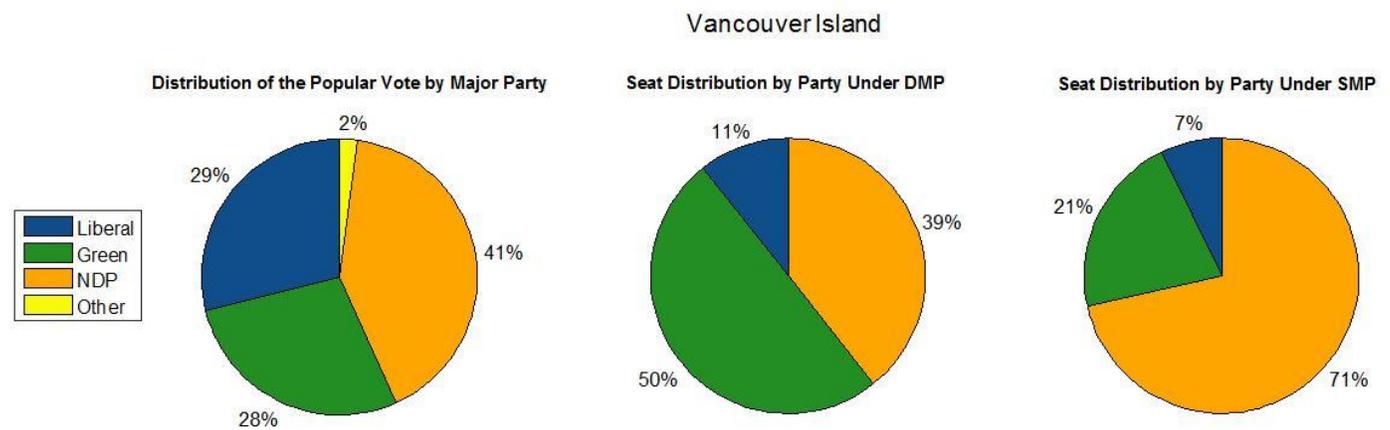


Figure 5

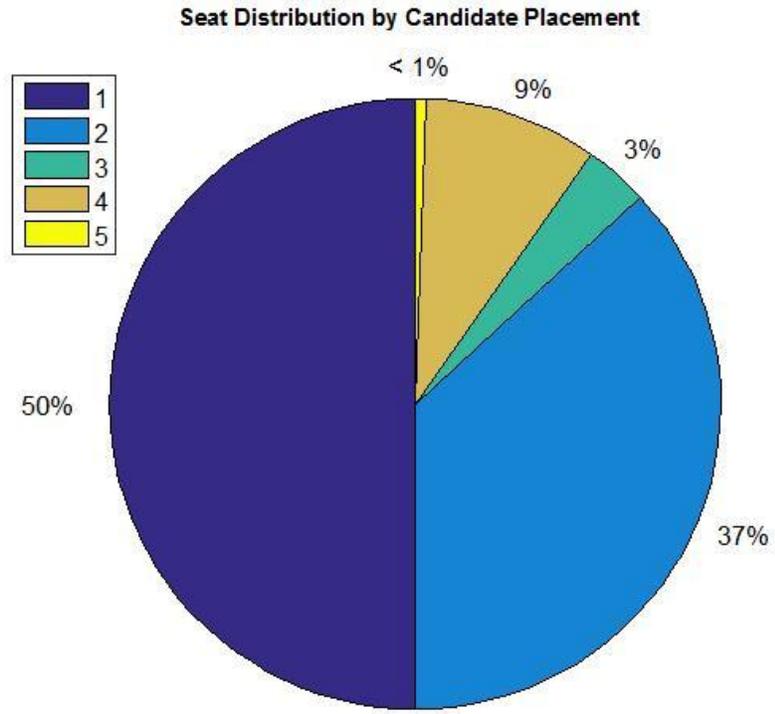


Figure 6

Districts With Single Party Representation vs. Districts With Dual Party Representation

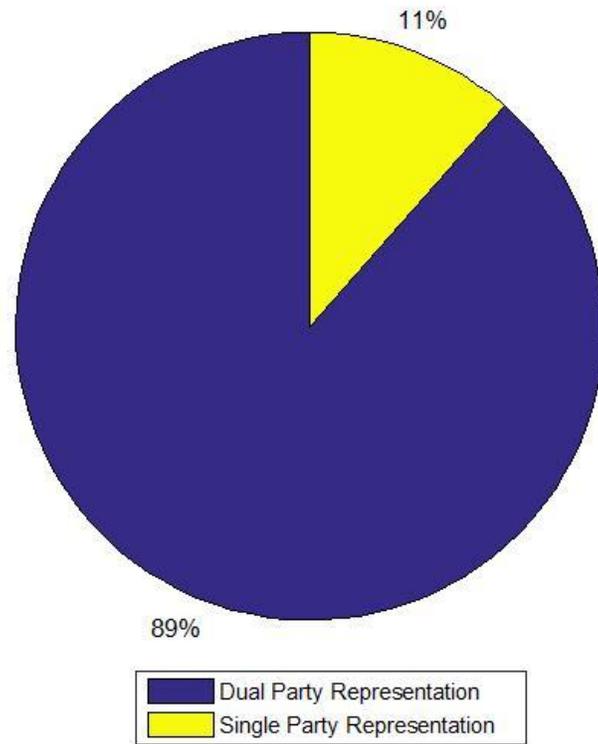


Figure 7

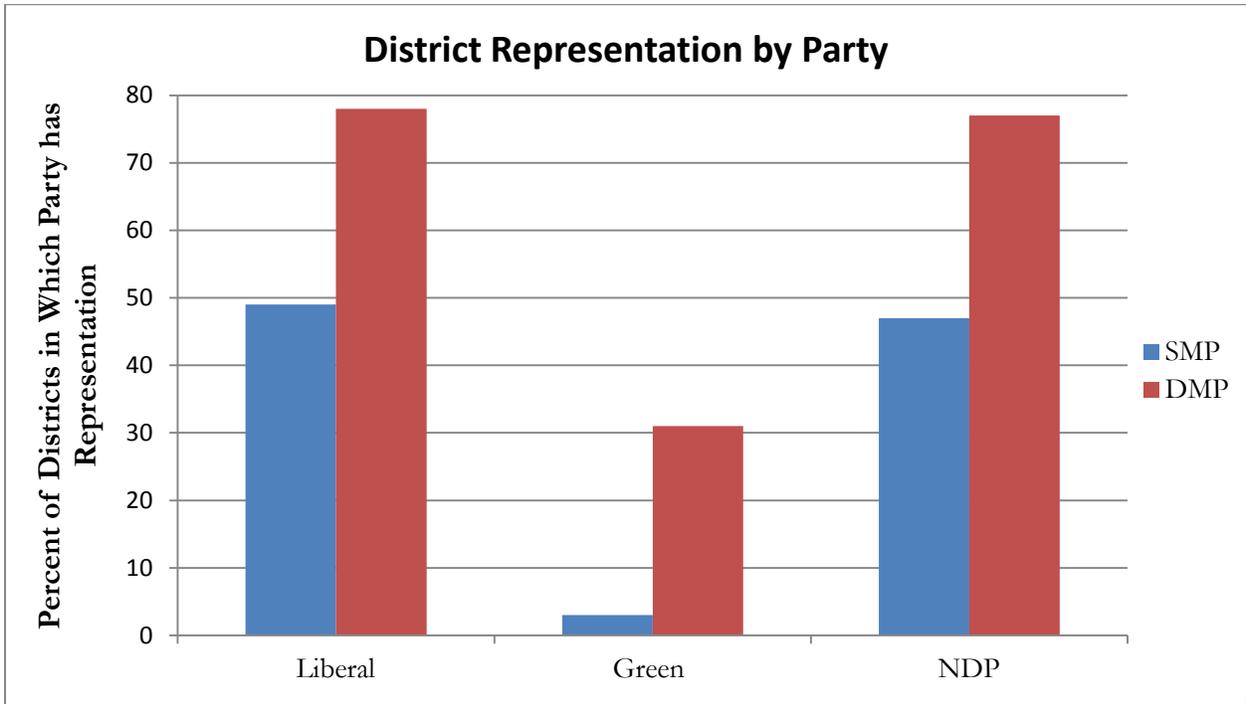


Figure 8