

**RANDY BOISSONNAULT
EDMONTON CENTRE**

**TOWN HALL REPORT
ON ELECTORAL REFORM
PUBLIC CONSULTATION**



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

**RANDY BOISSONNAULT
EDMONTON-CENTRE**

**RAPPORT SUR LES CONSULTATIONS
PUBLIQUES SUR LA RÉFORME
ÉLECTORALE**

CONSULTATION(S)			
Date(s) of the Meeting(s)	Time and Length (start time and end time)	Location of Consultation	Total Number of People in Attendance (you may indicate the number of volunteers and employees who assisted with the meeting)
August 18 th , 2016	6:00pm – 8:00pm	MacEwan University	140
Form: <input type="checkbox"/> Use of the Library of Parliament’s visual presentation <input type="checkbox"/> Presentation from the MP’s office <input type="checkbox"/> Open microphone <input type="checkbox"/> Question and answer session <input type="checkbox"/> Guest speaker <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify):			
SUBJECTS DISCUSSED (summary)			
Voting systems: <input type="checkbox"/>	Replacement of the current voting system: <input type="checkbox"/>	Voter turnout: <input type="checkbox"/>	Accessibility and inclusiveness: <input type="checkbox"/>
Mandatory voting: <input type="checkbox"/>	Online voting: <input type="checkbox"/>	Local representation: <input type="checkbox"/>	Other (please specify and describe below) <input type="checkbox"/>

Please return to:

Special Committee on Electoral Reform (ERRE)
 131, rue Queen Street, Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6
 Tel./tél.: 613-992-3150 Fax/télécopieur: 613-947-3089 ERRE@parl.gc.ca

Deadline: Friday, October 14, 2016

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What did participants say about the current system for electing Members of Parliament (benefits/flaws)? Did participants feel that their votes are fairly translated? (suggested limit: 500 words)

Regarding our current electoral formula, the majority of participants indicated that they do not feel that the House of Commons effectively represents Canadians. Reasons given for such feelings included that, under our current system, the House of Commons does not accurately represent Canada's many regions, nor its diverse communities – such as ethnic, religious, cultural, and gender communities, etc. It was also mentioned that the current first-past-the-post system misrepresents voter intention. Electors who cast their ballots for candidates who do not win become represented by Members of Parliament who may not represent their interests. Therefore, it is argued that the House of Commons is not representative of the will of the electorate. Words used to describe this notion were, for example, “wasted votes” and “unfair”. Many participants noted that the only benefit of first-past-the-post is its familiarity among the electorate. Additionally, the concept of “strategic voting” was referenced more than once. Participants indicated that a system that encourages voters to vote for a candidate or a party who is not their first choice is inherently inadequate in facilitating the will of the electorate.

A significant portion of participants did, however, indicate that the House of Commons does effectively represent Canadians under our current system. The importance of direct, local representation of citizens by MPs in the House of Commons that our current system provides was also stressed. It was mentioned, as well, that while the current system may distort voter intention, it provides “party cohesion”, which they believed is a comparably desirable feature of an electoral formula. The concept that our current formula “wastes votes” was refuted by a number of participants who stressed the idea that every vote is counted, and every vote counts equally. It was mentioned a few times that ‘the only vote that doesn't count is the vote that isn't cast’. The concept of accountability to the electorate, which was noted as a strength of our current system, was also frequently mentioned by participants.

The concept of false majority governments was a recurring theme throughout our discussion as both a strength and a weakness of the first-past-the-post formula. Participants mentioned that a system, which can deliver majority governments, is desirable, given the perceived effectiveness and stability that majority governments provide. However, other participants felt that false majority governments are not acceptable, insofar as a government should not be entitled to majority control of the House of Commons without the support of the majority of the electorate. It was also argued that minority governments are not necessarily to be avoided as they can also be very effective.

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Which alternatives to the current system were discussed? Did participants identify specific features that are important to them in an electoral system (for example local representation, proportionality, simplicity, legitimacy etc.)? (suggested limit: 500 words)

Prior to the discussion, Randy Boissonnault outlined a few alternative electoral formulas, namely: Alternative Vote, List Proportional Representation (both party lists and open lists were touched upon), Mixed Member Proportional Representation, and Single Transferable Vote. Additionally, a participant brought forward an additional formula that he has developed called Dual Member Proportional Representation.

The concepts of effectiveness, efficiency, stability, accountability, local representation, fairness, cohesion, and effective and accurate representation of the electorate were all concepts referenced as desirable in an electoral system. As well, as is mentioned later, Accessibility of the electoral system was also mentioned as being very important to certain participants.

Did participants discuss why they feel many Canadians choose not to engage in the democratic process? Did they suggest ways to encourage participation? (suggested limit: 500 words)

The general consensus at our town hall was that the majority of attendees do engage in the democratic process. The majority of participants indicated that regardless of whether or not they agree with our current electoral formula, they believe voting is our civic duty as Canadians. Some participants did also indicate that many people are not motivated to vote. The reason given, though not always justified, was that our current system disenfranchises certain communities and groups. It was specifically mentioned that youth and indigenous peoples are disenfranchised by our current electoral system. A few participants justified this feeling with the notion that it is the party system that is disenfranchising. It was also mentioned that our current system discourages voting because the outcome of our elections under the first-past-the-post system inaccurately represents the will of the electorate. Specifically, certain participants mentioned that they felt their votes don't count if the candidate for whom they voted did not win. As well, a few participants mentioned that voter education is not sufficient, which ultimately discourages people from voting if they don't properly understand for whom they should vote, the issues being addressed, or the electoral process itself.

A large number of others, however, did indicate that they are happy with the current system, and it is up to each and every eligible Canadian to perform their civic duty and cast a ballot.

Did participants feel that it should it be mandatory to cast a ballot? (Can include spoiling a ballot.) (suggested limit: 500 words)

The topic of mandatory voting was addressed. A slight majority of participants indicated that they were in favour of some type of mandatory voting system. Multiple participants stated that if mandatory voting were to be implemented, it should be done by incentivising voting, rather than by punishing non-voters. The example was given of implementing a tax incentive to encourage voting,

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rather than a fine/fee for not voting. It was also mentioned that if mandatory voting were to be implemented, there should be a “None of the above” option to protect a voter’s right to abstention. A slight minority of participants, however, were unsupportive of the implementation of mandatory voting. There were criticisms that if voting was made mandatory without increasing the accessibility of the voting process itself, many eligible voters who have physical limitations could be penalized if they do not have extensive arrangements in place to get to their polling station. As well, it was mentioned that those who are unable to take the requisite amount of time off from work to go vote would also be penalized by mandatory voting laws. This leads us to believe that some voters are unaware of their right to 3 consecutive paid hours of time off in order to go vote; as well as the likelihood of some employers not being aware of their obligation to allow employees to exercise this right.

Did participants discuss online voting? Did they express a desire to maintain current voting practices? (i.e. presenting themselves at a polling station, vote secrecy etc.) (suggested limit: 500 words)

Online and electronic voting were discussed. Many participants support in theory online and/or electronic voting. It was noted that online voting could potentially increase voter turnout and make voting easier and less onerous. However, there were strong concerns about the security and accuracy of both online and electronic voting. Many participants would support electronic and/or online voting if their security and functionality could be guaranteed. Although, as things currently stand, the majority were opposed. Additionally, it was mentioned that if electronic and online voting were to be implemented, the option of going to the ballot box and casting a paper ballot should be maintained.

Were any other major topics raised by the participants? (i.e. referendum, women/minority representation, accessibility, voter turnout etc.) (suggested limit: 500 words)

Another issue that was addressed was lowering the voting age. There was roughly an equal amount of those in favour of lowering the voting age as there were those who were not in favour. Many participants addressed that everybody’s right to vote is protected in constitution, not simply an adults right to vote. The idea that those under the age of 18 do not yet have the full mental development to vote was brought up. Other constituents refuted this by saying that those without full mental capacities over the age of 18 due to various conditions are still entitled to vote, therefore, mental development should not be a criteria in the decision whether or not the voting age should be lowered.

Several participants expressed strongly that there should be a referendum on changing the electoral system. Among the reasons were that changing the voting system is a very important and fundamental change to Canadian democracy – if it should happen. It was argued that to ensure every Canadian is involved in the decision, and to provide the government with the unquestioned mandate to change the voting system, a referendum should be held.

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Criticisms of holding a referendum included that the referendum happened when the electorate elected to government a party, which included in their platform the promise to change the voting system. Additionally, it was noted that upwards of 60% of the electorate voted for parties that had promised to change the electoral system in some fashion. Therefore, holding a referendum would be redundant, specifically given the high cost involved. The loudest applause of the night were in response to a comment that the government campaigned to change the electoral system and that a referendum is not needed. There were also concerns of the legitimacy of referenda and their divisive nature.

SUMMARY OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS AND COMMENTS FROM PARTICIPANTS (suggested limit: 1000 words)

Below are the raw numbers of the concepts that were mentioned by participants in response to the questions posed to them:

Concept: Frequency the concept was mentioned

Do you and/or the people you know usually vote in elections? Why or why not?

I vote: 40
I don't vote: 1
Youth don't vote: 3
Most people vote: 11
Most people don't vote: 2
Youth and other groups are disenfranchised under current system: 10
Decline in known voter turnout: 1
Lack of motivation to vote: 4
Lack of voter education: 1
Current system doesn't encourage voting: 4
Voting is our civic duty: 36
Vote doesn't count if candidate doesn't win: 7
Every vote counts: 2
Party system is disenfranchising: 3
Better to vote than to not: 5
The better educated have a better grasp of the issues: 1
Voter turnout is not sufficient: 1

Do you feel the House of Commons represents Canadians effectively? Why or why not?

Yes, it is effectively representative: 15
No, it is not effectively representative: 39

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Current system does not represent diverse groups and regions: 22
Too many people are represented by MPs for whom they did not vote and do not agree with: 14
Indigenous groups are specifically poorly represented: 2
False majority gov'ts undermine representation: 8
Party discipline is too strict: 3
FPTP allows people to be directly represented in the HoC: 3
Current system emphasizes divisive policies: 3
It's not bad, but it's not good: 5
Strategic voting undermines accurate representation: 4

What do you think are some strengths of our current electoral system? What are some of the weaknesses?

People who want to understand the system will: 1
FPTP: Simple & efficient: 11
FPTP: Distorts will of the electorate: 18
FPTP: Produces false maj. gov'ts (good & bad): 10
FPTP: Minority opinions unrepresented: 12
FPTP: Effective, strong & stable government: 9
FPTP: Regional/local representation & accountability: 12
FPTP: Strategic voting is bad: 6
FPTP: It's familiar: 9
FPTP: Too complicated: 2
FPTP: Perception that rural votes are more important than urban votes: 1
FPTP: Doesn't legitimize radical opinions: 4
Nothing matters after Ontario and Quebec have voted: 4
FPTP: Leads to two-party system: 3

How do you feel about lowering the voting age, electronic, online, and/or mandatory voting? Why?

Lower the voting age: yes: 18
Lower the voting age: no: 20
Online voting: yes: 10
Online voting: no: 10
Electronic voting: yes: 9
Electronic voting: no: 12
Mandatory voting: yes: 17
Mandatory voting: no: 15
Mandatory voting: Incentivise rather than punish: 6
Mandatory voting: Yes, as long as there's a non of the above option: 1
Online voting: Yes, as long as there's stil the option to vote at a polling station: 1
Mandatory voting: No, will increase donkey vote: 1

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Electronic voting + online voting: ONLY if security is strong enough: 11	
Report submitted to Special Committee on Electoral Reform (ERRE)	Date: October 13,2016
MP's signature:	Randy Boissonnault

Reports must be submitted to the Clerks of the Committee no later than Friday, October 14, 2016 in both official languages.

Please note that this document is for illustrative purposes only and can be modified or adapted to your needs. The report will be published on the Committee's web site.

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