

SHAUN CHEN
SCARBOROUGH NORTH

TOWN HALL REPORT
ON ELECTORAL REFORM
PUBLIC CONSULTATION



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

SHAUN CHEN
SCARBOROUGH-NORD

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)
1. Oct 1, 2016	1pm – 3pm	TAIBU Community Health Centre – Unit 1 – 27 Tapscott Rd, Scarborough, ON M1B 4Y7	48 people
2.			
3.			
4.			
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"/>

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
<p>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)</p> <p>Participants found that the current system for electing Members of Parliament is easy and simple to use. They stated that they found it to be good overall. Some found that the system works as long as there are people who work to get out the vote.</p> <p>With respect to some of the flaws with the current system, participants stated they found the system produces a lack of racial and gender diversity. They found the current system creates difficulties with respect to voting for an MP and voting for a party. Some stated that they wished there were a way to remove party affiliation. The current system has a tendency to benefit only the larger parties and that smaller, independent parties fail to be represented.</p>

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

Some participants stated that they may have preference for a particular MP although they may not like the party leader, and vice versa.

The majority of participants felt that overall their votes are translated fairly, although they did not necessarily consider the problem with some constituencies with higher populations of electors and other constituencies with lower populations of electors and how they affects the translation of votes during an election.

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)

During the consultation, we identified the following alternatives to the current system: alternative vote, list proportional representation, single transferable vote, and mixed member proportional.

With respect to the alternative vote, we discussed some of its advantages as being easy to use and understand, its ability to produce stable majority government and that it maintains a geographic link between constituents and members. We also identified some of its critiques, that seat allocation is disproportionate to the popular vote, that the system exaggerates regionalism and has the potential for wasted votes. We identified this system as being used in Australia's lower house.

We also discussed list proportional representation. On this topic there were several types that we identified: the open list, closed list, and modified closed list systems. We identified the open list system as one where parties create lists of candidates, and that citizens choose their preferred candidate from a party list. We identified this system being used in Denmark, Finland and Sweden. We identified the close list system, where citizens vote for a party, not for a specific candidate. This system is used in Russia and South Africa. Finally, we discussed the modified closed list as a system where modified closed lists allow electors some ability to influence candidates elected by stating preferences on the ballot. We told participants that this system is used in Austria, Belgium, and the Netherlands.

Single transferable vote was identified as an alternative to the current voting system. This system is among the more complex systems to explain. We identified some of its advantages being its ability to generate results that closely match the actual proportion of votes grant by each party, its ability to provide greater representation of small parties, and its ability to encourage coalition governments. Some of its challenges include the difficulty of voters to understand, a weakness in geographic link between constituent and MP, and a complicated ballot counting process. We used a video to help demonstrate this system.

Finally we identified the mixed member proportional system. We identified its advantages as creating fairly proportional outcomes, that it maintains the geographic link between constituent and MP, and that it allows smaller parties to be represented in parliament. Its weaknesses, which we identified, include its complexity and difficulty for the voter to understand, and that it creates two classes of members, those being constituency based MPs and list MPs.

Among concerns voiced by the participants, these included their identification of the need for local representation, some stating that they would not want to change the current set-up of one MP for each electoral district. They found simplicity in this approach. Participants stated that simplicity in voting is important to ensure higher turn-out rates and there was a general sense of concern that more complicated voting systems would reduce voter turn-out.

Several groups in our consultations suggested a preference for a ranked ballot, with single-member electoral districts for the House of Commons and a closed list Proportional Representation list for electing Senators with elections being held simultaneously. Another group stated that they wished their electoral system ensured greater accountability, calling for an electoral system which created the opportunity to replace their Member of Parliament should they lose confidence in their MPs ability to represent them.

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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)

Participants in our consultations felt that the lack of engagement in the political process was a result of a range of issues.

Some of the issues identified by participants were that they felt their votes were wasted in the first past the post system. When their votes feel wasted that this leads to disillusionment in the electoral process and towards the government in general. Some participants identified the issue when they did not like any of the political parties available to them, or when they felt that they could not always identify strongly with their platform, that having an electoral system that focuses heavily on party politics served as a means by which many Canadian citizens feel disengaged with the democratic process.

Participants felt that their one vote would not always make a difference in the outcome of the election. They also felt that voting can at times be problematic when their work schedules do not permit the ability to vote.

In densely-populated urban communities concentrated with new citizens, who may be coming from countries which do not exercise democratic processes, they will not have the mind-set to understand the Canadian electoral process. In these cases, participants in our consultations felt that there was a greater need to educate new citizens on how the electoral process so that they can become more engaged.

Having the option to select ‘none of the above’ or ‘decline’ might increase engagement, as was suggested by some participants, when they feel disillusioned by the political process.

Participants felt that making voting mandatory would encourage political participation in the electoral process, and some spoke of using incentives such as tax deductions or tax credits. Other participants discussed the merits of using fines to encourage voter engagement.

Other participants suggested the creation of Student Parliamentarians, or Youth Parliamentarians for people in the ages of 14 – 17. These participants likened this process to ‘Student Trustees’.

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

From our sample of participants, 72.4% supported mandatory voting. Participants suggested that the Australian system was effective. They also stated that they would be more likely to support mandatory voting if certain concessions were met, among these was the recognition of Election Day as a national holiday, and a few supported using online voting. Exemptions to mandatory voting would be necessary, such as for the severely disabled or the elderly living in retirement and / or nursing homes.

Some participants stated that they would not accept a mandatory voting rule. They would not accept fines for failure to vote, although they would agree to have a voter tax credit. Irrespective of this, they felt the option to ‘decline’ on the ballot was also necessary.

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)

Participants were split on the issue of online voting. Among those who supported online voting, reasons stated included being in favour of using technology to its full potential. They supported

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online voting as a system with the potential of saving money by reducing election costs.

Among the participants who did not support online voting, they stated that found the technology could not be trusted. They were concerned with their online privacy and they wanted to be ensured of their anonymity. Participants were concerned with the reliability of online voting systems. Some participants found that online voting would make our electoral system vulnerable to foreign and domestic hackers. They also felt online voting makes it impossible to independently scrutinize election results.

Younger people generally support online voting with far greater enthusiasm than the older generations.

In general, participants felt that online voting presented many risks that outweighed potential benefits. Even when they supported online voting they still wished to maintain polling stations. Some participants expressed a desire to have an increase in the number of available polling station locations. Others felt that there was no need for updated voting practices. Online voting was seen as a convenience for the majority of participants, but not a voting practice that they felt comfortable capable of overriding the benefits of our current voting practices.

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

Participants discussed the merits of holding a referendum over the issue of electoral reform. Half of the respondents thought that a referendum should not be held. 35.7% said that they did think a referendum was necessary, while a remaining 14.3% were unsure. Arguments against holding a referendum were based mainly on cost. Some participants were also concerned with the wording of a referendum question and felt it may be difficult to word such a question with sufficient clarity.

Other major topics participants raised included increasing representation of all categories of citizens in the electoral process. They felt that all levels of government should encourage the participation of all communities, women, minorities, and people with disabilities and special needs as being involved at all levels of the electoral process.

Some participants felt that voting rights should be extended to permanent residents in Canada. Others felt that 14-17 year olds should have the right to vote.

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

Key recommendations from this round of consultations can be summarized as being in line with what one might presume to be the general consensus. Many participants, while finding alternatives to the current electoral system to be attractive, found the first-past-the-post system provided a simple, user-friendly approach to the electoral process. When discussing alternative models they focused on the complexities of these systems and found that in some of the models that they did not want to give up some primary features of our current system, such as having a local representative tied geographically to their constituency. Most participants correctly identified issues within the current model, stating that it had a tendency to favour major established parties while preventing the emergence of smaller and newer parties. They expressed dissatisfaction with the requirement of having to choose between their local candidate and the party leader each time they go to the ballot box.

Online voting was discussed, and while many people identified the convenience of such a system, they wanted to be assured that their privacy and personal information would be secure and not available to the public. They do not feel online voting is sufficiently secure.

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The participants were curious about mandatory voting systems, and identified Australia as an example of a system where this rule is enforced. While a clear majority of participants supported mandatory voting, when it came time for discussion, not all participants favoured using fines as an enforcement mechanism as some favoured using less intrusive methods such as tax incentives as preferable positive reinforcement control mechanisms. If mandatory voting should be imposed, participants felt that they needed a method for selecting ‘none of the above’ if they felt they could not reasonably support any one of the valid options.

One participant wrote into our office following the consultation providing the following summary:

To the Liberals on this Committee, I implore you to maintain the same courage your leader and your party had when, prior to the last election, you vowed it would be the last election under FPTP and to take our voting system into the 21st century.

Many more voters---many in the younger demographics---voted for the first time because they believed in what the Liberal party was promising to do. It would disappoint or discourage by breaking a promise and choosing any other voting system other than a made-in-Canada form of Proportional Representation, which truly represents the voters’ wishes.

If some of you do not support a made-in-Canada form of PR, the voters will be terribly disappointed and wonder why you made a promise and why you put everybody through this process and not able to come up with a voting system which represents voters, without the need of going back to the voters.

Liberal’s want to be “fair”. That is who you are. It is not being fair to forsake your majority position on this committee to satisfy and placate the minority---this would be a blow to democracy. Being fair is supporting the majority.

It is you members of the Liberal party on this Committee that have the power to do this. If you want to be viewed as being “fair” then embrace necessary change and be brave.

With respect to the points that she has raised, she identifies a need for a ‘made-in-Canada form of PR’. This is interesting considering that some participants in this consultation discussed an approach to electoral reform that also included Senate reform. These ideas consisted primarily of keeping the House of Commons elected with a first-past-the-post system, maintaining a local MP and party politics, but introducing a revised Senate selection process where Senators would stand for election using a proportional representation model. Although, participants did not fully elaborate their thoughts to decide upon whether or not they wanted to use an open or closed list.

Report submitted to Special Committee on Electoral Reform (ERRE)

Date: October 14, 2016

MP’s signature:



Shaun Chen

(Name)

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

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