# Democratic Reform Town Hall

August 3$^{rd}$, 2016
Cassie Campbell Community Centre
Hosted by Ms. Kamal Khera, MP.
Brampton West

# Introduction

Approximately 110 individuals attended the democratic town hall over the duration of two hours (6:30 – 8:30pm). To engage constituents, the town hall began with several simple questions to gauge an understanding of their level of interest towards voting and prior knowledge of systems.

Ms. Khera led the town hall with an in depth explanation of different voting systems, using the pamphlets created and distributed as a visual guide to aid. Additional visual aids were prepared in advance by our executive assistant; each displaying a simplified version of each voting system highlighting its differences.

The format of the town hall was a "controlled open microphone", in which constituents had the opportunity to openly share their stance, thoughts, concerns and questions with Ms. Khera. In order to ensure this process was orderly and individuals remained on topic, constituents would have to raise their hand; Which was an indication to our staff that they would like to speak. One staff member, created a list, by recording the names of constituents by the order of who raised their hands. Referencing the name tags we distributed during the registration period allowed us to address these constituents by their name during their turn, to avoid confusion.

To prevent certain individuals from speaking for an excessive amount of time, we allotted each individual a speaking time of 1 minute and raised place cards that indicated how much time they had remaining. This would allow the constituent the opportunity to not only finish their thought, but an incentivize others to be concise.

At various points of time, polls were taken.

# Forum

√ Use of the Library of Parliament's Visual Presentation

√ Open Microphone

√ Question and Answer Session

√ Other (Please Specify): Polls

# Subjects Discussed (summary)

√ Voting Systems

√ Mandatory Voting

√ Online Voting

√ Replacement of current voting system

√ Voter Turnout

√ Local representation

√ Accessibility and inclusiveness

√ Other (please specify): Security in relation to online voting and autonomy.

## Discussion Questions

1) **What did participants say about the current system for electing Members of Parliament (benefits/flaws)? Did participants feel that their votes are fairly translated?**

Participants felt that the government should have better informed them on what the key benefits and flaws are of the current system, in addition to their stance on why this system needs to be changed, as well as their preferred alternative. Constituents felt overwhelmed by the options and found them very complex to follow, even when broken down. The consistent demonstrated preference was that this consultation process lacks simplicity and that is difficult for them to formulate their opinion at the town hall, as they have not had the time to properly reflect on the options.

From their understanding and personal experience of our current system, the flaws and benefits they identified are as follows.

| Flaws | Benefits |
|---|---|
| - Low Voter Turn out<br>- Manual Voting and counting<br>- Strategic Voting<br>- Vote "wasted" if preferred candidate does not win<br>- The percentage a candidate can win by is not representative of the population<br>- Vote splitting | - Simple and straightforward (the norm)<br>- The belief that the cost involved is minimal.<br>- Autonomy, compared to other options such as online voting. |

Constituents believe that this town hall should be the first of many that should occur in their district and that this conversation should continue to be fluid.

2) **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.)?**

All alternatives were discussed: Majority Systems, List Proportional Representation, Mixed Member Proportional and Single Transferable vote.

Specific features that constituents outlined was that they wanted a system that is not drastically different from the current system, but has the capability to eliminate many of the primary flaws in first past the post. It was unanimous that Single Transferable Vote, would be able to meet all their important needs such as: Simplicity,

3) **Did Participants discuss why they feel many Canadians choose not to engage in the democratic process? Did they suggest ways to encourage participation?**

Many Canadians choose not to engage because if they support a minority party, they know their vote will go to waste. If their uneasy about who to vote for, its difficult to choose between two parties and strategic voting goes against their values.

4) **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.)**

Participants did discuss online voting and did not feel that it was appropriate to implement at this time. They did prefer the desire to present themselves at the polling station, because it felt more secure and legitimate, than trusting your information inputted online. They expressed that if advanced safeguards were put into place that could guarantee their information would not be abused or hacked into, then they would reconsider in the future.

5) **Were any other major topics raised by the participants? (i.e. referendum, women/minority representation, accessibility, voter turnout etc.)**

Major topics such as minority representation, voter turnout, security, autonomy, accessibility, inclusivity and outreach were some of the major reoccurring topics mentioned by constituents.

**Summary of Key recommendations and Comments from Participants**

- Prefer the implementation of mandatory voting first and high fees charged to those who do not participate.
- The ideology behind proportional representation is the most appealing, but the implementation would do more harm than good.
- The most popular alternative voting system is Single transferable vote.
- The direction towards online voting is something everyone agrees is positive, but concerns regarding security, autonomy, cheating and exploitation are overwhelming.
- Constituents are very unhappy with the formation of the committee and believe that the power should ultimately lie with the majority government. Thus the committee should be comprised of a number of individuals from parties, that are proportional to our current government. (I.e More liberals). The committee should have also informed Canadians the impact their formation will have on the budget.
- Town Halls should be held by community leaders all across each district and Canadians need to be more informed about what electoral reform entails. Additional emphasis should be made on targeting millennials, marginalized and minority groups.

# Democratic Reform Tool Kit

## General

1. **Did you have a dialogue about electoral and democratic reform in general.**

## Democratic principles and values

1. **Did you have a dialogue about the principles and values that underpin Canada's democracy?** <mark>Yes</mark>/No
    a) If yes, what were the highlights of the dialogue?

    b) What principles did participants identify as the most important?
    - Trust
    - Security
    - Fair representation
    c) What principles did participants identify as least important?
    - Alternative systems aside from proportional representation and single transferable vote.

## Canadian Federal Electoral Reforms

1. **Did you have a dialogue about different potential federal electoral reforms?** <mark>Yes</mark>/No
    a) If yes, what were the highlights of the dialogue?

## Additional Feedback

1. **Did the dialogue yield additional thoughts you would like to share?** <mark>Yes</mark>/No
    a) If yes, what were those additional thoughts?

# Data Collection – Office of Kamal Khera

## Polls

Introduction:

1) **Who voted in the last federal election?**

40 Individuals

2) **Who engaged in the last federal election?**

43 individuals.

3) **Who understands what "First past the post" means and is comfortable with this system?**

25 individuals.

**4) What other systems do you prefer?**

The idea of proportional representation was appealing, but the preference remained with single transferable voting system.

**After Constituent #34:**

**5) Who believes that we should change our electoral system?**

N= 52

| Change | Not Change |
|--------|------------|
| 41 | 11 |

**6) Are you in Favor of mandatory voting?**

N=47

| Yes | No |
|-----|-----|
| 31 | 16 |

**7) In Favor of Online voting?**

N= 47

| Yes | No | Unsure |
|-----|-----|--------|
| 23 | 10 | 14 |

# Constituent Feedback: Meeting Minutes and Questions

**Constituent # 1:** What are the current discussions that are being held in the House of Commons, that validate the deficiency of our current system? Inquiry on the current system.

- Our office did not include an explanation of our current system in the pamphlet.

**Constituent #2:** Likes our current system, but believes that the priority should be to improve voter turn out first. Instead of changing the entire electoral system, we should be targeting core issues first. He recommends that we begin with the implementation of mandatory voting and prefers that the legislation be decided by our majority government instead of a referendum.

**Constituent #3:** Is not pleased with our current system as, it leads to strategic voting. If we don't vote strategically, that will cause "vote splitting", which leads to the success of the most undesirable candidate. (ex: vote split between liberals and NDP, leaving the conservatives with a majority).

**Constituent #4:** Does not understand fundamentally why change is needed, but agrees that 39% of the vote is not a representation of the true population, which she agrees is the only major problem with first past the post. She believes the government should focus on mandatory voting, to see if that percentage would change with our current electoral system.

**Constituent #6:** Is concerned that some electoral systems may be viewed as bias towards a certain party, which is why she is not sure whether supporting Mixed Member Proportional is the most ethical alternative. Would like more information on whether the results would representative of the population.

**Constituent #7:** Continued discussion on the topic of Mixed Member Proportional. The constituent began by accurately re-explaining what this electoral system entailed. He was concerned about the lack of statistics available on the effectiveness of individuals voting for a member vs party. He stated that: "Most people vote on a party, emphasis should be on the party first, then vote for the person. "

**Constituent #8:** Supports the idea of "Independent Voices", not tied to parties, which would allow MP's to vote on conscious.

**Constituent # 9:** Questioned why a committee on electoral reform is formed?

"We voted in the election, the majority government should hold the majority of seats in this committee as that is reflective of the beliefs of Canadians. Giving in and making it proportional does not show leadership and is not fair. Other parties are not in power because we do not agree with their values, why should they be given an equal opportunity and waste tax payer money."

- **The audience agreed**.

"So I ask again: why do we have a committee? Who is paying for this committee? How much more does this add to our budget? Where can we see the expenses of this? Why won't our government take charge of this instead of being pushed around. Their lack of leadership on this is costing tax payers and they fail to see that."

**Constituent # 10:** Agrees with all the points made by constituent #9 and also questions the need of a committee being formed. She believes that our government has more important problems to focus on.

"What is the cost of our present electoral system and what would the projected cost of the other systems be in comparison to our current one. I also support mandatory voting, since our census was clearly successful and whoever does not vote should be charged a high fee." Then it would cost less to get people to the polls to vote.

**Constituent # 11:** Does not understand the various proposals of electoral systems but strongly is against the idea of independent voters. The concern steams from the fear that an excessive number of independent member of parliament would never be able to reach a consensus of issues and constantly repeal each others policy.

"How can we ensure that our members priorities are streamlined with so many independents repealing each other? Without parties, who will decide on our policy moving forward? Already it takes a long time to pass bills in the house, we will accomplish nothing with strong minded intendents that do not follow a consistent ideology."

**Constituent #12:** Fails to grasp the purpose of a democratic reform town hall, if the faults of our current system are not acknowledged.

"What are the flaws to discuss? I do not know the purpose of why we are here to begin with if we cannot address that."

**Constituent #13:** Requests a brief re-explanation of the pros and cons of the current system, in comparison to the alternative systems presented.

"Explain the current system and what the issues are, then move on with the explanation of other systems. What are the success rates of these systems, because just like all ideas, they may sound good, but implementing them could actually do more harm than good?"

**Constituent #14: (Pat from Fair Vote Canada):** Believes that 20% is not representative of democracy and advocated for proportional representation. She is pleased with the electoral reform committee and the response from witnesses who support proportional representation.

"90 countries use proportional representation system and the problem with first past the post is that 9 million votes, 50% of votes elect no one. That 50% would decrease to 2% if you implement proportional representation. I also advocate for mandatory voting."

**Constituent #15:** The alternative systems presented are complicated and the focus should remain with increasing voter participation first. He believes that electronic voting is the direction we should be taking in the future, but implementing it all at once is too premature if we can't control for the variables. Begin with mandatory voting and investigate how we can incorporate electronic voting. The fear of cheating, safety, autonomy and manipulation, in addition to the lack of safeguards discourage him from online right now. If he had to pick an alternative it would be single transferable vote.

**Constituent #16:** Agrees that the current system is flawed, as governing based on 30% of a vote is not democracy. He believes that we can make the process as simple as possible, save money and make sure all preferences are heard, which makes a vote more reflective of the population. He supports single transferable vote.

**Constituent #17:** Supports single transferable vote, as it prevents vote splitting and allows the constituents preference to be known. Thinks that this is simpler to implement and is a relief knowing that even if their preferred candidate does not win, their vote is not wasted and their second choice has a fair chance.

**Constituent #18:** Represents the French community and agrees with the current system, but criticises that dialogue is not being presented in the French language at this town hall and material presented in general. She advocates for the translation of all materials, in languages the reflect the minority communities of different cultures. Her vision is of public servants fluent in both official languages.

"On behalf of the French community in Brampton, I would like to see the single transferable vote system."

**Constituent #19:** Acknowledges despite the diversity in gender, age, race and ethnicity of the individuals who attended the town hall today, they only represent the 1% of the population of Brampton West that are most likely engaged in politics.

" This is such a big region? Why should they care? They throw their votes away every year to begin with? Why should we even bother changing the electoral system first when we can't even get people out to the polls. People also may be held back by language barriers; so how will your government reach those people. This town hall can't be the end of the conversation, this is the beginning of something that should be discussed and advertised all around. Yet I didn't even know about what democratic reform

was until today. I support mandatory voting to begin with but don't feel comfortable with other alternatives. Maybe single transferable vote because that makes the most sense, but I want to know the answers to my other questions first. "

**Constituent #20:"** Why doesn't the government get more community organizations engaged to host their own town halls? "

**Constituent #21**: "Why doesn't the information pamphlet include first past the post information and I don't think we vote for parties; we vote for people. I like the idea behind proportional representation but I think single transferable vote is more realistic. "

**Constituent #22:** "Voting Is not complicated, it could be done better and the system we have right now is unfair. Proportional representation would be better. How does that look like at the ballot box though and after the ballot box what is the final result? How do those candidates represent us? How do we know who we are really supporting the most in proportional representation? Who ultimately gets the majority power at the end. It's too confusing, with too many gaps."

**Constituent #23:** Disagrees and believes that proportional representation is straightforward, simple and an obvious decision.

"That's why people voted for Justin, that's why he got the majority and that's what the constituents expect. He must take the lead on this."

**Constituent #24:** "Conservatives who can win off 29%, makes the representation questionable. I prefer single transferable and mandatory voting."

**Constituent #25:** Thinks that there is no problem in voting for the party that sides with your values over the candidate.

"I also think that a referendum should not be in the hands of uneducated Canadian citizens, especially since mandatory voting is not already in place. Guys, look at England, Brexit? Out of 33 million people, 15 million voted against leaving and afterwards the majority of people who claimed the voting for Brexit regretted the decision. That means that almost 50% of the population is unhappy with this decision. An absolute disaster, lets learn from their horrible mistake and leave it to our government. That is their job to begin with, to represent us and make the best decisions for us."

**Constituent #26:** Points out the millennium generation needs to be engaged in this conversation at platforms that they can most likely be reached (ex: Twitter, Facebook, Instagram etc.).

"This generation is glued to their cell phones and being a member of this generation, I can attest to the fact that we are not likely to come out to town halls. Our whole lives we've been under the impression that our voices don't matter and won't be heard anyways. The election turned that tied, but the government needs to do more to keep them engaged. This is a decision that will be most impacted by my generation, this is about the future. We should be the one to decide our future and have a greater say."

**Constituent #27:** "I want to begin by saying I am the biggest fan of proportional representation, but I know its definitely not the right choice of system. You know it's wrong, you need to come up with

another system. The government is not simple, therefore voting doesn't necessarily have to be simple. Nothing is ever going to be perfect, so we can't give up and constantly commit to informing."

**Constituent #28:** "You have to make it more simple, especially for us who are sitting in the back, it's hard to hear, which makes it confusing to understand. Maybe if you had some big photos or projections, so the older people can see too."

**Constituent #29:** The proportional representation system is worrisome.

"If no party is in majority, I'm worried about exploitation. This won't provide a majority or minority."

**Constituent #30:** Was initially in favor of proportional representation, but after seeing the impact of this system in Europe (i.e. fascist right wing party's), fears it may be dangerous.

"Though this system in theory is the fairest, but I prefer the single transferable vote. Ranked ballot system makes me feel that regardless [of] what the outcome is, I was heard."

**Constituent # 31**: Believes that the party that has a majority government has the power to put legislation they prioritize forward. With proportional representation, the minority power has the power to force the majority of compromise.

**Constituent # 32:** Had one main concern in regards to proportional representation:

"It sounds fair, so we all make this spur of the moment decision to support it. We need to stop and think whether this system has even been tested before. Why does the federal level of government need to take such a drastic risk? Why can't these different types of systems be implemented on a smaller scale first? Municipally? I can't support it until I know more. I am undecided and confused."

**Constituent #33:** Supports proportional representation as it will prevent strategic voting.

**Constituent #34:** Agrees that the ideology behind proportional representation is acceptable, but emphasizes that strategic voting can also be eliminated with single transferable vote. She emphasizes that all votes will still have value in this system too.

## Online and Mandatory Voting

**Constituent #1:** Has concerns regarding the security and integrity of the vote. (Ex: Lack of privacy, family pressures.)

**Constituent #2: (Pat from Fair Vote Canada):** advocates for mandatory voting and encourages the government to come up with more policy, to target the marginalized population. She also believes that forcing people to vote, would lead to the success seen by the recent census turn out.

**Constituent #3:** Is a tech security analyst by profession and lends his expertise by commenting on the fact that cyber security is not only expensive but can also be hacked. The lack of autonomy is a primary issue, as every single vote can be tracked and individuals could be potentially targeted based on their choice.

"Hitler or Stalin would have loved that access."

He believes in transitioning to mandatory voting first.

**Constituent #4:** Is pleased with the fact that the government is considering online alternatives, as his he noticed that many ballots were either miscounted or difficult to interpret, when volunteering for elections Canada.

**Constituent #5:** Is against mandatory voting, because the people who come to the polls care about the future of the government. In reference to voting he quoted:

"We get the government we deserve."

**Constituent #6:** Supports mandatory voting as an initial implementation and is not comfortable supporting any of the alternatives at the moment.

"I'm also a big fan of investments in technology, but before we make voting more accessible, we need to begin with day-to-day events becoming more accessible first."

**Constituent #7:** Concerned with confidentiality and lacks faith in our current security system. Strongly supports, mandatory voting.

**"To** this day we can't say for certain that our information is 100% secure. It's amazing what you can find in the extranet if you know what you're doing. If Harper was in power, he would completely abuse his power and target individuals who didn't support him. Even if he wasn't allowed to, I wouldn't be surprised if he did. "

"Look at Australia! It did them a lot of good, more people came out to vote. They had an 85% turn out with mandatory voting."

**Constituent #8:** Not comfortable with online voting but supports mandatory voting. He also recommends that Canadians be charged a high fee for not voting and putting that profit towards paying off the deficit.