MARC GARNEAU
NOTRE-DAME-DE-
GRÂCE–WESTMOUNT

TOWN HALL REPORT
ON ELECTORAL REFORM
PUBLIC CONSULTATION

HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

DAVID LAMETTI LASALLE
–ÉMARD–VERDUN

RAPPORT SUR LES CONSULTATIONS
PUBLIQUES SUR LA RÉFORME
ÉLECTORALE

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	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.			
2.			
3.			
4.			

Form: □ Use of the Library of Parliament's visual presentation
     x Presentation from the MP's office
     x Open microphone
     x Question and answer session
     □ Guest speaker
     □ Other (please specify):

	SUBJECTS DISCUSSED (summary)		
Voting systems: x	Replacement of the current voting system: x	Voter turnout: x	Accessibility and inclusiveness: x
Mandatory voting: x	Online voting: x	Local representation: x	Other (please specify and describe below) □

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)

Many participants said they were against the first-past-the-post system (FPTP). Some participants said the system was archaic and outmoded, and pointed out that Canada is one of the last countries in the world to use this system. Others pointed out its imperfections and called it a broken system. The most recurring criticism, of course, was the proportionality of election results that FPTP produced. The participants expressed reservations several times on the legitimacy of an MP elected with a low percentage of the votes. They also expressed their dissatisfaction with the representation of small parties, which a number of people said were under-represented in the House of Commons. Some participants also pointed out that the first-past-the-post system resulted in a tyranny of the majority where marginal parties were unable to express themselves against the big established parties.

Please return to:

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

Deadline: Friday, October 14, 2016

However, some participants said that, on the contrary, they liked our current system and emphasized its ability to elect majority governments in a strong position to take action. They also said that the special situation of Canada, a federation with a heterogeneous population spread over an immense area, was not suited to a proportional representation system that might produce regional parties whose interests would be difficult to reconcile within a coalition, unlike in homogeneous European countries with unitary governments and smaller land areas. Other participants said they were also afraid that a closed-list proportional representation system would increase the power of party leaders.

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)

The participants mentioned several alternatives that they would like to see implemented to replace the first-past-the-post system. Some said they supported a proportional voting system, others said they preferred a ranked-ballot system, and a few said they supported a single transferrable vote system. However, the most frequently cited alternative was mixed proportional representation. The participants said they would like election results to be more proportional to the popular vote, while preserving local representation, which mixed proportional representation made possible. They also said that such a system would make local representatives more accountable and increase the public's trust in them. However, the complexity of this system did not seem to influence them; this argument against this voting system was not cited very often.

Two other systems were also mentioned. The first was the fractional vote system, a system often used in corporate governance. The method for determining the composition of the House of Commons and its number of seats would remain unchanged. The difference would lie in the power of each MP in House votes. Essentially, each party would have a number of votes equal to its proportion of the popular vote rather than to its number of seats. So a party that received 10% of the votes, but only had two MPs in the House, would nonetheless be given the power to cast 10% of the votes in the House rather than two. This would mean that each MP in this party would have 19 votes. This also meant that a party with a number of MPs greater than the popular vote would have fewer votes than its number of seats, which would give each MP a fraction of a vote. A party with 60% of the seats but 40% of the votes would be made up of MPs who each had six-tenths of a vote. This system would help to introduce more proportionality into the House of Commons without substantially changing Canada's parliamentary and democratic infrastructure.

The parallel vote system was also mentioned. This system was also intended to introduce greater proportionality without exacerbating regionalism and involving extensive changes to Parliament. Rather than organize a single federal election, two parallel, simultaneous elections would be held to elect members to the House of Commons whose seats would be divided between two separate groups. The first election would elect local representatives by means of a ranked-ballot system, similar to Canada's current system. The second election would use a closed-list proportional voting system. This system, similar to the mixed proportional voting system, had the advantage, compared with the latter system, of preventing the creation and proliferation of regional parties while introducing a greater degree of proportionality than a majority voting system.

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)

A number of times, the participants discussed the reasons why many people did not vote, but this was not a dominant discussion topic.

Participants pointed out that it was necessary first to increase the responsibility of MPs in order to then increase the people's trust in them and the democratic system, and ultimately persuade Canadians that their votes counted and that they could make a difference. Widespread cynicism would have an adverse effect on the voter turnout rate.

It was also suggested that incentives be used to make it easier to vote, for example by scheduling election days on the weekend or by declaring a statutory holiday or a "national day" to be election day. People would be more motivated and would have more time to go vote, although on voting day, employers would be required to give employees a sufficient amount of time to exercise their right to vote. During the week, people would be too busy and would be less inclined to go to the polling station.

Another point raised was that young people had the impression that the current voting system worked against them and their values, and therefore they did not make it a habit to go vote if they wanted to vote for a marginal party that was not favoured to begin with by the first-past-the-post voting system. Some participants said they thought that the mixed proportional representation system would help young people feel that their votes counted.

One participant said he believed that it was necessary, first and foremost, to get rid of party lines in order to eliminate voter apathy. When one voted for a candidate, once that candidate was elected, he or she was no longer expressing the will of the voters when he or she was required to vote according to party lines. This would increase feelings of cynicism and produce voter apathy.

It was also proposed that the voting age be lowered to 16 and that events be organized in secondary schools to encourage young people to vote and to raise their awareness by making use of the power of social media to emphasize the importance of democracy and exercising one's civic duty. Participants agreed that it was necessary to get children and young people accustomed to the democratic process by getting them to vote along with their parents. A ballot box for future citizens could also be set up to enable children to vote symbolically. The earlier they learned these good habits, the more they would understand what it meant and the importance of the democratic process.

It was suggested that online voting would further encourage people to exercise their right to vote. It made it easier to vote, and the less effort that people had to make, the more they would be inclined to vote. They cited as an example that Statistics Canada had solved the security problem with the online Census: "If Statistics Canada can do it, so can Elections Canada."

Lastly, some participants said they believed that a law making it mandatory to vote, as in Australia, could eliminate the problem of low voter turnout in elections.

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

Opinions on the issue were fairly mixed. The topic was briefly addressed by participants and some said they believed it would be unconstitutional to make voting mandatory.

Some participants said they believed that people should not be forced to vote by making voting mandatory. Instead, they should be given good reasons to go vote. They acknowledged that it was necessary to combat voter apathy, but not necessarily by making voting mandatory. Generally, they preferred education over coercion.

Another comment made was that the problem was not so much the first-past-the-post voting system, but rather the lack of participation. In that regard, mandatory voting could solve this problem better than changing the system.

Lastly some participants said they were not necessarily opposed to mandatory voting, but they said that, given the government's current philosophy, which was one of openness, inclusion and freedom, they did not think that the government was about to pass mandatory voting legislation. Forcing people to vote would be contrary to the principles of freedom and free choice.

Did participants discuss online voting? Did they express a desire to maintain current voting

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practices? (i.e. presenting themselves at a polling station, vote secrecy etc.) (suggested limit: 500 words)

People in the ridings of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce–Westmount and LaSalle–Émard–Verdun were divided on the issue of possible online voting. Some said they were for or against, while others proposed a hybrid system.

People in favour of online voting emphasized that Internet use was increasingly common and that many daily transactions were done online (banking transactions, online shopping, etc.); consequently, the possibility of voting online would be feasible. They believed that security issues could be easily resolved. Many organizations, institutions and even some government service providers were using the Internet as a tool to facilitate transactions with their clients, and they were able to ensure the security and confidentiality of user data; so why not Elections Canada? In addition, it was a good idea to use new technologies, such as the Internet, because it would make voting easier and help increase voter turnout in elections.

Conversely, the people who were against online voting said they were concerned about data security and confidentiality. They did not have confidence that their information would be protected. They also emphasized fears about the checking of voters' identities. They believed that it would be fairly difficult, for example, to ensure that people did not vote in place of other people. In addition, the fear that an election might be stolen was something that was mentioned a number of times by those opposed to online voting. Lastly, a participant pointed out the problems of access to online voting for some segments of the population, particularly seniors. There was a risk that the adoption of online voting would marginalize these people and make the voting exercise more difficult, because of their lack of knowledge of the tools and of how to use computers.

To remedy this problem, one participant proposed the adoption of a hybrid voting procedure. He proposed that polling stations be kept as well as the traditional voting method, while making it possible for voters to vote online. This option would meet the needs of various types of voters, young people and seniors, and therefore make the voting process more accessible.

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

Accessibility was a concern expressed by participants attending the evening of consultations. They felt that promoting greater accessibility would have a ricochet effect by increasing voter turnout. Various methods were proposed, particularly online voting, as mentioned in the previous section. One participant also proposed that voting day be scheduled on a weekend or that election days should be declared statutory holidays in order to reduce the likelihood of work preventing people from voting. A number of participants said that making it easier to vote would increase public interest in the electoral process.

Some fears were raised about the speed at which the electoral reform had to be carried out. Electoral reform should be introduced gradually and wisely and without too much havoc created because Canadians were used to a first-past-the-post system. The choice of electoral system should reflect the strongly held values of Canadians, which will have been identified during this process of consultations on electoral reform.

Lastly, some participants mentioned their concerns about the results of these consultations on electoral reform. They said they were afraid of the reform being only a facade and that the public's opinions and viewpoints would not be taken into consideration in the choice of the next electoral system. They were afraid, on the one hand, that the report would be shelved and, on the other hand, that the government would adopt an electoral system that addressed its interests first and not the wishes of Canadians.

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

- Participants want to see a greater degree of proportionality in the distribution of seats in the House of Commons, while preserving a degree of local representation. A large proportion of these participants believe that mixed proportional representation is the best system for achieving these two objectives.
- Participants believe that the first-past-the-post system lacks legitimacy because of its low degree of proportionality in the representation it produces in Parliament. However, some of them acknowledge the ability of the first-past-the-post system to produce strong majority governments as an asset.
- Two systems that are not currently being studied by the Committee were submitted: the fractional voting system and the parallel voting system.
- Participants believe that cynicism and apathy play a major role in low voter turnout in elections and this should be remedied by giving MPs more responsibility. Eliminating party lines would also help to eliminate this problem.
- Some participants believe that incentives to vote should be introduced rather than making it mandatory for people to vote. Scheduling voting days on weekends or the establishment of a statutory holiday for elections may increase voter turnout.
- Young people feel neglected by the system and that the system works against them. Because they are more likely to vote for more marginal parties, they feel that their votes do not count on election day.
- Some participants proposed lowering the legal age to vote to 16 and organizing activities in schools to encourage young people to participate in elections. They believe that it is necessary to get young people accustomed to the democratic process.
- Introducing online voting would help to increase voter turnout by making the election process more accessible.
- Mandatory voting could also increase voter turnout, but participants felt that it would run counter to the government's current philosophy. Instead, incentives to vote would have to be introduced.
- Participants were divided on the issue of online voting. A number of them were afraid of technical problems, were afraid that the vote could be stolen, or that their confidential information would be disclosed. Some also pointed out that online voting disadvantaged seniors who are less accustomed to using the Internet.
- Conversely, a number of participants pointed out that the Internet has become a sufficiently secure platform for financial institutions and government agencies, and consequently could be used for voting.
- One participant suggested the introduction of a hybrid system combining online voting and traditional voting.
- Participants expressed concerns about the speed at which electoral reform was expected to be introduced and wanted to see it introduced gradually.
- Some participants also expressed fears about the outcome of the public consultations and their impact on electoral reform. They were afraid that the consultations might only be a public relations exercise.

Report submitted to Special Committee on Electoral Reform (ERRE)	**Date: October 14, 2016**
MP's signature: *Marc Garneau*	**(Name) MARC GARNEAU**

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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