



Submission to
The Special Committee on Electoral Reform (ERRE)

October 11, 2016

October 12, 2016

MP Karen Ludwig
New Brunswick Southwest

Electoral Reform Town Hall(s)

Dates:

- October 11, 2016
- October 12, 2016

Locations:

- Magaguadavic Place, St. George, NB
- Community Centre, Upper Kingsclear, NB

Hosted and Moderated by: MP Karen Ludwig

Note Taker: Nora Robinson, Legislative Assistant to MP Ludwig

Staff:

- Marlene Chase, Executive Assistant to MP Ludwig
- Tiffany Bell-Clift, Constituency Office Manager to MP Ludwig

Introduction

MP Karen Ludwig hosted two electoral reform town halls. The first was on October 11, 2016 at the Magaguadavic Place in St. George, NB from 6:30-8:30. The second was on October 12, 2016 at the Community Center in Upper Kingsclear, NB from 6:30-8:30.

Both town halls were intended to provide the members of New Brunswick Southwest an opportunity to inform the debate and share their opinions on our current electoral system.

The Federal government is committed to public consultations on the various electoral systems. Federal electoral reform is part of the Government's commitment to change. Canada has a strong and deeply rooted democracy. Once the study on electoral reform is completed, the hope is to revitalize certain aspects of Canadian democracy.

One way to protect Canada's democratic values is to continuously seek to improve the functioning of our democratic institutions- in particular, the first past the post electoral system.

This report contains feedback from each town hall. The following four discussion questions were asked:

1. What do you think could be done to help more Canadians feel more interested and involved in democracy?
2. What do you think are some strengths and weaknesses of our current federal electoral system?
3. What alternative electoral systems do you think could work in Canada? What are some strengths and weaknesses of these systems?

4. What are your opinions on online and/or mandatory voting being used in Canada?

Thank you, to the Committee on Electoral Reform, for taking the time to read and consider the comments herein.

Town Hall One: Magaguadavic Place, St. George, NB

October 11, 2016

Ice Breaker

Why have you decided to join us today?

- The electoral system has influenced politics for several years and will continue to affect voters for years to come.
- Participants were seeking to be more informed on the current electoral system and wanted to learn about the alternative options.
- Participants were concerned with the low-voter turnout of past elections.

Summary: The majority of participants who attended the town hall wanted to learn more about Canada's electoral system and potential alternatives.

Question One

What do you think could be done to help more Canadians feel more interested and involved in democracy?

- Education is imperative. In order to make Canadians feel more interested and involved in democracy, it should be taught consistently in schools, not just during an election year.
 - Leadership Conventions and Youth Councils should occur more often.
- Elections Canada should make it easier for students to volunteer during election campaigns. For example, a student should be able to volunteer with an election campaign during school hours, in exchange for a school credit.

- There needs to be more trust in the electoral system. In order for this to happen, less government scandals need to occur.
- Participants wanted to see a candidate from the riding representing them in Ottawa.
 - Candidates should understand and listen to the communities in which they are representing.
- Mobile ballots should be encouraged more. Participants felt that mobile ballots were not encouraged enough in nursing homes or seniors' apartments in New Brunswick Southwest.
- Advanced polling stations should continue to exist, in order to allow voters the flexibility to travel to the polling stations. That being said, advanced polling should be better advertised.
- Canadians abroad should be able to vote, only if away for a limited amount of time. Canadians, living abroad for a limited amount of time, should be able to vote in Federal elections. For example, university students who study abroad should be able to vote in Federal elections. On the other hand, Canadians who are living abroad and who are not paying taxes in Canada should not be able to vote in Federal elections.

Summary: The themes that were expressed throughout the responses focused on education and accessibility. In terms of education, participants had limited knowledge pertaining to Canada's electoral system, and in turn, the potential alternatives.

Participants felt the education system in Canada needs to put a stronger emphasis on learning about Canadian democracy.

In terms of accessibility, the process of voting needs to become easier for everyone.

New Brunswick Southwest is a very large riding, making it difficult for voters to get out

and vote. In order to increase the accessibility of polling stations, mobile ballots and advanced polling is strongly supported and encouraged.

Question Two

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

- Overall, participants saw the benefits of Canada's first past the post electoral system. However, they still wanted to learn about the alternatives.
- The strength of a first past the post electoral system is that a majority government can be formed. Although a majority government has the ability to make decisions, some participants questioned whether or not a majority government was a strength or weakness.
- The weakness of a first past the post electoral system in Canada is there tends to be a disproportionate representation between the seats awarded compared to vote share received.

Summary: Participants were not against Canada's first past the post system; however, they were willing to learn about other electoral systems. Participants could see the benefits and disadvantages of a first past the post system.

Question Three

What alternative electoral systems do you think could work in Canada? What are some strengths and weaknesses of these systems?

- Participants were strongly opposed to a candidate being parachuted into a riding by a party during an election. Voters wanted to choose their own candidate to represent them in Ottawa.
- Participants were opposed to closed list proportional representation. They did not like the idea of voting for a party, instead of a candidate.
- Overall, participants wanted to see a candidate who they know and trust and who could represent New Brunswick Southwest values in Ottawa.

Summary: Participants wanted to be well-informed before taking a stance on electoral reform. Strengths and weaknesses could be applied to all electoral systems; however, it was concluded that the best option was trial and error. The ideal electoral system would not be formed overnight, as something this important deserves and takes time.

Question Four

What are your opinions on online and/or mandatory voting being used in Canada?

- Participants were concerned about low- voter turnout in past elections; “how do we get more people out to vote?”
- In terms of mandatory voting, participants believe that it will create resistance among voters. Participants interpreted mandatory voting as undemocratic. There becomes a point where democracy is lost.
- Mandatory voting should allow voters the option of spoiling their ballot. However, the opposite argument was also made, that voters should make their vote count towards electing a candidate.
- In terms of online voting, participants could see both benefits and disadvantages. The advantages included greater accessibility for voters. Online voting would help facilitate the voting process for constituents who are unable to visit a polling

station. The disadvantages included the lack of security. Participants were not convinced that online voting was secure enough to work appropriately.

Summary: Both mandatory and online voting options were discussed briefly; however, until further information and logistics are provided, participants were unable to form strong opinions one way or another.

Town Hall One: Community Centre, Kingsclear, NB

October 12, 2016

Ice Breaker

Why have you decided to join us today?

- Participants felt that Canada's first past the post electoral system does not represent Canadians accurately.
 - The majority of participants could agree that they liked the decisiveness that first past the post provides.
- Participants wanted to learn about the possible alternatives to first past the post.
- Some participants did not see the need to address Canada's electoral system; however, they were still willing to listen to both sides of the argument.
- Participants felt that all Canadians should be represented through the electoral system.
 - "The minority should not represent the majority"
- Participants were frustrated from the decisions made by the previous government.
- Learning about electoral reform was important to participants in order to help educate their fellow voters. Information is valuable.
- Participants were concerned with alternative electoral systems, specifically those that include party lists. Participants were concerned that too many candidates would be appointed rather than elected.

Summary: Participants came to the town hall with the intention of learning more about Canada's electoral system. They wanted to hear what others thought in comparison to their own beliefs.

Question One

What do you think could be done to help more Canadians feel more interested and involved in democracy?

- More courses pertaining to Canadian government and politics should be taught from Kindergarten to Grade Twelve. These courses should be mandatory and not optional.
- There should be a stronger emphasis on information accessibility. There should be more messaging promoted through forms of social media, such as, Facebook and Twitter.
- Some participants believed voting was a responsibility. From a young age, they were taught that voting was a privilege.
- There should be more local involvement in government on the federal level. There is a disconnection between constituencies and Ottawa.
- The Liberal and Conservative parties' platform are relatively similar. Voters tend to vote a government out rather than voting a government in.

Summary: Participants agreed that educating voters from a young age is important. There should be a stronger connection between constituencies and Ottawa. Some participants felt a sense of disconnect between local issues and Federal politics.

Question Two

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

- Participants have been increasingly encouraged to get out and vote; however, they often feel their vote does not count.
- Not enough voters are educated on the current federal electoral system, as it is complex.
- The first past the post electoral system is too exclusive.
- Participants were concerned that if the current electoral system changes, Canada will never experience a majority government again.
- Some participants felt the first past the post electoral system encourages too much complacency; "voting a government out, rather than voting a government in."
- Participants felt the first past the post electoral system does not represent Canadians equally. However, this electoral system's advantage is its decisiveness and simplicity.
- First past the post system gives the Maritimes strong representation, in comparison to alternative electoral systems.

Summary: Overall, participants tended to point out the various weaknesses of Canada's current electoral system. However, participants did note the advantages of the current electoral system. Overall, the Maritimes continue to be strongly represented on the federal level, as they have 32 constituencies represented.

Question Three

What alternative electoral systems do you think could work in Canada? What are some strengths and weaknesses of these systems?

- Proportional representation based on region.
- Participants were strongly against having a closed list electoral system.
- Participants suggested studying how other countries, similar to Canada, run their democracies.
- Electoral reform will and should take longer than four years; "I have no idea how to answer this question, as there is so much to learn in a short amount of time."
- Participants knew what they did not like; however, were unsure of the other options available.

Summary: No electoral system will ever be perfect. The electoral system should remain the same until a better alternative is established. Significant democratic changes, such as electoral reform, should not happen in four years. Participants are seeking more information on the alternative electoral systems.

Question Four

What are your opinions on online and/or mandatory voting being used in Canada?

- In terms of mandatory voting, participants believed that voting should be compulsory until voters become habituated to it. Voting should be perceived as a responsibility rather than an option.
- In terms of online voting, it will fill the void for busy voters who are unable to attend the polling stations. However, participants felt technology is not advanced enough in regards to security.

- Participants focused heavily on voting accessibility and how to make voting easier for the voter. For example, if the voter does not bring a valid form of identification, 1) they could have someone at the polling station vouch for them or 2) they could confirm their address indicated on the Elections Canada sign-in sheet. Another proposal was to open the polling stations earlier in the day,
- Participants believed that Elections Canada need to do a better job of promoting voter awareness. For example, not enough voters know about advance polling. Canada has a relatively flexible voting system; however, not enough people are aware of this.

Summary: Mandatory voting, online voting, and having greater accessibility to polling stations were all discussed. Participants wanted to see Elections Canada do a better job at reaching out to Canadians in terms of providing them with information on how to vote, where to vote, and what resources are available to make the voting process easier.

Independent Submissions

"Do away with political parties. They bring out the worst aspects of tribal behaviour. I vote for the individual who keeps responsibly informed and acts with intelligence, humility, wisdom and compassion. To me, this is what makes a good politician strong." - ***Submitted to the Office of Karen Ludwig on October 6, 2016.***

"Make voting compulsory. Too many lives have been lost to preserve the clumsy idea called democracy. The least we can do is show our gratitude by making our mark on the ballot" -***Submitted to the Office of Karen Ludwig on October 6, 2016.***

"Design a system that uses preferential voting combined with a hybrid of weighted and proportional representation. Our country with its large land mass and small, but highly concentrated population of people needs some degree of weighting. However, we have to get beyond this chronic situation that allows a party - and prime minister - to form a majority government by winning less than 40% of the votes cast. How can this possibly be seen as democratic?" -***Submitted to the Office of Karen Ludwig on October 6, 2016.***

"In light of Point No. 3, study Australia's electoral system. It uses preferential voting and may have something to offer since it is the western country most like ours in demographics, population distribution and land mass." -***Submitted to the Office of Karen Ludwig on October 6, 2016.***

"Outlaw attack ads and the grotesque amount of money that can get spent by a party or candidate during an election campaign. Design a system that ensures that each candidate gets the same amount to spend on their campaign. Candidates should win by merit, not because they have very rich supporters." -***Submitted to the Office of Karen Ludwig on October 6, 2016.***

"I support some form of proportional representation as a voting system. It just isn't fair that 39 % of the vote would lead to a majority government. And it's bad for the democratic process, because people give up thinking their vote is worth something. The hardest part of campaigning for me was to knock on someone's door, and have them tell me they had no interest in voting because their vote didn't count. Mixed member proportional sounds to me like the fairest system." - ***Submitted to the Office of Karen Ludwig on October 11, 2016.***