

HON. JOHN MCKAY, P.C., M.P.
SCARBOROUGH-GUILDWOOD



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

HON. JOHN MCKAY, P.C., M.P.
SCARBOROUGH-GUILDWOOD

TOWN HALL REPORT
ON ELECTORAL REFORM
PUBLIC CONSULTATION

RAPPORT SUR LES CONSULTATIONS
PUBLIQUES SUR LA RÉFORME
ÉLECTORALE

CONSULTATION(S)			
Date of the Meeting	Time and Length	Location of Consultation	Total Number of People in Attendance
09/13/2016	18:30 to 21:00	Global Kingdom 1250 Markham Road Scarborough, ON M1H 2Y9	42
Form:			
<p>The Town Hall began with a presentation using the Library of Parliament's visual presentation and supplemented with two videos produced by the New Zealand Electoral Commission. Participants then divided into five roundtable discussions. Following a summary of the group discussions, an open microphone and quick straw polls concluded the evening.</p> <p>In addition to the Town Hall meeting, I received electoral reform correspondence from 15 constituents who were not in attendance. While several of the e-mails were generated by online petition campaigns, 5 individuals wrote detailed personalized correspondence to share their views on electoral reform. These views are incorporated in the report.</p>			
SUBJECTS DISCUSSED (summary)			
Voting systems: YES	Replacement of the current voting system: YES	Voter turnout: NO	Accessibility and inclusiveness: NO
Mandatory voting: YES	Online voting: YES	Local representation: YES	

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?</p> <p>The current electoral system was familiar to all Town Hall participants. A simple plurality system, First Past the Post has typically produced clear and immediate results. Supporters of the status quo appreciate the stable majority governments and close relationships forged between Members of Parliament and local constituencies. They also argued that the current system has served Canada relatively well.</p> <p>Proponents of electoral reform argued the current system produces distorted outcomes. Several individuals believed a minority of voters should not be able to elect a majority government. The current system's lack of proportionality results in poor representation of minority views and favours political parties with strong regional support.</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

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.)?

Town Hall participants discussed the Alternative Vote, List Proportional Representation, Single Transferable Vote and Mixed Member Proportional voting systems.

Alternative Vote or Ranked Balloting was the preferred option for a group of individuals attending the Town Hall. Supporters argued that the relatively minor change would keep the methodology simple and similar to the current system. Riding redistribution would not be required and all Members of Parliament would legitimately represent the majority of voters in their constituency. Opponents expressed concern about potential increase in spoiled ballots due to voter error. An individual also argued this system could potentially benefit political parties who present themselves in the centre of political spectrum.

Proportional Representation was highly debated with a majority of proponents of electoral reform both at the Town Hall meeting and in written correspondence supporting this form of system. Generally, they argued a Member of Parliament elected under First Past the Post or Alternative Votes do not truly represent the views of all voters in their riding. Instead, only a proportionally elected Parliament enables almost all voters, no matter where they live, to elect representation of their choice.

However, there was no support for pure List Proportional Representation. All participants made it clear they wanted to elect a local Member of Parliament. There was also general opposition from all Town Hall participants to candidate lists being established by a political party head office.

Extensive discussion regarding Mixed Member Proportional voting occurred at several roundtables. While discussion primarily revolved around the New Zealand model, Germany and Latvia were also discussed amongst one group. Proponents argued simplicity was important. General consensus existed that a threshold of 5% of the popular vote should be required for a political party to be represented in Parliament. While participants liked the continued existence of a Constituency Member of Parliament, there was concern about the role of List MP. Would a List MP open a Constituency Office? What level of resources should they have access to? How do you prevent MP shopping for case work and inquiries? Despite this debate, supporters of MMP liked the fact they can choose both a party and a candidate of different parties. It was argued this option would reduce the need for strategic voting under the party vote.

Proponents also argued that government policies would better represent Canadians under a PR system through negotiation, compromise and increased cross party collaboration. However, opponents, including supporters of Alternative Vote, expressed concerns over the lack of public acceptance in Canada for coalition governments. This issue could result in additional snap election and erode confidence in Canada's electoral system.

Single Transferable Vote was perceived as too complicate by Town Hall participants. Only one constituent who contacted me by email supported the adoption of STV as the preferred electoral reform option.

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

This topic was not generally discussed at the Town Hall meeting.

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Did participants feel that it should be mandatory to cast a ballot? (Can include spoiling a ballot.)

Mandatory voting was highly debated among Town Hall participants. While a slim majority of 54% favoured adoption, opponents dominated the discussion. They argued voting should remain a choice that needs to be freely exercised. The benefit of forcing unwilling individuals to cast a ballot and the cost of enforcement were also questioned.

Supporters of mandatory voting argued that this system would highlight the importance of democracy. They also argued an individual could always spoil or decline a ballot at the polling station.

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.)

A significant number of Canadians conduct online banking and completed the 2016 Census online. Assuming proper security protocols are implemented, 80% of Town Hall participants supported the adoption of online voting. While supporters argued online voting offers a convenient and accessible alternative, they were opposed to the elimination of traditional polling stations. Opponents of online voting expressed concerns involving secrecy and potential for voter fraud.

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

76% of Town Hall participants were opposed to holding a referendum on electoral reform. While the minority argued a referendum would legitimize electoral change, opponents argued Canada lacked the tradition of voting in referenda. For example, when the Constitution was patriated and Charter of Rights and Freedoms entrenched in 1982, no referendum was held despite being a fundamental change to Canadian society. If a referendum was held, participants argued an extensive and well-funded educational campaign would be required.

There was also a suggestion that a referendum might be appropriate a decade after electoral reform. This vote would allow citizens to decide if a new system of elections should be maintained or the reintroduction of First Past the Post.

During the open microphone, a brief discussion on House of Commons seat allocation occurred. A couple of participants argued every riding across the country should have similar population base to ensure "one member, one vote." Other participants pointed out that such proposal would require a Constitutional amendment to Section 51 and 51A.

Finally, one roundtable discussion unanimously supported the implementation of a National Holiday for voting. While this topic was not addressed beyond this small group, it is a proposal worth further discussion.

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SUMMARY OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS AND COMMENTS FROM PARTICIPANTS

The current First Past the Post electoral system has traditionally produced stable majority governments. Supporters of the status quo argue the current system has served Canada relatively well and enabled close relationships to forge between Members of Parliament and local constituents. Even proponents of electoral reform agreed with the importance of electing a local Member of Parliament.

Alternative Vote and Mixed Member Proportional electoral systems were the preferred options of electoral reform for proponents. Single Transferable Vote was perceived as too complex and there was general opposition from all Town Hall participants against proportional representation candidate lists being established by political party head offices.

The adoption of Alternative Vote would be a relatively minor change that would keep the methodology simple and similar to the current system. Riding redistribution would not be necessary and all Members of Parliament would legitimately represent the majority of voters in their constituency.

The adoption of Proportional Representation based on a Canadian adaptation to Mixed Member Proportional would enable almost all voters, no matter where they live, to elect representation of their choice. There was general consensus that a 5% voter threshold should be mandated. Allowing separate votes for both political party and local constituency members would reduce strategic voting as party vote totals would dictate the composition of Parliament. However, the role of List MPs was highly debated and there was little desire for increasing the size of Parliament. Opponents also expressed concern over the lack of public acceptance in Canada for coalition governments. This issue could result in additional snap elections and erode confidence in Canada's electoral system.

While proportional representation was the preferred choice for most electoral reform supporters – particularly views received by written correspondence – it remains unclear if this small group of engaged participants scientifically represent the average constituent in Scarborough-Guildwood.

Participants were also divided over the adoption of mandatory voting. While the implementation would highlight the importance of democracy, the benefit of forcing unwilling individuals to cast a ballot and the cost of enforcement were questioned. Voting is a right of citizenship yet many argue it should remain a choice.

The adoption of online voting received overwhelming support of 80% of Town Hall participants. Supporters cited the safety of online activities such as banking and Census 2016 when promoting the convenience of offering an accessible alternative rather than eliminating traditional polling stations.

76% of Town Hall participants were opposed to holding a referendum on electoral reform. This perspective reflects our tradition of governments making fundamental changes to Canadian society, such as the 1982 Charter of Rights and Freedoms, without a referendum.

Finally, a proposal to implement a National Holiday on voting day is worthy of further discussion

Report submitted to Special Committee on Electoral Reform
(ERRE)

Date: 2016/10/13

MP's signature:

Hon. John McKay, P.C., M.P.

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