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HOUSE OF COMMONS
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CANADA

Parlement

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To the Special Committee on Electoral Reform,

I am pleased to provide you with the attached summary of Ottawa Centre constituent views on electoral reform.

I hosted a town hall meeting on this fundamental question for our democracy on Tuesday, October 11. Some 160 concerned and committed people attended. I presented the issues and then circulated amongst the seventeen or so tables where participants enthusiastically discussed the following questions:

1. What is your opinion of our current electoral system? What do you think are its flaws? What do you think are its strengths? Do you feel as though your vote is fairly translated through our current, First-Past-The-Post system?
2. What specific features are important to you in our electoral system? Local representation, proportionality, simplicity, legitimacy, inclusiveness, effectiveness?
3. Many Canadians choose not to participate in our democratic process. What do you think can be done to encourage greater participation?
4. Should it be mandatory to cast a ballot (choosing "none of the above" or spoiling the ballot would be allowed under mandatory voting)?
5. Should online voting be an option? If so, do you have any specific concerns and are do you think there are ways those concerns could be addressed?

We then had plenary one minute summaries of the views of each table and, finally, a show of hands on support for a referendum on this (no) and on electronic voting (no).

It is clear to me that there is wide engagement on this broad issue and I trust these views of Ottawa Centre constituents will be of assistance to you as you consider the best path forward for Canadians.

Yours truly,

Catherine McKenna

Catherine McKenna, M.P., Ottawa Centre



CONSULTATION INFORMATION			
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)
October 11, 2016	2 hours (7-9pm)	Tom Brown Arena (Ottawa Centre)	Approximately 160
Form: <input type="checkbox"/> Use of the Library of Parliament's visual presentation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): MP presented Library of Parliaments visual presentation, small group discussion (40 min – approximately 16 tables of 10 people each), sharing of findings with the broader group, notes from each table collected and recorded.			
SUBJECTS DISCUSSED (summary)			
Voting systems: Yes	Replacement of the current voting system: Yes	Voter turnout: Yes	Accessibility and inclusiveness: Yes
Mandatory voting: Yes	Online voting: Yes	Local representation: Yes	Other (please specify and describe below)

Summary

Question#1: Current Electoral System- Strengths and Weaknesses

The majority of the room felt that change from the current FPTP system is needed. Those that do support FPTP also feel that it has flaws. There was a strong sense that the current FPTP system results in many negative effects (unrepresentative, polarizing, too party-focussed, and not accountable), but there was also recognition that it is fairly simple to understand and does lead to strong local representation.

Common themes of strengths and weaknesses were identified:

Strengths

Provides a stable government, and majorities are often the outcome of many Canada's federal elections. This gives governments the stability and votes need to implement the programs that they think are important to building a better Canada

It is a relatively simple system to understand - it is the person with the most votes wins.

It allows for MPs to be tied to riding directly, strong local representation is given through the First Past the Post system.

Many people said the system has worked for 100 plus years - why change it?

The main takeaway was that if Canada was to stay within the current system, change would be desired (i.e., less party control, getting rid of whipped voting to let MP's vote their consciences, etc.)

Weaknesses

First Past the Post does not allow for a minority voice, proportional system would better allow for this (for example, the Green Party received a million votes in the last election and has one seat to show for it).

The current system favours strategic voting. Many at the event would like to see a PR system added to reduce or eliminate strategic voting.

Feeling that First Past the Post does not represent the will of the people. It often creates false majorities with many of the controlling parties getting close to 40% of the vote, while minority parties control and represent 60% of the population although this 60% is fractured.

Question#2: Important Features of an Electoral System

Local Representation was very important. Almost every group talked about having access to a Member of Parliament representing local issues.

Simplicity was another issue that was brought up a lot. Many groups talked about if Canada were to introduce a new system that it would have to be simple and easy to use. One group brought up the fact that not every family, and especially the ones on government support or who live paycheque-to-paycheque, may not have electoral reform as their top priority.

Accountability was another common theme of the evening. MPs need to be held accountable for their actions from their constituent base.

Question #3: Voter Engagement

Many possible reasons for low voter engagement were identified. The majority agreed that more should be done to encourage voter engagement. Education is important - ongoing civics education is important in school and beyond. Ongoing education has to continue outside of the classroom, dinner table and through peer groups.

Idea of voting at any poll was raised - that a Canadian citizen can vote at any poll in the country and cast a ballot for a representative in their riding.

Expanded advanced voting- rather than sectioning off certain times when citizens can vote, make advanced voting available all the way up to e-day.

Carrot rather than the stick method to mandatory voting- a tax credit over a fine for not voting.

Question #4: Mandatory Voting

Much like online voting, the results were mixed; some wanted it enforced, other groups however were not enthusiastic about this.

Many groups felt that there are other ways to encourage voting that do not require it to be mandatory.

Question #5: Online Voting

Online voting was a general interest of the broader group but there were concerns over security and voter fraud. Many groups had 50/50 of people who would want online voting versus people who didn't.

The physical process of voting was also brought up, many groups and people said that it is important for people to go and vote as it is our civic duty

A one day dream- but not realistic today.

Appendix – Responses

1. What is your opinion of our current electoral system? What do you think are its flaws? What do you think are its strengths? Do you feel as though your vote is fairly translated through our current, First-Past-The-Post system?

- “I think we have grown past it as we have [firmly parties] so first past the post doesn’t work”
- “Don’t like current system overall. It works, but it could work better.”
- “In certain regions, there are issues with individuals votes counting (ex: Alberta)”
- “Our current system promotes regional politics”
- “Want some sort of electoral change”
- “Transparency is easy with our current system”
- “Our current system is very simple” (Many agree and say that simplicity is its strength)
- “Our current system accentuates conflict on issues”
- “Our current system does hold government to account in majority situation”
- “No, our current system does not currently represent individual votes”
- “Does not represent a true majority i.e. conservatives who only represented 30% (70% did not vote for that majority). Coalition governments should be reflected. Can cause a two-party system.”
 - Pro: Effective as it allows for strong governments, makes it simple to understand
 - Con: Strategic voting encouraged under FPTP
 - Pro: Best system we have, not the greatest. Allows candidates to fight for their riding.
 - Con: System of seat distribution is not the best, allows for over representation of certain provinces.”
- “Current electoral system is okay, but- not even close to the best possible system for democratic representation. I do not feel that my vote is fairly translated into political representation for me.”
- “Works with minority gov’t/coalitions”
- “No way to elect gov’t desired- very random appearing”
- “Any system will improve status quo”
- “Some proportionality good, threshold for representation in parliament”
- “Majority governments good”
- “Status quo understood, that’s good”
- “Wanted both leading candidates from the riding elected in last election”
- “Flawed system- too many focused on leader (not candidate)”
- “Weighted system- why is every citizen only given one vote?”
- “Not satisfied, not fair- sense that Canadians are dissatisfied”
- “Flawed- discourages people from exercising civic duty- “votes not worth it””
- “If riding has strong party affiliation, other votes don’t count”

- “FPTP doesn’t represent the population very well- party in power can ignore those opposed”
- “(+ve) FPTP gives local representation- problems with false representation”
- “Tendency in FPTP to polarize- lack of respect”
- “Flaw- not representational of the vote. Can vote against the candidate elected in a riding”
- “Local representation is needed”
- “Regardless of who I vote for, I will have a representative”
- “Not always fairly translated”
- “You end up with a party that can make decisions- example: Spain”
- “Strong members can override other parties”
- “Do not like that less than 50% of the vote can decide the outcome”
- “Mixed member would be best, not closed lists, open lists, voters have more decisions”
- “Voters result in feeling disenchanted due to current method deciding regions (examples: Ontario, Quebec)
- “System is made for 2 candidates- not multiplicity”
- “Too politicized”
- “Too power focused- strategic”
- “Small majority could govern as though they have large majority”
- “Local representation is important, not just who becomes PM”
- “Not democratic”
- “Too focused on image”
- “False majorities”
- “Local representation, but wanting to vote for a party- voting for a candidate versus a party”
- “Lopsided results. Winning majority of the seats with a plurality of the vote. Strengths include consistent majority governments, which are more stable”
- “Rep. Democracy, but not very representative- Winner-take-all system is volatile because a small increase in support allows change of government”
- “Vote doesn’t always count. You try to vote people out instead of voting people in. We need better balance in gov.”
- “The results are skewed based on strategic voting. Voting/ campaign culture could be better under a different system. Strengths of current system are simplicity in procedure, size and representation”
- “Current system discourages youth voting by lack of online voting and counting of votes. Voter apathy. More voter turnout w/ new system”
- “Your riding’s traditional voting preference discourages participation of smaller voting groups. Voting out instead of in. Maybe get away from larger party option”
- “Lopsided aspect of FPTP. Discourages interest. Lack of development in third parties get out.
- “Media coverage prioritized larger parties instead of smaller less viable parties.”
- “Why bother cover parties with small chances”
- “Gerrymandering is easier to do in FPTP. Less likely in prop rep.”

- ““Personality politics” using superficial appeal”
- “Counterbalance”
- (Criticism) “Don’t vote for the candidate you want, but against candidates you don’t want to win.”
- (Crit.) “Unsatisfied with the results”
- “The political system/ Parliamentary system is flawed. Changing the electoral system fails to fix the root of those problems.”
- “How do we ensure that we have a simple system?” Majority governments are more effective. FPTP favors majority governments”
- “Disconnect between local representatives”

2. What specific features are important to you in our electoral system? Local representation, proportionality, simplicity, legitimacy, inclusiveness, effectiveness?

- “Local representation is important”
- “Regional representation is equally important (not just governing for Ont. And Que.)
- “Transparency is important”
- “Decentralization of power (particularly from PMO)
- “Local representation: -dislikes lists by party
 - Doesn’t want to vote strategically
 - Important to personally connect
 - Want one person”
- “Proportionality: - nervous about total proportionality”
- “Simplicity: -very clear, understandable”
- “More proportionality”
- “Whether cabinet, stronger legislature”
- “Need more information on MPs”
- “More interest if MP had more power (freer speed, freer votes)”
- “Two principles that are critical to me: local representation & proportionality”
- “Ensure people are represented by locals (keep ridings) local reps
- “Ranking system means it will not be black & white”
- “Mixed proportional representation will make it less about the person and more about parties” (A lot agree with this)
- “Legitimacy: -fair representation of what population wants
- “Inclusiveness: -plurality of voices
 - Represent all opinions”
- “Region:
 - different communities have different concerns

- prevent fraud”
- “Effectiveness: -want innovation”
- “Every vote counts”
- “Representative of local & natural interests”
- “Not afraid of coalition”
- “All of them- more proportionality is important. Our beef (conflict) is often with party system, if this had more power (i.e. more free speech in parliament, especially more free votes. We like simplicity.”
- “Local representation is important”
- “Majority with less than 40%of popular vote raises question of legitimacy”
- “Simplicity is important”
- “Inclusiveness is important- women, indigenous people (New Zealand has system of 7 separate indigenous seats), ethic”
- “Votes aren’t wasted- avoid vote splitting- minimum either % or # of votes”
- “Mixed would give the representation=proportionality
- “Simple system”
- “Education”
- “System where decisions can be made”
- “Legitimacy of “classes” of those voted in- do not want this in the new system”
- “Donation- public voting, less of other funding”
- “More emphasis on ideology”
- “Most people want a local representative- voters choices reflected in the House (proportionality)
- “Avoid chaos- effectiveness”
- “legitimacy- democracy”
- “Proportionality- inclusiveness”
- “Poll: Local Rep: 37/50
 - Prop: 47/50
 - Simplicity: 20/50”
- “Simplicity of execution is much more important than simplicity of entire system and procedure”
- “We assume system will be legitimate – Inclusiveness: 49/50”
- “Fosters participation from all groups and fosters involvement of all political parties and actors. Including people like students who struggle to vote. Is inclusiveness also involving wasted votes. Voters matching demographic of Canadians. Proxy voting.”
- “Most people vote for a party federally:
 - but it depends on your local area
 - there may be candidates that are parachuted in, others that are from the area.
 - FPTP can prevent some fringe candidates from being elected

- “How do we get people to come out to vote for a referendum?” If we had one could we adequately teach the system to people”

3. Many Canadians choose not to participate in our democratic process. What do you think can be done to encourage greater participation?

- “Make election day a holiday”
- “More engagement with electorate between elections”
- “Politics is not relevant and is corrupt.”
- “Young people don’t see their issues”
- “No sense of impact of the system”
- “Greater participation:
 - technological solution preferred- on-line voting
 - removing barriers to meaningful participation
 - civics education
 - mandatory voting
 - more representation of minorities
 - PR would bring more voter engagement
 - Add referendum question to ballot to attract voters
- “A lot of people don’t know when election is happening”
- “Don’t know how to encourage participation if people don’t care”
- “Politicians avoid saying anything that would make people vote against them, that would increase turnout”
- “Telling people their vote got the subsidy made them feel like their vote mattered and more likely to vote”
- “Point out participation rates (possibly higher rate due to social media)”
- “Electoral system causes people to vote against parties rather than for”
- “Politicians don’t try to interact with citizens, don’t respond to letters/emails”
- “No mandatory voting- people don’t vote on the important issues”
- “Fines for not voting would encourage discussions and get people talking”
- “Reform electoral system and more people would feel like their vote would count”
- “Less of an adversarial House of Commons(democratic process)”
- Was not able to come to group conclusion on mandatory voting
- “Important for people to feel comfortable having differing opinions and discussing them in a polite way”
- “There seems to be a lack of Canadian patriotism that could decline voter turn out”
- “The way we consume media has changed so we can “opt out” of what news you want to follow (including politics)”

- “Too much influencers and not enough participants”
- “Positive reinforcement, spoiled votes need to be allowed”
- “FPTP means there’s less engagement, change the system”
- “Not a great system, forces people to vote, and may not reflect the lower income populations”
- “Can be un-democratic”
- “More Canadians would participate in the electoral process if they felt as though their vote made a difference. We can’t force politicians to be true to their campaign promises, but- we can make sure that citizens at least have someone who represents them in Parliament. Getting rid of strategic voting would help.”
- “Minority gov’ts very good”
- “Make my vote count”
- “Maybe not everyone needs to vote (example: those that don’t know the issues)”
- “MPPR will help make people feel their vote counts”
- “Promote subsidy”
- “The tone on the campaign trail, politicians need”
- “Clearly identify who the candidates are on ballots”
- “Education as to who the candidates are”
- “Independence- left party control of members”
- “Build strong middle class”
- “Feeling that your vote makes a difference”
- “Expand advance- open all the time” (many agree)
- “Tax credit”
- “Educate adults as well as students”

4. Should it be mandatory to cast a ballot (choosing “none of the above” or spoiling the ballot would be allowed under mandatory voting?)

- “No. I would like to see more done to encourage people to participate including making election day a national holiday. Schools should do more. Electrics Canada & others should be encouraged to educate voters.”
- “Our table does not have a definite answer:
 - **Cons:**
 - Violates freedom of expression
 - Indignant voters
 - Small fine (does it really make a difference?)
 - **Pros:**
 - Higher voter turn out

- Over time, helps re-engage electorates
- Parties must go beyond their base”
- “No, but new ways of encouragement”
- “If you can waste your ballot, there shouldn’t be a problem”
- “Responsibility- like paying taxes, census”
- “Mandatory: -change system first then see what happens
 - Might be solved by other electoral reform
 - Could say vote needs spoil option”
- “People don’t have to take it seriously- loss of freedom”
- “Voting could be right of passage...If everyone has to vote, parents could accompany their coming of age children”
- “Strong middle class- don’t force people to vote”
- “Make sure voice is heard”
- “No mandatory voting at this point- clouds issue”
- “Not to- compulsory- getting people not really interested randomly”
- “Are for it- puts the burden on the rest of us to be educated on the topic”
- “Mixed feelings, perceived legitimacy may not be connect or justified”
- “No to compulsory- people who don’t vote increase the importance of my vote”
- “yes- equivalent to having to pay taxes”
- “Lower the voting age. The earlier kids vote, the more likely they will vote”

5. Should online voting be an option? If so, do you have any specific concerns and are do you think there are ways those concerns could be addressed?

- “A resounding yes”
- “Until we can guarantee the robustness of specific groups of people (ex. Military)”
- “Privacy is a big issue!! (Hacking is a reality)”
- “We can modernize how we cast a paper ballot count (incorp. Some sort of mechanization of ballot counting)”
- “We need a physical paper trail to count”
- “Online voting could create a less engaged electorate”
- “Voter ID fraud is important”
- “Would be important to hear from people with physical restrictions”
- “No. I’m not sure that any system that is entirely online is ever going to ever be fully safe or secure. I do support computerized voting for citizens with accessibility needs. But voting in general should be on paper & should have a verifiable paper trail of ballots that can be counted and re-counted as needed”
- “Online voting might not be taken seriously”

- “Cheapens the ceremonial impact of voting”
- “Think it’s inevitable”
- “All for it, provided it’s secure”
- “All elections can be stolen, but paper makes it harder”
- “Needs to be air tight, but in the long term, yes.”
- “Online and mandatory voting are distractions to main issues”
- “Electronic vote:
 - Security paramount- fool proof
 - Keep the paper
 - Electronic count needed
 - With a receipt
 - Start electronic at vote stations
 - Laws and accountability”
- “**Don’t** be a leader in this change”
- “Pose ritualistic aspects”
- “But can increase participation”
- “Mixed- security issue/ illegitimate”
- “Believe it will happen in time and ok with that”
- “**ABSOLUTELY!** Manual is an issue and costly today. Online is the future and security issues and anonymity can be addressed. Roll out in small ways”
- “If we can bank online, why not vote? **Risks:** Elderly or dependant individuals. **Online:** Could be done during advanced polls. Parliament has been good at ensuring a distance from Elections Canada. **Privacy:** how to make sure your ballot is anonymous”

Additional notes and/or not question specific answers:

- “We would have liked more of a group discussion about the new electoral options available to us. We feel like it was touched on but we didn’t really get to talk about it.”
- “Don’t want to change system without a consultation”
- “Requires a referendum”
- “Delivery of roll out on how to decide on “new system”...Referendum?”
- “No referendum” (x2)
- “Vote in parliament” (x2)
- “Doesn’t have to be final, it can evolve”
- “Using a pin number sent by mail to vote online is an option”
- “Platforms online”
- “Candidate online”
- “Public policy can only benefit from a system that is less vulnerable to special interests, in which every vote influences the outcome; a system that yields and interests the electorate, and promotes less adversarial elections and more co-operative parliaments.

Governments elected by PR would experience fewer policy lurches, take a longer view, be more responsive to the interests of the many, and even, arguably, more creative and open to policy innovation.” (Alex Himelfarb, former clerk of the Privy Council)

- “Strongly in favour of electoral reform. Strongly advise against holding a referendum to approve the change: Referenda rarely address the problem at hand and it would be rather costly. Free vote, no referendum” (Grant Reader) (Some agree)
- “Parliamentary committee should choose a model”
- “Process of physically voting in election is important” (Some agree)