Submission to the Special Committee on Electoral

Reform

September 7 2016

Marc Miller, M.P.

Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Sœurs

Montreal, Québec

Electoral Reform Public Consultation – Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest— Île-des-Sœurs

1. What was the nature of the event:

Community Dialogue

2. What date was the event held?

September 7, 2016

3. Where was the event held?

CÉDA – Comité d'éducation aux adultes de la Petite-Bourgogne et de Saint-Henri (CÉDA)

4. Who hosted the event?

Marc Miller, Member of Parliament for Ville-Marie – Le Sud-Ouest - Île-des-Sœurs
Moderator – Charles-Alexandre Vennat
Note-takers: Bryan Rourke and Laura Gareau

5. Approximately how many people attended the event?

40

6. Brief description of the event:

Participants broke out into small groups to discuss 3 topics. After a 15-25 minute discussion on each topic the groups presented the points discussed to the entire group. Notes were taken of these presentations by the groups themselves and two note-takers from our office.

Common Themes

- New system should increase voter turnout.
- New system should preserve the link between the representative and their riding.
- New system should be more proportional.
- There was support for both MMP and the status quo. More support for MMP.
  - The most common argument for MMP was that it increases the proportionality of the system.
  - The most common argument for the status quo was the stability and simplicity of the system

- Participants were interested in the idea of electronic and online voting but had serious concerns about the security of both of these options.
- More participants were for mandatory voting than against, although there were still many participants against.
- More participants were for lowering the voting age than against, although there were still many participants for keeping the voting age at 18.
- Education of the electoral system is currently lacking – this could pose a challenge when introducing a new system.

Please note the above common themes were not shared by all participants. Notes from each group of participants can be found below in the Feedback section and may offer a more complete picture of the opinions of the participants.

Feedback

Topic 1: Strengths and Weaknesses of the Current System

Table 1:

Strengths

There is a clarity of choice in the ballot box. It is clear who your PM will be at the ballot box.

Stability in majority governments – able to enact their platform

Weaknesses

Safe seats discourage voting

Safe ridings can be overlooked when parties and governments are developing heir platforms if parties only fight over a subset of winnable riding.

Governments are often formed after receiving less than 50% of the vote

Table 2: - see more on their sheets

Strengths

Majorities are common and offer stable governance.

There is clear local representation in the House of Commons. 1 MP 1 Riding

There is no need to educate the population on a new system

Weaknesses

Rural ridings have too much power/ City centers have too little power.

Seniors who may have intellectual deficits are able to vote and may not entirely understand their choice.

Majority governments have too much power.

No possibility of revisiting, once your vote is cast your decision has been made for the entirety of the mandate of the elected government which is commonly 4 years.

There is not fixed election date which allows the sitting government to call an election at a time most opportune to their party.

Ministers are not able to dedicate as much time to representing their ridings, this has the potential of leaving their ridings with less access to their elected representative.

Table 3:

Strengths

Current system is familiar to most people.

Changing to a more complex system has consequences.

Current parties are known quantities; with a more proportional system it is more likely more fringe parties will have seats.

The current system frequently elects stable governments.

Weaknesses

A majority government can set some of the terms of the electoral campaign, such as the length of the campaign period.

Table 4:

No participants at table 4

Table 5:

Strengths

Stable

Simple to understand

Cheaper to run than the alternatives

Low threshold to entry – the system is not difficult to understand for new voters.

Can vote for any individual on your ballot. In systems with runoffs choices are limited.

Weaknesses

Seats in the house are not apportioned based on the proportion of the vote each party received.

Favors the clustering of political views. If you live near likeminded people the representative of you chosen party is more likely to be elected.

Voter in ridings won by the winning party have a stronger voice in Ottawa

Current system encourages strategic voting and discourages voting for smaller parties

Table 6:

Strengths

Stability

Easier and cheaper to run an election

Weaknesses

Plurality does not produce a majority of vote?

If things are going well people not as inclined to vote

Lack of education on the system

Table 7:

Strengths

The current system works well.

Weaknesses

People may cast their vote for the party a candidate represents even if that individual candidate is not their preferred choice.

People may make their choice based on a regional issue even if they are voting for a federal representative

Table 8:

Strengths

Simple

Transparent

Weaknesses

Often results in majorities which decreases the need for compromise

Government may not represent a majority of voters

Tends toward a two party system

Centralizes power in Cabinet and the Office of the Prime Minister

Table 9:

Strengths

Stability, however this stability is often because of an artificial majority

Simplicity

Direct representation of each riding by a Member of Parliament results in a clear connection of a member with their riding

Can vote for an individual candidate person and not a party list

Results are simple to understand and come in quick – you know what your government will be

Weaknesses

Lower participation

Lack of proportion

People voting for parties and not mps

The possibility of minority governments

Feeling that votes might not count in non-competitive ridings

Table 10:

Strengths

Clear and precise results

Flexibility with regards reaching people

Weaknesses

There is no direct vote for prime minister (head of state)

Electoral financing – party in power has an advantage in fundraising

Table 11:

Strengths

Simplicity – easy to understand

Quick results

It is familiar

Favors clear majorities

Possibly less expensive

Weaknesses

Lack of representation for a lot of voters – (not proportional)

Discourages some groups from voting as they feel their vote does not count

Favors safe candidates and discourages minority, women and aboriginal candidates

Because of the lack of proportionality some voters may not vote

Table 12:

Strengths

Stable

Weaknesses

Topic 2: What electoral system would best serve Canadians?

Table 1:

The benefits of Alternative vote and Single Transferable Vote are that they preserve local representation of a geographic area by a single member of parliament and may decrease strategic voting

Alternative vote has the benefit of being a more simplistic system

Benefit of Single Transferable Vote is that there are no safe seats, as a result each vote is fought for. This system also leaves room for the views of smaller parties

Would like to see more proportionality in the new system

Table 2:

Mixed Member Proportional was there preferred system of those explained by the Library of Parliament

Would like to see in the new system:

      Vote for cabinet and PM directly

Limit donations to 100$ and no ads or posters

Help for financing smaller parties

Something about regional services

encourage crossing the floor

possible direct voting (referenda) for big ticket items

fixed election dates

distribute party platforms to all citizens during an election period

Table 3:

Preferred system is either Mixed Member Proportional or Alternative Vote, these two systems better capture the will of the voters

Table 4:

No participants at table 4

Table 5:

Disliked alternative vote because system was not proportional

Proportional representation is important

List Proportional Representation is simple and increases the proportionality of the system

Single Transferable Vote is complex, can be intimidating, but allows citizens to express their preferences all the way down the ballot. System is much more proportional. Having multiple MPs is good as it gives citizen's more than one avenue for help.

MMP – could be a balance between the List Proportional Representation and Single Transferable Vote. Allows people to separate preference for a local candidate from part preference/affiliation. Concern with MMP is where the top up candidates come from.

Other:

2 views regarding the implementation of new system

1 felt any changes should be preceded by referendum

Others wanted referendum afterwards 1-2 elections using the new system

Open list allows for a balance of local knowledge and party preference

Table 6:

Most important consideration when determining a new system is increasing voter turnout.

First Past the Post

Weakness: Majority governments can be formed without a majority of the vote. Diversity of the electorate not reflected in the results.

Proportional Representation

Weaknesses

    Can lead to too many parties – too many coalitions make it difficult to govern

Strengths

      A larger diversity of views

      May increase voter turnout

      Force parties to form coalitions and work together

Other

Against a referendum

Important than Canadians that do not live in Canada still have a voice and a vote

Table 7:

Would like see the following in the new system

Higher vote turnout

More proportionality

Minimum percentage cut-off – less than 5% of total vote a party gets no seats – even if they win a riding

New system should not be more complicated than the existing system

Against Alternative Vote – will centralize parties and discourage parties from proposing innovative ideas that do not appeal to the center

Against List Proportional Representation – parties creating lists of candidates to top up is not very democratic

Table 8:

1 person was in favor of keeping First Past the Post – the formation of coalitions often not transparent - less conducive to democracy

3 members of the group in favor of Mixed Member Proportional

Encourages collaboration

Gives voice to smaller parties

Results in representation proportional to the vote

New system should

Incentivise collaboration and open debate

Result in greater independence for MPs with regards to votes

Table 9:

No ideal system

Good system is

Simple

Proportional

Increases voter turnout

Is reviewed new after a an election or two

Preserves link of MP to their riding

Against List Proportional Representation – territories might end up underrepresented

Current system (First Past the Post) is acceptable if voter turnout can be increased

Any changes should not require reopening the constitution

Concerned about how change will be implemented

If there is a referendum what is the threshold?

What if some provinces vote in favor and some against

Preference is Mixed Member Proportional with Closed list which preserves a link of an MP to their riding

Table 10:

Mixed Member Proportional is preferred system

List of candidates for riding is an excellent idea

Would also like regional representatives – about 20 ridings per region – elections Canada already has these regions internally

Regional MPs could support riding MPs

Direct vote for PM

Any change will require an enormous amount of education about the new system

Table 11:

New system should be more proportional

Could lead to a more civil House of Commons

Important to keep connection between the MP and their riding – if anything increase the connection between the MP and the riding and decrease MPs party loyalty?

Table 12:

New system should be more proportional

Preserving local representation is very important

Topic 3 : Mechanisms of Voting

Table 1:

Electronic/Online Voting

For - if security concerns can be addressed

Practical, could result in cost savings, has the potential to raise voter turnout

Mandatory Voting

For

Table 2:

Electronic Voting

For – if security concerns can be addressed

Online Voting

For online voting for topic specific referenda, access to these referenda should be limited to people who voted in the most recent general election

Other

Discourage uninformed voters from voting – possibly by a test on their knowledge of the system

Decrease the number of polling stations

Allow voters to suggest people they believe should run for office

Find a way to verify the mental capacity of voters

Table 3:

Electronic

Against – security concerns

Prefer the current system where the result are counted and can be verified by representatives of each party.

Online Voting

Against – security concerns

Harder to protect against voter fraud

Harder to verify the identity of the person voting

Mandatory Voting

For

May have the side effect of people paying more attention to the issues over time

Voting Age

Keep voting age at 18

Other

Would like to see a mechanism under which there are consequences for parties that break campaign promises once in office

Table 4:

No participants at table 4

Table 5:

Electronic

Against – security concerns, might be an option if a biometric voter ID were developed

Liked the expedience of electronic voting

<u>Online Voting</u>

Against – security concerns

Chance of hacking and fraud

<u>Mandatory Voting</u>

Against

Patronizing and controlling

Forces uninformed people to vote

<u>Other</u>

Encourage citizen to care about the issues in turn this will lead to higher voter turnout.

Table 6:

Canada works with the existing federal system

No referendums

No electronic or online

Pro-polling blackouts – no polling during the elections period

Expats outside Canada should still be able to vote

Table 7:

<u>Online Voting</u>

Against – security concerns

Security of and confidence in the system are the most important considerations in making any changes

<u>Voting Age</u>

1 Against

3 For

<u>Mandatory Voting</u>

Instead of providing a disincentive for not voting provide a positive incentive to vote

Although education is a provincial jurisdiction promotion of education of the electoral system beginning in primary school

<u>Other</u>

Extend the voting period

Find a way to accommodate mobile populations such as students who often change ridings requiring them to register every election – perhaps by via a permanent electors list

Increase education of civics

Table 8:

<u>Online Voting</u>

Unsure – Online is not as secure however the current way of counting votes relies on temporary employees who may not be the most reliable

<u>Voting Age</u>

1 was Against lowering the voting age

Those under 18 do not pay taxes therefore should not get to vote

4 were For lowering the voting age to 16

Table 9:

<u>Electronic Voting</u>

Will likely happen regardless

<u>Online Voting</u>

For if security concerns are addressed

Will increase turnout

<u>Mandatory Voting</u>

For

<u>Voting Age</u>

For lowering the voting age to 16

<u>Other</u>

Choice of new system should be voted on by the public; either by national referendum or by the inclusion by the chosen new system in the platform of the governing party in the next election.

Table 10:

<u>Electronic Voting</u>

For

Suggest developing a voter ID card for use with the system

Should be used in conjunction with traditional paper ballots for general elections, in case there are issues with the electronic system.

Table 11:

<u>Online Voting</u>

Against

Voting should require the physical presence of the voter in order to lessen the possibility of fraud

<u>Mandatory Voting</u>

Against

Personal rights – keep the choice to not vote

<u>Voting Age</u>

Keep voting age at 18

<u>Other</u>

Increase education of the electoral system

Table 12:

<u>Online Voting</u>

For

Increases accessibility

Keep the option of local polling stations in addition to online voting

<u>Mandatory Voting</u>

Against

<u>Other</u>

Information on how, where, when to vote should be more widely available

Voter registration should be simpler and more widely available online