

**ROBERT FALCON-OUELLETTE
WINNIPEG CENTRE**

**TOWN HALL REPORT
ON ELECTORAL REFORM
PUBLIC CONSULTATION**



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

**ROBERT-FALCON OUELLETTE
WINNIPEG-CENTRE**

**RAPPORT SUR LES CONSULTATIONS
PUBLIQUES SUR LA RÉFORME
ÉLECTORALE**

CONSULTATION(S)			
September 24, 2016	10:00 am – 11:30 am (1.5hrs)	Bandwidth Theatre 585 Ellice Ave	Total Number of People in Attendance: 40
Form: Use of the Library of Parliament's visual presentation Presentation from the MP's office Open microphone Question and answer session			
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: See below*
*Indigenous representation in Parliament *Ranked ballot and Approval voting *Lowering the minimum voting age to 16 *Voter identification *Voter education			
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)			

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**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

Many of the attendees who expressed favour of proportional representation indicated that the current system trumps democracy, citing that voters often partake in strategic voting. Many also indicated that the first past the post voting system does not reflective what voters want. An attendee who spoke out against a ranked ballot indicated that with the current way votes are tabulated, it is simplistic and straight forward. Of those that participated in the discussion, all but three individuals spoke in favour of some sort of proportional representation system. The other three were in favour of maintaining a first-past-the-post electoral system.

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)

Participants discussed a need for openness in an electoral system. A closed-list system was only brought up to express to this system. There was much discussion and favour expressed for a proportional representation system. Features that were important to attendees included fairness, proportional representation, representation at the local level, and simplicity (in voting and tabulating votes). One participant expressed opposition to the alternative voting system, indicating that it would not work at the federal level. A participant that spoke in favour of proportional representation indicated that 51% of the vote should translate to 51% of seats and to 51% of the power because it was fair. Three participants spoke in favour of a mixed member proportional system, citing shortfalls of other proportional systems, such as no local voice like in a list proportional representation system. Regarding a ranked ballot, one candidate cited that it could be problematic if the second choice candidate was a distant second choice and others added that such a ballot was too complicated, while others spoke in favour of it. One attendee introduced the group to the idea of approval voting, where voters select the candidates and can “approve” as many of the candidates as they like.(i.e. approve of 1, 3 and 5) and those with the most approvals get the vote. They suggested this would solve the trends of vote-splitting and strategic voting, that it was simpler than ranked ballots, and offered a more fair representation of what voters want and would in turn encourage more people to vote. Another individual suggested that those who voted for last place candidates should be able to re-cast their vote to decide on the winner, and feel their vote counted. Another attendee suggested going beyond advanced polling and having two separate tallying of results where individuals who were not crossed off at the first round of voting would be encouraged to come out and vote by a set later date and that these votes would be tabulated without the first rounds results being released to the public.

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)

Many participants spoke on building on a sense of pride in voting for those that do not currently

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vote. The lack of pride and, in exchange, lack of engagement stems from people who feel that their vote does not count.

A participant indicated that democracy is not populism and that a vote is never wasted because, even though whoever one may vote for may not get elected, they can still attend their office and request time with their MP or staff. They further states that there needs to be a shift toward this mode of thinking, and pride in voting needs to be instilled in the next generation of voters.

Education, age, and financial situation were all cited as having an impact on a person's choice or ability to vote. This brought up the topics of voter education, including educating high school students, and voter identification.

Uneducated voting was stated as being just as dangerous as not voting, with their being more education needed in high school on elections and voting. When posed the question if the voting age should be lowered to 16, a participant stated that some 16 year olds are more informed than some 40 year olds, and have a better grasp on the issues and party policies. It was also stated that voters who start voting at a younger age are more likely to be life-long voters and that it was crucial to engage them at a young age. Education and awareness were both cited as being key to voter turnout.

A 16 year old in attendance stated that rather than lowering the voting age, young people could still engage in the democratic process in other ways, either through election awareness organizations or actual election campaigns. Another participant added that Elections Canada should work with organizations like Youth Parliament to appeal to kids who are not as engaged. These programs are rife with middle to upper class participants because lower income families simply cannot afford to have their children participate. As a result, young adult voters from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are less inclined to be engaged voters than their more middle to upper-class counterparts.

One attendee indicated that voters should be given time off of work to vote. Although another attendee pointed out that such legislation does exist, they added that it is not necessarily enforced. Other participants suggested positive reinforcement for voting, such as reintroducing per-vote subsidies, so that a riding like Winnipeg Centre, which is one of the poorest federal ridings, has more resources to echo their concerns. Others suggested entering voters into a lottery or a draw for prizes such as a trip in Canada.

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

Participants mostly argued against mandatory voting, citing that it would be difficult to enforce, overrides democracy; is punitive, and if such measures were taken to enforce it (such as fines) it would disproportionately negatively impact those already at a financial disadvantage.

One participant suggested that mandatory voting should be implemented, but the penalty should be placed on the candidates and MPs for not encouraging voter turnout. Another participant stated that rather than using coercive measures (negative or positive) parties should work harder to appeal to voters.

By citing personal observation, a participant backed up their support of mandatory voting by relating their own experience in talking to Australian voters. They had suggested that mandatory

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voting instills a sense of pride in voting.

A participant suggested that if mandatory voting were to be implemented, voters should still be allowed to spoil their ballots so as to make a political statement.

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.) (suggested limit: 500 words)

On the topic of online voting, the responses were split. Some argued it would be complicated to implement, but others argued that it allows those out of the country, those that are bed ridden, and others facing an inability to physically attend a polling station to exercise their right to vote. Another indicated that it could be beneficial in getting more young people to vote. Further input indicated that if it were to be implemented, online voting must be secured, un-hackable, and individuals cannot vote twice (essentially, better encryption).

Others cited voting at the polls with paper ballots to be more reliable as there is a paper trail, also citing the complexities with security and selling of voter information by hackers. They indicated that it would be too traceable and some individuals might use online voting to get others to vote for someone against their choice and potentially without their knowledge.

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

Concerns over impact and costs were raised by a participant. They expressed concerns about how information from the electoral reform consultations would be used and how impactful it would be in reforming how Canadians vote. The participant who raised this concern also questioned how much extra it would cost for the committee on electoral reform to meet and discuss the issue, and how much more money it would cost to pay those that work elections to sort out ranked ballots. Several participants raised the issue of the homeless vote. A participant suggested that polling stations should be set up at homeless shelters, making it easier for homeless people to vote. The issue of voter ID was also raised. A participant suggested that if identification is required to vote in a federal election, then the onus must be on the federal government to provide adequate identification to all eligible voters.

While the majority of those in attendance did express support for some form of proportional representation, one participant stressed the need for the committee to look at the current reforms going on globally in countries using other forms of electoral systems.

One participant indicated that voting should be open to non-citizens as well, and that all taxpayers with adequate ID should be able to vote.

Opinions on Indigenous representation in parliament were also expressed. The idea of having seats reserved for First Nations, Metis and Inuit representatives was an idea that was supported by most who had an opinion on the matter. One of the attendees that expressed support for this idea stated it would honour the treaties, while promote inclusion and working with Indigenous peoples. They suggested that seats could be based on geographic area, proportion of representation in Indigenous groups in a province, or using some other way to determine how many seats should be set aside for Indigenous representation. Another attendee suggested having a parliamentary Indigenous caucus

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that would also represent those with Indigenous ancestries who are not currently recognized as Indigenous, and that such a caucus should be non-partisan so as not to be influenced by Indigenous organizations or federal political parties. Another attendee suggested an Indigenous voting day. One participant voiced their opinion that those east of Prince Edward Island should not be allowed to participate in parliament, and that Indigenous people should not have a special place in parliament. These opinions did not represent the opinions expressed by others in attendance. While one other participant was not fully on board with the idea of having a set amount of Indigenous seats in parliament, citing that it may be difficult to implement, they did express that First Nations people did not to be represented and acknowledged in Parliament. Improving the voter list and better enumeration was also brought up, citing that improvements to enumeration could expand the voter list and allow for greater voter participation. Another participant brought up the need for intergovernmental participation and cooperation to alleviate costs by sharing relevant voter information.

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

In summary, many in attendance voiced support for some form of proportional representation, some form of a ranked ballot, support for more youth and young voter engagement through education and programming, support for implementing more measures to address barriers that prevent certain groups from voting (with focus on the homeless vote), and support for some sort of Indigenous representation in Parliament. While the topic of online voting received mixed reception, the majority of participants were opposed to implementing mandatory voting, lowering of the voting age to 16, and having a referendum on electoral reform.

Report submitted to Special Committee on Electoral Reform (ERRE)

Date:

MP's signature:

Robert-Falcon Ouellette, Winnipeg Centre

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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