

ARIF VIRANI
PARKDALE – HIGH PARK

TOWN HALL REPORT
ON ELECTORAL REFORM
PUBLIC CONSULTATION



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

ARIF VIRANI
PARKDALE – HIGH PARK

RAPPORT SUR LES CONSULTATIONS
PUBLIQUES SUR LA RÉFORME
ÉLECTORALE

CONSULTATION(S)			
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)
1. October 11 th	7pm – 9pm	Bishop Marrocco/Thomas Merton Catholic Secondary School	111
2.			
3.			
4.			
<p>Form: <input type="checkbox"/> Use of the Library of Parliament's visual presentation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Presentation from the MP's office <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Open microphone <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Question and answer session <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Guest speaker (Parliamentary Secretary Mark Holland) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): Distributed comment card asking participants, "If you could change one thing about the electoral system and how we vote, what would it be?" (see accompanying package sent by mail)</p>			
SUBJECTS DISCUSSED (summary)			
Voting systems: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Replacement of the current voting system: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Voter turnout: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Accessibility and inclusiveness: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Mandatory voting: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Online voting: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Local representation: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other (please specify and describe below) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High interest for P.R. with open lists • Mixed support for a referendum • Some distrust of process of making this decision • Some concern about voter fraud • Some support for advanced voting
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS			

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

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)

- Overall, the participants suggested that FPTP (First past the post) is deeply flawed and they are eager to transition to another form of electing officials (see below).
- In particular, they felt that this system undermines democratic legitimacy because it creates “false majorities.”
- Some also suggested that FPTP is outdated and unable to represent the voices of 100,000 constituents adequately (whereas it worked adequately in the past, when ridings comprised only 5,000 voters).
- A few participants argued that the current system too easily keeps power in the hands of the same two parties, or in the hands of the elite (often at the expense of youth).
- Quite a few were concerned about how majoritarian systems sacrifice proportionality in favour of local representation.
- Some were unhappy about the need to vote strategically, and about the fact that not all votes count under the current system. Others believed the current system does little to hold MPs accountable for their campaign promises, and that the media has a disproportionately high influence on voters’ choices.
- Notwithstanding, a small minority of participants suggested that the FPTP system adequately reflects voters’ wishes, and remains the best possible 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)

- The participants overwhelmingly favoured proportional representation (PR) in some form. While there was no consensus on what form of PR Canada should adopt, a plurality of speakers preferred mixed-member proportional (MMP). Many favoured single-transferable vote (STV) or alternative voting (AV) with ranked ballots, and a few expressed interest in hybrid proposals.
- The most pressing issue for most speakers was a desire for PR with open lists, although there were some dissenting voices. The most commonly cited reasons for supporting open lists was voters’ distrust of parties’ and leaders’ choices when they are allowed to set closed lists (including but not limited to nepotism and favouring party stalwarts), as well as a desire for voter choice (or a devolution of power away from elites) before and during elections.
- However, some preferred closed lists because they would find it difficult to choose among a high number of candidates.
- One suggested that riding associations, not parties, should be in charge of voter lists.
- Some criticized PR lists generally, because a single representative would be more accountable to constituents than would multiple candidates.
- Those in favour of MMP spoke about its capacity to balance local and national interests, as well as proportionality of voter choice. Also important for proponents of MMP (and others) was a desire for a more diverse Parliament where all Canadians can see people of similar backgrounds and opinions in the House of Commons.
- However, some claimed that MMP would disproportionately favour those in rural ridings, provide no accountability to local constituents, and cause confusion about the division of labour and compensation between MPs in the same riding.
- Participants who preferred STV cited increased accountability to voters and to other candidates to justify their position. In this system, they felt their vote would count in all

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circumstances. There was little opposition to STV, though most participants favoured MMP.

- Those who favoured AV and ranked ballots argued that it would best reflect voter interests and proportionality. In particular, they noted that every vote would count and it would eliminate strategic voting. Many were in favour of ranked ballots as long as the system was proportional instead of majoritarian. A few participants were adamant that ranked ballots are not too difficult for Canadians to understand, although some others disagreed. One noted that this could be done on a trial basis for a single election.
- Those who opposed AV spoke about its tendency to favour moderate parties, thus breeding indifference and apathy, and encouraging parties to adopt similar positions to one another. They also noted that AV can worsen the problem of false majorities.
- Proposals for hybrid systems included Elizabeth May's proposal (MMP with a party list comprised of the highest second-place candidates around the country); Stéphane Dion's P3 proposal (PR at a local level); a combination of MMP with AV and closed lists; and modified MMP with Super Ridings (see accompanying comments).

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)

Discussions about engagement touched on three major points.

- First, participants were concerned with how the inaccessibility of voting could affect electoral engagement (see below).
- Second, as noted above, some participants believed that having a more diverse group of MPs would encourage marginalized populations to better engage with Parliament.
- Most common, however, were concerns about how to engage youth. Participants proposed, as solutions to this problem, a lower voting age (from 18 to 16), facilitating voting at post-secondary institutions, improving civic education in schools, and moving toward electronic voting.

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

Participants did not come to a consensus about compulsory voting:

- One spoke in favour of it, stating that it was the only way to make people value their responsibility to vote.
- Some opposed compulsory voting; one compared the system to Australia's and argued that disengaged voters will simply spoil their vote. Another noted that PR systems tend to increase voter turnout rates, so compulsory voting would not be necessary if the committee decided to adopt PR.
- One argued that compulsory voting should not be implemented unless the electoral system is improved first.
- Finally, some spoke in favour of compulsory voting as long as it is coupled with more adequate civic education, and the option of abstaining on the ballot, or checking off "None of the Above."

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)

Participants did not come to a consensus about online voting.

- One favoured a hybrid system with electronic ballots that are then changed into paper format for easier counting and verification.
- Many were fully in favour of electronic voting, pointing to other systems (e.g. Canadian census, Estonian elections) where it is used effectively. They also cited the greater

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accessibility of online voting for the elderly and those with mobility issues.

- Although some participants believed that electronic voting presented no security risk, an equal number disagreed on this point. They cited the ease of tampering with online voting compared to paper votes, coercion at home from dominating heads of the household, concerns about anonymity and the inability to preserve our cherished secret ballots, and Canada's inability to deal with other forms of electronic fraud (e.g. robo-calling).

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

- Many participants expressed doubt about the current process to decide on a new voting system. Some believed that it would be feasible, but not ideal, to implement a new electoral system before the next election in 2019. They feared it will result in a rushed process with inadequate debate, ending with a flawed system.
- Others believed citizens' assemblies were more effective than town halls as a consultation mechanism. One pointed out that the process currently underway is very top-down, and the options being considered by the committee better reflect the parties' interests than those of the Canadian people. He also noted that it is irresponsible to borrow from other jurisdictions due to Canada's unique situation.
- Another suggested that this decision should not be left to parliamentarians alone, but to a committee composed of members of the general public and experts. Most participants who spoke about a referendum did not favour this route since, they argued, it would unfairly leave minority interests up to the will of the majority.
- Moreover, one pointed to evidence from referenda in B.C. (electoral reform) and the U.K. (Brexit) suggesting that plebiscites are vulnerable to misinformation campaigns.
- Some distrusted a referendum because plebiscites presume that all Canadians will "do their homework." Others disagreed, stating that Canadians are intelligent enough to vote in referenda and that town halls are not an adequate forum to gauge public will.
- Some expressed interest in a referendum after the 2019 election is held.
- Others cited issues with the poor accessibility of polling stations. Specifically, they argued that polls should be within walking distance of all Canadians, that there should be more advanced polls, and that voting day should be on the weekend with longer hours of operation (as in Australia). Some were in favour of being able to vote for one's home constituency even from outside their riding (as in Australia).
- Furthermore, some felt that the new requirement for government issued ID in order to vote created impediments for some people (including lower socio-economic groups), and that these changes were implemented by the previous government to combat a problem that many felt doesn't exist (i.e. voter fraud). Similarly, some were concerned about the coercion of voters at polling stations (specifically by those who accompanied the voter to the polling station).
- Some were particularly concerned by the underrepresentation of Indigenous people in Parliament, which is partially due to the lack of Indigenous population density in any given riding. One participant proposed a system wherein at least 30 ridings have an Indigenous population of at least 60 percent.

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

- The plurality of residents who attended were in favour of a PR electoral system. They perceive this reform as "an opportunity to do real good", to strengthen our democracy, and reflect more accurately, voters intentions. It was expressed that PR would improve their representatives' legitimacy in comparison with the current FPTP system.

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- The most popular option among participants was an MMP system with an open list, although a significant minority preferred AV, STV, or hybrid systems, including those with closed lists. Their presentations reflected the complexity of this issue.
- Voter engagement played a secondary role, cutting across discussions of other key issues, but many participants observed that the current electoral system leads to increased voter disengagement. They presented concrete suggestions for how Canada can better foster engagement, particularly among youth (see above).
- Participant opinion was divided over compulsory voting and online voting, but each side presented strong arguments about their views.
- Finally, participants raised important points about the ERRE consultation process, voter accessibility, and the need to better reflect Canada's diverse population, particularly Indigenous people.

Report submitted to Special Committee on Electoral Reform (ERRE)

Date: Oct. 13, 2016

MP's signature:

**Arif Virani
(Name)**

Reports must be submitted to the Clerks of the Committee no later than Friday, October 14, 2016 in both official languages.

Please note that this document is for illustrative purposes only and can be modified or adapted to your needs. The report will be published on the Committee's web site.

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