

Office of Member of Parliament Gord Brown

Official Report on Electoral Reform

Leeds-Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes

Submitted : Wednesday, October 12, 2016

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Leeds-Grenville-Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes

To the Special Committee on Electoral Reform,

I want to thank you for the opportunity of allowing my constituents to have their voices heard regarding this important issue. My riding of Leeds-Grenville-Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes is a large area with a population of highly engaged voters. Fortunately, they were more than happy to share their opinions on the process of electoral reform during our consultation session, sending emails, letters, and completed survey forms in expression of their diverse opinions.

To ensure the greatest response possible, we used a media release and advertised in a number of daily and weekly regional papers which reached every mailbox in the riding, encouraging our constituents to research the issue, and write in response. My Householder (sent out on September 1) contained a comprehensive explanation of electoral reform, a list and description of potential electoral systems, eight suggested questions to consider, and a questionnaire and comment section to be returned to our office. The Householder is also on my web site.

Hosting a town hall style meeting in a riding with such a low population density would have presented an undue amount of travel to our constituents, many of whom would be unable to attend due to scheduling issues. Hosting such an event would only ensure that a small demographic of citizens was represented, while the vast majority would remain unheard due to circumstances beyond their control. It is very important to me that each and every one of my constituents has a fair chance to voice their opinion, hence my choice to use our householder and local newspapers to inform them on the issue of electoral reform.

This report contains the results, including constituent's feelings on the possibility of a referendum, opinions on barriers to voting, and opinions on the prospect of having a mandatory voting system in place.

Please do not hesitate to ask if you require any further clarification. I will be happy to supply you with the completed constituent surveys and letters if you feel that they would help you to better understand the perspective of the people of Leeds Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

Yours truly,



Gord Brown

Member of Parliament

Leeds-Grenville-Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes

Content of the Electoral Reform Householder

Below is a brief overview of what was contained in the electoral reform householder in Leeds-Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes. If you would like to request additional information, or require a copy of the householder, feel free to contact my office to make arrangements.

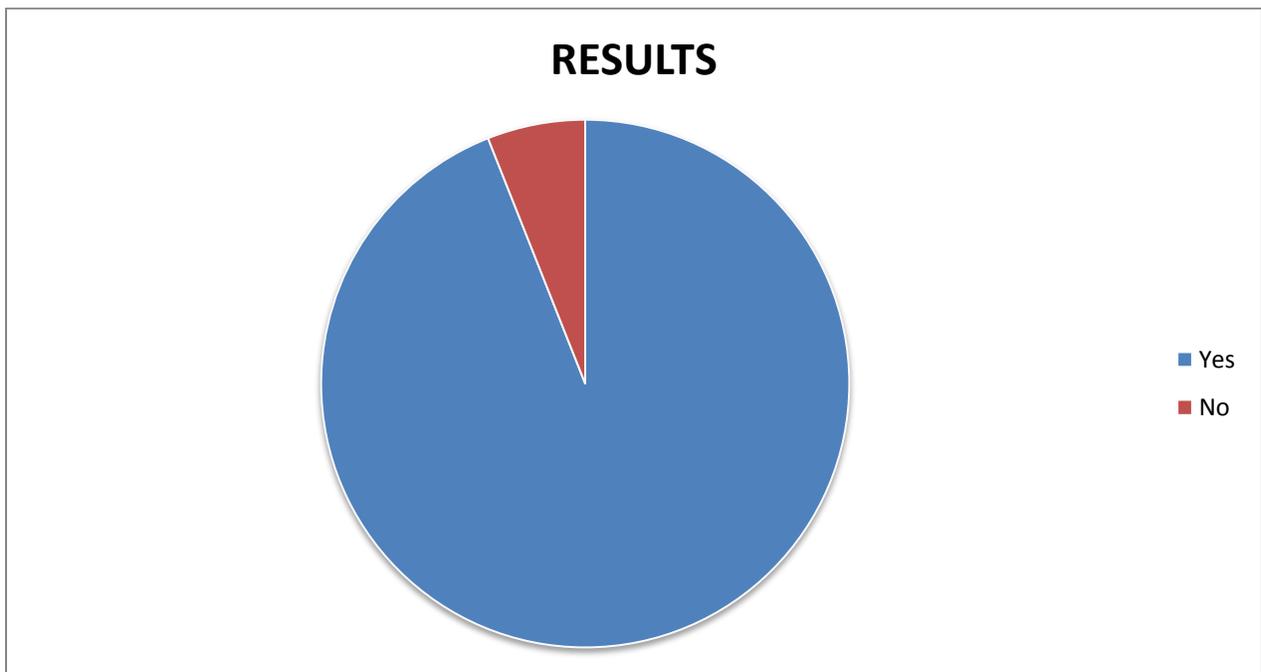
Householder Contents:

- A brief article explaining why electoral reform has recently become an issue in Canada, and some of the potential implications (pg.1).
- Guidelines for written submissions (pg. 1).
- A balanced list of arguments both for and against the possibility of a referendum, including quotations from both sides (pg. 2).
- A timeline of the electoral reform process (pg.3).
- An informative summary of each of the proposed electoral systems (pg.4).
- “Important questions to consider” on democracy (4 questions), barriers to voting (2 questions), and government (2 questions) (pg. 4).
- A survey on the possibility of a referendum with a section for comments from our constituents (pg. 3-4).

Consultation Results and Charts

Question: Before changing how we elect our MPs, should the government hold a referendum to get the approval of Canadians?

Response	Number of Constituents	Percentage of Total Responses
Yes, we should hold a referendum.	1400	94%
No, we should not hold a referendum.	96	6.4%



Important note:

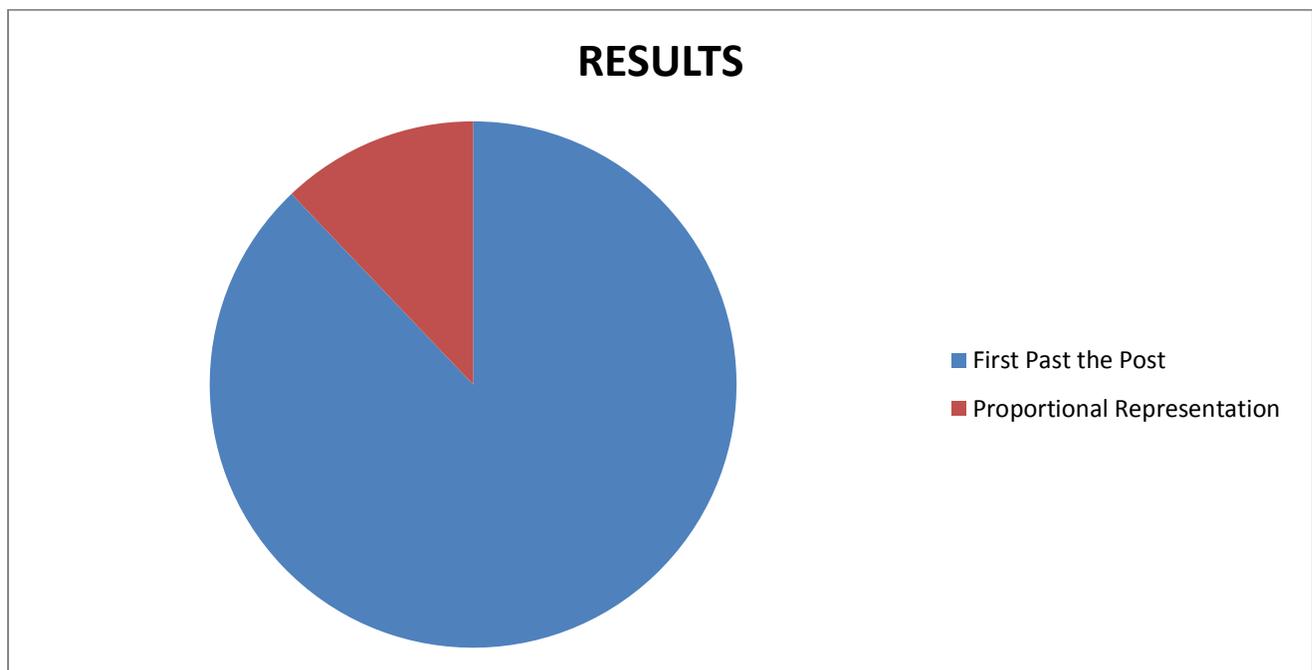
While many of the ‘yes’ voters favored first past the post as our electoral system, some also commented that they were in favor of electoral reform, but thought that a referendum was the only fair way to proceed in a democratic society.

- This is an indication that across political lines the Canadian people are looking to have a say in our electoral system. Both supporters and non-supporters of electoral reform stated that it would be an infringement on democratic rights for the government to move forward without first consulting with the people through a referendum.

Consultation Results and Charts

Certain constituents had specific requests in terms of what system they wanted to see implemented in Canada, which they indicated in the “comments” section of our survey. Overall I had the most requests to see First Past the Post remain the electoral system; however, there were also a number of requests for Proportional Representation, many of which we also sent directly to the committee. There was one request for a Single Member Party Proportional system, which is too small a number to tabulate in the chart.

System Requested	Number of Requests	Percentage of Total Responses
First Past the Post (Keep the current system)	166	87.8%
Proportional representation	23	12.1%



Important notes:

- Those who listed First Past the Post as their preferred electoral system often cited the fact that it has a history of producing strong, stable, and effective governments. They also noted that Canada has one of the world’s most respected democracies which is not in need of a drastic change.
- Those who listed Proportional Representation cited their desire to have their vote counted in a way they perceived as being more meaningful.

Direct Constituent Comments

Below I have listed a number of comments submitted by constituents which capture their sentiments on the issue of electoral reform. The number of comments portrayed for each side is in direct proportion to the number votes cast for the given option.

“Changing the way in which we vote will definitely have a fundamental impact on the way of life in Canada. Considering this it is important that we the people be consulted through a referendum so that every single Canadian will have the opportunity to be heard.”

-Joan & Mark Lahey.

“We must have a referendum to hear from all Canadians before changing our voting system. Our present system has served us well.”

-Frances M. Pike

“Alternative voting options will be very complex—too much to expect all citizens to take the time to analyse the consequences. That is the job of our members of Parliament. So no referendum, but MP’s must be free from Party control to make and justify their own decision.”

-Robert A. Millar

“First Past the Post has served us well for 150 years. It’s not broken, so why fix it?”

-James & Diane Gursby

“Let the people of this great country have a say on how decisions are made.”

-William & Margaret Harper

“Only the people should be able to change the electoral system. It belongs to the people, not the government.”

-Gary Gallinger & Elizabeth McLean

Direct Constituent Comments

“The Liberal Government does not have the right to change how Canadians vote without asking Canadians if they want a change. This country is a democracy!”

-Dwain & Cathy Earl

“Why are we even considering a different system when the one we have is the best system there is?”

-Katie Stevenson

“Something as fundamental as the way we choose our elected representatives and the way we have been throughout our history is not up to the Party elected. The people of Canada need to decide, not those in power who may have their own interest influence them. Canada is a democracy not a dictatorship where those in power decide the way the government works.”

-Kerry & Mariela Lamont

“Governments have no right to change the way we elect our representatives ...they are elected to serve.”

-Craig F. Windsor

“A referendum is essential when making such a fundamental change to how and by whom we are governed. The public in general should make the decision, not just MPs who might have a particular vested interest.”

-Maureen Copeland-Gross

“Contrary to what the Liberals may think, they did not receive a mandate to make or impose electoral reform. They got a mandate to form a government. Although some of their policies may have been popular with a portion of the 40% who voted, their opinion may or may not be popular with the majority of the population.”

-Ruth & Neil Plant

General Constituent Comments

On Barriers to Voting:

Many constituents addressed disenchantment with the governmental system as a reason why certain individuals may choose not to vote, whether due to disinterest or in protest of the system as a whole. Some common concerns were:

-A dislike of MPs who vote with Party lines as opposed to voting with the desires of their constituents.

- The MP should represent the people first and their Party second.

-A lack of *education* regarding how our governmental system works.

- People do not understand the issues well enough to have an informed vote.

-A lack of *transparency* in terms of how money is being spent and by whom.

- Too many spending scandals and too much over-spending on unnecessary expenses.

-Too much control in the hands of the government as opposed to the people.

- It is perceived as undemocratic for the government to push unpopular issues through using their mandate.

On Mandatory Voting:

A few constituents did mention a desire to see mandatory voting implemented, but it was not a common theme in the responses we received. It should however be noted that of those who *did* request to see a mandatory vote, it was common to also request *increased education* to ensure that voters would be aware before they voted.

Analysis

While there is a vast diversity of opinions on the subject of electoral reform, there is a clear desire among the people in my riding of Leeds Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes to have their voices heard through a national referendum. This was the choice of people of all political stripes, many of whom self-identified in the survey that they are not supporters of mine, and others who I know are not supporters.

Many noted the hypocrisy of a government claiming that our democratic system creates false majorities and then using that majority to force change on the people. This was a recurring theme in the responses. It has surely not gone unnoticed by the rest of the Canadian people.

If we truly want to represent the will of Canadians we must refrain from patronizing our citizens by stating that they are incapable of making decisions for themselves. This kind of infantilization is not becoming of a government which represents some of the best-educated people in the world—the very same people who elected us in October 2015.

At this point in time, *what* system we decide to use is much less important than *who* gets to make the decision. In a democracy such as ours, it is the people's will which comes first, not the will of the government (even if democratically elected). A referendum (including all viable options) is the only way to uphold our democracy in a meaningful way.

The Canadian people have shown time and again that they are capable of deciding for themselves—so let's allow them to do so.

Gord Brown

Member of Parliament

Leeds-Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes