

Toronto-Danforth Electoral Reform Consultation Results
MP Julie Dabrusin

Dear Mr Chair

On September 14, 2016 I held a two-hour electoral reform town hall meeting in my constituency of Toronto-Danforth. The event, which took place at the Calvary Church on Pape Avenue, lasted two hours and was attended by approximately 100 people. For those constituents who were unable to attend the town hall, but who wanted to contribute as well, I provided an online survey that asked the same questions that were put to the in-person respondents.

My office designed the format of the town hall. It began with a short presentation from my staff regarding the various types of electoral systems that are being considered by your committee. Following the presentation we split the participants into small groups and had them brainstorm ideas and responses to the questions we put to them. For me to understand the views presented to me at the town hall it was important that my office ask participants to provide me with both a positive and negative analysis of the current electoral system, as well as the other proposed systems. As such the information my office collected highlights diverse aspects of many electoral systems.

Part I : Principles to Guide Electoral Reform

I asked the participants of my town hall and my online survey to tell me what fundamental principles they wanted to see in our Canadian voting system. The four most important principles were:

- i. representation proportional to percentage of popular votes
- ii. more consensual, co-operative and cross-party law making
- iii. local representation; and
- iv. increased citizen engagement.

The principles that received the least support were:

- i. following Canada's electoral tradition
- ii. systems capable of producing majority governments
- iii. record of electoral systems in other jurisdictions; and
- iv. the ability to vote for more than one party.

Based on the voices I heard at my town hall, as well as the responses I received to my online survey, the theme that ties all these principles together is the desire to have an electoral system where people feel their vote is important and counts.

A second, equally important theme that I heard relates to education. People “know how First Past the Post works” was a common refrain. It was described as “easy”, “simple”, “familiar” and “easily understandable”. This contrasts with the discussions we had about other systems, such as Mixed Member Proportional Representation (MMP), Single Transferable Vote (STV), Ranked Ballot, List Proportional Representation and variants which elicited such adjectives as “complicated”, “rather complex”, and “confusing”. The theme seems to point to a strong desire for as much information as possible about what ever system is being chosen, so that Canadians understand the changes.

Part II : Possible Electoral Systems

I heard the following views about possible electoral systems from the participants at my in-person town hall and my online survey.

i. MMP

This system is described as local and proportional. It provides a fair and accurate representation of the will of the electorate. It also allows a voter to choose both a person and a party. The percentage of votes a party gets is the percentage of seats they get in parliament. It helps minority views and populations be represented in parliament.

A concern is the difficulty of having a local and regional MP, and their accountability to voters as well as their being a hierarchy of MPs. It risks creating a fragmented parliament with minority governments. There are concerns about who chooses the list candidates, who list candidates represent and their legitimacy. It would create a very large parliament and large ridings. It is a complicated system.

ii. STV

This system is described as proportional and reflective of local views. It also requires the local candidate to win by more than half of the votes.

Some of the concerns raised about STV relate to its complexity. The quota system was not something favoured by many of my constituents. It was also described as requiring too many MPs. This system was consistently described to me as extremely complicated.

iii. PR

This system was lauded for creating a representative number of parliamentarians based on the number of votes the parties received. It is described as validating every vote. Constituents described PR as allowing for a more pluralistic political dialogue. The opportunity for smaller voices and political values to be represented is magnified. This system was described as a compromise system.

One concern about this system that was voiced to me is that it could allow parties that espouse hateful values to be represented in parliament. A second is that the math

is confusing and complicated. This system risks creating deadlock in parliament and challenges with continuity of government through shifting coalitions.

iv. Alternate Voting / Ranked Ballot

This system was described as allowing people to run without being concerned about vote splitting, allowing people to vote for the party they want. It was suggested that AV helps candidates engage with the whole community and would empower voters to feel like their vote counted, even if the candidate was not their first choice.

A concern with this system is that it is not necessarily proportional, or at least not more proportional than other systems. It may risk stifling ideas and dissent. A concern expressed is that it moves votes to the centre.

Conclusion

Through this consultation I have had an opportunity to speak to a number of my constituents about what they see as the best way forward for our democracy's voting system. I look forward to continue speaking to constituents door-to-door and in person as this national dialogue continues.

If I can be of any further assistance to you, Mr Chair, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours very truly

Julie Dabrusin MP

Toronto-Danforth