

ALI EHSASSI, MP
WILLOWDALE

TOWN HALL REPORT
ON ELECTORAL REFORM
PUBLIC CONSULTATION



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

ALI EHSASSI, DÉPUTÉ
WILLOWDALE

RAPPORT SUR LES CONSULTATIONS
PUBLIQUES SUR LA RÉFORME
ÉLECTORALE

CONSULTATION(S)			
Date of the Meeting	Time and Length	Location of Consultation	Total Number of People in Attendance
September 6, 2016	7:05 p.m. – 9:35 p.m.	North York Civic Centre Council Chambers 5100 Yonge St., Toronto, ON	100
Form: ✓ Use of the Library of Parliament's visual presentation ✓ Presentation from the MP's office ✓ Open microphone ✓ Question and answer session ✓ Guest speakers ✓ Other: Written questionnaire collected from participants			
SUBJECTS DISCUSSED (summary)			
Voting systems: ✓	Replacement of the current voting system: ✓	Voter turnout: ✓	Accessibility and inclusiveness: ✓
Mandatory voting: ✓	Online voting: ✓	Local representation: ✓	Other (please specify and describe below) <input type="checkbox"/>

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?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An overwhelming majority of constituents feel inadequately represented because they do not believe that their vote is fairly translated into seat allocation in the House of Commons by the first-past-the-post voting system.

- Many participants believe that the electoral system is inherently flawed, resulting in unfair electoral results that are a poor reflection of citizens' views. Constituents cited concerns with the practice of 'strategic voting' as many participants reported often voting for a candidate with the sole purpose of preventing another party from coming to power.
- A minority of constituents believe that FPTP works well, citing the benefit of having a stable government.

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.)?

- Reformists are generally supportive of an electoral system based on proportional representation, although there was not a consensus around any one flavour.
- Constituents emphasized that the electoral system must be simple. Some concerns were raised that a complex system may actually deter more voters than we would stand to gain from implementing a more representative system.
- Participants generally considered legitimacy connotative with a proportional representation system, and that was one of the biggest factors in its favour.
- Some participants argued for different systems for rural and urban areas. Since local representation was viewed as less important in urban areas (where constituents' interests are similar across a city) there was some support for having larger ridings in cities, as necessary for proportional representation, and smaller ridings in rural areas which would vote through a ranked ballot.

Did participants discuss why they feel many Canadians choose not to engage in the democratic process? Did they suggest ways to encourage participation?

- Participants emphasized the perception that backbenchers are powerless as a primary reason why many Canadians do not participate in the democratic process.
- One of the panelists noted that many eligible voters simply forget to vote.
- An overwhelming majority of constituents expressed concerns about their role in the Canadian democratic process. Participants cited concerns that their vote often does not

make a difference in either Parliament or in terms of producing policy or social change.

- A significant number of constituents believe that a lack of knowledge leads to apathy towards the democratic process. Constituents believe that education programs in public schools that engage youth may incentivize more Canadians to become democratically engaged. .
- Constituents expressed a desire for a metric to measure their MP's performance, as well as to help restore accountability and confidence in the democratic system. Openparliament.ca was suggested by one of the panelists as a solution.

Did participants feel that it should be mandatory to cast a ballot? (Can include spoiling a ballot.)

- A clear majority of constituents do not want voting to be mandatory, citing freedom of expression and choice. Although participants do believe that mandatory voting would induce a higher voter turnout, they weighed respecting freedom of choice and expression to be of greater value.
- If mandatory voting were to be implemented it should only be done in tandem with a revamped civic education scheme. Participants favoured the carrot over the stick in this case: tax incentives for voting were preferable to a fine for not.

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.)

- Constituents generally dislike the idea of online voting, citing security flaws as their primary concern. However, constituents acknowledged that online voting would increase the accessibility of voting which is an important benefit.
- Participants suggested that the impact of online voting on voter turnout and election integrity in other jurisdictions should be examined.
- Constituents feel that online voting could be instituted as an additional option to current voting practices (i.e.: an alternative to mail-in ballots), not as the sole option.
- Some constituents raised concerns that widespread online voting could result in a significant number of votes being cast under duress, as there would no longer be any safeguards for ballots being secret.

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

- The consensus in room was that constituents do not want a referendum on the issue of electoral reform. They believe that the Government should be held accountable to implanting this campaign pledge and that we have a representative democracy for a reason. Concerns were raised that without comprehensive knowledge on this complex topic, many voters may make an ill-informed decision (Brexit was cited as a motivating example).
- Constituents are in favour of a lower voting age, as well as more educational programs/courses in public schools to drive youth to become engaged in the Canadian political process. Some participants argued for the federal government to mandate civic education in schools, noting that only Ontario current offers a mandatory civics course in secondary school.
- Some constituents want a more open process to select their local MP candidates. There was a perception that some parties select candidates based on the votes of a very small number of people, and this does not always result in high quality choices on election day.

SUMMARY OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS AND COMMENTS FROM PARTICIPANTS

- **Most important consideration is to create a stronger correlation between popular vote and seat allocation in the House of Commons without sacrificing simplicity of voting.**
- **Empowerment of backbenchers and creation of tools to hold MPs accountable.**
- **Rejection of online voting, mandatory voting, and a referendum.**
- **Open to a lower voting age and more open candidate nominations.**

Report submitted to Special Committee on Electoral Reform (ERRE)

Date: October 14, 2016

MP's signature:

