

**Host:** Darren Fisher, MP  
**Moderator:** Councillor Tony Mancini  
**Topic:** Electoral Reform  
**Style:** Lecture & Workshop  
**Date:** 18 August, 2016  
**Time:** 6:30pm-8:30pm  
**Location:** Woodlawn Public Library, Cole Harbour, NS

### **Electoral Reform Town Hall**

Gathering at the Cole Harbour Woodlawn Public Library for MP Darren Fishers' Town Hall, approximately 60 individuals listened to information regarding electoral reform styles before breaking out into groups and discussing ideas of their own. Common themes often arose between the eight groups, (Q1) such as the introduction of safe and secure electronic ballots to help more Canadians feel more interested and involved in democracy. Other popular ideas addressing this were increasing education in public school systems, increased accountability amongst government representatives and mandatory voting. (Q2) In addition to, many individuals feel that a strength of our current electoral system is its simple nature and its historical presence. Expressed weaknesses include locals feeling as though their votes don't count, formation of a majority government based on a minority of votes, strategic voting, and too much power going to individuals in leadership positions. (Q3) When asked about systems that the constituents had heard of, many recognized proportional representation and mixed member proportional, along with the ranked ballot system. Collectively, major pros of other systems were identified as online voting and fair voting. Loss of seats/enlarged ridings, too much power going to parties and a more complicated voting process were established cons. (4) Regarding the relationship between constituents and their Member of Parliament, citizens feel as though MP's should facilitate discussion on a variety of topics, be more accessible, increase communication with constituents and go door-to-door on a regular basis, not just during election time. (5) Finally, groups that the constituents feel are excluded from the current electoral system include the economically disadvantaged, the disabled, first nations, youth, and women. Proposed

solutions include making these groups feel as though their votes count, providing them with education as to why voting is important, identifying barriers and encouraging candidates from excluded groups.

These five questions were meant to initiate conversation amongst constituents to allow for ideation upon the subject of electoral reform. Below, the questions are listed and *all* answers that were recorded by each group are included. It is to be noted that all common answers are mentioned in the executive summary, as they are largely representative of the group.

### **Questions for reference:**

1. What do you think could be done to help more Canadians feel more interested and involved in democracy?
2. What do you think are some current strengths of our electoral system? What are some weaknesses?
3. Are there any other electoral systems that you have heard about? If so, what have you heard? Are there things that you like about these alternatives? If so, what? Are there concerns you have about these alternatives? If so, what?
4. What do you feel the relationship between an elected Member of Parliament and citizens in his or her electoral district should look like?
5. Are there certain groups that you feel are excluded from the current electoral system? If so, how can they be included?

### **Detailed Suggestions for Question 1:**

- Form a mandatory incentive for voting
- Implement electronic ballots and consider the security of them
- Increase education in the public school system. A recommendation of beginning in the primary years was given as well as more political science class options in high schools
- Host model parliaments
- Mandatory Voting: This way, individuals are more likely to vote for a specific party rather than checking a “None of the Above” option. Here, it is important to consider that if voting becomes mandatory, convenience of voting (especially in rural areas) must be considered
- Count the “spoiled”/“None of the Above” option ballots
- Youth Groups
- Remove partisanship for community issues in order for all levels of government to collaborate
- Give the Speaker power to enforce respect
- Ensure that politicians are accountable (keeping their promises)
- Increase the visibility of politicians throughout the riding, as this instills trust in constituents
- Tightening the expense rules
- Less “vote-whipping”

- Host more Town Halls to increase involvement
- Show that every vote counts and makes a difference
- Increase government transparency
- Allow the majority of people in the area to create policies and determine laws
- Increased access to polling stations
- Create meaningful debate regarding Electoral Reform and enable constituents to voice their concerns
- Allow elected representatives to determine policy as opposed to directions being “handed down from higher up’s”
- Fix the misconception of politicians being “crooked”, show they care and are invested in their constituents

### **Detailed Suggestions for Question 2:**

#### Strengths:

- Simple voting process and historically well-known
- Quick results
- Geographic/community based connection to representation, allowing for elected representatives to address local issues
- Policy mandate
- Feeling a sense of ownership/direct accountability of MP
- Accessibility to polling stations (advance voting, home visits, etc.)
- Easier consensus building
- The public knows who is in power
- The impact of social media (“calls out”)
- The party/parties in power can be voted out (allows for change in government)

#### Weaknesses:

- Too much power going to individuals in leadership positions
- Leadership (Prime Minister, more specifically) being party based
- False representative for collective (national) vote (the formation of a majority government based on a minority of votes)
- Strategic voting (casting “anti” votes)
- All votes are not equal as some don’t count
- Underrepresentation/unbalanced/skewed representation of some parties
- Minority government leading to concession-based policy making
- Elected representatives
- Not possible to form a coalition government for consensus
- Distorts the political will of people (minority rules over majority)
- Majority of voters become disenchanted (“wasted vote”)
- “Phoney” majority
- Hyper partisanship
- Potential dictatorship
- Encourages “extreme positions”
- Wasted finances on partisanship

### **Detailed Suggestions for Question 3:**

Other electoral systems & effectiveness:

- Mixed Member Proportional
  - New Zealand
  - This form of voting allows for two votes to be cast. Some said they would like more information on the version of MMP utilized in Germany
- Proportional representation
- Ranked Ballot

Things that you like about these alternatives:

- Online voting
- Mixed Member Proportional:
  - Allows for choices for alternate systems at a Provincial level and allows for customized variation to the Canadian federal system
  - Every vote counts with this system
  - More collaboration/stability
  - Regional representation
  - Structure
- Proportional representation
  - Fair
  - Can vote for more than one party
  - Open party list: enables voting for both a candidate and a party

Concerns you have about these alternatives?

- If voting process is more complicated, voters may be deterred
- We (presumably Atlantic Canadians) may lose seats with alternative systems
- Mixed Member Proportional:
  - Enlarged ridings
  - Gives parties too much power (as with Proportional Representation)
- Proportional Representation
  - Complicated
  - Haven't heard of a better alternative
  - Too many parties (such as Italy, for example)
  - Complicates voting process, which could potentially lower voter turnout
  - Closed party list
- Possible dictatorship

#### **Detailed Suggestions for Question 4:**

- Open and informative
- Public forums
- Facilitate discussion on an array of topics
- Send out questionnaire/survey for constituent feedback
- Blind representation/non-partisan (noted that this is less likely with first past the post)
- Inclusive across party lines
- Employer/employee relationship
- Accountability
- MP consults/informs constituents
- "Very strong" relationship, to allow citizens to feel that their voice is heard
- MP should be responsive to questions, correspondence, feedback, etc. on a consistent basis

- Regular door-to-door correspondence
- Host more town halls
- More mechanisms offering feedback to the MP
- Accessibility
- Be in public more regularly (not just during election times and at government functions)
- Outreach & listen (more than social media, offer personal contact on occasion)
- Accommodate various times (ie. those who do shift work, etc.)
- Cabinet position shouldn't hinder constituency relationship/work
- MP's should be knowledgeable and know their community

### **Detailed Suggestions for Question 5:**

Excluded Groups:

- Youth
- Hospitalized individuals
- Individuals of lower socio-economic background
- Native/indigenous groups
- Non-citizen residents
- Illiterate
- Homeless
- Transient
- The Green Party
- Elderly
- Rural communities
- Those whose votes are "wasted"/don't count
- Women (some also with a minority status)
- Recent immigrants with language barriers

How to include them:

- Lower the voting age
- Appeal to youth by changing the voting system
- Education
- Encourage candidates from excluded groups
- Identify champions within the community
- Lead by example
- Identify barriers
- Increase transparency
- Engage disabled groups
- Provide incentives
- Make their voices count: benefits targeted to this group
- Make voting mandatory
- Rolling rolls
- Make it easier to vote
- Involve disenfranchised on a personal level with policies
- Social programs demarginalizing individuals
- "Better" candidates
- All votes should make a difference
- Electronic voting

- Build a connection between the groups
- Proportional representation could potentially solve these issues
- Ensure gender parity in government
- Increase communication and meetings
- Have percent of votes and number of MP's correlate
- Create more diversity in politics
- TV/media message for civics such as Heritage Vignettes/Canadian Wildlife Infomercials, etc.