

**KARINA GOULD, MP
BURLINGTON**

**TOWN HALL REPORT
ON ELECTORAL REFORM
PUBLIC CONSULTATION**



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

**KARINA GOULD, DÉPUTÉ
BURLINGTON**

**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. 09/10/2016	12:30-15:00	4015 Mainway, Burlington, ON L7P 3N9	90 participants, 10 group facilitators, 3 staff, 2 volunteers.
2.			
3.			
4.			
Form: <input type="checkbox"/> Use of the Library of Parliament's visual presentation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Presentation from the MP's office <input type="checkbox"/> Open microphone <input type="checkbox"/> Question and answer session <input type="checkbox"/> Guest speaker <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): Eight facilitated table discussions			
SUBJECTS DISCUSSED (summary)			
Voting systems: x	Replacement of the current voting system: x	Voter turnout: x	Accessibility and inclusiveness: x
Mandatory voting: x	Online voting: x	Local representation: x	Other (please specify and describe below) x

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
<p>What did participants say about the current system for electing Members of Parliament (benefits/flaws)?</p> <p>Did participants feel that their votes are fairly translated? (suggested limit: 500 words)</p> <p>The participants who took part in our public discussion expressed great pride in our democracy. However when it comes to First-Past-The Post (FPTP), there was disagreement. Some participants were in favour of keeping our current electoral system, while others expressed concerns about FPTP.</p> <p>Those who are happy with our current electoral system expressed the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel that it is a fair system, it has been working well, and is easy to understand. • Feel that instead of getting rid of FPTP we should instead restore the effectiveness and

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legitimacy of voting as it already exists in the system.

- Feel that many of the perceived ‘democratic deficiencies’ that exist could be fixed in other ways.
- Feel that Canadians are not asking for this change and it was not a high priority item in the election - rather it is a change being engineered by the Government.
- According to one participant, electoral self-interest will always trump the common good, thus we should not reform the current electoral system.

Those who have concerns about our electoral system mentioned the following:

- False majorities: participants noted that the current system often gives parties with less than 40% of the vote (25% of eligible votes), 100% of the power. Provincially, in some cases FPTP has given majority status to the second place party.
- Votes not counting: some are concerned that with FPTP, their votes do not count. For example NDP and Green supporters who live in largely Liberal or Conservative ridings, feel that their votes do not count in federal elections.
- Voices lost: one participant expressed concern that the current electoral system does not create space for solutions or ideas to be proposed by Members outside of the ruling party.
- Strategic voting: constituents feel compelled to vote strategically if they wish to block the election of a less desired candidate. People want a system which incentivizes voting *for* someone, not *against* someone.
- Voter apathy: participants expressed concern that many people do not understand or care how votes are translated into an elected government and simply assume the process is fair.

Suggestions raised in the discussions groups:

- Participants suggested that perhaps the Government should consider fixing the current administration and delivery of the existing *Canada Elections Act* prior to changing the method for deciding the outcome of an election.
- Others suggested that Canada’s smaller parties and aspiring independent MPs should have a more significant voice and vote in the House of Commons to influence Government policy. This would then make it necessary for the governing party to consider all the available solutions to issues.

Overall sentiment: participants feel that it is time to have a modern, fair voting system, where voter intent is reflected in the election outcome.

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)

As part of our moderated discussions, participants took part in an exercise on Canadian Democratic Values, and were asked to share the attributes that they believe are the most important for a strong and healthy democracy. As a group, they were asked to choose their top attributes which they believe are the most important for a strong and health democracy, and to discuss why.

The following attributes were highlighted:

- Transparency: participants felt very strongly about the need for greater government transparency and openness. Canadians want to be able to access information on legislation, decision making, and the impact these decisions will have on communities, both quickly and efficiently.
- Representativeness: participants want an elected representative who will focus on national

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as well as local priorities. Participants believe strongly in local representation. The public understands that Members of Parliament have a platform to uphold (as they were elected under a party banner), but expect their individual representatives to have the autonomy to represent the views of the people who voted them into office.

- Truthfulness: participants want a representative (and government) that is truthful and open.
- Inclusiveness: participants want a system that is fair, inclusive, and based on mutual respect.
- Accessibility: participants want a representative that is accessible to them; who they can reach out to, share ideas with, and know where they stands on issues of importance.
- Diversity: participants suggested our MPs were not 'diverse' enough. Having elected officials who come from diverse backgrounds and experiences would strengthen our electoral system.
- Vision and Leadership: participants expect their representatives to think about the future of our country and be selfless in their decision making. They expect officials to consider future generations of Canadians, and not just what's best for the here and now.

As part of the exercise, constituents were also asked to share their expectations of their representative in regards to these values:

- Constituents in our riding expect their representative to represent their community and local interests. Participants discussed the balance between party platform and local issue representation, and questioned if local interests are being represented adequately in our elected officials in Ottawa.
- To some, local representation means having representatives that listen to their constituents and do not tell their constituents what they should think. Others in the group expect their representative to become knowledgeable on the issues to be decided and to make informed decisions on their behalf. On this point, there are differing expectations of a representative's role.
- Overall, our constituents understand that for elected officials, there is a party platform to uphold, but they expect their individual representatives to have the autonomy to represent the views of the people they are representing.

Alternatives to FPTP:

With respect to alternative systems of voting, participants expressed that being able to vote directly for someone to represent the constituents was important to them. Some felt that the Mixed Member Proportional system provides this ability. However, participants also expressed concern that people do not understand proportional representation. Some participants indicated Canada is too large and sparsely populated in certain regions for Proportional Representation to be successful.

It was suggested by one participant that Proportional Representation could be used as a system within Parliament to elect Senators. This way, all parties would select Senators, rather than only the leader of the majority party/government.

On Ranked Ballots or Two-Round Systems, some constituents felt that this system is favored by people who believe they are most peoples' first or second choice, and is not preferable alternative to FPTP.

A couple of participants also expressed their interest in a Single Transferrable Vote system.

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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)

In the discussion groups, different factors were raised:

- Some participants suggested that it was a question of education. Participants suggested that more education about the electoral system might increase interest in Canadians exercising their democratic rights
- Others mentioned accessibility as a possible factor – perhaps making voting easier or more convenient for people (ex. online voting) would improve engagement.
- Some suggested that the lack of transparency in the political landscape hurts voter engagement. Constituents expect their elected representative to act transparently. When people feel that the government is hiding information from the public that is when people begin to lose trust and interest in political engagement.
- Some suggested that government messaging and communication plays an important role. The public expects elected officials to make decisions based off sound evidence. The public should not have to use the *Freedom of Information Act* to ask for more information on decision-making; it should be shared openly with Canadians.

Suggestions to encourage participation:

- The government should take active steps to increase levels of trust and public perceptions of transparency in governance. This can be done by improving channels of communication and sharing information with citizens.
- One way to do so would be to ensure that there is an *ongoing* engagement process between elected representatives and their constituents. The first key step for voters is involvement in broader processes.
- Participation and voter turnout will increase if individuals feel that there is an identifiable benefit to voting and if people feel that their voice matters.
- Many constituents mentioned youth as an important group to engage with.

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

For many participants, voting is just one piece of the broader democratic puzzle. What we do and say between elections is as important if not more so than the vote itself.

On mandatory voting, there was no clear consensus among participants: some individuals felt very strongly in favour, some very strongly against, and many open to the idea but with no clear preference.

For those who were in favour of mandatory voting, participants expressed concern that there is a ‘democratic deficit’ and that there is a duty to vote as a right of citizenship. As a democratic society, it is each person’s responsibility to participate in the democratic process by casting their ballot.

If we were to implement mandatory voting, one participant suggested that penalties for mandatory voting should include fines for people who do not vote and incarceration for people or groups that interfere with an individual’s right to vote. Those who are in favour of mandatory voting made reference to the success of the Australian model, where voter turnout is consistently above 90

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percent.

One constituent expressed that the problem is not that not enough people are voting, but rather that not enough people feel the need to vote. This is something that must be considered as part of the broader electoral reform process.

One participant suggested that there are steps we can take to increase voter accessibility and turnout. For example, Canadians who are of legal age and eligible to vote should be placed automatically on the Federal Voters List, and the current option of sharing your personal info with Elections Canada when you file your income tax return with the Canada Revenue Agency should be removed and made mandatory. Additionally, if a citizen is accessing services through other federal departments or agencies, these agencies could report the client's personal information to Elections Canada to add or update their voter information.

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)

Within the discussion circles, the sentiment on online voting was mixed.

Some participants felt that online voting would help increase voter turnout. While some voters are able to exercise their right to vote by way of advance polls or by mailing in their ballot, some participants indicated online voting would accommodate voters who have made their decision prior to polling day. Many eligible voters wait until polling day to make up their minds and cast their vote. This could potentially mean voters, who encounter a delay at the polling station (ex. lengthy line/wait) or in some cases, attend the wrong polling location, may not cast their ballot due to inconvenience. Online voting would better accommodate voters who are willing and able to vote. The participation rates of the 2016 Census demonstrate the popularity and ease of access for completing a task such as a survey or poll online.

However participants also expressed concern with the security, verification and the integrity of the electoral process for online voting. Foreign and/or domestic hacking and data manipulation is a possibility that could jeopardize the entire electoral process. In the event of voting fraud, it would be easier to stuff a ballot box with electronic ballots than with paper ones. The Government would need a way to verify and ensure the individual casting a ballot is in fact who they are supposed to be. Participants also wondered how electronic votes would be stored for recounts and voter challenges.

Other participants felt that while the number of votes cast would increase with online voting, it must be accompanied by in person voting as well.

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

Some participants would like the existing laws under the *Elections Act* revised with respect to providing building access for Revision Agents/Enumerators who are preparing the voters list. This would apply to building superintendents, property managers, property owners, condominium boards, persons residing in rental accommodations like apartment/condo type dwellings, as well as nursing or long term care facilities that tend to have a higher degree of resident relocation than people who own the home they reside in.

On the issue of holding a referendum to legitimize electoral reform, participants noted that Canada did not need a referendum to give women, first nations, etc., the right to vote. And most felt a referendum was not necessary.

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Some participants believe that those who oppose electoral reform see a referendum as a way to prevent it.

Some participants would support a referendum or plebiscite after voters have used a new voting system a number of times to determine whether they like the new system (ex. New Zealand).

However, there were some participants who expressed the view that it is important that any changes to the electoral system should be voted on by all Canadians in a national referendum and that anything less would not be democratic.

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

This consultation was moderated by facilitators at eight tables. The moderated table discussion asked participants to focus on Canadian democratic values, guiding principles for Canadian federal electoral reform, and to reflect on the dialogue of the consultation itself.

Consensus on these topics varied significantly and each table's discussion was unique in the way which facilitators guided their group of participants.

Participants were asked to explore the values associated with our democratic system, such as transparency, accountability, representation, inclusiveness, accessibility and participation.

Through these discussions, four areas of recommendation were identified:

Education

The issue of electoral reform is complex. Reform will impact our democracy as we know it. Participants believe in order to help all Canadians understand the different electoral systems, it's critical that the Government distribute information to every citizen that outlines the differences between the current system and the proposed alternative systems.

Communication

Electoral reform is a conversation between the Government and Canadians. The consultation process is an important first-step for elective representatives to listen to their constituents on this issue. The next part of this conversation will be the Government to acknowledge and respond to the feedback it has received from participants from consultations such as this and all Canadians who have expressed their opinion on our democracy and electoral process.

Access to Information

While some participants were well versed in the options of different electoral systems, others expressed concern that much more public awareness and information is required to inform Canadians on this issue. Information needs to be provided through different platforms (Ex. Print, electronic) and made as accessible as possible.

Value of Voting

It is important to participants that there is value behind their vote. The less impact a ballot has, the more likely a voter will not engage in the electoral process. It is vital that any reform to the electoral process incorporate the value of the individual ballot as a key principle for consideration.

Participants who engaged in this consultation understand this feedback will be considered by the Committee and look forward to the recommendations to be made in the coming months.

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Report submitted to Special Committee on Electoral Reform (ERRE)	Date: October 14, 2016
MP's signature: 	Karina Gould, MP

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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