

Special Committee on Electoral Reform: Comments from a long-time voter

I am pleased to provide my input to the process of identifying a suitable replacement to the current first-past-the-post voting system (FPTP).

As I understand the committee's mandate, two broad alternatives to FPTP are under consideration: various concepts of proportional representation (PR), and a bewildering array of options that may be summarized as a ranked ballot or transferable vote (RTV). As elaborated below, while these alternatives have had some degree of success in other countries (mostly where there are multiple parties on all sides of the political spectrum), **Canadians' long-standing practice of voting three major blocs (Liberal \pm 40%, Conservative \pm 40%, NDP *et al* 20%) means that PR and RTV and their many permutations would each be a significant step backward from the democratic process.**

First, regarding PR, its most persistent supporters have been parties whose platforms render them unelectable by FPTP. However, in my admittedly jaded view (probably shared with a majority of Canadians) the real reason they wish to change the system has little to do with gaining a voice in Parliament, and everything to do with seizing influence over the government. Above, I cite Canadians' historic voting preferences within fairly narrow numeric ranges, and one would suspect these preferences would continue regardless of which electoral system may be in vogue. Therefore, there is a very real possibility that parties otherwise unelectable become kingmakers in a minority coalition, effectively blackmailing the coalition into pursuing some of the agenda that makes them unelectable in the first place. Consider that the NDP's share of the popular vote since 1970 has been in a narrow range averaging 17 percent (even including the 2011 spike to 30.6 percent). Some have objected to the "false majority" obtained by the Liberals in 2015 under FPTP, with 39.5 percent of the popular vote. I believe most Canadians would prefer to be governed by a party garnering 39.5 percent of the vote, rather than risking the tyranny of the seventeen-percenters.

The RTV group of options is even more odious, in terms of its democratic deficit as anticipated by any realistic election outcome. While there are many variants with which to confuse the electorate, all seem to involve casting a second-choice vote. As it is inconceivable that a Conservative voter would name a NDP candidate as his second choice (or vice-versa), the Liberals would pick up their usual 40% of first choices, plus virtually 100% of voters' second choices; thereby retaining power literally forever with little to no opposition, and positioning Canada firmly amongst the group of totalitarian states which we have opposed for the last century. Mr. Trudeau has recently spoken to the UN General Assembly about "re-engaging" with the UN. Should we begin using RTV, we would have no moral authority to do so, particularly regarding our previous illustrious role as election supervisors.

Finally, there is nothing new about electoral reform. Since 2000, **five provinces representing 77% of Canada's population (ON, QC, BC, NB, PE) have retained FPTP** either by failed referenda (twice, in my adopted province of BC!) or by a change of government. The losing reformers tended to brush off the results as a product of an uninformed electorate. I wonder; perhaps

the electorate was informed enough to anticipate the concerns I've noted here (which only require understanding basic arithmetic), and voted accordingly.

I believe the issues I raise here transcend the directive to change the electoral system, and urge the committee to stay the course and retain FPTP.

Respectfully submitted,

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