

*From Ian Bailey*

*Electoral Reform suggestions and other thoughts*

Committee Members,

I write to you about some proposed changes to Canada's electoral system. Currently, our system is first-past-the-post where the candidate with the most votes wins a seat. This can lead to huge distortions whereby a party can win 35 per cent of the vote and win a majority of seats. This may be ideal for a two party system, but Canada has a multiparty system. The purpose of the reform is to make the system more accessible, open, transparent and accountable.

Specifically, I would like to see the following changes:

1. Election campaigns would vary between 29 and 43 days to account for the large distances from Ottawa and the size of the riding. This would apply to general elections, by-elections and referendums
2. A ban on all government advertising 1 month before the writ is dropped.
3. All government advertising before and after the election would be subject to an independent oversight to verify that the advertisements are relatively nonpartisan. This could be the role of the auditor general.
4. Strict limits on spending would be enforced during a campaign to ensure no party or individual would obtain an unfair advantage. Related to this is full disclosure of all funds raised and spent.
5. Debates could be held in English and French on such topics as the economy, social programs, environment, democratic reform, foreign affairs and national defense. There could be two debates in English and two in French.
6. To obtain official standing in the House of Commons a party would have to win 24 seats. The House of Commons has recently expanded to 338 seats, so no fringe or protest parties would be able to obtain government funding. I would suggest a reduction in the House of Commons to 254 seats, a reduction of 25 per cent.
7. Electronic voting would be available for all elections, referendums and for the House of Commons and the Senate. This could take the form of voting by internet in the polling station, by smart phone or iPhone, iPad or computer ballot paper. This would eliminate the need for recorded voice votes in the Commons and Senate. Results would be faster, more accurate and timely.

8. A ban on all public opinion polls in the first and last weekend of the campaign to not influence voters' intentions and desires.
9. A new voting system could feature 1/2 of the voters chosen under the current system, while the other half would be chosen randomly or at large with no party affiliation. I believe this better reflects the true population of Canada and its desires. One could characterize this idea as a variation of the MMP system, which is used in New Zealand.
10. Recounts could occur if the margin of victory in an election or by-election would be less than 100 votes.
11. If a seat is declared vacant, there would be a by-election held within 180 days to ensure people are properly represented in the House of Commons.
12. I oppose mandatory voting because people are free to participate or not in the process and should not be penalized for expressing their free will.
13. If a referendum were held, there would have to be a clear question. Related to this is what constitutes a majority? Is it a simple majority of all Canadians or a simple majority in each province or region?(50 % + 1).What about funding for a referendum? Are there spending limits in place? Who is going to pay for the referendum? Is the result binding?

The important idea is to have a system that reflects the values, ideas and feelings of the voters and that is fair, open and honest.

Please keep an open mind on all suggestions.

Thank you for your time. Good luck with your committee!

Sincerely,

Ian Bailey