

Electoral Reform in Canada

Submission to the Special Committee on Electoral Reform

by

John Boyle

Vancouver, BC

In providing you with my views on electoral reform in Canada, I will use the language of the 11 January 2016 Library of Parliament publication *Electoral Systems and Electoral Reform in Canada and Elsewhere: An Overview*.

Electoral System

First, I am firmly opposed to the first past the post (FPTP) electoral system we now have. My reasons are several, but primarily that a candidate, and a party, should not be elected who did not receive more than 50% of the vote. It is simply unfair and unacceptable that a party can win a majority government (i.e., 100% of the power) with less than 50% of the vote. Thus, the Liberal Party campaign pledge to get rid of FPTP is most welcome.

Second, I firmly support a new electoral system in which the number of seats a party holds in Parliament reflects its proportion of the national, and perhaps regional, vote. Thus, I support proportional representation in our electoral system. I think there should be a minimum threshold, say 5% of the national vote, below which a party will receive no seats they did not win in a constituency vote. This means that I do not support the simple adoption of alternative voting (AV), or of two-round or block voting, as a way to fulfill the Liberal Party campaign pledge – these options do not produce proportional representation. If any of these options are what we are offered at the next election, I will consider that the Liberal Party has failed to meet the spirit of its pledge.

Third, I want an electoral system in which there is one MP for my constituency, I can vote for them rather than for their party, and I know who to go to if I need assistance in dealing with the federal government. Thus, List PR systems are unacceptable. So are STV and SNTV systems which are too complicated to understand and are thus not transparent, easy to understand and trust.

These factors lead me to prefer a Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) system. However, unlike the descriptions of mixed electoral systems described in *Electoral Systems and Electoral Reform in Canada and Elsewhere: An Overview*, I want the constituency candidate elected through an AV rather than an FPTP ballot. This is because, like most people I know, I usually have a first, second and perhaps third choice based on both the candidates and their parties, and want to be able to express those preferences at the ballot box.

I am convinced that MMP offers the best option for electoral reform that meets the criteria I care about – an electoral system that is:

- Fair, representative and proportional;
- Transparent and easy to understand and trust; and that
- Supports our politicians in being less adversarial, and more collaborative and productive.

Referendum

I notice that Democratic Institutions Minister Maryam Monsef is wary of holding a referendum on the proposed new electoral process. I go further and say to not hold such a referendum. Referenda involve just too much risk of a vote based on voter confusion and misinformation, and, as expert Arend Lijphart told you, “the outcomes ... are often highly volatile and unpredictable, [and] often involve a lot of emotionalism and outright lies”. The recent Brexit referendum should be proof enough of this point.

The Special Committee on Electoral Reform is now well constituted to represent a good spectrum of political interests. I am confident you can be relied upon to sift through the evidently complex matters associated with electoral reform, and to recommend a new system that meets the criteria I noted above and enjoys the support of a strong majority of committee members. There are just too many matters to consider that the Canadian electorate can be relied upon to make an informed, rational choice in a referendum.

Instead, I recommend that the proposed new system be subject to a free vote in Parliament, and then to a non-binding review referendum after, say, three elections with the new system.

Other Matters

I do not think mandatory or compulsory voting is a good idea. Let people vote who care enough about how they are governed to inform themselves about the issues, parties and candidates, and to take the time to vote.

John Boyle
August 24, 2016