

An Electoral System to Provide Canadians with Fair Regional and Local Representation: *A Brief to the Special Committee on Electoral Reform*

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Our first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system was an inheritance from the British tradition. Over time, superior voting systems have come to the fore and Canada has changed greatly since Confederation. It is long past time that we adopted a system designed for our current needs.

Among the more serious problems with FPTP is its potential to grossly distort regional representation. Canada is a highly regionalized country which makes FPTP an especially bad system for us.

As an example of the egregious effects regional misrepresentation can produce, we might consider the National Energy Program (NEP) implemented by the federal government in 1980. Many Albertans were infuriated by what they considered an assault on their province and talk of secession was widespread. At this time, Alberta had no voice in the governing (Liberal) caucus. Even though the Liberals had received 22 per cent of the popular vote in the province in the preceding election, they failed to be rewarded with even one MP. Under a proportional representative (PR) system, the Liberals would have elected five MPs, Alberta would have been well represented in caucus, and the NEP would have been far more sensitive to the interests of Alberta. I can say this with confidence because in 1993 the Liberals elected four MPs in Alberta and one was appointed Minister of Natural Resources.

Another example is the 1993 election, following which the Bloc Québécois became the official opposition even though both the Progressive Conservative and Reform Parties received more votes. The reason was that the Bloc ran candidates in only one province. The other parties ran candidates across the country thus scattering their votes. FPTP gave a powerful advantage to the party that least represented the regional diversity of our country and penalized those that did. The election to official opposition of a party that was the voters' fourth choice, represented only one province, and wanted to break up the country was as ludicrous as it was divisive, and added considerably to regional hostility.

FPTP also deprives many Canadians of meaningful local representation. For example, the 2011 election saw Conservative candidates win all Calgary ridings, sending eight MPs to Ottawa. Those many thousands of Calgarians who voted for other parties in effect had no local representative.

Under a PR system, all Canadians, at least all Canadians who support one of the major parties, could have a local candidate that represented their views. In the case of the 2011 election, if Calgary had been one constituency electing eight MPs, a PR system would have sent five Conservative MPs to Ottawa along with one each from the Liberal, NDP and Green Parties. Every Calgarian would have had a representative he or she could comfortably discuss issues with.

PR can even offer voters a choice among the candidates of their preferred party whereas FPTP offers only one candidate per constituency, take him/her or leave him/her. Under Single

Transferable Vote, for example, voters can rank the candidates of the party they support and even include candidates from other parties in their ranking. This system gives voters more control over the process relative to party control than any other. It maximizes voter choice.

Under a PR system, all provinces, all political parties and all Canadians would be fairly represented within the bounds of constitutional constraints.

By ensuring fair regional and local representation, PR would conform our electoral system to principles one (Effectiveness and legitimacy), two (Engagement), and five (Local representation) as set out in the motion adopted by the House of Commons on Tuesday, June 7, 2016, outlining your committee's mandate.

Democracy demands that all citizens have a relatively equal say in their governance. FPTP fails utterly to achieve this. We have an electoral system but not a democratic system. Only proportional representation will ensure that the will of the people is respected. It is time to design a Canadian system for a modern Canada.

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