

What follows is a contribution to the Government's democratic reform initiative.

The Government's five guiding principles are laudable, if possibly contradictory in practice. What is missing is the legitimacy of the process itself. Regardless of what is finally proposed, it is how the proposals for reform come about which matters most.

The all-party parliamentary committee is reaching out and consulting Canadians, giving them an opportunity to have a say in impending reforms to our electoral system. This has been presented as an opportunity of sorts, but this is what every parliamentary committee does - there is absolutely nothing new here. By having individual Canadians and organizations submit their preferences and proposals one at a time, there is an opportunity for political parties to play one off against the other, and to construe any recommendations through the rubric of party interest. The essential problem with the present approach is that it pretends that political parties have no interest in the outcome of democratic reform, when in fact, there is no other issue before parliament today - or arguably since Confederation - in which they have less of an interest.

This is why political parties should not be left to interpret the consultative recommendations of Canadians as they see fit, and to negotiate democratic reform behind closed doors based on what they perceive as their particular party interests. There is an obvious conflict of interest here on the part of political parties that can only be resolved by way of a consultative referendum where the opinions of all electors are sought and considered. This alone makes the "dividing and conquering" of individual consultative recommendations impossible, as no politician can ignore a recommendation for reform that is expressed at a national level.

Eleven Referendum Questions follow, reflecting the widest range of likely changes to the present system. While a referendum is consultative in nature only, it is suggested here that whatever Canadians say "yes" to should be implemented as soon as possible. It is further recommended that, for a "yes" vote to succeed, the level of support should be 55%, or a majority of electors. This is to ensure that support for a given measure is clear (e.g. avoid the recent Brexit situation, and follow the lead of the Supreme Court of Canada on separation votes in Canada, where there must be a clear majority).

It is important to note that this list is not exhaustive, and I am not wedded to any particular issue. I do not support or oppose any party or politician, nor is this intended to support or oppose any party or politician, or any of the reform proposals put forward by them. I would be comfortable with no changes to this system.

1. Should we have internet voting?
2. Should constituents be able to recall their Members of Parliament?
3. Should voting be mandatory?

4. Should citizens elect their representatives through the use of a preferential or ranked ballot?
5. Should Members of Parliament represent no more than an average of 75,000 constituents?
6. Should citizens have the ability to trigger national referenda?
7. Assuming that the Senate will continue in its "sober second thought" role and not become a competitor to the House of Commons, should Senators be elected?
8. Should the yearly stipend to political parties be restored with the caveat that citizens should be able to direct the payments between elections?
9. Should we have fixed election dates?
10. If no candidate in a riding gets more than 50% of the vote, should there be a runoff election between the top two candidates.

The specifics of and rationale for making these changes to the electoral system follow. The point is to show what proponents may say in support of these possible changes. Again, I am not wedded to any of these. There are arguments in opposition to each one, but these are not included as the point of this overall exercise is to change the system, not to explain why it should remain unchanged.

1. Internet Voting: It should be possible to vote either via the Internet or in person in the next federal election in 2019.

- Anyone can do their banking and investing over the Internet. We even pay our taxes over the Internet. We also spend thousands of dollars to buy goods and services over the Internet.

If people can engage these complex and private transactions with ease on-line, the time has come to make voting easier by allowing people to vote on line if they so choose. This could go a long way to addressing the perennial problem of declining voter turnout - bring the ability to vote to the voters.

2. Recall: Constituents should be able to recall their Member of Parliament and force a by-election, subject to strict criteria, such as 60% of electors in a riding signing a petition demanding a recall by-election within a 90-day period.

- It is ridiculous that MPs cannot be fired by the people they represent between elections. A recall by-election should be difficult to launch, but if an MP's behavior warrants his or her firing, this option should be available to constituents.

3. Mandatory Voting: Every citizen should be required to vote in a federal election, with a small fine being levied against those who do not do so.

- It works in Australia! Taking 30 minutes every four years to show up to vote is not too much to ask in a democracy (...especially if matched to Internet voting, which will make

voting even more convenient). If voters do not like the candidates, they are free to spoil their ballots, but it is important that everyone be included in an election to add to the integrity of every Parliament's mandate.

4. Ranked Voting/Preferential Ballot: Voters should be able to rank their preferences on a ballot, by indicating their first, second and third choices for their Member of Parliament. Rounds of votes should be counted until someone receives more than 50% of the votes. The candidate who receives the greatest amount of support over 50% will win the seat.

- The supporters of proportional representation argue that with the first-past-the-post system, the winner of a riding is usually elected by only a plurality - that "their vote did not count". Actually, all votes are counted, and these people are really complaining that the person they preferred as their representative, or the party that they are a member of, didn't win. They are also concerned that that the person who did win did it with a level of support that leaves a question in the minds of many as to legitimacy of their mandate.

To get around this, ask that voters rank their top three preferences, and count rounds of votes until the winner shows the greatest level of support over 50%. This will allow the winner to be able to show that they did, in fact, get the over 50% of the vote. It also opens a world of possibility to parties that usually get a significant percentage of the vote, but which cannot convince more than a handful of constituents in a given riding to support their candidate. If they work to become everyone's second choice, they could actually govern one day.

5. No More than 75,000 Constituents per Riding: Make sure that Members of Parliament represent no more than 75,000 people, which would increase the size of the present House of Commons to about 470 members.

- This will dramatically increase the size of the House of Commons, but in so doing, it will also dilute the control that political parties have over their members, freeing them up to more often vote their conscience as informed by the will of their constituents. It does this by making it more remote that a given MP will ever become a minister of the Crown; the desire for which is one primary reason that MPs are loyal to their parties.

6. National Referenda: Citizens should be able to trigger a referendum on any issue, subject to strict criteria, such as 50% of national electors signing a petition within a 90 day period demanding the same.

- Citizens should be able to launch national consultative referendum on issues of the day. It should be hard to do this, limiting the number of referenda that may go ahead, but the option should be available so that whether or not a referendum is launched is not entirely subject to the interests of political parties and politicians that control this country.

7. Senate Reform: The Senate should be elected, with elections being organized by whatever method suits the provinces and territories that they represent, but an elected Senate should continue with its traditional "sober second thought" role so as to not become a legislative competitor to the House of Commons.

- This is 2016, not 1916, or even 1816...it is time for an elected Senate in Canada. As noted by the Supreme Court, our constitutional framework requires that the Senate only perform a "sober second thought" role, and that the lead legislature still be the House of Commons otherwise we need to amend the constitution. Nonetheless, as long as this basic role does not change, there is no reason why the Senate cannot be elected - there are two elected Senators right now.

8. Advertising Between Elections: Spending on political advertising between elections must be registered with Elections Canada, and all such spending must be publicly reported.

- The Conservatives started campaigning between elections. There are no rules governing this activity. If rules during formal campaigns are necessary, so are rules between those campaigns.

9. Restore Public Financing of Political Parties: The yearly stipend that political parties used to receive should be restored, but with the caveat that citizens should be able to direct their stipend to whatever political party they prefer, perhaps through the use of a box on their yearly income tax form.

- If campaign financing is going to be tightened further (see above) it makes sense to restore the yearly stipend to political parties, perhaps at a rate of \$2.00 per voter. In its previous incarnation, the yearly stipend was awarded based on the results of the previous election, so that parties like the Greens would get, say 4% of all available funds because they got 4% of the popular vote in the previous election. This could not be changed between elections no matter what the political party in question did. If voters could direct these funds between elections, they would have an ability to reward those parties that performed well, and punish those that didn't by directing their stipend to whatever party suited their fancy, and withholding it from others.

10. Fixed Election Dates: We have a fixed election date law that is so toothless that its originator was able to ignore it twice when it suited his political purposes. If the Prime Minister is still free to ask the Governor General to dissolve Parliament and call an election whenever he wants, we need to ask whether or not fixed election dates make sense.

- Fixed election dates provide predictability to the electoral system, and ensure that the rules of the game regarding when we have elections are crystal clear. The timing of federal elections is too important to be left to the machinations of political parties and their leaders.

11. Run-Off Votes: If no candidate in a riding gets more than 50% of the vote, should there be a runoff election between the top two candidates.

- This is the simplest way to answer critics of the first-past-the-post system who say that people are elected with less than 50% of the vote in this country. In short, if no one gets more than 50%, have a run-off vote between the top two a couple of weeks later to

ensure that the winner gets more than 50%, and is seen to do so. This is better than preferential ballots as voters get a second look at candidates before casting their second ballot.

Thank you for considering this submission,

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