A Brief to the Special Committee on Electoral Reform

by: R. Wayne Steeves

retired engineer

I offer these thoughtful recommendations as an interested, regularly voting senior citizen. I am fully responsible for their content and no other member of my family should be punished for their publication.
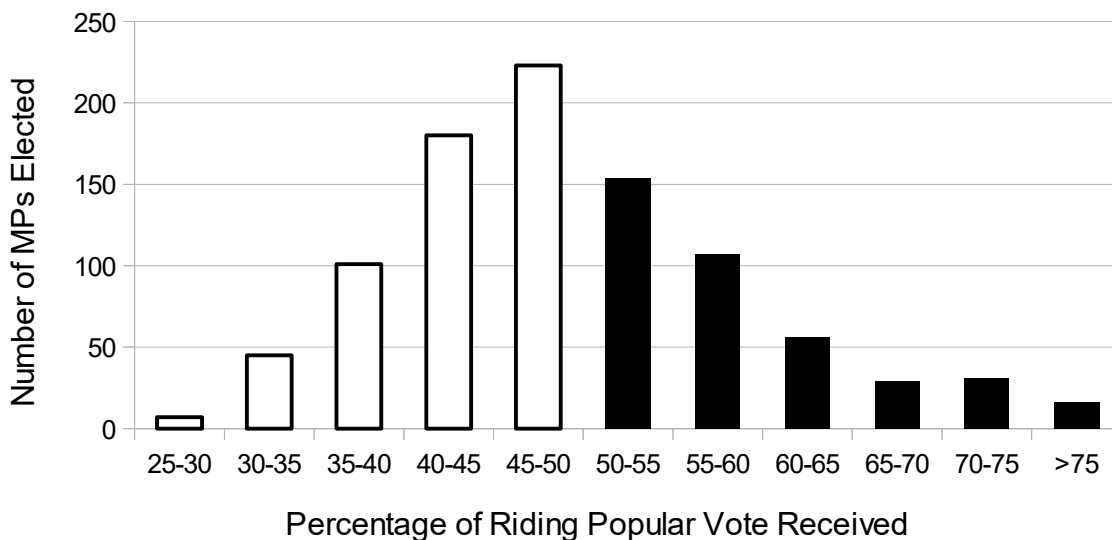
RECOMMENDATION #1:

The government of Canada, as a first priority, should ensure that each MP is elected by a majority of voters.

REASON:

Representative government starts with the riding representative. How many votes must a candidate get to be able to claim they, more than any other candidate, have the right to represent the riding? Clearly they should have more votes than any other candidate. For the **politician** this is enough to claim victory. This is **First Past The Post**.

How many votes did they need to win?

2008, 2011 & 2015 MP Elections

But from the **voters** viewpoint how many votes does the candidate need to represent every voter in the riding? This is what the voter wants when they send the MP to Ottawa. Clearly the voter would be very happy if the candidate had 100% of the vote. Then every voter will have already endorsed the candidate as their representative.
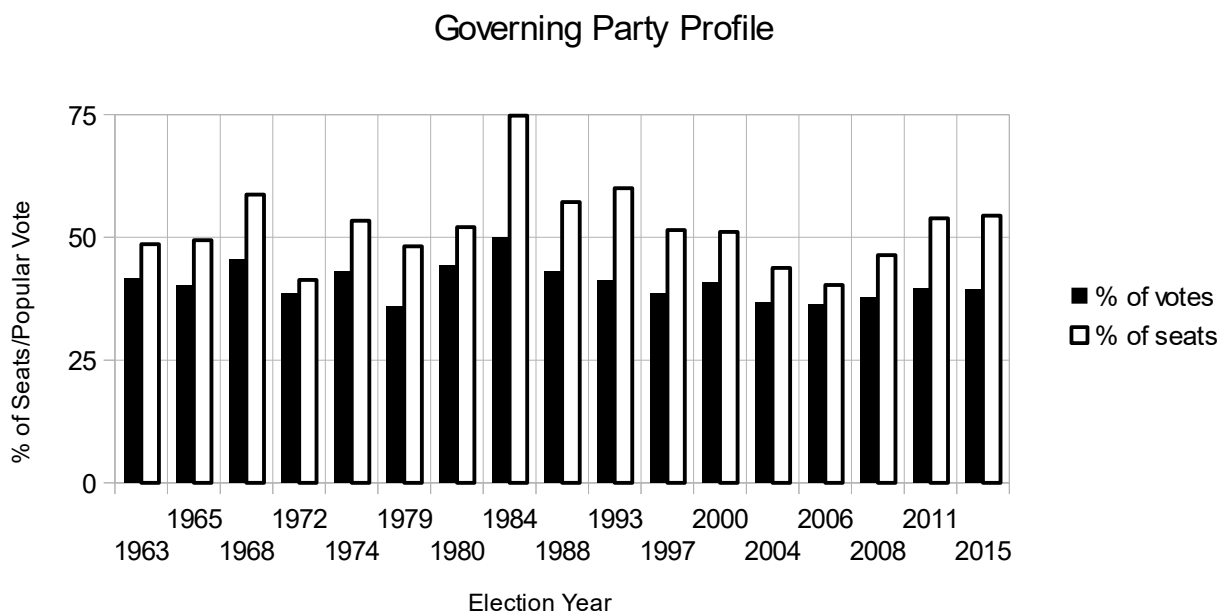
The key question is, then, if you did **not** vote for this candidate, how many votes does the candidate need to convince you that those votes of their supporters can legitimately override your single desire? Well, 100% minus one , i.e. everybody else, would probably convince you. How about 90% of everyone else? 80%? 30%?

Clearly you find yourself in a minority position you'd rather not be in. But you are in a minority position only as long as some of the other voters are in a majority position. At the point in which no group of voters is in a majority position, every voter is in a minority position and has no right to claim their candidate is the most legitimate candidate to represent the **entire** riding.

Thus, any candidate who can muster more than 50% of the votes, a **majority**, is the only candidate whose supporters can justify as being the riding's representative.

If the vote creates only plurality, secondary and tertiary voter preferences can provide additional support to candidates still trying to muster a majority.

The following graph shows that over the past 53 years of FPTP, in spite of 10 majority governments, not one has ruled with a majority of the popular vote!

Governing Party Profile

This weakness in visible representation in the House starts with the weakness of the representation in elections at the riding level. Its resolution will greatly improve the House profile.

EXAMPLE:
The simplest and cheapest way to produce majority results is the Alternative Vote or Ranked Ballot method. This method increases the application of the voter's preferences and better reflects their intent by providing them the option of ranking additional candidates. If they choose to rank all candidates, their preferences will always be carried through to the final count that provides the majority outcome. Every such vote will have a direct impact on the outcome.

SUMMARY:
With First Past The Post the politicians win; with a Majority Vote the voters will win too.
Politicians must earn the right to rule. Implement majority elections.

RECOMMENDATION: #2
Voting is, and must remain, a right.

REASON:
I agree with the Star editorial July 26, 2016 by Peter Macleod and Lyndsay Poaps.

EXAMPLE:
Trying to force people to vote cannot be the best approach to improve turnout.

SUMMARY:
Do not change voting to a duty.

RECOMMENDATION: #3
The government needs to demonstrate they can and will manage the performance of the electoral system in full public view.

REASON:
Our experience in the provinces suggests there are strong political forces at work trying to influence an otherwise analytical decision to improve our electoral systems. The government must keep the process at arms length from these political self-interests.

EXAMPLE:
To do this they should
1) Define the desired principles or ideals of the electoral system.
2) Specify one or more measures that indicate the degree to which each of these principles are met.
3) Assess past results to establish a profile of the existing system.
4) Use this historical data to forecast which changes should improve performance.
5) Implement a non-trivial change that should improve performance.
6) Report the comparative performance of the changed system.
7) Evaluate the cost effectiveness of the change.
8) Retain or reject the change
9) and make everything public.

SUMMARY:
If you can't measure it, you can't manage it. Use a public analytical process for change. Avoid opportunities for political influence.

SUPERSUMMARY:
Implement majority elections of MPs.
Retain voting as a right.
Manage our electoral system analytically and free from political self-interests.