

Brief to ERRE, the Special Committee on Electoral Reform

Submitted by David Arthur

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My brief supports Proportional Representation.

It deals specifically with the principles of effectiveness and legitimacy, my personal experiences meeting people in other countries with PR, the issue of distorted results with FPTP, the lack of understanding for many Canadians, my recommendation for some form of MMP, the need for large top-up regions, and the need for a sufficiently low threshold to provide fair representation.

My brief contains 1200 words.

You, the Special Committee on Electoral Reform, are asking the views of Canadians regarding alternate voting systems to replace the first-past-the-post system.

The first principle, **effectiveness and legitimacy**, must increase confidence that our democratic will, as expressed in our votes, will be fairly translated, must reduce distortion, and must strengthen the link between voter intention and the election of representatives.

The second principle, engagement, must increase voting and participation and must enable inclusion of underrepresented groups in the political process.

To meet these principles, the key qualities in our voting system must be **equal and effective votes**, and a share of seats held by each party that closely reflects the popular vote.

Only proportional representation can achieve this. This fact is recognized by the vast majority of developed democracies in the world, including 85% of EU and OECD countries, who use forms of proportional representation. First-past-the-post fails these principles in all respects.

You have been presented much information and many views from Canadians and experts from around the world. I wish to present to you some **personal experience**.

On a choir tour to Scandinavia a few years ago, we had dinner with a Swedish choir. In our discussions, I told them that in Canada a party could receive 38% of the popular vote, 60% of the seats in parliament, and 100% control. Our Swedish friends sat back in disbelief and said "How can that be?"

On a recent trip visiting South America, I asked our guide in Uruguay about their voting systems. She said that most South American countries have long used proportional systems because "Everyone must have a voice."

On meeting a couple from New Zealand I asked about their experience in changing to MMP and the referendum after several elections that showed clear satisfaction. They said that "even though some New Zealanders who had lost their advantage with FPTP wanted to get rid of PR, we won't let them".

On our visit to Scotland and Ireland this summer, we met people who were convinced that, when Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland created their own parliaments in 1998, they made the best decision in rejecting FPTP in favour of proportional systems.

I am submitting this brief as an individual who has been a long time member of Fair Vote Canada and feel very strongly that the many **distortions that result from our current voting system are unacceptable** in a true representative democracy.

I will list a few of the many examples available. None of these could happen with PR.

- 2008 federal election (14 million voters)

Conservative	5.2 million votes (38%), 143 (46%) seats, minority gov.
Liberal	3.6 million votes (26%), 76 (25%) seats
NDP	2.5 million votes (18%), 37 (12%) seats
BQ	1.4 million votes (10%), 49 (16%) seats
Green	0.9 million votes (7%), 0 (0%) seats

5.2 million Conservative voters receive 143 seats, 0.9 million Green voters 0 seats
- 2015 federal election (18 million voters)

Liberal	39% votes, 54% seats, false majority government
Conservative	32% votes, 29% seats
NDP	20% votes, 13% seats
BQ	5% votes, 3% seats
Green	3.5% votes, 0.3% seats
18 fringe parties	total <0.5% votes, 0 seats

Almost 11 million Canadian voters who did not support the Liberals are underrepresented.

NB/NS/PEI/NL	246 000 (19%) Conservative voters have no representation an equal number of NDP voters have no representation
Toronto	1 million (34%) Conservative voters received 6/46 (13%) seats
Alberta	60% Cons votes, 29(88%) seats, 25% Lib votes, 4(12%) seats
Waterloo Region	45% Lib votes, 80% seats
- Since WW1, 13 of 17 majority governments have been false majority governments that did not represent a majority of the voters
- 1998 Quebec provincial election, Liberals received more votes than PQ but fewer seats
- 1987 New Brunswick provincial election, Liberals received 60% of votes, 100% of seats
- 2001 British Columbia provincial election, Liberals received 57% of votes, 97% of seats

These and many other examples of distortions are the result of first-past-the-post. Unfortunately, **too many Canadians do not understand** this issue. The referendums in Ontario and Prince Edward Island clearly demonstrate this fact as polls showed 50% did not really know what the referendum was about and 70% did not understand the recommended alternative. While Canadians are considered a fair and tolerant society, it may unfortunately be true that some Canadians favour a system that gives their party an advantage at the expense of fair representation for other Canadians.

Canada needs a proportional voting system. FPTP is a winner-take-all but not a truly democratic system. Any analysis of past results will also show that a ranked ballot or alternative vote system will favour a centrist party and will add in second and third place choices to reach 50% majorities for candidates but will not significantly avoid distorted results or provide for effectiveness or legitimacy.

I hope you will **recommend a proportional representation** voting system and help Canada join the vast majority of developed democracies who use PR systems successfully and whose systems go a long way to fulfill all the principles in your mandate. Which PR system you recommend needs to be based on the nature of Canada's society, its diversity, its geography, and the desire for local representation.

My own feeling is that **Mixed Member Proportional MMP** or a variation of it could be designed to fill all these needs very effectively. However, simulations of MMP and STV using small top-up regions or small multi-member ridings improve proportionality for large parties but not for smaller parties. **Top-up regions or multi-member ridings must be large enough**, preferably a minimum of 12-15 seats to guarantee PR for all parties that meet a reasonable threshold.

Some countries use a threshold of 5%. This is too high. The **threshold must be low enough** to recognize that a party with the support of several hundred thousand Canadians should have representation in Parliament. For example, based on our last election where 18 million Canadians voted, a threshold of 2% represents 360 000 voters, and extrapolates to 720 000 of the population of Canada which is approximately the population of either New Brunswick or Nova Scotia. This number of Canadians have a right to representation in parliament. A threshold of 1% represents almost double the population of Prince Edward Island. A reasonable threshold that is lower than 5% would not necessarily create a proliferation of single issue or fringe parties. In the last election 17 such parties together won less than 0.5% of the votes.

I commend the committee for all its work and its consideration of all the witnesses, briefs, and input of Canadians on this very important issue. Canada must join the vast majority of developed democracies who provide fair representation for all their citizens.