

Introduction

This brief is the result of public citizens meeting that was held at the High Park Public Library in Toronto, Ontario on September 29th 2016. It is a summary of the main points raised by the participants in the small group discussion that took place.

Summary of the Discussion

The participants that attended were all in agreement that the current first-past-the-post system does not meet the guiding principles that have been set out by the committee. The participants agreed that the current system is deficient with regards to nearly all of these principles except for local representation. Even though the current system does allow for local representation, it can allow for the election of a local representative whom the majority of voters in the riding did not vote for in some cases so is not legitimate in this regard.

All in attendance believed that any change in the electoral system should maintain some form of local representation. Most participants favoured some model of Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) representation and all favoured proportional representation. There was concern expressed by several people present that any change in the electoral system that is recommended by the committee should be for a system that is easy for the public to understand. Participants did not like the idea of an electoral model with political party lists as a means of electing politicians. One participant mentioned the importance of considering electronic voting or other measures to modernize the voting process.

Participants agreed that the current 'winner take all' electoral system was making political parties increasingly dysfunctional and distant from the general public. The group discussed how political parties have become less and less spaces for different groups in society to convene and develop policy ideas and more and more into electoral machines. The fact that only a tiny percentage of Canadians are members of political parties speaks to the widespread civic disengagement in the country and the sorry state of political parties. It was argued by one participant that a change to an electoral system that was not based on all or nothing politics would perhaps improve the quality of debate and in the country and increase civic engagement.

Conclusions

The participants in the public meeting all wanted to see significant changes to the current electoral system. There was consensus that only an electoral system based on some form of proportional representation would meet the guidelines set out by the committee.