



**FORUM**  
RESEARCH INC.

# **SUBMISSION TO THE SPECIAL PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE ON ELECTORAL REFORM**

---

## **SUMMARY**

### **PUBLIC OPINION OF ELECTORAL REFORM**

**FORUM POLL BY FORUM RESEARCH INC.**

Presented by:

Dr. Lorne Bozinoff, President and CEO

and

Mr. William Schatten, Research Director

## INTRODUCTION

We like to think of ourselves as a civically-minded county, with a passion for a healthy democratic government, yet only a minority of Canadians understand the electoral system under which we elect our representatives.

With the election of Justin Trudeau in Oct. of 2015, the federal government has been working under a campaign promise to “make every vote count” and to review Canada’s federal election system<sup>1</sup>. This campaign promise made it through to the first budget submitted by Justin Trudeau and his Liberal government<sup>2</sup>, and this has led to the creation of the ERRE Special Committee on Electoral Reform.

The Electoral Reform committee is tasked with a challenging and monumental mandate to “understand and study viable alternative voting systems to replace the first-past-the-post system”, as well as mandatory voting and online voting<sup>3</sup>. In conducting their mandate, the committee needs to understand what Canadian’s think and how they feel about our current system, any competing electoral systems, and their receptiveness to change.

As Forum Research is one of Canada’s leading public opinion research firms, we are well positioned to assist the committee in this endeavor. In the proceeding pages, we present high-level findings of our most recent study in a series of Canadian opinion poll on the topic of electoral reform. Our findings will reinforce the inherit complexity in the committee’s task, and at the same time, highlight the importance of this work.

Electoral reform is an important issue among Canadians, ranking comparatively high amongst other pressing issues facing the Canadian government. Canadian’s are also receptive to changing the Canadian electoral system, however, there is a clear knowledge gap which would need to be addressed when the government is ready to move forward with electoral reform.

Importantly, a segment (11%) of non-voters indicate that the reason they didn’t vote was because they felt their vote wouldn’t count, and an even large proportion (28%) who indicate they would have voted if Canada had a different electoral system.

---

<sup>1</sup> *A New Plan for a Strong Middle Class, Liberal Campaign Platform*, (p. 27).  
<https://www.liberal.ca/files/2015/10/New-plan-for-a-strong-middle-class.pdf#27>.  
Accessed on Oct. 12 2016.

<sup>2</sup> *Growing the Middle Class. 2016 Federal Budget*. March 2016. (p. 209)  
<http://www.budget.gc.ca/2016/docs/plan/budget2016-en.pdf#209>. Accessed on Oct.  
12 2016.

<sup>3</sup> *ERRE Special Committee on Electoral Reform, Mandate*, June 7 2016.  
<http://www.parl.gc.ca/Committees/en/ERRE/About#collapse-mandate>. Accessed on  
Oct. 12 2016.

## METHODOLOGY

The Forum Poll™ is Forum Research Inc.'s public opinion survey division. All Forum Poll surveys are non-sponsored and non-partisan surveys which seek to measure the public's opinion on key and trending issues.

The Forum Poll™ discussed in this research brief was conducted through an interactive voice response telephone survey of 1143 randomly selected Canadians 18 years of age or older. The survey was conducted between October 7th and 9th, 2016.

Results based on the total sample are considered accurate +/- 3%, 19 times out of 20. Subsample results will be less accurate.

Where appropriate, the data has been statistically weighted by age, region, and other variables to ensure that the sample reflects the actual population according to the latest Census data.

All Forum Poll data are housed in the Data Library of the Department of Political Science at the University of Toronto.

With offices across Canada and around the world, 100% Canadian-owned Forum Research is one of the country's leading survey research firms. This Forum Poll™ and other polls may be found at Forum's poll archive at [www.forumresearch.com/polls.asp](http://www.forumresearch.com/polls.asp)

## ISSUE IMPORTANCE AMONG CANADIANS

Canadians were asked their opinion regarding the importance of different issues, including Electoral Reform. They were asked to rank the importance of each issue on a scale of 1 through 9, where 1 was 'Not at all Important' and 9 was 'Very Important'. The average score for each issue is shown in Figure 1.

Canadians consider all the issues polled as important, as indicated by rankings of greater than 4.5 out of 9 possible points. Of the 6 issues polled, Electoral reform received the fourth highest score.

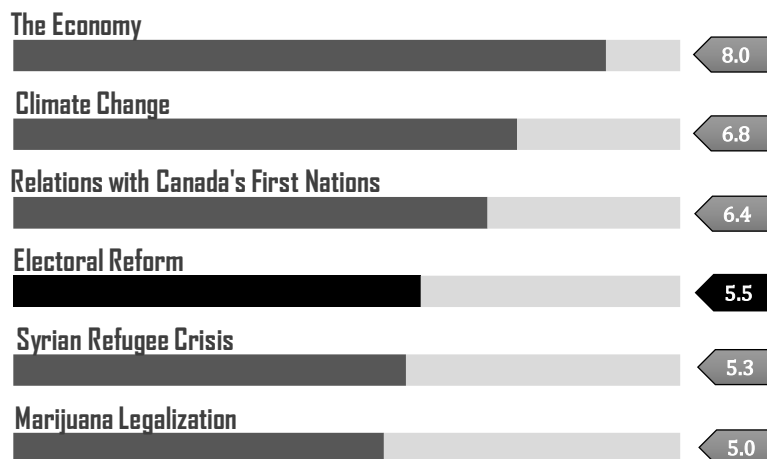
Canadians consider the Economy the most important issue (8/9 points). Other than the Economy, Canadians rank the importance of Electoral Reform (5.5/9 points) lower than the issues of Climate Change (6.8/9 points) and Relations with Canada's First Nations (6.4/9 points). Canadians however rank the importance of Electoral reform higher than that of the Syrian Refugee Crisis (5.3/9 points) and Marijuana Legalization (5.0/9 points).

When the importance of Electoral Reform is considered in relation to political party preference, Canadians rank Electoral Reform as an important issue irrespective of political party voted for in the last election, with the exception of Canadians that voted for the Conservative Party in the last election (4.5/9 points). Canadians that voted Conservative in the last election rank the importance of Electoral Reform significantly lower than Canadians who voted for other parties.

In relation to region, Canadian located in Quebec rank the importance of Electoral Reform (6/9 points) significantly higher than those located throughout the rest of Canada.

**FIGURE 1: MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE**

Average score shown. Canadians were asked to rank each item on a scale of 1 through 9, where 1 was 'Not at all Important' and 9 was 'Very Important'.

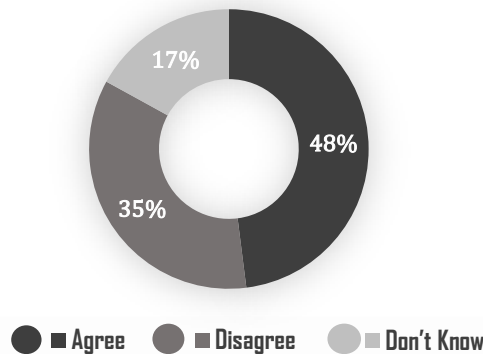


## DOES CANADA NEED TO CHANGES ITS ELECTORAL SYSTEM?

In order to gage receptivity to Electoral Reform, Canadians were asked whether they agree or disagree that Canada needs to change its electoral system (Figure 2). It appears that around half of Canadians are receptive to change, with 48 percent agreeing that Canada needs to change it electoral system. Younger Canadians in particular appear to be receptive to change, with just over half of Canadians under the age of 34 years (53%) agreeing that Canada needs to change its electoral system. Further, Canadians living in Quebec (50%) and British Columbia (55%) appear to view electoral system change more favourably.

It should be noted however that no small proportion of Canadians appear to be unreceptive to change; Just under 4-in-10 Canadians (35%) disagree with the statement that Canada needs to change its electoral system. Otherwise, just under 2-in-10 Canadians (17%) appear to remain undecided regarding whether Canada needs to change its electoral system.

**FIGURE 2: DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE CANADA NEEDS TO CHANGE ITS ELECTORAL SYSTEM, THAT IS, THE WAY WE VOTE?**



## AWARENESS OF REVIEW COMMITTEE

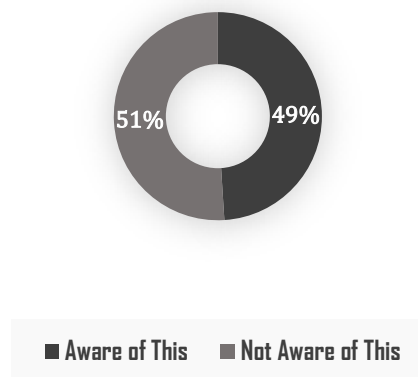
Canadians were asked if they were aware that the government has formed a Special Committee on Electoral Reform to hold hearings on Canada’s electoral reform. As shown in Figure 4, this question has produced a nearly even split in respondents with 49% being aware, and 51% being not aware of the Special Committee.

Older Canadians (55 and over) are significantly more likely, compared to the younger demographic (under 34 to 44), to be aware of the Special Committee (59% avg. compared to 42% avg.). Males are significantly more likely to be aware than females (57% compared to 42%). Further, awareness increases as income levels increase. Accordingly, Canadians in the highest income category are significantly more likely to be aware of the Special Committee than those in lowest income category (64% compared to 41%).

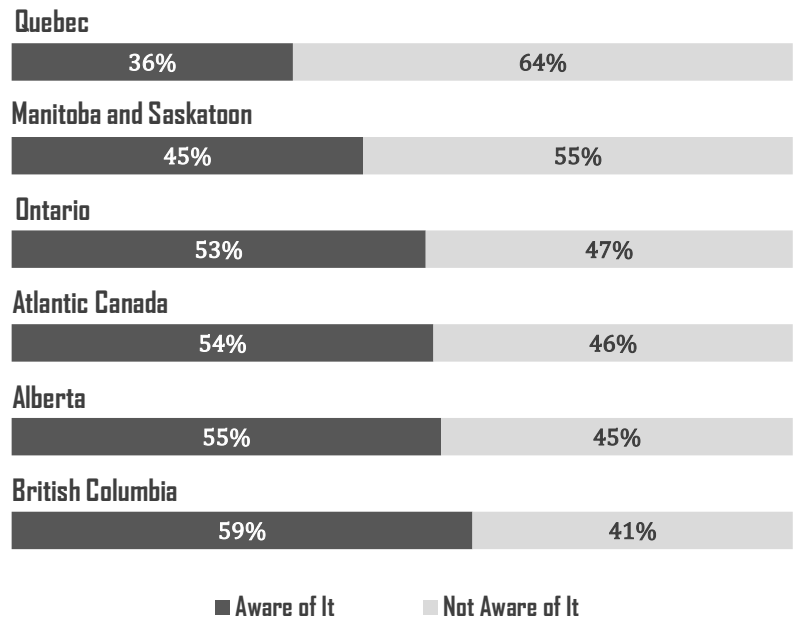
As shown in Figure 5, respondents in Quebec are significantly less likely to be aware of the Special Committee compared to all other provinces. Meantime, respondents from British Columbia are the most likely to be aware.

It’s worth noting that respondents who agree that Canada needs an electoral system change are more likely to be aware of the Special Committee than those who do not agree with that sentiment (56% compared to 48%).

**FIGURE 4: WERE YOU AWARE THE GOVERNMENT HAS FORMED A SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON ELECTORAL REFORM TO HOLD HEARINGS ON CANADA'S ELECTORAL SYSTEM?**



**FIGURE 5: AWARENESS OF COMMITTEE BY REGION**



## COULD CANADIANS DESCRIBE DIFFERENT FORMS OF ELECTORAL SYSTEMS?

To examine whether Canadians understand the different electoral systems, they were asked whether they could describe each system to a friend (Figure 6). 6-in-10 reported that they could describe the Proportional Representation system (63%), and about half could describe First-Past-The-Post system (54%). Comparatively, only around 4-in-10 of Canadians (41%) report that they could describe the Ranked Ballot System.

Though a large number of Canadians claim they could describe the different systems, when they were asked to identify the electoral system that Canada currently uses (Figure 7), only 4-in-10 Canadians (40%) correctly identified First-Past-The-Post. Addressing this apparent knowledge gap would necessitate the implementation of an informative and accessible public engagement campaign that seeks to inform Canadian's about both the current electoral system, what the proposed changes are, and how it will impact voting in upcoming Federal elections.

FIGURE 6: IF YOU WERE ASKED BY A FRIEND, COULD YOU DESCRIBE EACH OF THE FOLLOWING ELECTORAL SYSTEMS?

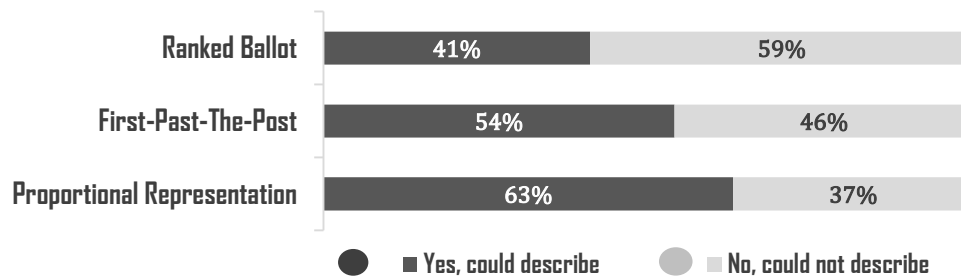
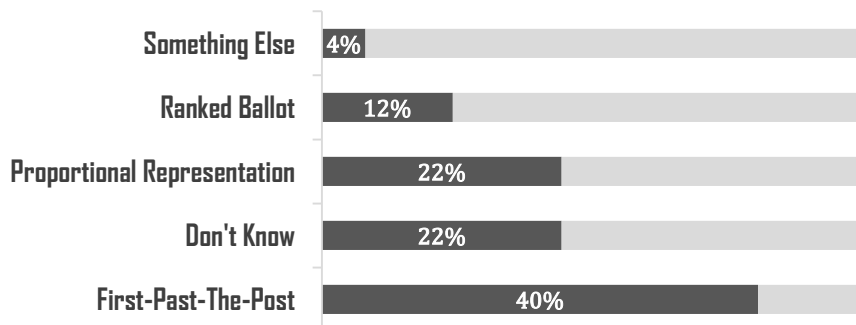


FIGURE 7: WHICH OF THESE ELECTORAL SYSTEMS DOES CANADA

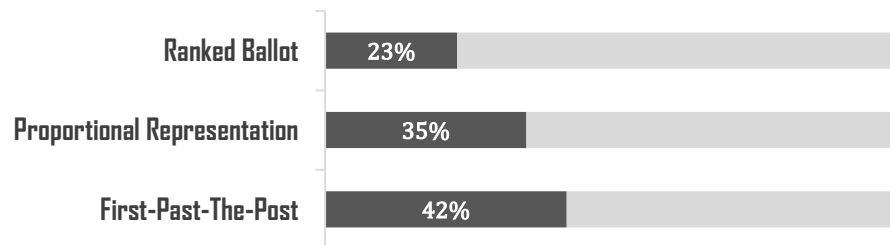


## WHICH ELECTORAL SYSTEM DO CANADIANS PREFER?

When asked which of the three electoral systems they prefer, 4-in-10 chose First-Past-The-Post (42%), just fewer chose Proportional Representation (35%), and 2-in-10 chose Ranked Ballot (23%), shown in Figure 8. Older Canadians (35+) are more likely to prefer the First-Past-The-Post system, compared to the youngest Canadians (under 34) who prefer the Proportional Representation system. Canadians in Quebec and British Columbia are more like to prefer the Proportional Representation system compared to all other provinces where Canadians prefer the First-Past-The-Post system.

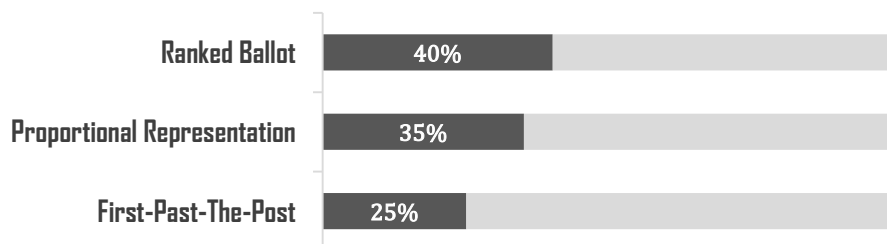
When Canadian's were asked what their second choice was for an electoral system, the majority selected a ranked ballot system (40%) as opposed to a First-Past-The-Post (25%) or Proportional

**FIGURE 8: PLEASE TELL ME WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING ELECTORAL SYSTEMS YOU PREFER**



Representation (35%) system.

**FIGURE 9: AND WHAT IS YOUR SECOND CHOICE OF ELECTORAL SYSTEM?**





**TABLE 1: ELECTORAL SYSTEM DESCRIPTIONS PROVIDED**

<b>First-Past-The-Post</b>	First-past-the-post, that is, the current system in Canada, where the candidate who gets the most votes in each riding wins, even if they don't get fifty percent of the votes
<b>Proportional Representation</b>	Proportional Representation, that is, where parties are awarded seats based on their proportion of the total vote. In this system, your MP may not be the person who wins the most votes in your riding
<b>Ranked Ballot</b>	Ranked Ballot, that is, where voters pick a first, second and other choices, and if no candidate gets fifty percent of the first choices, then the second and other choices are added together until someone gets fifty percent of the choices. In this system, your MP may not be the person who gets the greatest number of first choices in your riding

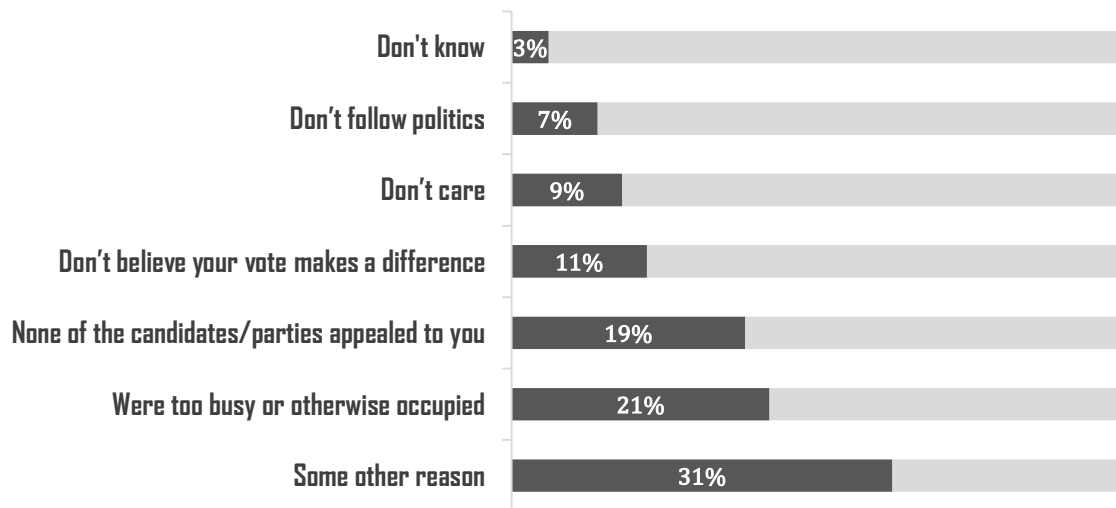
## CANADIANS THAT DID NOT VOTE IN THE 2015 FEDERAL ELECTION

Canadians who did not vote in the 2015 Federal Election were asked why they did not do so. The two most popular provided reasons were: “too busy or otherwise occupied” (21%), and “None of the candidates/parties appealed to me” (19%). 3-in-10 reported that they did not vote for some other reason (31%).

Further, the same sample of Non-Voters was asked if they would have voted in the last Federal Election if Canada had a different electoral system. 5-in-10 reported that they would not have voted (52%), meanwhile nearly 3-in-10 reported that they would have voted (28%), and 2-in-10 did not know (20%).

**FIGURE 10: WHY DID YOU NOT VOTE IN THE LAST FEDERAL ELECTION?**

\* Canadians that did not vote in 2015 Federal Election



**FIGURE 11: WOULD YOU HAVE VOTED IN THE LAST FEDERAL ELECTION IF CANADA HAD A DIFFERENT ELECTORAL SYSTEM?**

\*Canadians that did not vote in the 2015 Federal election

