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**Submission to the Special Parliamentary Committee on Electoral Reform, October 7, 2016**  
**By Patricia McGrail**

## **SUMMARY**

During the 2015 election, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told Canadians that FPTP was broken and that the Liberal Party would “Make Every Vote Count.” This pledge echoed a promise made in 1921 by PM Mackenzie King, a proposal made by PM Pierre Trudeau in 1981 and numerous studies undertaken since then.

Canadians believed Mr. Trudeau and have been lining up, by the hundreds, at microphones all over the country to say that they want proportional representation. The Electoral Reform Parliamentary Committee (“ERRE”), as it currently operates, is the best of what the Liberals have offered us to date. ERRE demonstrates how Canadians expect their Parliament to operate. We also appreciate Minister Monsef’s consultations and the over 150 electoral reform town halls that have been held to date.

Canadians are daring to hope that the promise of ERRE will be realized to bring all Canadians together in a new era of revitalized democracy and collaboration for our common good. To that end, here are my expectations:

- Canada must have a well-designed proportional system to provide all citizens with equal and effective votes. Canadians deserve a Parliament that looks like them and is accountable to them. No winner-take-all voting system (FPTP, Alternative Vote, or Two-Round) can provide this.
- It is the role of our Parliament to ensure that Canadians can enjoy this civic right in time for the next federal election in 2019.
- If further public consultation is required, a citizens’ assembly may be the best vehicle. However, since there have already been 13 Canadian studies on this issue, all recommending an element of proportionality, further consultations and discussions should focus only on the particular proportional voting system that suits Canada best. It appears that either MMP or STV, or some variation thereof, would be best suited for Canada.
- I do not support either mandatory voting or online voting. Both are insignificant to what is needed now and serve as red herrings to derail proportional representation.
- Sufficient resources must be provided to ensure that Canadians understand how to use their new voting system now, and in the future.
- I do not support referenda, in general. However, it may be prudent to have citizens approve continued use of the new proportional system after it has been in place for at least three elections.

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- The Guiding Principles of the Electoral Reform Committee are fulfilled by Proportional Representation. In brief:
  - 1. Effectiveness and legitimacy,
  - 2. Voter engagement,
  - 3. Accessibility and inclusiveness,
  - 4. Integrity, and
  - 5. Local representation.

## Background

Although I have voted at every election my entire life and followed political issues in the news, I stepped into a MP's office for the first time about 3 years ago to discuss electoral reform. Once retired, I had time to contemplate the full extent of the divergence between our governance and the needs and aspirations of Canadians - and the possible reasons for it.

I visited Parliament for the first time and attended a meeting of the Government Operations and Estimates Committee. I heard newly-installed Auditor General, Michael Ferguson, explain that he had no way to confirm that what had been spent by the government had been approved by Parliament. Budgets and accounting records were prepared on a different basis with no means of reconciliation. The subsequent discussion around the table made it clear that our then-government saw no problem with this grave failing of accountability to Canadians. Reports of dysfunctional Parliamentary committees clearly had substance.

My former Conservative MP was planning a Democratic Reform Town Hall to discuss Michael Chong's Reform Bill. He shared his dismay with the way Parliamentary committees operated saying that he had been scolded by his colleagues for some insignificant support to an opposition member. My MP was very receptive to including Professor Dennis Pilon in his planned town hall to discuss Proportional Representation (PR). It was a very successful event with over 100 attendees. After Dr. Pilon's presentation, my MP told me he hoped to include PR in his next private members' bill. And so began my interest in electoral reform.

I have since become acquainted with all eleven current MPs in Mississauga and Brampton, co-hosted a few electoral reform town-halls and a Community Dialogue. I have viewed or listened to 39 ERRE hearings and live-tweeted most of them. I am not an "elite" or "special interest." I am simply a citizen who became thoroughly disillusioned with our governance and had time to do something about it. I have voted for all parties at one time or another and now shun party partisanship.

I was a single parent and now have grandchildren. I became a Chartered Accountant and entered public accounting when it was rare for women to do so. Being a tax specialist kept me closer to home. I learned to appreciate ***collaboration, cooperation and focusing on what is important – attributes that have served most Canadians very well.***

## Making Votes Count

In the last election, 51% of all votes cast elected no-one. Boards of Directors answer only to those who hold enough shares to out-vote everyone else. Not sure why we expect governments to be accountable to most Canadians who elect no-one.

Locking votes up in silos so that they elect no-one is a masterful way of effectively disenfranchising many. Subject to manipulation by gerrymandering and robocalls, single-member ridings are a great vehicle for “dividing and conquering” citizens. ***It is not fanciful to say that many votes don’t “count” under winner-take-all voting systems. It is simply arithmetic.***

No voting system ensures that everyone casts a successful vote for a candidate or party, nor should it. But proportional voting systems ensure that a much higher proportion of citizenry elects a representative or party of their own choosing. We can do much better. We are greatly diminished by not doing so.

Democracy is about representation for all. I cannot remember casting anything, other than a strategic vote to keep the most threatening candidate out, unless I was in a “safe” riding and my vote did not count anyway. I certainly do not feel represented if my MP consistently votes for policies that I oppose and do not meet my own needs and aspirations.

## Changing the Culture of Government

I know something about the culture of large institutions from working in Big Four accounting firms and servicing multinationals. Institutions become permeated with their own unique culture. In my experience, both leadership and the foundational objectives of an institution shape culture.

Small changes can reverberate to change the culture of an organization. But the institutional memory of large organizations, based on how things have been done before, can make change slow, even with the most determined leadership. Lasting change, real change happens at the foundation – where incentives and motivations are created.

How MPs are elected greatly impacts how they behave once in Parliament. The voting system is the foundation that provides the incentives and motivations for certain behaviours. Winner-take-over voting systems require lock-step military precision to corner the handful of swing voters who will determine whether a party wins the golden ring – a majority government that gives them 100% control. Hence, we get strict party discipline and an overbearing PMO.

It is trite, but true, that absolute power breeds corruption. Canadians know this well. How often have we booted out one corrupt government, only to do so again, and again.

Proportional voting systems change the incentives for candidates and parties. Candidates and parties

can present more creative platforms because they are not all seeking votes from the same swing riders. They can seek their own constituencies and know that they will get seats according to the strength of their support.

Multi-party coalitions and minority governments require the collaboration of other parties in order to pass legislation in behalf of a true majority of citizens. On the whole, PR governments are just as, or more stable, than winner-take-all governments with less policy lurch. PR governments have greater continuity and can better solve the problems that need long-term planning.

Can we undertake reforms that will improve the operation of Parliament without proportional representation? In my opinion, any lasting, significant improvement requires a well-designed proportional voting system. We certainly need many other Parliamentary and party reforms. I see PR as the foundation and catalyst for those needed reforms.

***As for expecting real reform under a winner-take-all voting system, can a leopard change its spots?*** The whole premise of winner-take-all voting systems is an affront to fairness and equality in our modern age. As a society, we are leaving many serious challenges for our children to deal with. We also need to leave them a solid foundation and the ability to govern for their greater good.

### **Alternative Vote (winner-take-all ranked ballots)**

Westminster parliamentary systems are susceptible to one-party rule due to their poor separation of executive from legislature. Single-party majorities are an easy target for global forces that threaten to supplant our sovereign governments. ***A primary motivation for seeking proportional representation is the elimination of single-party majority governments.***

Alternative Vote (AV) generally results in more single-party majority governments. Even with both mandatory voting and AV, Australia has false majority governments, with six wrong winners since 1940.

AV does not even guarantee a majority winner in individual ridings when optional preferences are used. Many exhausted ballots leave too few votes to transfer to achieve a majority winner.

AV offers little benefit for voters but often empowers major parties at the expense of smaller parties. After almost a century of AV, Australia is a duopoly. It's powerful, elected proportional Senate is needed to moderate the AV majorities in the House of Representatives. Gridlock often results.

Proportional representation is needed where government policy is generated – in the lower house.

## Fragmentation and “Extremist” Parties

Fear has become a tool employed in elections because it is effective under winner-take-all voting systems. I live in a community where, as a Caucasian, I am a minority. My community is peaceful but I am keenly aware that there is a delicate balance that is easily disturbed. Islamophobic material posted online during recent elections was shocking. Winner-take-all elections fuel the “us versus them” mentality.

FPTP has meant that Canada seldom has a government that is represented in every region. Geographic concentration gives some parties too many seats while denying representation to many others. National concerns such as climate change remain unaddressed while provinces bicker. Regional resentments build up and are acted out in counterproductive ways. FPTP allowed a separatist party to become the Official Opposition when it did not even have a majority of the popular vote in Quebec.

Given this, it is frankly preposterous to say that a proportional voting system will exacerbate extremism. What is often called “extremism” is merely another legitimate point of view. Parties that acquire sufficient popular support, that exceeds a minimum threshold, deserve expression. More diverse views may be expressed under PR but, in order, to have any impact, they must find common ground with the majority. ***The tail does not wag the dog.***

Extremism, to the extent it exists, is more easily moderated when expressed, than subverted. PR does not promote extremism, although it may make it more visible. We will deal with it appropriately. Fear-mongers should not be allowed to dictate our voting system.

Much of this fear-mongering comes from a privileged minority that has a vested interest in maintaining a winner-take-all voting system. We cannot call ourselves a democracy if the few rule the many.

## Political Will and Cynicism

Due to its natural wealth, Canada has prospered despite a winner-take-all voting system. But that prosperity is increasingly distributed inequitably. Climate change threatens all. There are tough choices to be made by future generations. Civil unrest will grow if citizens are denied the representative and accountable governance provided by effective proportional representation.

For decades, political actors have denied many Canadians full participation in their governance through myth-making and obfuscations. Frankly, a government that truly believes in evidence-based decision-making has no choice but to deliver a proportional voting system based upon the evidence presented in at least 39 ERRE hearings, numerous town halls and the 13 previous Canadian studies. The Liberal government has a historic opportunity to give Canadians what they have been denied so long. ***Focus and leadership is needed now to get the job done.***