

Dear Honourable Members of the Committee,

My name is Katie Duffy and I am a 4th year political science student at the University of Ottawa. I am writing to contribute to the current discussion on electoral reform happening around the country.

While I trust you, the members of the committee, to put forward a report containing a workable electoral system to replace the current one, there are a few principles that I wish to be considered as the report is drafted and ultimately, a new electoral system is recommended.

First and foremost, the new electoral system must be easy to understand. One of the benefits of first past the post (FPTP) is that it is the most simple of all electoral systems, and therefore easily explained to Canadians. The new system must be just as easy to understand in order for Canadians to have the ability to grasp how their government is elected.

While a major critique of the current FPTP system is that it creates false majority governments, this system has produced efficient governments that have been able to pass important legislation effectively. One risk of systems that constantly produce minority governments is that it slows down the legislative process considerably. While the opposition members are better able to hold the government to account in a minority situation, the current political climate in the House is very hostile, and would need to be changed to allow for more cooperation and less party discipline in order for minority governments to become effective.

Moreover, implementing an electoral system that requires lists, such as the proportional representation electoral system, has the potential to yield different problems than those already present. By electing MPs off of lists, it removed the personal connection citizens have with their representatives. This would be especially true if it was up to political parties to create these lists. This would create the potential for government to become composed of political party “elites” as opposed to the voting population. Having closed lists also has the potential to further disenfranchise women, Indigenous persons, and visible minorities, as there would be no guarantee that these groups would be effectively represented in these lists. Any new electoral system should keep these groups and their ability to participate in the legislative process in mind.

Finally, it is crucial that whichever electoral system replaces FPTP maintains local representation. Canada is an extremely geographically diverse country, yet its population is concentrated into a few urban centres. If local representation is abolished, elections would be decided by those that live in these centres, meaning that Canadians in rural areas could potentially have their concerns ignored. In addition, having a local representative provides a link between Canadians and their federal government. Each Canadian having a local representative in Ottawa has been a foundation of our electoral system since Confederation, and despite all issues with the legitimacy of the first past the post system, this aspect of it is still of vital importance.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my recommendations and I look forward to reading your report on December 1st.

Regards,

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