

Dear Honourable Members of the Committee,

As a politically engaged youth, I looked forward to voting for the first time in the 2015 federal election, but not everyone gets excited about voting. While the voter turnout increased in the last election, it was still low as many Canadians felt that their vote does not count. The First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system contributes to apathy and a loss of faith in the election process because it does not lead to an effectively representative government. FPTP uses a simple majority to choose an elected official, so people who voted for the losing candidates have their votes counted, but their voices go unheard. FPTP also fosters false majorities. Political parties without even half of the popular vote can have all of the power in parliament if they have enough seats. Additionally, minority groups, women, and Indigenous people are not fully represented in the House of Commons because they are less likely to be chosen as candidates for male-dominated political parties. There are many Canadians who are left out by the current electoral system and this must be changed. While I do not know what electoral system would best replace FPTP, I can support a number of wider ideas and principles that can help improve the representativeness of parliament, and increase confidence and engagement in the electoral process.

To improve the accessibility and inclusivity of voting, Canadians should have more time to vote. Prince Edward Island's electoral reform plebiscite is going to be held for over a week long period to give people more opportunities to vote. This practise should be extended to federal elections because people would be able to fit voting into their schedules better which could help increase turn out. Additionally, over the phone voting and online voting would help increase accessibility and convenience because it would help those from rural regions and people with mobility difficulties cast their ballots. Further, polling stations on campus should be continued. They were convenient and helped students from outside of the riding or province know where to go to vote.

I recently helped lead a student town hall on electoral reform at the University of Ottawa, and a reoccurring topic was civic education. Many of us from a variety of provinces felt that our civics classes in high school were inadequate and did not teach us about the voting process. Ensuring that high school students are educated on how to register to vote and about the voting process would help promote more first time voting. People who vote the first time are more likely to be life long voters, so greater education would encourage more people to vote. The Minister of Democratic Institutions should work with provincial education ministers to help create a more valuable civic education.

One process I believe does NOT improve engagement is mandatory voting. Mandatory voting only disguises apathy; it does not fix any of the issues that create apathy. Voting would become a burden and an obligation. Ideally, people should engage with the electoral process because they believe that their vote actually counts. We should be focusing more on how Canadians feel about their representation and the electoral process rather than the exact percentage of people who vote.

One of the most common suggestions to replace FPTP is Proportional Representation (PR). While there are some advantages to this system, such as the representation of every vote in parliament, there are some issues that should be considered. In some PR systems, people do not directly elect their representatives. This is a problem because Canada is a regionally diverse country, so it is important to have those regions represented by people who understand them. Additionally, electoral districts hold their Members of Parliament accountable if they have the power to directly elect them because they can change their votes in the next election if there are scandals or inadequate representation. Further, PR usually involves a list system where parties present a list of candidates. In some forms, voters can choose from the list, but in others, parties control the order in which candidates are elected. The order of the list can inhibit the representativeness of parliament, and if such a system is chosen, parties need to be encouraged to put minority, women, and Indigenous candidates on the list in an equitable way. For example, women could be listed in every other slot to encourage gender representation.

What ever new system is chosen, it is important that we make voting more accessible to Canadian by using new technologies and lengthening the voting period. It is also imperative that Canadians receive adequate civic education so that they are more likely to engage in the political process. Moreover, I believe that we need a new electoral system because there are a lot of issues with FPTP. What I would most like to see in a new system is greater representation and real opportunities for women, Indigenous, and minority groups to be presented in parliament.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my suggestions, and for your valuable work on electoral reform. I look forward to hearing the committee's recommendations in the coming months.

Sincerely,

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