

Submission to the Special Committee on Electoral Reform

Community Dialogue: Summary Notes

On September 17, 2016 at Kitchener City Hall, the Waterloo Region Greens hosted a community dialogue for proportional representation. Over 40 attendees came from many experience levels, party affiliations, and demographic groups.

Sharon Somerville, a local representative from Fair Vote Canada Waterloo Region, opened the event with a brief overview of the electoral reform process and an informational summary of the major electoral systems.

We then conducted small group discussions based on the questions provided by the Ministry of Democratic Institutions:

1. The first question asked participants about motivations for voting (or not voting).
2. The second question asked participants to evaluate the Ministry's five principles for electoral reform.
3. Finally, participants were asked about the pros and cons of four electoral systems: first-past-the-post, alternative vote, single transferable vote, and mixed-member proportional.

The notes that follow were collected from the small groups, compiled, and edited for clarity. They do not represent a homogenous opinion of the group, but they reflect the diversity of views which we have faithfully recorded for your consideration.

About Waterloo Region Greens: Waterloo Region Greens is an umbrella organization for the five Waterloo Region branches of the Green Party of Canada and Green Party of Ontario. Past events organized by Waterloo Region Greens include community discussions on voting reform and basic income, and a documentary movie screening about climate change.

Sincerely,

Sam Nabi, Communications Chair, Kitchener Centre Federal Green Party
Kitchener, ON

Date: September 17, 2016
Time: 3:00 pm – 4:30 pm
Location: Council Chambers, Kitchener City Hall, 200 King St W, Kitchener, ON N2G 4G7

Participants

Evan Rosamond	N2G 2X9
Stacey Danckert	N2M 2L9
Windsor Viney	N2G 4V3
Alim Nathoo	N2G 4L9
Torry Chen	N2V 2N5
Richard Walsh	N2K 2Z5
Chloe France	N2M 2T9
Joe Craddock	N2J 1L5
Shannon Purves-Smith	N3B 1Z6
Christopher Vollick	N2K 2V8
Mikhail Gogolev	N2L 6K8
Arvo Ranni	N2E 2V2
Larry Russwurm	N2C 1G2
Jason Hammond	N2H 6T8
Lindsay Orr	N2L 2Y8
Stephen Weber	N2H 5N4
Daniel Chirilenco	N3A 4M2
Robert Campbell	N2G 1Q3
Teresa Cornwell	N2M 3V3
Nina Iourkova	N2G 6K8
Mason Slavner	M6C 1N4
Margaret Girodat	N0G 1Z0
Kelly Anthony	N2L 2H2
Rup Chatterjee	
Jayanthi Chatterjee	
Julian Ichim	N2G 3M6
Bryan Izzard	N2J 2H3
David Weber	N2P 2X4
Donald Lacasse	N1R 1N2

Do you and your friends vote, and if not why not?

Most people I know don't vote, because they feel it doesn't make a difference.

The major three parties are all the same, and once in office there is no accountability or right to recall them.

My acquaintances and friends that vote tend to be the ones who support the major parties. The ones who don't vote are the ones who support other parties and don't think that their vote will count, so they don't bother to vote.

I don't vote, but my family does, and they just do it so that they have the right to complain.

I don't vote because politicians aren't accountable, so I don't feel like it will change anything.

Upper-middle-class, white, privileged people tend to vote (even for parties that don't win)

There is a symbolic value to voting

People feel that they have been browbeaten into voting. They're not doing it from the heart.

We feel like our vote doesn't matter.

I know social work students that vote because they care about issues that are not being addressed by government.

There are lineups at university for advanced polls. Students vote!

Many are reluctant to vote because they are not educated about issues.

I am from a politically interested family, and my friends do vote.

My family only voted for a perceived "winner" in the municipal election. Federally, they want a chance to have their vote count.

I don't vote regularly but I am discouraged by the results. I try to encourage others within the current system.

I vote when possible, but current situation only helps the elite.

A change is needed. Some youth don't vote because they are discouraged by the election results at odds with their worldview.

I vote but I don't push others. Usually the results are unfair. First past the post is unfair.

I vote, but without confidence in the system.

Some reasons for not voting include frustration, apathy or lack of knowledge.

Young voters do vote, when issues like tuition are at the forefront. Decision to vote is value laden.

Many students would rather vote at university than home.

There is disillusionment with the system. People would vote differently if the system were different.

Immigrants don't feel like they belong, which can translate to lack of voting.

Voting in the current system produces distortions. Lack of participation is tied to representation.

Do you feel that the House of Commons represents Canada accurately?

No, we don't have a say in what goes on in Parliament, and they make decisions without consulting us.

It is an elected dictatorship. We put them in power, and they do whatever they want.

No, the political structure as designed and the parties it advances provide limited options.

The Green vote is not represented accurately. But I'm OK with that, as the Liberals are my second choice.

I don't like majorities where there is only one voice. Proportional representation would offer more choices.

This is a philosophically difficult question. I know what I believe and don't feel my vote counts.

We don't hear what real representation looks like.

Parliament is not the only way to govern Canada – we need to be looking at other ways we are represented.

Some of Canada's diversity is represented in the House, but not all.

We need a democracy where everyone is equal.

There is a sense that something is changing for the better.

Some cynicism remains, but more hopeful than last year because consultation is happening.

In favour of expanded civics education.

Government has a negative image, separated from "regular people".

There is no accountability in government.

Difficult to assess representation, as I don't know information about candidates.

Few people are engaged at the local level, parliament is seen as distant.

Voting is not an effective tool to ensure representation.

MPs do not represent that you, they represent their party. There is minority rule.

The rules need to change.

Not enough people vote, so the MPs cannot represent everyone.

Whipped votes distort independence.

What principles are most and least important for you?

The small groups considered the following five principles:

- **Effectiveness and legitimacy:** Reducing distortions and representing the popular vote
- **Engagement:** Improving participation of underrepresented groups in elections
- **Accessibility and inclusiveness:** Making it easy to vote
- **Integrity:** Confidence and trust in election outcomes
- **Local representation:** Keeping MPs accountable to their constituents

There was a strong sense in all groups that all five principles are important, and that they are mutually reinforcing. If you improve one, you will improve them all. This was the overwhelming theme for these questions. Below are some specific comments that expand on these topics further.

They're all important principles. But for any of these things to come about, we need to reduce the distortion in the popular vote.

We can accomplish all five of these principles with the right kind of electoral reform, so we don't need to choose.

Local representation and engagement are most important to me. It seems like all of the other principles fit into those categories.

Local representation is important, but it can be at a slightly larger scale; I would be okay if we had larger ridings than we do now.

The one principle that needs the most attention is representativeness and engagement. If the electoral system represented us better we would be more engaged.

Local representation is the most important for me. I'm from Northern Ontario, and rules are made here that affect our way of life up north, and this is wrong because our lives and our needs are so different up there.

It's hard to represent areas that are too large geographically.

Having a local representative doesn't make them accountable if they are still following the party's orders.

The country is not a homogenous spot. People need to represent an area.

Effectiveness and legitimacy and representing the popular vote are most important so that people can vote for the candidate they actually support.

We need to be able to recall local candidates if they aren't doing what we have asked them to do.

One member of the group stated that their most important principle is to reinstate the per-voter subsidy. Some people just vote to direct funds to their desired party, even if they have no chance of winning.

If people feel like their members of parliament are accountable, then there would be integrity and inclusiveness. Integrity comes if people feel they are part of the system.

Access and legitimacy is important. Everything else will follow. X2

Integrity is important (rule of law)

Integrity is not a great concern because Canada does a great job.

Electronic or online voting could damage integrity.

Hope is that reforming the electoral system would increase engagement on its own, as people would have a more valuable vote.

We need to bring new voters and new perspectives. If all generations voted, we would have broader-based outcomes in terms of actually representing the opinions held in society

First Past The Post: Pros

None of us thought that there were any pros for first-past-the-post at all.

Anyone can think of it.

It's designed for poor communication.

It's useful for illiterate people.

It's familiar.

It allows for independents.

First Past The Post: Cons

Winner take all. Doesn't represent all groups and may exclude groups.

Consolidation of power to the bigger parties.

Encourages strategic voting.

Suppressing the vote for smaller parties.

We can't vote with our hearts.

It suppresses voting overall, because people feel their voices are not heard or are very limited, so they don't bother voting.

It doesn't give us a proportional Parliament.

It paves the way for money and corporations to have influence on Parliament.

Too many flaws to count. It is bad.

Encourages rebound policies. It encourages oscillation.

Results in an elected dictatorship. It flows from the tradition of land owning white people, not based on universal rights.

Any other option is better than first past the post.

Alternative Vote: Pros

It opens the opportunity for people to vote for what they believe in... But the results would still not be an outcome that was representative of what they wanted.

It gives people the comforting feeling that their vote would count more than it would under first-past-the-post... however erroneous this may be.

They get to live in ignorant bliss so they can sleep better at night.

It reduces strategic voting.

Allows people to express intent. Approval of majority locally.

338 elections not one election.

Allows for independent candidates.

Might result in the election of someone who would lose otherwise.

Alternative Vote: Cons

It is first-past-the-post on steroids.

It further distorts votes and further consolidates power.

It eliminates minor parties.

First choice of votes that are reassigned lose all of their value.

It creates the illusion of change when there isn't any.

It acts as a safety valve for people's disillusionment, so they can feel they've done something when they haven't.

The adoption of alternative vote would defer the possibility of real meaningful change for decades or generations to come.

It's lipstick on a pig. It doesn't change who the pig is.

Alternative vote is not proportional encourages the two party system. It's hard on small parties.

Can have the same results as FPTP.

Still a winner take all system.

Single Transferable Vote: Pros

Decisions are more collaborative, so they last longer.

You can vote for what you really want and know that you can get it, and if you don't, your vote will go to your next favourite choice.

You don't have to feel like your vote will be wasted.

The excess votes give us the best members of parliament.

It's very simple for voting... The only people who really need to understand it are the folks who count the votes.

There is less fighting in Parliament.

You can vote for what you really want and get it.

It's been used and proven in many other countries.

It's more democratic ...any proportional system would be the most democratic than a majoritarian system.

Women and minorities tend to be more represented.

Still allows for independent candidates.

Local proportionality.

All candidates are tested by the electorate. This gives people a person to support as MP. They can select which MP they would like on a different issue.

Your second choice might be elected too.

More "colour" to the outcome.

Results in bigger ridings – that's a good thing.

Single Transferable Vote: Cons

Compared to some mixed member proportional systems, STV can suppress valuable minority opinions that don't quite reach the threshold required for election in STV.

It still tends to eliminate smaller parties.

STV has a complex ballot with lots of candidates. It's hard to do research on them all.

The media has too much power with STV. They will not educate the population. And they are not going to talk about local issues.

STV creates larger ridings. This does not work for all provinces. What happens to Northwest Territories, Yukon, Nunavut?

The counting software needs to be open source. It breaks the simplicity of other systems and is hard to understand. It is a mathematical system. A recount by hand would be hard.

STV produces variable mandates for MPs. For example if you are elected as the fourth-ranked MP for a riding, you may not be seen as legitimate as the first-ranked MP.

There needs to be transparency on voting numbers at each level.

Name recognition is hard.

Voters need to be literate.

Complicated for voters at tabulation stage.

The house may be bigger.

Complicated to count.

Mixed Member Proportional: Pros

You get what you vote for.

You get to see the actual percentage of people who support the parties, and you get to see them represented.

The make-up of parliament better represents the population's make-up and its desire, and includes minorities that are otherwise ignored.

You can vote for your preferred candidate, even if she or he does not belong to your preferred party.

You can like and support both the party and an individual representative.

We don't have to vote strategically.

It encourages cooperation in Parliament. Decisions that are made collaboratively last longer.

It's a more stable government.

It's more democratic than a majoritarian system.

Women and minorities are better represented in Parliament.

MMP is the most proportional. It has smaller ridings than STV. It has a simple ballot potentially but it must align with senate reform.

Easier to understand result than STV.

Reflects what people think they're doing under current system (voting for a party).

More accountability and outcomes better than options.

Ability to rank choices based on weight (ranked ballot MMP).

I am confident that an MMP system of some sort would be the best way to address local representation while simultaneously ensuring that minority voices get a voice. My proposal is that we have a two-tier system for party lists: a specific level geographically (i.e. two list members in our five member region of Waterloo), and a larger province-wide "riding". This would ensure a degree of local representation in the list MPs.

Mixed Member Proportional: Cons

No system is perfect, but we think that if a made-in-Canada version of mixed member proportional were chosen, it would be the best one for Canada.

Not that much regional variations in urban districts.

Institutionalizes parties. There are no independent candidates.

Accountability is difficult with party list.

It would mean more MPs.

There is lower perceived integrity with party list MPs. Diminished mandate.

Classifies MPs in unequal categories.

Complexity, possible causes legal issues due to challenged outcomes.

People would be sitting in the house of commons only to only vote for the party line. Whipped votes would be worse.

Potential instability.

Same sized ridings (would prefer larger ones).

Other comments

It would be important to have recall legislation for MPs who were not representing their constituents properly.

Accessibility in voting is important... Making it easier for people to get to polling stations.

More encouragement for younger people to vote is needed.

We think electronic voting would be dangerous in that it would almost certainly be hacked at some point. We also felt that there might be pressure from others in the household, so that people may not be voting the way that they want to, or someone else might vote for them on their computer.

We should lower the voting age.

It would be important to have a threshold for the percentage of the popular vote that a particular party got in a proportional system, but it is also important to have the diversity of different smaller parties.

If a certain percentage of the country supported to party, they should be represented. The core parties would still be supported, but they may pay attention to issues raised by smaller parties that they might not otherwise consider. It would be a way for the larger parties to hear the issues that people are interested in.

Both yes and no voices for term limits.

It would give power to ALL of the people if smaller parties got in, in a proportional system, because nearly everyone would have some representation in Parliament.

Keep the vote results private until the next day. Don't release election results right away to keep the vote unbiased.