

# Submission to House of Commons Electoral Reform Committee

Plant Recreation Centre Dialogue

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## Summary

The consensus of those attending this dialogue was that some form of Proportional Representation (PR) is the best option for Canada, albeit, one tailored to our needs. The majority of the participants were not in favour of holding a referendum as referenda were viewed as being skewed toward the status quo. They were also seen as not particularly democratic as simple questions do not serve complex issues. If the decision were put to the people, a citizens' assembly was considered the best route to measure voters' views. A few were content with First-Past-The-Post (FPTP), but most were not; it was felt to be unfair, and policies tend not to be discussed enough during elections. Non-voters were of some concern, but no consensus was reached on a solution, although mandatory voting was mentioned.

## ERRE Principles

Much of the discussion centred around the five principles included in the ERRE's mandate.

### Principle 1: Effectiveness and legitimacy

The consensus was that our reformed electoral system should be based on the assumption that it will adhere to democratic principles. It should reflect voters' choices and turn them into a fair allocation of seats. People want to vote with their hearts rather than try to assess how best to vote in a strategic way. Under PR a discussion of a wide range of views leads to better solutions. They want every vote to have weight and count equally; Single Transferable Vote (STV) or Mixed-member Proportional (MMP) was preferred. They feel that MMP would be the easiest "sell" as some see it as closest to our tradition. As well, the bigger the district, the closer one can get to real proportionality.

### Principle 2: Engagement

Most agreed that if people felt their vote "will count" they would be more inclined to be interested in voting. In addition, they thought that this might encourage younger people to exercise their vote and take a greater interest in how the country is governed.

### Principle 3: Accessibility and inclusiveness

Voting should be as easy as people say FPTP is. However, voters in countries that use a form of PR have no difficulty. PR has proven that it encourages diversity and inclusiveness for minorities and results in more women being elected.

### Principle 4: Integrity

People believe that our system already has integrity, and that PR should not change it. Indeed they felt that it could even enhance it.

### Principle 5: Local representation

The local element is extremely important. Voters like having a local representative, and this should not change in the reformed system. People believe that their MP should be answerable to them first, not to

the party. Voters need to know that their MP's priority is to serve them in Parliament.

### **Other issues of concern**

The problem of non-voters was a big issue and some thought this could make an argument for mandatory voting. However, a few others thought that if everyone voted FPTP might work better.

A few were concerned about how the final decision on a new system would be made. When someone raised the issue of a referendum, several people worried that one would be held because referenda usually lean toward the status quo. Most, however, were not in favour of a referendum as it was viewed as undemocratic in that questions can be manipulated to get a predetermined result. As well, it is an inappropriate way to make a decision on a complex issue such as electoral reform. If the decision were put to the people, a citizens' assembly was considered the best route to measure voters' views.

Someone mentioned that the new system should ensure that independents have a chance of being elected. There was also concern over how a new system would affect the size of ridings which would affect representation.

### **New System Preference**

The consensus was that the new system should be some form of PR. All agreed that whatever system is implemented, people need to be well-informed, because only informed views provide a good basis for a decision. PR's advantages included the following: it is seen as more democratic as it encourages a broader range of citizens' input; it fosters cooperation which results in better and more inclusive policies; and, it was pointed out, that almost all OECD countries with PR governments have less income inequality and better opportunities for women. These systems, including STV, MMP and Rural-urban (STV+) were explained; AV was also mentioned. Most people preferred either MMP or STV+.