Electoral Reform Brief

Presented to the: The Special Committee on Electoral Reform

Submitted by: POLS*3050: Canadian Political Parties, Elections and Pressure Groups (F16), University of Guelph

October 7th, 2016

Introduction:
This brief on electoral reform is submitted by the students in *POLS*3050: Canadian Political Parties, Elections and Pressure Groups* (F16) at the University of Guelph. There are 24 students in this class and the instructor is Dr. Tamara A. Small (Associate Professor, Department of Political Science.)

As part of this class, we were tasked to undertake a process to learn about electoral system and reform in Canada and recommend whether to keep the current electoral system or adopt a new one. We did not consider the other issues of mandatory or online voting.

This brief is organized as follows: it begins with a brief outline of the process by which we come to our recommendation. It follows with our recommendation and our rationale. A brief description of the authors of this report is included at the end of this document.

Our Process:
The question guiding our task was: *should Canada keep the current electoral system or adopt a new one?*

In order to answer this questions, we engaged in a 3 phase process:

Phase #1: Learning: In order to establish a common understanding regarding electoral systems and reform, each of the main electoral systems were presented in the form of group presentations. There were a total of seven presentations; the topics and the groups were:

First-past-the-post	Alternative vote	Two round
Declan Lawrence	Elizabeth Brown	Daniel Attard,
Ileah Rindfleisch	Brandon Mank	Gabriel Broderick,
Dennis Ross	Courtney Robertson	Rebecca Dudgeon,
Megan Spencer-Enright	Philip Sheppard	Jamiee Jeffries

Party list	Single transferable vote	Mixed member proportional
James Lemcke	Julien Pinsonneault	Camilla Bagby-Grajales,
Amanda Mast	Haley Russell	Ainsley Black
	Samuel Turner	Filip Cevriz,
		Manpreet Parmar

Electoral reform in Westminster
Krish Chatterjee
Benjamin From
Mason Huycke

Our presentations focussed on the ballot structure, district magnitude and electoral formulas of the main system as well as their advantages and disadvantages. The presentations also addressed other countries that used these systems and comparisons to the current system (FPTP). The final presentation was a contextual presentation that discussed electoral reform at the provincial level in Canada and in New Zealand and the United Kingdom. The presentations were a mixed of scholarly and popular discussions on the topic.

We were also required to read:

> Pilon, Dennis. 2016. "Party Politics and Voting Systems in Canada," in *Canadian Parties in Transition Fourth Edition* (eds. Alain-G. Gagnon and A. Brian Tanguay). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

> Courtney, John C. 2004. *Elections*. Vancouver: UBC Press. (Chapter 6 Representation, Plurality Voting and the Democratic Deficit)

Phase #2: Reflection: Based on what we learned in Phase #1, each of us wrote a short reflection paper that indicated our own personal preference on whether Canada should keep the current electoral system or adopt a new one. We were asked to consider our own values in light of the principles of electoral reform as identified in the *Update on the Special Committee's Study on Electoral Reform* (i.e. effectiveness and legitimacy, engagement, accessibility and inclusiveness, integrity and local representation) and based our reflection on evidence from research material including academic journals, books, chapters, media reports, government documents, etc . . . The paper was between 750 – 1000 words.

Phase #3: Deliberation: On October 6, 2016, we met as an entire group to deliberate electoral reform in Canada. This started with a brief presentation of our individual reflection papers, which indicates our own personal choice. The following is a summary of those papers:

MMP	11
STV	6
AV	1
FPTP	1
TRS	1

From there, our discussion focussed mainly on two systems, MMP and STV, as real options for electoral reform in Canada.

Recommendation: Based on our deliberations, we have three main recommendations:

Recommendation #1: We unanimously recommend that Canada abandon first-past-the post (FPTP). Our reasons are as follows:
- FPTP is not proportional, therefore, the results do not accurately reflect the views of Canadians (especially, support for smaller parties and minority views (e.g. women, visible minorities and indigenous people)); proportionality in an electoral system is of the utmost importance to us;
- FPTP wastes too many votes; we find this unfair;
- false majorities are too common; this is exacerbated by low turnout in Canada; and
- inequalities in the House of Commons cause distrust in elected officials and the overall electoral system.

Recommendation #2: In a unanimous decision, we agreed that proportionality *must* be a fundamental aspect of any electoral system that the committee chooses for Canada. Plurality and majoritarian systems do not allow for proportionality, and we do not think they should be considered real options for Canada.

Recommendation #3: In a unanimous decision, we agreed that maintaining local representation should be respected in any electoral system that the committee chooses. Canadians need to have the opportunity to choose the people who speak for them, and have the ability to hold them accountable in elections. This was the one aspect of FPTP that we all agree was important to maintain.

We could not come to a single recommendation on an electoral system for Canada. In the end, 13 of us supported mixed member proportional and seven supported single transferable vote. We provide our rationale for each system below. That said, both systems respect proportionality and local representation, which, as we have noted, should be fundamental principles of electoral reform in Canada.

Rationale for Mixed Member Proportional:
- It maintains certain aspects of FPTP, and therefore makes an easier transition
- It is more cost and time efficient than STV both to implement and execute, simpler transition means less education costs and simpler counting means less costs on election day
- There are strong international examples which formerly had similar structures to our own such as Germany and New Zealand

Rationale for Single Transferable Vote:
- Local representation kept regionally
- Accountability of MP's to electorate; all MPs remain accountable to those who elect them
- Fewest wasted votes
- Larger choice of candidates
- Creates greater choice of access to MPs

About Us:

We are students in the course POLS*3050: Canadian Political Parties, Elections and Pressure Groups at University of Guelph instructed by Dr. Tamara A. Small. We are taking this course as an elective credit for our various degree programs.

The calendar description of POLS 3050 note the course will "emphasizes political process rather than governmental structures. Topics to be explored include the role of political parties, pressure groups, the electoral system and voting and their impact on the nature of Canada as a democratic state." The course focusses on parties and elections at the federal level and seeks to provide:
- understanding of the Canadian electoral system from a historical and contemporary perspective.
- understanding of the key political actors (political parties, candidates, interest groups).
- an opportunity to connect real life electoral events with the scholarly literature on elections.

This final brief was developed the following students in POLS*3050:

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Camilla Bagby-Grajales	Mason Huycke	Ileah Rindfleisch
Ainsley Black	Jamiee Jeffries	Courtney Robertson
Gabriel Broderick	Declan Lawrence	Dennis Ross
Elizabeth Brown	James Lemcke	Haley Russell
Filip Cevriz	Brandon Mank	Philip Sheppard
Krish Chatterjee	Amanda Mast	Megan Spencer-Enright
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This final brief was submitted by Tamara A. Small

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