

Brief to the Special Committee on Electoral Reform

To: House of Commons Special Committee on Electoral Reform

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Topic: Why Proportional Representation should be Canada's next electoral system

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Implement a single open list proportional representation election system in Canada in order to better represent the distribution of the population in the House of Commons.

ISSUE

The current First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system in Canada does not allow for accurate representation of the different regions and their issues in the House of Commons. The current riding system allows for one representative in the House per riding, but that does not necessarily mean that one member is enough for a given area. Also, the FPTP system does not accurately represent the percentage of votes that a party gets in an election when distributing the seats. For example, in the 2011 federal election, the Conservative party won a majority government with only 37% of the vote. Similarly, the current Liberal majority government was won with 39% of the vote.

BACKGROUND

FPTP systems divide the country into electoral ridings and candidates run for election in these ridings. This system allows for one candidate to present themselves per political party in a riding, and the person that receives the most votes wins the seat. By that logic, a candidate can

win a riding with only two votes, if the other candidate only receives one. Attempts at changing this system to a more proportional system have been made though no change as ever been implemented.

A proportional representation (PR) system uses party lists that are either open or closed, that allow voters to see who they are voting for and to choose from a selection of candidates of who they want to represent them, and then these candidates are elected in popular election. A proportional system also divides the country differently: instead of dividing a region up into smaller ridings with one representative, the region would have several representatives for the entire area. This system is in effect in Israel, Brazil, Austria, Denmark, Russia and South Africa.

CONSIDERATIONS

Recently, there have been two majority governments back to back, which means that the government is able to push their own agenda without any resistance. PR systems make it harder for a party to form a majority government, therefore, the law-making process is slower. However, speedy law-making should not be the goal of the government: efficient government does not translate into effective government, and the goal of all governments should be to hold as much healthy debate as is necessary to make the best laws possible for Canadians.

PR systems also encourage more inter-party cooperation, since the minority governments have to win the support of opposition parties to make sure that bills get passed. In a PR system, parties would be forced to negotiate with each other more, instead of forcing bills through using time allocations and limiting debate.

Open list PR systems allow for voters to see their candidates ahead of time and choose based on that list who they want to run in the election. A closed list would create a blind choice

situation, where voters do not get to see the candidates, and they are instead picked by party leaders. Open list systems are more transparent and create the possibility for more diversity in representation, since voters can pick the candidate that they think would be the best representative, instead of party elites trying to parachute their preferred candidate in.

OPTIONS

- 1) Introduce and phase in an open list PR electoral system in Canada
- 2) Do not introduce PR in Canada and remain with the status quo

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Option 1: introduce an open list PR electoral system in Canada. This system allows for Canadians to choose their candidates from the party list, while receiving more proportional representation in the House of Commons, based on their geographic area. This allows for more than one Member of Parliament to fight for constituents in an area, instead of one person representing a widespread area. An open list PR system would also encourage more inter-party cooperation in the House of Commons, since majority governments would be less likely, and could encourage decorum in general in the House – something that has been seriously lacking in recent Parliaments.

Changes to something as fundamental as our electoral system in Canada is a debate that should transcend partisan divides: the goal should be to find an electoral that accurately represents voter distribution in Canada, while accounting for the percentage of votes each party receives and translating that into the number of seats they then hold in the House. I

humbly submit that proportional representation should be the new electoral system for future elections, as I believe it is the system that will best achieve the aforementioned goals.