

Answers to seven questions

Individual Submission by Lewis McCall

Introduction

In an update issued in early September, 2016, by the House of Commons Committee on Electoral Reform, the section on Phase 2 - Consulting with Canadians - the Committee suggests that those appearing before the committee may wish to consider seven questions.

While appearing before the Committee would not have been practical for me, I wished to put on the record my views on the seven questions. Therefore, this document is not a continuous narrative. Rather, each of the seven questions in the update are listed and a short answer is provided for each question.

Evidence is not formally referenced but has been gathered by watching expert testimony to the Committee on CPAC, reading the Committee's reference material, particularly the fact sheet, and newspapers, magazines and online publications.

Questions from Committee update - September 7, 2016

1. Why is electoral reform important to you?

Electoral reform is important to me because I dislike the dictatorships that are allowed by false majorities under FPTP . In 2011 a strong majority Conservative a government was elected with less than 40% of the vote. In 2015, a Liberal government was elected with about the same percentage of the vote. Because these governments won a majority of seats although not a majority of votes, they were or will be able to act like dictatorships for four years. While the Liberal government has committed itself to much public consultation, it can still force something through the House of Commons and into law if it so chooses. The contrast in ideologies of the two parties leads to significant policy lurch whenever one of them replaces the other.

2. What do you understand to be the strengths and challenges of Canada's current electoral system and of other systems?

The alleged strength of FPTP voting system is that it tends to produce more stable majority governments. This is a fallacy. During the committee hearings, it was noted that the research showed that elections occurred at virtually the same rate in FPTP systems as in a number of systems using proportional representation.

There are some who think FP TP produces more accountable government. However, when accountability is defined by a vote every four years, it is not a timely form of accountability. It is said to give more local accountability than PR but a Mixed Member Proportional also provides local accountability although the districts would probably be bigger than under FPTP. In fact, local accountability is possible under an STV PR system as well.

3. Do you consider Canada's current electoral system to be "fair"? "Inclusive"? "Representative"? Why or why not?

Basically, Canada's current electoral system is **unfair**. When a majority government is elected with less than 50% of the vote as is common, the party in government can, and often does, act like a dictatorship. In these circumstances the opposition members tend to be cut off using time allocation and other methods. While some majority governments try to act by listening to the opposition and other elected members, there is no practical constraint forcing them to do this.

Because of this, both the people who voted for losing candidates and those who voted for losing parties may be left without a voice in Parliament. This cannot be considered fair.

The system is clearly not representative. And over the years, it has become hyper partisan.

Exceptions in the past have occurred when FP TP produced minority governments. Some of these minority governments have produced some of Canada's most valued institutions such as Medicare, the CPP and EI. But minority governments do require a little more inclusiveness and cooperation between at least two parties so the ability to be a dictatorship is seriously reduced by the need for cooperation in order to stay in government.

Since coalition governments are the norm under PR systems, parties have to learn to work together.

4. What do you think about mandatory voting?

I think mandatory voting should be the rule with penalties for not registering and voting. This practice seems to work well in at least two other stable democracies, Germany and Australia.

It should be impressed on citizens that contrary to the mainstream media position which is generally libertarian, in a democracy, voting is not just a right, it is also a responsibility.

5. What do you think about online voting?

I believe that online voting is currently impractical. It is too insecure. Each day a multitude of very sophisticated electronic systems are hacked and data is stolen or destroyed. In the second George W Bush term, the election that gave him the presidency had computer issues in Florida. Those have never been satisfactorily resolved.

It is my understanding that in the US where electronic voting has been used, some states are now insisting on the production of paper backup to support the electronic results. So, in this case what is the saving? Where is the economy?

With respect to vote counting, I believe that counting should not begin in Newfoundland until the polls are closed in BC. This will be a bit frustrating for those in Newfoundland but it will end the media game trying to get leaks in Newfoundland and the Maritimes and publishing them in BC before the BC polls are closed.

6. What do you think should be the future steps for electoral system reform (such as a citizens' assembly, a referendum, etc.)?

- Analyze testimony from the committee meetings with experts.
- Organize and analyze input from public.
- Prepare one or more proposals.
- Provide elections Canada with resources and time to develop educational material for all Canadians
- Organize citizens assemblies across the country.
- In the event that the government can reach a consensus on a proposal with three of the parties representing more than 50% of the vote, a change may be made by Parliament alone.

Note:

Some groups and individuals are calling for a referendum on electoral change. In my view, such a referendum is not likely to be useful based on a recent in the UK, specifically the Brexit referendum where there are now petitions with over 4 million signatures demanding a second referendum.

It is not constitutionally or democratically necessary to hold a referendum on this issue. What should be adequate to change the electoral system is a majority of parties in the House of Commons representing a majority of votes in the last general federal election.

7. Each type of electoral system emphasizes certain purposes and values/principles. What values and principles do you think ought to be prioritized when designing an electoral system for Canada?
- Fairness - setting up an electoral system in which at least most votes contribute to the election of a representative. In this regard, PR systems are generally perceived to be more fair than majoritarian systems.
 - A reduction in the hyper partisan ambience of the House of Commons. That situation is aggravated by the competitiveness of FPTP. In a PR system, coalition governments are more likely since the popular vote would not produce many one party majority governments. To form coalitions, parties would have to learn to negotiate and cooperate with one another
 - Based on my values, the House of Commons should reflect the diversity of the Canadian population. In addition, the goal should be to have gender equal representation in the House and other institutions of government. While these goals could be obtained under virtually any system, they seem to occur more naturally in a PR environment. For example, in Australia the upper house is elected under a PR system while the lower house is elected under a majoritarian system. Over time the percentage of women in the upper house has increased at a faster rate than the percentage of women in the lower house. The reduction of hyperpartisanism in a PR system could also contribute to the participation of women and minorities in the electoral process.
 - Exhaustive research by a number of electoral systems scholars has shown that PR electoral systems have responded better than majoritarian systems with respect to such issues as climate change, the economy and quality of life. This was demonstrated by expert testimony at the Committee hearings.