

Brief to the Special Committee on Electoral Reform

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September 25, 2016

I have voted in every election since I have been able to vote. Over the years I have had a growing disillusion with our First Past The Post (FPTP) voting because I increasingly have to vote strategically rather than the way I wish to vote. The FPTP system does not accommodate my voting intentions. Subsequently I feel my vote is fundamentally wasted, especially in what is typically not a swing riding. I also feel that with the FPTP system the winning candidates can basically ignore those people who are unlikely to vote for them, focusing only on their supporters. Those who are ignored then have no voice whatsoever in what government does.

I know many other Canadians feel the same way, when in at least the last two elections most people did not vote for the party that had gained all the power in parliament.

The FPTP electoral system is an antiquated system that was designed for a two party system, or a two-candidate system with no political parties. With a system now of five major political parties we need to have an updated electoral system. It is absolutely unacceptable in 2016 that a party that gets only 39% of the votes, gets a majority of seats in parliament and 100% of the power in government. It is also unacceptable that the outcome of the election and the balance of power hangs with a few votes in a few swing ridings. We have seen how this distorts the campaigning of the political parties, the geographic focus of the government in power, and how it can pit one region of the country against another.

We need to get rid of FPTP and put in place a proportional representation system, as over 90 other countries have done. These countries now boast better voter turnout and more representative governments than Canada. They typically have governments that are at least as stable as in Canada, and have governments that better represent the diversity of the population.

I believe it is imperative that Canada move toward a system of proportional representation and away from the "first past the post" system. The false majorities resulting from the FPTP system in the past two elections, and many before that, are major contributors to the increasing polarization of politics in Canada, if not of the Canadian population itself. This is part of the democratic deficit noted by the Law Reform Commission some ten years ago when it proposed electoral reform grounded in the principle of proportionality. We must move towards a system where every vote counts and where people are encouraged to vote rather than discouraged to vote. Only a proportional representation system can accomplish this. The preferential ballot system, which is sometimes considered as an alternative to the FPTP system, is not an acceptable alternative as it only entrenches the false majority situation and can exacerbate an already flawed system.

Most importantly, a proportional representation system will force the political parties to work together, as Canadians expect our elected MPs to do. With our parliamentary democracy we elect a parliament, not a government. Canadians expect all of the parliamentarians elected to work for and represent them. The false majorities that we often have with the FPTP system and the immense power of party politics put all the

power with the party that forms government. That party can basically ignore the opposition and any one who happens to be contrary to its positions, as long as it keeps its base of supporters. This renders the majority of parliamentarians essentially powerless in working for and representing their constituents and Canadians in general.

Canadians have immense frustration seeing our politicians doing nothing but fighting with each other rather than working together to improve our country. I have heard many times of teachers taking their classes to view parliament in action and being totally embarrassed of what their students are seeing. This has to change. I believe a proportional representation system will result in more coalition governments where the MPs will have to work together. By working together they will develop stronger national policies rather than strictly partisan policies, which are then often undone by the subsequent government. It is certain that much of the cynicism that keeps Canadians from voting comes from the behavior of the members in a FPTP parliament. I believe that if Canadians would be much more inclined to vote if they saw their parliamentarians working together to improve our country. I believe proportional representation is one way to help achieve this.

I encourage the committee to obtain expert advice and study the different forms of proportional representation so it may make solid recommendations to parliament on the best form of proportional representation for Canada - one that makes every vote count and maintains regional representation and accountability to the electorate. I encourage government to put in place proportional representation for the next election and to ensure that Canadians are fully informed ahead of time on the new electoral system. I also encourage government to act on this election promise for electoral reform and to continue to improve our democracy, for it needs to evolve as much as all other parts of our society are evolving.

I look forward to voting in the next election and having my vote count along with that of millions of other Canadians.

Thank you.