

Written Brief to the Electoral Reform Committee
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I have followed the goals and make-up of your committee. I thank you taking this on, on behalf of Canadians. I've heard for years the entreaties of some vocal Canadians declaring that the system must change because they don't feel as if their votes matter. They want an emotive purity of democracy, with a proportionate electoral system. Those supporting small parties also want to wield power for pet issues. However, with that approach there is serious potential to convert our stable democracy to one less stable with many small groups wielding bits of power, leading to instability in governance.

Canadians understand minority governments as we have had, with some smaller parties supporting a larger party to form a government. But even our minority governments have relatively large blocks of elected seats. A look at some other countries can reveal a much more difficult and extreme state of affairs. The model that I know well is Israel, in the news almost daily. I am a friend of Israel and am acquainted with Israel and its elections for 50 years. Amongst many visits, I was there a number of times during elections.

It is my contention that decades ago Israel would have achieved peace with its neighbours if not for its proportional representation system that stymies leading parties from being able to do right by setting policy. This is a strong statement to make, but understanding how that system works shows that at any time there can be more than 20–30 political parties, joining for an election to perhaps 10–20 combined parties. Israel currently has a 3.25% minimal threshold of overall votes to get seats. There were numerous parties combined into 10 or so with elected seats in their last election.

Once an election is over, the real horse-trading takes place behind the scenes, but not for the voters. A to-be prime minister needs support and negotiates, actually buying and selling power and policies. A to-be prime minister gives ministerial posts to various factions with their own policy base. In Israel, this translates to excessive power in the hands of small parties each with a few seats, with specific issues. Policies like public education, religious education, religious leaders control of civic matters, finance ministers diverting public funds to support party pet projects (such as more West Bank settlements, roads to settlements, higher education expanded into West Bank settlements) are examples of control by small groups in the proportionate electoral system. This is not, in my mind, true democracy; it is government in camera trading hidden favours amongst a few controllers, creating multiple near-dictatorships. To get their way, Ministers can threaten to withdraw from a coalition, effecting kicking the PM out of work, unless new favours are given.

It is easy for Canadians to say that we have no such blatant and divisive issues as Israel has, so why worry? Well, who will benefit with a proportionate system in Canada? Small parties with a small electorate that now can't make a dent. They will be the kingpins like in Israel for coalitions, with power horse-trading behind the scenes. The

whole process will be changed. Once a change is made, there will be no turning back – multiple small groups controlling a coalition will never agree to rescind power.

Canada will be changed forever; we are gambling with predictions based on what is now, but the evolved party system will change once the whole process changes. We can end up like Israel, where no government (except for a few months in 1969) can bring in its thought-out policies. We can predict this to be a most irresponsible system. Canada deserves more than playing to theorists' vanity who refuse to see how this plan has served badly elsewhere.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2013/01/23/the-secret-behind-israels-dysfunctional-political-system/>

I know that in Canada politically there is a current commitment of parties to bring in some change; Justin Trudeau promised it during the campaign. Your committee is expected to report back with such. Whatever you do, please do not bring in a proportionate system even with a thresh-hold like Israel of 3.25 % of votes for a seat, or even 4 or 5%. If needed, make changes to be very much short of Israel's system. Look at Israel's politics and be very frightened to adopt that model.