

Submission to the ERRE by Katherine Emily Anne Kitching
October 6, 2016

Dear ERRE,

I want to begin by letting you know that I planned to attend your in-person session in Halifax this past Tuesday Oct 4th - however I have a new baby at home, which makes timing more difficult, and I also teach a fitness class starting at 5:00pm on Tuesdays, so in the end I was not able to make it downtown and back in the short window of time available.

Also, I want you to know that there are a lot of consultations going on right now in Halifax - there are consultations on a new "Centre Plan" for the city, as well as a Transportation Master Plan, and consultations at the federal level for the TPP and for Affordable Housing, among other things. We also have municipal elections coming up, and various candidates debates to attend. I wanted to let you know this because I would have been there in person if I could have - as would some of the women in my fitness class and other friends and acquaintances of mine- but with so many demands on our time, we can't find time for all the consultations happening. This is important for me to tell you because I worry that you will think that the number of people attending in person reflects the degree of interest in the topic - but in fact I know many people who care very much about this issue but who are just too overwhelmed by the demands of life to come out to yet another meeting.

Now, on to my input into the electoral reform consultations:

I am heartily **in favour** of making some changes to our electoral system.

I would like to see a new system which allows the number of votes for each party cast across the country to correspond to the number of seats each party holds in parliament. That is, I am strongly in favour of a **proportional system**.

Here are two of the reasons I think we need such a system:

1 - There are a huge diversity of views in Canada. Some people have very conservative values, and some very liberal. It doesn't seem right that depending on how the election swings, one group of people get things more or less how they want it for four years, while the others watch in anguish as policy they strongly disagree with gets passed.

I think our democracy would function better if people with diverse values were compelled to listen more to others' perspectives and work more often towards compromises. I believe that a proportional system would mean that we'd need more cooperation between parties to get things done.

Some critics say that this could make it harder for legislation to get passed, and it could take longer. I don't disagree with this assessment, but I say this is a **good** thing. If a party wants to pass legislation that nearly half the electorate disagrees with, then I don't think it's good for our government to be able to rush that through. Instead, there should be more discussion and debate and opportunities for people to learn about the issue, and we should take the time to find a workable compromise that most Canadians can live with.

2 - I think our current, purely geographically-based form of representation is no longer as relevant as it once was. First of all, many of our urban electoral districts encompass such a huge number of people now, that it's not practical or realistic for urban dwellers to go have coffee with their MP and chat about issues- there are simply too many constituents "sharing" the same MP to be able to have a relationship with them. So I don't worry so much about the loss of "local" representation that might ensue if we change our electoral system, because I didn't really feel a local connection with my MP.

(I should note that this was especially true when I lived in Ottawa. Here in Halifax, where we're a smaller city, I feel it a bit more of a connection, and I think this would be even more true if I lived in a rural or northern area... so it might be interesting to consider some form of proportional representation that allows for more direct geographical representation in rural and northern areas, but less geographically-tied representation in urban or other population-dense areas).

Secondly, our geographically-based form of representation was designed with the idea that people who live in a distinct geographical region have the most closely shared needs and shared values. This made sense when most people in Region A were dairy farmers, most everyone in Region B was working as a lumberjack or miner, most everyone in Region C was living in an affluent neighbourhood and most everyone in Region D was in a poorer neighbourhood. But now city boundaries have expanded blurring former divides between various neighbourhoods and between rural/urban populations. Also, with the advent of technology, we have much more diversity of occupations in the same geographic region.

Today, I believe that in any given riding, you will find a *huge* variation in needs and values, and **the average Canadian could have much more in common with someone living on the other side of the country than they do with their next door neighbours.**

For this reason also, I believe it is not important for our electoral system to be strictly tied to geographical representation. Instead, the most important thing would be to **find a way for groups of people with shared values and needs to have a shared voice in parliament.**

I have other concerns about our current electoral system (e.g. the fact that a party can win power with less than 50% of the vote, the fact that we have a dearth of women in office), but I feel that these concerns have been well-voiced by other organizations. Instead I wanted to focus on the two points above, and I urge you to find some sort of system that will address these issues.

Thanks very much for considering my views,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Katherine Kitching". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid and connected.

Katherine Kitching
Halifax Nova Scotia