

A Brief on Electoral Reform and Democracy in Canada

To: The Electoral Reform Committee (ERRE)

Discussion Participants:

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As part of the Electoral Reform Committee's mandate to hear from Canadians regarding potential changes to the voting system, a group of friends gathered on September 17, 2016 to discuss the topic of Canadian democracy. Participants were asked a series of questions to illicit responses that touched on the topic of electoral reform and, at a larger scale, on the topic of democracy in Canada in 2016. First, we discussed values and came up with a mission statement for the meeting. Since these statements are brief, I have included them fully in this report.

#### Values Statement:

We are members of the precariat. We are concerned about the state of democracy for future generations: it is precarious. We grew up in an era when democracy still felt real, and many of us bought into that belief. However, if we continue to move forward in a direction we are currently going at, we feel there will be not much point for our children or future generations to have any faith in democracy. That would be a great loss. Because it is the value of democracy that makes us strong people that we are today.

#### Mission Statement:

To seek out other forms of democracy and voting that have worked in other jurisdictions, most notably in Europe, Australia and New Zealand that can better position future generations to value and believe in democracy as a means to attain justice within society.

We know that democracy as it exists today in Canada is no longer functional because our population is growing and diversifying with elements from all over the world. This is in stark contrast to the prevailing attitude that brought this country to life, specifically how non-British immigration and language was oppressed through legislation and enforcement. In our opinion, a clean slate is required in the twenty-first century, and that it should begin at the ballot box, which is the most accessible and fundamental form of democracy we have. With many challenges ahead, we should act swiftly on turning this country into a modern democracy that is the envy of the western world. Let us not get bogged down in partisan-based battles or petty referendums that would appease only those interested in maintaining the status quo. We have an opportunity to think and act with long-term goals of creating a wealthy and prosperous nation that future generations can thrive in. If the committee shows leadership in avoiding petty, partisan-based battles, they will have the satisfaction of knowing they represented the people who elected them very well.

#### Ideas of what electoral reform would look like in Canada:

Some form of proportional representation was agreed upon by the group to be a suitable replacement for the current first-past-the-post model. This was seen as a

way of ensuring proper representation in parliament of women, visible minorities, indigenous peoples, and other disenfranchised groups. As well, voter engagement and outreach was discussed.

A strong opinion that voting should be mandatory came from one participant, while another viewed it as not essential. As a group we decided to agree that voting ought to be mandatory if a spoiled ballot would count. One member of our group offered this suggestion: if all candidates are deemed unfit by voters, there should be an option to vote for none of them. If enough people select this option, there should be a new slate of candidates in a new election.

Online voting is another tactic that could be used to bring more people into the fold of democracy. Our only concern with that has to deal with cyber security. Elections Canada would need to be provided with the necessary resources to combat hackers and others who might try and undermine the democratic process in an online-voting scenario. But, we see a net positive from the idea because in a world that has seen Canadians get busier and busier, the convenience of making your selection online would easily make it more accessible for everyone.

As a group, prior knowledge of proportional systems and how they work was not entirely evident. However, the fundamental principle of having the percentage of popular vote equal the percentage of seats each respective party receives, was viewed as something of fundamental importance in whatever system our government chooses. We feel it would also increase the level of integrity and accountability each Member of Parliament has, as such a system encourages collaboration and cooperation between parties, with a better outcome for all Canadians. This would also allow more voices to be heard in the House of Commons, which could give governments the ability to take a preventive approach to social and economic issues, as opposed to a reactive approach. This diminishes the loss of life and hardships of the people of this country, and would foster positive relations between constituents and their elected representatives.

On the topic of local representation, our group agreed that while it is important to have the needs of local residents met, an MP should be more focused on national issues. City councilmembers ought to be the elected representatives to look after specific needs. That which falls under the jurisdiction of federal MPs ought to be considered by staff at the MP's office, and, if necessary brought to the attention of the MP herself. But the most important job the MP has is keeping the country running, while giving her constituents a voice in parliament.