

I am writing in support of electoral reform in Canada. I had been unaware of the deadline for submitting a brief so this is not as researched and polished as I would have liked.

For most of my adult life elections in Canada have been decided based on a surprisingly small proportion of voters. Somehow the notion that more people voted for A than for any of B or C or D or E had translated into the fact that A should have all the power, even though a majority thought something other than A. Sometimes "my" party played the role of A, sometimes not. But in either case it seems somehow dishonest to ignore B and C and D and E and..... I do not believe that democracy should be primarily about winners and losers, but rather about engagement.

As a case in point, in the (in)famous election in which the former Progressive Conservative party was reduced to two sitting members, I believe they actually came second in the popular vote (I apologize for not checking this fact again due to time but I believe this is correct). A large number of Canadians supported this party, and the consequence was its destruction. On the other end of the political spectrum, something between 5-10% of Canadians vote for the Green party, yet the consequence is that they get something like 0.3% of the seats in our parliament.

Canada has always been about many peoples, many ideas, many cultures, and many political viewpoints. This is a strength: both the founding of the country and the introduction of medicare (to name but two events) were implemented by governments that cooperated, for one reason or another, with other political parties. Cooperation is a good thing.

FPTP favours winners and losers at the expense of representation. It emphasizes a "clear" decision over a reasonable one. Political parties that come second get ranked dead last, parties with significant but not total support get shut out. Differing voices are locked out of the process.

FPTP favours competition over cooperation. Groups that have significant common ground are forced to become bitter enemies, because it is easier to convert voters who are already in partial agreement than those at the opposite end. Listening to and learning from and cooperating with other people is a liability.

A proportional system allows other voices to be heard. If 15% of Canadians think X then X should be part of the political landscape. Their democratic voice should not get "implicitly transferred" to a party that got 30%. They should be heard.

A proportional system favours cooperation. Few Canadian governments in my knowledge have ever received 50% of the votes cast, yet in every election the most bitter fights are between parties that

actually have broad common ground. In a PR system, parties need to form alliances, and so PR would favour a process whereby "similar" parties would tend to work together. Indeed medicare can be said to be the consequence of a lucky "non victory", an accidental PR-ish result. By not having a majority government Canada implemented one of the most Canadian policies of my lifetime.

I have lived abroad and returned to Canada, happily. But the experience shaped my view of what is wonderful about Canada and what is less so. I've always believed that patriotism means the courage to fix the things that are wrong and not the desire to pretend that everything is perfect.

I've lived in New Zealand, and the myths about PR creating legislative stalemates and fringe parties holding the country hostages are just that, myths. Government there is stable and productive. Interestingly, the government of John Key (perhaps roughly similar to the old Canadian PC party) is in power due to an alliance with the Maori Party. Key's National Party doesn't get 50%+ of the vote, and the consequence is that Maori interests and concerns are not just an item on the agenda, they are a formal part of government. The Waitangi Tribunal becomes a fundamental part of the political process of the country. This would likely not have developed the same way under FPTP.

Proponents of FPTP sometimes point out simplicity as an important advantage. But this is misleading. Dictatorships are simple, but that is not a compelling argument. The truth is that democracy, like many other important things, is a little bit of hard work. It takes thought, it takes engagement, and it takes commitment. The fact that we might have to, say, mark one ballot for our representative and one for our party, or that we might have to mark our ballot by ranking the candidates rather than a single "x", is hardly a compelling reason to abandon hope.

Another argument in favour of FPTP is that each riding needs its own representative, that will take its concerns to the government. But as far as I've ever been able to tell, most Canadians seem to vote for a party, not the actual representative. "I always vote Conservative" says one of my friends, another "is an NDP supporter". And in fact this is entirely rational: the actual power in Parliament is controlled by political parties, not by individual representatives. So we already have lost whatever mythical "representation" we might have from our "representative". There are of course exceptions, but the norm is that what matters is quite simply: to which party does our representative belong. Fundamentally, Canadians already vote for a party and not a representative, so why not make it official?

Popular engagement is a common concern: voting turnouts are not as high as one would want, and especially young people think that there is "no point". This is not an argument to simplifying the system,

it is an argument for making it more relevant. Activities to "make voting meaningful" and to try to "convince" people to become more engaged are perhaps somewhat misguided. We don't learn to run by first learning to crawl, we learn to run because there is something we want to run towards. No amount of brochures or videos or social media posts will convince a rational person that their vote is meaningful in FPTP. In the long run, the way to convince them their vote is more meaningful is to engage them with a more meaningful process for which their vote does count and their voice does matter.

There are of course disadvantages to any vote-counting system (this is not just a trope, it is a Theorem to due the Nobel Laureate Kenneth Arrow). A mixed system, such as where voters elect a representative and also vote for a party, offers a credible compromise. One advantage of MMP is that it allows individuals who are not associated to any party to run for office and have some possible voice (assuming of course they get enough votes). Indeed MMP preserves somewhat the clarity and direct representation of FPTP while allowing voters to say more than the name of their favourite person. It is entirely credible (and in my experience somewhat common) to support a particular person but a different party. The individuals whose voice I would hope to be a part of my government and the parties I would hope to be a part of its parliament are not the same thing.

I thank the committee for its time.

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