

*I would like to thank the members of the Special Parliamentary Committee on Electoral Reform for this opportunity to share my thoughts on the need for Canada to adopt an electoral system which integrates the principle of **Proportional Representation**. As the time for public input into your deliberations on this critically important issue draws to a close, I salute your sincere efforts to do the right thing for the Canadian people.*

PROPORTIONALITY IS THE ONLY WAY TO MAKE EVERY VOTE COUNT

In her first speech in Parliament, Minister Monsef said,

“ ... the reforms we eventually choose must be designed to address people who feel that their concerns are ignored.”

To the Minister’s noble sentiment I can only respond that there is nothing more likely to make people feel that their concerns are being ignored than to have their votes discarded when it comes time to do the all important tally that will decide who will represent them in Parliament.

ONE PERSON, ONE VOTE, ONE VALUE is a fundamental principle of political equality in a democracy. It affirms the principle that each citizen must have one vote and that every vote cast must have equal value.

WHAT IS THE VALUE OF A VOTE?

The value of a vote lies in its currency to determine the distribution of political power. In Canada, only those who vote for the winning candidate in each riding have their vote deliver on this promise. The rest – routinely over half of us – see our choices for political representation deemed irrelevant. For this reason, majoritarian systems like First Past the Post and Alternative Vote have been aptly called ‘the tyranny of the minority over the majority.’

IT DOESN’T HAVE TO BE THIS WAY

“81 countries use elements of proportionality when electing their national assembly, including most long-term democracies ... most of these have used it for decades. New countries almost never opt for a system like Canada’s when setting up their first democratic voting system.”¹

It is important to note that the principle of ONE PERSON, ONE VOTE, ONE

¹ <http://www.fairvote.ca/faqs/who-actually-uses-proportional-representation/>

VALUE would not be reflected in an Alternative Vote (AV) system either. Unless proportionality were also integrated into the system, the majority of voters would be denied their first choice of political representative, giving rise to two classes of voter – those who get their first choice, and those who must settle for their second or third choice.

In order to meet the demands of the democratic principle of making every vote count, an electoral system must ensure that the popular vote is reflected as closely as possible in the distribution of seats. That's PR in a nutshell. In the most recent federal election, more than 9 million citizens cast votes with no political currency at all.

THE EVIDENCE: BENEFITS OF PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

Gender Equality. In countries which use majoritarian systems women make up on average 23% of the Members of Parliament. In countries which use plurality systems (PR) the number of women in Parliament nearly doubles to an average of 39%.

The body of research on Proportional Representation also reveals that **voter turnout is higher in PR countries** and citizens are more engaged and satisfied with the performance of their countries' democratic institutions, in no small part because PR creates conditions which reshape governments so they become more cooperative, collaborative and responsive to the needs of the electorate.

Other statistically proven benefits include:

- better economic and fiscal performance
- stronger stewardship of the environment
- more stable long term policy directions
- more inclusive, tolerant and engaged societies
- less income disparity and greater educational opportunities
- greater respect for privacy
- lower levels of conflict and militarism

The evidence is clear that PR improves the lives of citizens by almost every

measure of democratic progress.²

THE END OF FALSE MAJORITIES AND STRATEGIC VOTING

One of the greatest boons of Proportional Representation is that it puts an end to the need for strategic voting. It will come as a massive relief to millions of Canadians to realize that we never again have to vote for a party which doesn't reflect our values in order to prevent a party we like even less from gaining 100% of the power with less than 50% of the vote. 10 of the 14 "majority" governments elected in Canada since WWII won less than half the votes cast. In each of our last two elections the winning party won less than 40% of the popular vote and yet wound up with 100% of the power. This is the sign of a broken democracy. This gross distortion of democratic principles would not occur under an electoral system which used Proportional Representation.

IN CONCLUSION

Canadians are counting on you to fix our broken voting system. We are counting on you to give us the precious legacy of a fair and equitable voting system which makes every vote count and count equally. We are counting on you to recommend a voting system which allows Canadians to make their electoral choices based on their values rather than having to vote to ward off a result they fear. Please do Canadians the great service of recommending an electoral system that works for the people, rather than to further the interests of large political parties which are disproportionately empowered by our current system. Please do us the honour of helping us to create a true democracy operating under the principle of Proportional Representation.

Thank you for your attention.

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² Arend Lijphart. 1999. *Patterns of Democracy*. New Haven: Yale University Press.