

# Brief to the Special Committee on Electoral Reform

Submitted by: Victor Hendrickson

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Thank you for taking the considerable time and effort to hear from experts and the public on the issue of electoral reform.

To introduce myself, my name is Victor Hendrickson of Trenton Ontario. I am a voter. I am not an expert in matters politic or law but I have a keen interest in democracy.

The mandate of the Committee is “to identify and conduct a study of viable alternate voting systems to replace the first-past-the-post system...”.

I am writing to speak in favour of the first past the post (FPTP) method of voting and suggest there is no viable alternate system that can be implemented in the near term.

By saying the near term I refer to comments made to the committee by Professor Larry Leduc (Professor Emeritus, University of Toronto, As an Individual) on July 27, 2016. He said “...unlikely that electoral reform will happen in Canada.” “ It's the problem that you run into when you're trying to change an institution like an electoral system that people have grown up with and are accustomed to.” He went on to say it took 9 years in New Zealand and 20 years in Japan.

A focus on a campaign promise to ensure “that 2015 will be the last federal election conducted under the first-past-the-post voting system” will result, in my opinion, in a rushed design and implementation and questionable results in meeting the principles of the Committee’s mandate.

Let us focus on the campaign promise to “**MAKE EVERY VOTE COUNT**”.

I am not trying to be negative or a pessimist because I believe all MPs can go back to work **tomorrow** and fix ‘the problem’.

Let me start by positing that democracy in Canada has been in decline for several decades and it is now broken.

There are many reasons for believing that democracy is broken and the voting method is in no way at the top of the list.

The FPTP method is a very simple method of voting, well known by Canadian voters, with the results known to voters in a very timely manner.

There are two very important messages we get from this plurality method of voting:

1) We know which candidate has the confidence of the most voters in each electoral district to govern Canada; and

2) We know the popular vote.

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One problem for democracy in Canada is what we do with these messages after the vote.

### **We ignore the popular vote!**

Go back to work tomorrow and change the Standing Orders to ensure all committees represent the popular vote. Ensure committees have the resources and time to come to a consensus and ensure their recommendations cannot be changed or ignored without a two-thirds or three-quarters vote in the House.

Make that last provision a new Constitutional Convention to be ignored by a future government at the risk of the wrath of the popular vote.

There were other Liberal campaign promises with respect to committees that should be implemented as well. Namely “We will strengthen the role of parliamentary committee chairs, including elections by secret ballot. We will also ensure a more robust system of oversight and review for legislation and other matters in the House of Commons and Senate. Specifically, parliamentary committees will be given more resources to acquire independent, expert analysis of proposed legislation. We will also change the rules so that Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries may not be, or stand in for, voting members on committees.”

Reporting of committee work should be transparent and complete. Nothing should be confidential unless the committee votes to make it confidential and the vote and subject matter of the confidentiality be disclosed.

If you have the will, you can fix the problem of proportionality now. No referendum, no constitutional amendment required, and no comprehensive communication program.

Using committees with proportional representation (popular vote) to advance legislation meets the principles laid out in your mandate:

1) Effectiveness and legitimacy; the proposed measure would increase public confidence among Canadians that their democratic will, as expressed by their votes, will be fairly translated and that the proposed measure reduces distortion and strengthens the link between voter intention and the election of representatives;

2) Engagement; the proposed measure would encourage voting and participation in the democratic process, foster greater civility and collaboration in politics (similar to minority governments);

3) Accessibility and inclusiveness; the proposed measure would avoid undue complexity in the voting process, while respecting the other principles;

4) Integrity; the proposed measure can be implemented while safeguarding public trust in the election process, by ensuring reliable and verifiable results obtained through an effective and objective process that is secure and preserves vote secrecy for individual Canadians; and

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5) Local representation; the proposed measure would ensure accountability and recognize the value that Canadians attach to community, to Members of Parliament understanding local conditions and advancing local needs at the national level, and to having access to Members of Parliament to facilitate resolution of their concerns and participation in the democratic process.

**Strategic voting would decrease under this committee method of proportional representation as voters will know their vote will count.**

**Voter turnout may also increase for the same reason.**

The Committee was also asked to consider mandatory voting and on-line voting. If desired these issues can be incorporated into the existing FPTP method of elections.

My preference is not to go with mandatory voting – if I do not ‘like’ any of the candidates I will not vote for any of the candidates. A candidate must have my confidence that they can govern Canada.

I assume that mandatory voting is being discussed to get the participation rate higher. The last election had a 68% participation rate. I think that is high enough to give the election legitimacy. To force someone who does not take the time to understand the candidates and issues to vote will not increase the legitimacy of the vote.

My preference is not to go with on-line voting until security can be assured and that assurance is communicated and understood by the electorate. By security I mean voter ID, data collection, data reporting and maintaining confidentiality of the voter and their vote. As I contemplate computer systems I do not see perfection (Phoenix payroll, Shared Services Canada/Statistics Canada dispute and the hacking of computer systems around the world). To accommodate accessibility I can accept on-line voting in a limited environment as long as security is good.

There will for some time yet be voters who do not use or like computers so a dual system would have to be maintained.

Of course there are numerous other problems with our broken democracy that need to be fixed and I consider them of greater importance than the voting method (after it is corrected to reflect popular vote through committees). For example: whipped votes, omnibus bills, time limiting debates, use of prorogation, concentration of power in the PMO, national party influence overriding local selection of candidates etc. I will not expand this list further as it is not the question before this Committee.

Thank you for your consideration. Submitted

with respect

Victor Hendrickson