

ERRE Committee Brief  
Kamloops-Thompson-Cariboo Election Reform Committee  
September 27, 2016

## INTRODUCTION

During the federal election of 2015, three parties had policy planks relating to improving our First Past The Post system of voting. Those three parties, Greens, New Democrats, and Liberals, combined for 64.75% of the popular vote in our riding. In aggregate, Kamloops-Thompson-Cariboo (KTC) voters strongly indicated an interest in changing our present system of voting.

After the Special Committee on Electoral Reform (ERRE Committee) was formed, the Conservative Party refused to encourage town hall meetings. This policy was adhered to in the Kamloops-Thompson-Cariboo riding.

Others disagreed with the CPC's approach. A number of community members decided to form a committee and engage voters by holding open events, educational in nature and include the input our participants gave us in a brief to the ERRE Committee.

Our committee - the Kamloops-Thompson-Cariboo Election Reform Committee - included active members of federal and provincial Greens, NDP and Liberal parties, as well members of FairVoteCanada and the Anglican Church. We hosted events from mid-July until September 19th. We held 10 events: 5 farmers' markets, 3 open meetings including Thompson Rivers University welcome back BBQ, one Rotary Club, and a town hall. We spoke directly with roughly 200 people, reached more through radio interviews plus a radio talk show, sparked articles in the local newspaper, and wrote letters to the editor.

We noticed an up-tick in election reform discussions in the letters section of the newspaper. Finally, over 4000 emails were sent out to voters alerting them to what the committee was doing.

Across those 10 meetings we found no appetite for a referendum, approximately 12 people we spoke with supported a referendum (6%). Support of FPTP was equally weak.

## FINDINGS

We asked a series of questions at our events. The following questions provided volunteers a framework for discussions:

- 1) What values are most important to you?
- 2) Are you satisfied with the present FPTP system?
- 3) (edited) Other systems combine current ridings into larger local districts so almost every voter has a representative. What do you think of this option?
- 4) Which is more important to you:
  - a) a position articulated by a party, or
  - b) a position articulated by a candidate?
- 5) If you wanted Canada's electoral system to change, what would that change look like?

These questions took up the bulk of our discussions.

Plus we asked four other questions:

- a) Do you favour dedicated seats for First Nations?
- b) Do you favour mandatory voting?
- c) Do you favour automatic registration for youth turning 18?
- d) Do you favour on-line voting?

Question one produced perhaps the most responses. Boiled down, respondents wanted a value-driven system that clearly included: fairness, equality, and inclusiveness. Frequently the rationale 'if you get 25% of the vote, you should get 25% of the seats' was the starting point for a discussion about fairness. Further the new system should be simple, collaborative, adaptable, and keep wasted votes to a minimum.

A number of people had difficulty with party lists, which would be a feature of most PR systems. The connection between a party producing a list and a voter selecting his/her preferred party and possibly having a choice of which list candidate for that party he/she would have at the same time caused some confusion. If lists are part of a new system then much education and patience will be required to help voters understand how the system works.

There was noticeable support for Single Transferable Vote and discussion around Rural-Urban PR at the town hall. A motion passed at an earlier KTC Reform Committee meeting favouring PR and “leaning towards MMP.” That motion was carried 14-4.

Question 4 - voting for the party or the candidate was a more challenging question, with no clear positions one-way or the other. Our committee believes that FPTP is too rigid. The difficulty participants had in making a decision between party and candidate is another sign that proportional representation is a better option for our electorate.

Participants indicated a desire to be represented locally and to have each vote count. One person said we shouldn't have to choose between our preferred party and our preferred candidate if the candidate belonged to another party.

At the town hall, several favoured more opportunity for independent candidates to be elected. A desire was expressed for a more accessible system with strong local representation. The town hall indicated a displeasure with MPs being more connected to their party brass in Ottawa than their voters in the riding.

Eighty three out of 91 at the town hall wanted a change from FPTP, many preferred a form of PR; one of the tables said they specifically favoured Rural-Urban PR.

The idea of larger electoral districts which PR usually requires met with approval. However, sentiment was decidedly against increasing the number of seats in Parliament - increases in spending and taxes were cited as primary reasons.

The last few questions during the town hall discussion were yes/no:

- a) Dedicated First Nations seats was favoured by roughly 85%;
- b) Mandatory voting, 40% in favour;
- c) Automatic voter registration was nearly unanimous (only one opposed);
- d) On-line voting was favoured by 45%. Those opposed cited concerns of fraud.

Many believe the current voting system is polarizing. Those people felt compromise, collaboration, and cooperation were desirable attributes in a voting system.

There was discussion on the topic of lack of knowledge about electoral systems, and how our democracy works. At most of the events and forums, and with friends, family and co-workers, it was suggested our schools should play an important role in educating our students about Canadian democracy. Giving our students a firm grasp of our democratic system, municipal, provincial/territorial, and federal is essential.

## CONCLUSION

The KTC ERC found an overwhelming desire for change. People disliked being forced into strategic voting, were angry with the disconnect between constituents and their MP, and wanted the ability to vote for the candidate of their choice and the party of their choice.

About 90% of the people we talked to want a proportional representation system, but were open to suggestions as to what that system would look like.

There was no ambiguity, however, when it came to what the new system should deliver. It has to be accessible, fair, inclusive, and open to smaller parties and independents. Single Transferable Vote and Rural-Urban PR had support from our respondents but MMP was also popular.

Including dedicated First Nations seats and automatic voter registration for those turning 18 were highly supported, but those we engaged with were split on mandatory and on-line voting.

**KAMLOOPS-THOMPSON-CARIBOO  
ELECTION REFORM COMMITTEE**

For the KTC Election Reform Committee:

Blaine Adamson	Debora Burgess	Betty Cadre	Michael Crawford
Barbara Hooper	John Hooper	Bill Hadgkiss	Beat Klossner
Fanny Monk	Diane McLeod	Anne Neave	Ron Pilling
Penny Reid	Arthur Stack	William Sundhu	Carol Todd
	Murray Todd		