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Brief to the Special Committee on Electoral Reform

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Summary:

"There is no perfect or even best electoral system" (Carty, UBC)

The ERRE committee's (**broad public support ?**) engagement process is greatly flawed. There have been **no valid random polls** of the silent majority of Canadians who do not come out to town halls, submit briefs or appear before the ERRE committee. Your respondents, so far, are not a valid random representative cross-section of the Canadian population. The respondents are mainly academics, political party members, avid PR supporters and political dilettantes. This is a very small % of the Canadian population. Your e- consultation has a very low number of respondents compared to other e-petitions. (E-382 Blasphemous Libel has 6,061 respondents to date.)

Dr. Nelson Wiseman: (U of T) comments to ERRE committee, July 25,2016, Ottawa

" I don't think Canadians are terribly interested in this issue. I think studying alternate voting systems is an elite pleasure industry.

If you look at any of the polls taken before the last election, in which people were asked what the most important issues were, you'll see that changing the electoral system did not register. Now, are Canadians interested? The people you will be meeting—and you're going to be travelling across the country—I suspect are going to be largely self-selected. Most will be in favour of changing the system, but **they will not be representative of the public.** "

Prof. Maxwell Cameron, UBC. stated " Electoral reform is too important to leave to politicians"

Canadians should decide with **direct democracy** on any future electoral system just like PEI is doing this fall or like N.Z. did in 1992-93. What is the rush? Educate Canadians on the electoral systems and have a plebiscite/ referendum in conjunction with the 2019 federal election. The last referendum held (Charlottetown Accord)(1992) had a turnout of 76.7% in B.C. I think the turnout would be even higher with a referendum on electoral reform. It would really engage people. Much more than what the ERRE committee is doing.

We do not have geographic equality in Canada in regards to representation by population. Vancouver Island has a greater population than New Brunswick and yet gets only 7 MP's compared to N.B's 10. Alberta and BC have a greater population than Quebec yet get 76 MP's to Quebec's 78 and then there is PEI with 4 MP's with a low population of approx. 146,000 or approx. 36,464 per MP compared to BC's 108,899 per MP.

The voting power of ERRE members should be exactly proportional to the 2015 popular vote. Elizabeth May with 3.4% of the vote should only have a weighted vote of 0.41, BQ 0.57, each Liberal 0.95, each Conservative 1.28 and each NDP 1.19.

Comments:

1. Education

I realize it is not in your ERRE mandate, however, you should be directing people to educational websites such as (**Samara Canada/electoral reform**)

Samara Canada has a very good 20 page synopsis on electoral reform and an excellent section [**further reading**] which lists a myriad of sources for information. It is truly non-partisan and objective. Samara also gave an excellent presentation to the ERRE committee in Ottawa.

Few Canadians (19% ,Ipsos poll) know about the ERRE (**e-consultation on electoral reform**) or the meetings going on now across the country. You need to do a much better job on public relations and advertising. Your media exposure is very poor.

2. The Liberal Platform statement "**We will make every vote count**" is semantic antics.

Every vote counts equally now, does it not? It is the **result** and number of MP's elected that may not be equal to the percentage of the popular vote

Under STV and MMP, there are thresholds and quotas- so if your candidate or party does not reach them, your vote does not elect an MP i.e. contrary to the mantra "make every vote count"

One's vote for a small fringe party or independent may not result in an MP under any system except maybe pure PR with no quotas or thresholds.

Lots of people buy lottery tickets and they all have an equal chance of winning before the draw. The only thing that happens in politics is the result, in that, the number of mp's elected is not completely proportional to the popular vote for some parties especially the NDP and Greens. It would be even less so now that the NDP vote has declined to 13%. There is no system other than pure PR that would make all MP seats exactly equal to the popular vote and even pure PR would not do it as you can't have a fraction of an MP. i.e. 19.7% of 338 is 66.59 MP's. If one wants an exact proportional vote in Ottawa, you do it by **weighted vote** using the simple formula [popular vote % x 338/ (seats actually won)] so to two decimal places based on 2015 results the weighted vote would be for each MP: Liberal (0.73), Conservative (1.09), NDP (1.52), BQ (1.59) and Green (11.50)

3. Cynicism and public distrust

"Voters are not interested in electoral reform" (Wiseman, U of T)

There is "deep antipathy and suspicion of political parties amongst voters" (Carty, UBC)

"less than 2% of Canadians belong to political parties and those that do are not representative of the general population" (Cross, Mt. Allison U)(Young, U of C)(The Contours of Political Party Membership in Canada)

Some polls (Reader's Digest, May 2012) and (Ipsos Reid, Sept. 2014) show Canadians do not trust federal politicians very much, only 6 to 11%. Politicians are at the bottom of the heap on the scale of public trust along with lawyers, used car dealers and telemarketers.

So, here we have partisan politicians and partisan political parties, with a vested interest in certain electoral systems, deciding our new electoral system rather than Canadians via a referendum where every vote really counts.

Samara Canada states "changing the electoral system does not guarantee a significant boost in satisfaction with the way democracy works."

4. Does an electoral system increase diversity ?

No. It is political parties through their nomination processes .

Canadian political parties are very sophisticated marketing organisations with the major power tripping goal of getting the most MP's they can. They now, smartly, target ethnic groups and minorities and what better way to get out that vote than having an ethnic or minority candidate.

The diversity of our current MP's is close to the general population now. We have 10 indigenous MP's and 6 LGBT plus many Indo-Canadians, Chinese- Canadians, Afghan/Iranian Canadians, Jewish -Canadians, Muslim- Canadians etc. and this is with FPTP.

There is a lack of equity in female MP's. However, most women place great value on home, friends and family and politics is not for them. Politics is an alpha male ultra competitive partisan sport complete with flying elbows, fickle fingers and Shawinigan handshakes. Political parties have teams of researchers constantly trying to dig up dirt on their opponents. If a party does not do well in an election, the leader is gone, post-haste, just like hockey coaches.

5. Economic correlation between electoral systems and debt/GDP ratio?

No study can prove that . There are far too many variables.

"the relationship between debt and growth is a politically charged issue" (quote from The 90% question- The Economist , April 2013)

6. Voter turnout

No studies can really prove or disprove whether an electoral system increases or decreases turnout. Academics have debated this for years.

It depends on the election issue to a large extent. . In the Feb 2014 issue of The Economic Journal (Royal Economic Society) Professors Herrera, Morelli and Palfrey show that **in a tight election FPTP gets a bigger turnout than PR.**

In New Zealand, Robert Peden, Chief Electoral Officer stated before the ERRE committee: " New Zealand has been experiencing a significant decline in voter participation since the early eighties. There was a spike in participation in 1996 and 1999, but since then the **overall trend of declining participation continues**, which is of concern to the commission, to the New Zealand Parliament, and to the government.

There has been research on the impact of the change in participation by Professor Jack Vowles; it indicates that **the change to MMP has had a neutral effect on participation.** "

Voter turnout is all over the map and no relation to electoral system.

Switzerland was 48.40 % in it's last election, France was 55.40% Canada 68.28% US 42.5% Germany 71.5% (figures from IDEA-International Institution for Democracy and Electoral Assistance)

In Canada, the Royal Commission on Electoral reform(1989) stated " 5% of the population are perennial non- voters" and that a substantial portion of those who do not participate in any given election do so for " **everyday life reasons**" such as being away, sick, busy, or unenumerated. The Broadbent poll (Dec. 2015) shows that 81% of respondents voted even if they believe their vote will not change the outcome in their electoral district.

7. Mandate

The issue of electoral reform was in the platform of most of the parties, however, it was **not a major issue in the election** and no political parties stated that there would be no referendum. So, now political parties, especially the NDP and Greens are saying we have a mandate-we don't need Canadians to decide the system. Voters may have voted for electoral reform but they did not vote against a referendum to decide a new electoral system. A referendum has not been ruled out by the ERRE committee. I don't think that many Canadians read the party platforms -they vote on a leader's persona and maybe some major issues that they see or hear in the media. **CBC News (Oct. 2015) compared**

federal party platforms and election promises on 19 issues- electoral reform was not one of them.

The majority of voters also voted for parties that had a **balanced budget** in their platform. The NDP stated " We will run balanced budgets" "4 years of balanced budgets"

What happened to that mandate and what happened to the modest deficit of 10 billion by the Liberals- it morphed to 30 billion and growing. (" We will run modest deficits for three years"- Liberal Platform 2015) 25,000 Syrian refugees were to be settled by Dec.31, 2015 - that didn't happen.






To paraphrase from politicians feel

Orwell's "Animal Farm" All mandates are equal, however, some mandates are more equal than others.

8. AV (preferential- ranked ballot)

MP's would need broad support to be elected. Not like Canada where only 133 (39.35%) of MP's received more than 50% of the popular vote in their ridings.

Seats won, by share of vote going to winning candidate^[4]

Party in 1st place	>50%	45-49.9%	40-44.9%	35-39.9%	<35%	Total
 Liberal	87	48	26	13	10	184
 Conservative	42	24	20	8	5	99
 New Democratic	3	4	12	14	11	44
 Bloc Québécois			2	1	7	10
 Green	1					1
Total	133	76	60	36	33	338

It doesn't seem to be "FPTP on steroids" in Australia

Some get elected with a very small portion(0.54%) of the national vote but the majority vote in their ridings . Also, they have more diversity than Canada with approx. 8 parties and two independents .

Furthermore, the "Three Ontario Votes" project show some parties like the NDP would do better under AV than FPTP . 308.com shows the same.

A new voting system is a whole new ballgame. Especially with an optional preferential ballot where people can vote for one candidate or all of them. No one really knows what would happen with the behaviour of voters and political parties in Canada. **There is lots of strategic voting under any system.** N.Z shows 31% strategic voting. Australian political parties give voters an AV list (plumping they call it) to help them rank in the manner that would be best for the party in that riding There are many more parties in Australia than Canada and a centre right coalition as well.

My choice would be AV Plus ie. AV geographically (approx 60- 70% of MP's) so we don't get MP`s elected with 33.2 % of the vote like Nanaimo -Ladysmith and the plus would be approx 30-40% of MP`s from open party lists, also voted in by AV. So basically AV with an MMP component but with more list MP's than the 1998 UK Jenkins Commission.

9. MPP

Every vote does not count because of quota's or thresholds and the geographic MP's are still elected by FPTP.

Every vote does not count with STV, as well, because of the threshold to be reached for election .

The only way to have perfect proportion to the second decimal place would be a **weighted vote** in Parliament using the simple formula [{ % popular vote x 338 } divided by geographic seats won] with AV or FPTP used in the current ridings.

There are 9 countries that use MMP and 58 countries using FPTP. (Samara Canada states)

In MPP, who decides who gets on the party list side? The party leader ? Look what happened in Nanaimo- Ladysmith. The party leader denied Paul Manly and Laurie Gourlay from running for the NDP with no reasons given to the public. Here we had the party leader usurping the local constituency- very anti democratic. Also, what is to prevent the biggest brown noser to the party leader getting on both the geographic list as well as the party list

In Europe, small parties are still excluded from electing MP's with thresholds. i.e. in Germany if a small party gets less than 5% of the national popular vote and elects no geographic MP's they do not get an MP. So, if I voted for the Rhinoceros party and we got 3% of the national vote but no geographic vote , I won't get an MP of my liking. Australia, under AV, has people getting an MP with 0.54% of the popular vote.

The LCC proposal for MMP in Canada would have a threshold whereby the small party would have to have candidates in one third of a region or province's geographic seats despite having a national vote of any percentage.

Also, in the LCC's list seats there would be , I believe, be an 8% quota for a list candidate to reach to be elected. Again , another threshold.

10. Urgency

We do not have an urgent democratic crisis in Canada requiring a rushed 6 month consultation and change of the electoral system. Canadians are not marching in the streets or occupying legislative lawns over electoral reform. We need to take our time and do it right. There are lots of political flip flops and changes/delays in implementing things.

We were only going to have a modest deficit of 10 billion - now it's 30 billion. The country is being run better than most. The voter turnout was up this past election, especially young voters. Look at the turnout for most recent elections in some countries- France 55.40%, Switzerland 48.40% and the US 42.5%

Educate the population about electoral reform issues and have a referendum in conjunction with the next federal election. The last referendum, the Charlottetown Accord, had a 76% voter turnout in B.C. So, maybe a referendum with the election would get a great turnout of voters.

11. Referendum

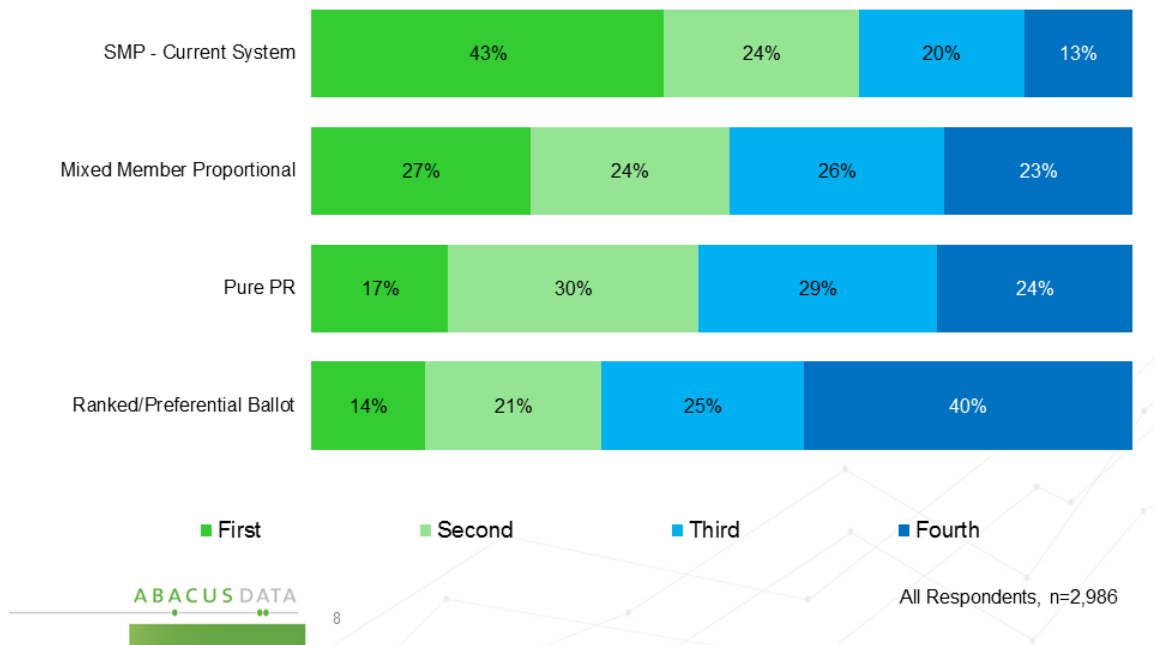
Broad public support should be gauged through a direct vote by Canadians on an option or various options including FPTP for Canada's electoral system

The Broadbent poll(Dec 2015) used a preferential ballot with it's approx. 3000 respondents and the counts were as follows :

Preference for voting system



Below are descriptions of our current voting system and three possible alternatives. Please rank them from the one you like the most to the one you like the least.



A letter writer to the Time-Colonist expresses it well in stating "What the government should be providing is a process to identify a number of systems that could be used, including FPTP, and clearly educate Canadians on the pros and cons of each system. Canadians must then have the right to vote and choose the system that each prefers.

What are the politicians afraid of . Are they afraid that Canadians can make good choices. " The vast majority of Canadians do not trust politicians.

No province would dare change the electoral system without a referendum. Have one just like N.Z, with the same questions ,or like PEI will have this fall with a preferential ballot and let Canadians choose the system-FPTP included.

As Thomas Mulcair stated " The other thing that people have to understand is that even if it's not constitutional change *per se*, it is **profound democratic change**, and precisely because of that, it's not they type of thing that you can do either by just snapping your fingers the day after an election, or without profound consultation. People have to be brought in. It's a little like any form of development -- this is democratic development -- and it has to be from the base up. People have to agree with it. You can't shove it down people's throats "

Marc Mayrand, Canada, Chief Electoral Officer feels that like N.Z key changes to election laws- including provisions dealing with the **method of voting-require the support of 75% of MP's or a majority vote in a national referendum** (Victoria Times-Colonist paper, Sept.22, 2016 article by Joan Bryden, The Canadian Press)

Recent polls , show most Canadians favor a referendum :

Insights West(Feb. 2016) 65% Yes

Ipsos Public Affairs(May 2016) 73% Yes

Ipsos Public Affairs (Sept.2016) 55% Yes

Sincerely, Paul W. Williams