

Reform of the Voting System

Brief submitted in a personal capacity

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Bold font is used in the following to refer to the founding principles of the ERRE Committee.

Introduction

To give you some background information about me, I am Canadian by birth and in my twenties. Since I turned 18, I have voted in every provincial and federal election, and the candidates I have voted for have never managed to win in my riding because I have always had difficulty in voting strategically. I also do not feel that the government (nor the one before it) represents me. I am dissatisfied with the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system and would like to take this opportunity to submit the measures that I am in favour of. My brief is divided into several sections: proposed measures, the referendum issue, the minimum of changes to be implemented, and the conclusion.

Proposed measures

Before starting, I would like to say that the following section presents my opinion of what the voting system should be for Canada. I believe that the ERRE Committee consulted subject matter experts, and I do not presume to have the truth on my side or even an in-depth knowledge of all the possible voting systems. However, I feel it is my duty to express my opinion to you so that you will know what one Canadian thinks about this upcoming change. Given that Canada is a so-called democratic country, I will exercise my right to speak, while hoping that I will be listened to and that what I have to say will be taken into account.

Concerning the voting system

I would like Canada to have a proportional voting system. **A pure proportional system with a closed party list would be the method that is most representative of the political opinions of Canadians because the total number of votes for each party would be directly proportional to the number of seats allocated to each party.** To date, I have not had confidence in my government because my vote is not counted. In a pure proportional system, my vote would be added to the other votes to determine the percentage of seats that would be allocated to each party. **In my view, this would help Canadians regain trust in their electoral system because each vote would count. If they have renewed trust, people will be more inclined to go vote.**

A number of opposing arguments have often been made against this system. The closed lists and absence of constituencies scare the majority without the arguments against these two principles being clearly stated. With respect to closed lists, it will be necessary to regulate how they are drawn up to ensure that they are consistent and representative of the Canadian population. **Man-woman alternation, introduction of minorities (First Nations, immigrants, French Canadians, etc.) and the geographical distribution of candidates are examples of possible regulations that would ensure better representation of the population as well as greater inclusion of Canada's diversity in our government.** Currently, the government is all men, most of them white and older. This is certainly not what represents Canada best! Where are the 50% of the population who are women? Where are the First Nations who have been plundered and neglected for so long? With respect to constituencies, most Canadians say they want to keep them, but without providing arguments when asked why they want so much to keep them. Most have never spoken to or even met the Member of Parliament who represents them. Most of them have no more feeling of belonging to their constituency than is necessary. Most

complain when they are in a constituency where the majority supports another political party, because their favoured candidate cannot win the election. Without talking about the redistribution of ridings, which occurs at the time of every census, a time when there may be conflicts of interest for those doing the redistribution. Who, in fact, is completely objective when it's a matter of obtaining access to more power? In fact, instead of having constituencies where each party nominates a candidate, the party lists should contain candidates from each province, possibly in proportion to each province's population size. It would even be possible to regulate the representation of smaller regions within the provinces if the Committee deems it necessary. With respect to regional representation, I will talk about an idea that I feel strongly about in the section entitled "Concerning the dual role of Members of Parliament" in order to have better regional representation, while avoiding mixing up regional representation and representation of political ideology.

Since the beginning of 2016, many people have been saying that this is 2016 and such progress is being made that everything (or almost) is possible. **In a similar vein, online voting would be a method to be implemented to increase citizen participation in federal politics.** The average Canadian already does a number of transactions online, mainly financial transactions, where it is necessary to provide identification. If we are able to identify ourselves online, we should be able to vote online. **Moreover, this method would be a new way to consult voters about upcoming decisions.** It would be possible to appeal to them in order to have more direct democracy: citizens included in decision-making.

To make it possible for more voters to exercise their right to vote, consideration should be given to opening polling stations at times when people are not working. **In fact, having polling stations open on Saturdays would be well worth considering to increase the participation rate.** For example, in order to accommodate all voters, the polling stations could open on Friday morning and close on Saturday evening, and there could be a period when the polling stations are closed between 9:00 pm on Friday and 8:00 am on Saturday. Of course, I leave it up to the Committee to determine the best times for the polling stations to be open to facilitate a more continuous flow of people and a higher participation rate. The goal here, of course, is to help more voters exercise their right to vote without having to miss a work day.

Concerning the dual role of Members of Parliament

The reforms that I described above are very far-reaching, of course, and I know that it is not very likely that Canada will make such radical changes. That is why I say the following: I think that an issue has not been raised in the current discussions on electoral reform, but it should be raised very soon. I think there is a problem with the dual role given to Members of Parliament sitting in the House of Commons. I see there being two roles associated with the jobs of Members of Parliament associated with a constituency. The first role is regional representation and second role is federal representation. An MP is given a mandate to represent the interests of the people in his or her region at the same time that he or she is given a mandate to represent the interests of the entire population of Canada. In my view, there is a clear conflict of interest. How, objectively, can an MP make a decision that addresses both of these interests if they are not complementary or even contradictory? I think it would be better to separate these two mandates and give them to two people with very distinct roles. I leave it to you to figure out the details (number of MPs in each role, size of constituencies, etc.). In my opinion, the regional representative should not be affiliated with a party and should personally represent his or her region. On the other hand, the federal representative should be affiliated with a party and adhere to the promises that his/her party made to the people during elections. It would not be possible to have

independent federal representatives and an elected federal candidate would not be able to change parties during his/her term because this would constitute a betrayal of the voters. In this way, the regional MP would be able to fight for the interests of his/her region, whereas the MP affiliated with a party would represent the federal interest. **Because the roles are separate, voters can go to the right MP, depending on their needs, and would no longer have the impression of being betrayed by an MP elected as an individual whose hands are tied by the party line or, conversely, by an MP elected for his party allegiance who does not follow the party line. In this context, I believe the people would regain confidence in their MPs and their government.** Each role and the powers associated with it should be carefully thought out, of course. Perhaps the regional representative should have a solely advisory role, while the federal representative has legislative power. Perhaps they should share this legislative power according to certain rules to be determined when this type of reform is introduced.

Referendum or no referendum?

There is a big debate under way on the referendum issue. Some people say it is necessary, while others don't want one. I think that the ERRE Committee has ample legitimacy where reform of the voting system is concerned. Experts have been consulted, the people have been called upon to give their opinions, and each major party is represented on the Committee. So, all those who wish to express their opinion can do so. **In this context, I ask the government not to call a referendum.** I think it would be ridiculous and ineffective to summarize in a single question all of the complexity of the upcoming changes. As I said, those who wished to express their opinions were able to do so during the public consultations held by the members of Parliament, during ERRE Committee meetings, in social media, and, as I am doing, in a brief submitted to the ERRE Committee.

What I am asking for, at a minimum

The following section contains a list of the minimum changes that must take place in Canada to establish a true and legitimate democracy. These changes are the minimum to be implemented to avoid an illusion of democracy, as we currently have. As part of the current reform, the following are the minimum measures that I ask for:

- It is of paramount importance that Canada have a proportional voting system;
- It is of paramount importance to have a system that allows for better representation of women and minorities in the House of Commons, as the system with closed lists makes possible;
- It is of paramount importance that polling stations have longer hours to allow Canadians to express their opinion. Having polling stations open on Saturday is a possible solution;
- If it is technologically possible, online voting should be introduced;
- It is of paramount importance to continue discussions about our democracy in order to help our system evolve into a direct democracy.

Conclusion

To conclude, I would like to thank the ERRE Committee for the steps taken to implement the recommendations that will be submitted to the government in December 2016. I would ask that these recommendations be non-partisan and that they represent what the people and the experts deem to be necessary and good for Canada. As for the rest of it, I have expressed to you my hopes for a more democratic Canada. I hope that the reform of the voting system will be one of many reforms resulting in a direct democracy that gives power to the people and not to a white male elite.

That is what I wanted to say.