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Summary:

- I prefer and strongly recommend the adoption of the Single Transferable Vote system in Canada, though another proportional system would still be preferable to First-Past-the-Post.
- Proportional electoral systems deliver governments and policies that are no less stable, and in fact are often more stable, than First-Past-the-Post.

Dear Members of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform,

I would like to commend your work so far on engaging Canadians in this process and earnestly pursuing improvements to our electoral system that I hope will help modernise our democracy and make it more representative of contemporary Canadian voters and their values regardless of the party they support.

I would like to structure this brief in two short sections:

- Notes on electoral system design; and
- Notes on the false “stability” of governments elected under First-Past-the-Post (FPTP).

#### **Electoral system design:**

I believe it is important to distinguish, for the benefit of Canadians, the difference between ballot structure and electoral system. Many people in the public, the media, and even in the political class appear to confuse ranked ballots, which are a type of ballot structure, with “Alternative Vote” (AV – also known as “Preferential Vote”), which is an electoral system. In fact, ranked ballots can be used in either non-proportional systems like AV, or in proportional systems, like Single Transferable Vote (STV) or Mixed-Member Proportional (MMP).

**I believe that the primary aim of this reform, as suggested by Prime Minister Trudeau, who promised to “make every vote count,” is to reduce the number of wasted votes (which elect nobody) to near zero.**<sup>1</sup> Any proportional system will do this; the prerequisite is to introduce multi-member ridings. A system with single-member ridings, like FPTP or AV, will always leave a large proportion of wasted votes, since there is no representation for the people who did not form part of the plurality or 50% + 1 in a given riding. Consider the case of a riding where 51% of the people vote for Party X; both FPTP and AV deliver the same result, and everybody who voted for another party wasted their time in going to the polls. In fact, in that case, everybody who voted for the winner above the 50% + 1 threshold wasted their time as well, since they did not gain additional representation for those “extra” votes. While AV could be a very slight improvement over FPTP in that it would ensure that at least 50% of voters elected a representative, only multi-member ridings can ensure that the proportion of voters who can elect a representative is closer to 100% than to 50%.

While I would happily accept MMP with open lists as a vast improvement over FPTP, **I very much prefer and recommend STV**, which keeps all representatives local, maximizes the influence of voters on the electoral outcome, and does not disadvantage independent candidates or entrench political parties within the electoral system itself. In fact, STV is also financially economical in design, because parties will only run the number of candidates they think they can elect in a small multi-member riding. This means that only the best candidates will be put forward, instead of each party having to fill a full slate of 338 candidates across the country and possibly running into vetting problems. Given election

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<sup>1</sup> In the October 2015 Canadian federal election, only 49% of voters voted for a winning candidate.

financing laws on reimbursing candidates' expenses, this will result in substantially cheaper federal elections in Canada that vastly improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the results for voters.

### **The false “stability” of First-Past-the-Post:**

One of the frequently cited “advantages” to FPTP systems, which would presumably also apply to other systems that use only single-member ridings – like “Alternative Vote” (AV) – is that they promote the stability of government by making it more likely that any given election will deliver a majority government to one party. While the premises may be true that majority governments last longer than those with fewer than half the seats, and that majority governments are more likely under FPTP or AV, the conclusion that these factors improve the stability of government appears to be false on at least two grounds.

First of all, the increased likelihood of majority governments does not demonstrably increase the lifespan of governments *overall*, when one accounts for minority governments, whose lifespan is significantly decreased. This is well-documented in Peter Russell’s book, which compares the number of federal elections since World War Two in Canada and Germany, and finds that FPTP Canada has elections more frequently than proportional Germany.<sup>2</sup>

The second reason why FPTP systems actually do not provide more stable government than proportional representation systems is that the resulting governments tend to be alternating “majority” governments that only represent an often polarized minority of the voters – typically about 40% of the voters in Canada in elections since 1988. Therefore, a new government often comes in with absolute control of the legislature, and sets about undoing much of what the previous government has done. By contrast, there is more continuity of policy (and less waste of resources) in proportional systems, where every vote by the legislature was won by representatives of a true majority of the people.<sup>3</sup>

Thank you again for your consideration of these issues. I urge you to write your report on electoral reform in the best interests of Canadians, without any consideration whatsoever for your party affiliations.

Best regards,

Stefan Wesche

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<sup>2</sup> Russell, Peter H., *Two cheers for minority government: The evolution of Canadian parliamentary democracy*, Emond Montgomery Publications Limited, Toronto (2008).

<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed discussion of measures of government stability, see Wesche, Stefan, “Electoral Systems and their Effect on the Survival of Minority and Coalition Governments in Parliamentary Democracies,” Major Research Paper <<https://www.ruor.uottawa.ca/handle/10393/24147>>.