Make every vote count

Submission to the Special Committee on Electoral Reform

Laura Winter
7 October 2016

In our current voting system of first-past-the-post (FPTP), votes are not equal. The Liberal government that is currently in power was elected with only 39.5% of the popular vote, yet formed a majority government. Hence, there is a disjoint between the number of voters that vote for a given party and the number of seats that that party receives in Parliament. The contrast is seen clearly with the following figures:

6,942,937 votes for the Liberal Party = 184 seats in the House of Commons

602,933 votes for the Green Party = 1 seat in the House of Commons

(Source: Official Voting Results, Forty-second general election, from www.elections.ca)

Thus, while the Green Party received a little over 1/12 the number of votes of the Liberal Party, it received only 1/184 the number of seats. This means that a vote for the Green Party did not count as strongly as a vote for the Liberal Party.

Given the majoritarian nature of the current FPTP system, many voters choose to vote "strategically" in order to elect, from their point of view, the least unfavourable candidate who has a chance of winning. In the 2015 election, a staggering "46 per cent voted for a party that was not their first choice" (Mr. Broadbent, presentation to Special Committee on Electoral Reform, Aug. 29, 2016). This is extremely frustrating and unsatisfying, and most likely a significant factor contributing to Canada's low voter turnout. I should know, since I have felt compelled to vote "strategically" in every federal election since being able to vote.

I strongly believe that Canada needs an electoral system based on proportional representation (PR). Proportional representation will make every vote count. Many countries worldwide successfully use some form of PR. PR leads to more cooperation between political parties, helping to eliminate the antagonistic nature of current politics in Canada. Under PR, policies are developed through cooperation and consensus, and enjoy the support of a broad representation of Canadians. This should lead to more stable government, without policies being reversed every few years when a new party comes to power, and a higher effectiveness in government.

I personally support the Single Transferable Vote (STV) model of proportional representation. I like this system because it allows voters to express support for more than one candidate, even across different political parties. This speaks to individual differences and strengths among candidates, which is the reality of politics. A voter may find that her priorities align closely with a specific Liberal

candidate even though she generally supports the Green Party. STV would allow this voter to express her support both for the Liberal candidate and for one or more Green candidates.

With the multi-member ridings of STV, voters will have several local representatives. The elected candidates will still provide local representation for voters, as is currently the case with single-member ridings. Additionally, however, voters will have the benefit of being able to choose from several local representatives when they want their voice to be heard in Ottawa. They will be able to choose to speak to the MP that most closely aligns with their values or with the issue they are raising. Moreover, this ability to "shop around" for the most suitable representative will provide an incentive for MPs to be available and open to their constituents. The service they are deemed to provide to their constituents will affect their chances of re-election.

In summary, Canadians want and need a form of Proportional Representation in order to make sure that every vote counts equally. I believe that the best model of PR for Canada is STV. The basic STV model may need to be adjusted to accommodate the realities of ridings that cover large geographic areas. Nevertheless, I believe that STV provides the best local representation, proportionality and equality for Canadian voters.