

Dear Committee Members

On Sunday, Sept. 18 the local Council of Canadians, Comox Valley Chapter sponsored a public dialogue on electoral reform using questions developed by Fair Vote Canada. There were 17 people participating in small group discussions, using specific questions as a spring board. I have synthesized the results of these group responses from the questionnaire discussed.

Without question, all of the participants want some form of proportionality when electing candidates to parliament. Under our current First Past the Post system there is no requirement for the winning party to have a majority of voter support to form government: 40% or less usually suffices. The majority of people found this to be problematic and profoundly undemocratic. The share of seats should be equal to the share of votes. When considering whether a government can pass legislation without the support of other parties or whether they should consult, the majority of participants agreed that consultation was the best method of legislating new policy.

About half of the participants voted strategically in the last election and the other half voted for the party of their choice. Most people want to be able to vote for the party of their choice and not to vote for their second or third choice to avoid a majority they don't want. Ensuring that as large a share of votes as possible should count to elect representatives in line with voters' political preferences was of utmost importance to participants. In other words, votes in safe ridings should count as equally as in swing ridings. Having an electoral system that accomplishes these things lends legitimacy and effectiveness to the voting process.

When there is some form of proportional representation (PR) all votes are counted equally giving voters a greater reason for political engagement. PR also encourages collaboration and compromise among parties and greater civility when discussing policy options. Most people agreed with the formation of coalition governments which represents a majority of the electorate and they liked the idea that it made it easier for independents to be elected as well as new parties to form. Everyone agreed that there should **not** be a dominance of two main parties in our system.

Most people agreed that making the system easy and accessible for voting was important as well as not increasing the number of elections. Most participants also agreed that making the system more accessible to women and minorities was important.

Everyone agreed that our democratic system should be based on strong principles of integrity and that measures are taken to safeguard every aspect of the process including the idea that all votes count equally.

Most people did not want to maintain our current system of one single MP per riding. The majority preferred a system of multi member ridings large enough to ensure proportionality. Without a doubt, all participants wanted to have a system whereby

voters elect representatives across the country in proportion to their share of the votes in each region. Everyone wanted to elect an MP who would be attentive to local issues and help them with personal matters but they did not want the loyalty of their local MP's to override their duty to work for the public good at the national level. All agreed that politicians should take a long term approach to policy making, avoiding large swings in policy due to small changes in voter preference. We all wanted to ensure that the best representatives were elected in each party.

There was a wide variety of familiarity with the different voting systems but for everyone who participated, of utmost importance was a system of electoral representation that was proportional. Everyone agreed they wanted to replace the current system with some form of proportional representation, where the number of seats in Parliament approximates each party's share of the vote. It seems that most of the people would choose some form of Single Transferable Vote or a Rural-Urban Hybrid option for their first choice.

I hope that this information will be useful in informing the committee when recommending a new voting system.

Regards,
Barbara Berger
Comox Valley Chapter,
Council of Canadians, BC

Polling Questions on Electoral Reform

Developed by Fair Vote Canada, this questionnaire is meant to provide information on citizens' views likely to be of interest to our politicians and the general public. I will be synthesising the results of our discussion today and sending a report back to the Special Committee on Electoral Reform via email.

PART I: General Considerations

1. There is no requirement for the winning party to have majority voter support to form a majority government under our current First-past-the-Post system. A share of 40% or less usually suffices. Which of the following best summarizes your views about this?
 - a. This is a good thing because it makes it easier to form majority governments.
 - b. That is how our system works, but this is neither good nor bad. I think minority governments are fine but majority governments are fine too.
 - c. It is problematic because it gives an unfair amount of power to the winning party.
2 people voted for option c.
 - d. It is profoundly undemocratic. The share of seats should be equal to the share of votes.
15 people voted for option d.
2. Which is preferable to you?
 - a. A government with a majority able to pass legislation without the support of other parties
 - b. A government that is obliged to consult with other parties and make compromises
All 17 people voted for option b.
3. Did you vote for your first preference in the last election or did you vote strategically?
 - a. First choice
 - b. Strategically
Half the participants voted strategically, the other half voted their choice.

Part II - Principles and Values

What follows are a number of features of electoral systems that could be affected by electoral reforms. These are organized into five groups, corresponding to the five principles being considered by the multi-party electoral reform committee of parliament.

Please read through these various features and determine which ones are most important to you and rate their importance to you from 0 to 4, giving a value of 0 to features that you don't consider important at all or that you might consider as a bad thing, and 4 to features that you consider to be of the most fundamental importance.

Effectiveness and legitimacy

- a. Make it unnecessary for voters to vote strategically:
15 VOTED 4, 2 PEOPLE VOTED 3.
- b. Ensure that the number of parliamentary seats of each party should correspond to its share of the popular vote;
14 PEOPLE VOTED 4, 3 PEOPLE VOTED 3
- c. Ensure that as large a share of votes as possible should count to elect representatives in line with voters' political preferences:
17 PEOPLE VOTED 4
- c. Make sure that votes matter equally in safe ridings or swing ridings:
17 PEOPLE VOTED 4

Voter engagement

- a. Give voters a greater reason to vote by making all votes count equally:
17 PEOPLE VOTED 4
- b. Encourage collaboration and compromise among parties and greater civility when discussing policy options:
16 PEOPLE VOTED 4, 1 PERSON VOTED 3
- c. Encourage the formation of coalition governments representing a majority of the electorate:
13 PEOPLE VOTED 4, 4 PEOPLE VOTED 3
- d. Make it easier for independents to be elected:
8 PEOPLE VOTED 4, 6 PEOPLE VOTED 3, 2 PEOPLE VOTED 2,
1 PERSON VOTED 0
- e. Make it easier for new parties to form and prosper:
11 PEOPLE VOTED 4, 2 PEOPLE VOTED 3, 2 PEOPLE VOTED 2,
2 PEOPLE VOTED 1
- f. Avoid the election of MPs from too many small parties:
6 PEOPLE VOTED 0, 3 PEOPLE VOTED 1, 5 PEOPLE VOTED 2, 2 PEOPLE
VOTED 3, 1 PERSON VOTED 4
- g. Encourage the dominance of two major parties:
17 PEOPLE VOTED 0.

Accessibility and inclusiveness

- a. Make the process of voting as easy as possible for voters:
15 PEOPLE VOTED 4, 2 PEOPLE VOTED 3.
- b. Avoid increasing the frequency of elections:
10 PEOPLE VOTED 4, 2 PEOPLE VOTED 3, 2 PEOPLE VOTED 2, 2 PEOPLE VOTED 1, 1 PERSON VOTED 0
- c. Elect more women and minorities to Parliament;
14 PEOPLE VOTED 4, 2 PEOPLE VOTED 2, 1 PERSON VOTED 1

Integrity

- a. Ensure that our democratic system is based on strong principles of integrity and that measures are taken to safeguard every aspect of the process:
17 PEOPLE VOTED 4
- b. Ensure that all votes matter equally in electing representatives:
17 PEOPLE VOTED 4

Local representation

- a. Maintain our current system of one single MP per riding:
15 PEOPLE VOTED 0, 2 PEOPLE VOTED 1
- b. Establish a system of multi-member ridings large enough to ensure proportionality:
12 PEOPLE VOTED 4, 5 PEOPLE VOTED 3
- c. Ensure that voters elect representatives across the country in proportion to their share of the votes in each region:
17 PEOPLE VOTED 4
- d. Ensure that the loyalty of MPs to their local constituency does not override their duty to work for the public good at the national level:
11 PEOPLE VOTED 4, 2 PEOPLE VOTED 2, 2 PEOPLE VOTED 1,
2 PEOPLE VOTED 0
- e. Elect MPs that are attentive to local issues and can help constituents with personal issues:
17 PEOPLE VOTED 4
- f. Encourage politicians to take a long-term policy perspective:
17 PEOPLE VOTED 4
- g. Avoid large policy swings due to small changes in voter preference:
16 PEOPLE VOTED 4, 1 PERSON VOTED 3
- h. Ensure that we elect the best representatives in each party:
17 PEOPLE VOTED 4

Part III: Electoral Systems

1. How familiar are you with the proposal to introduce **ranked ballots** while retaining the winner-take-all approach that we have now (otherwise known as **the Instant Runoff** or Alternative Vote system)?
 - a. Very familiar 6
 - b. Fairly familiar 5
 - c. Somewhat familiar 2
 - d. Not at all familiar 4

2. How familiar are you with the proposal to introduce a **Mixed Member Proportional system (MMP)**, based on somewhat larger ridings combined with the use of top-up seats on a regional basis to ensure proportionality?
 - a. Very familiar 4
 - b. Fairly familiar 6
 - c. Somewhat familiar 7

3. How familiar are you with the **Single Transferable Vote** system (STV), which would group ridings together in multi-member districts to ensure that voters with different preferences can elect a number of MPs to reflect those different preferences?
 - a. Very familiar 3
 - b. Fairly familiar 8
 - c. Somewhat familiar 3
 - d. Not at all familiar 3

4. How familiar are you with some of the **hybrid options** being put forward that would combine multi-member ridings in cities with single-member or two-member ridings in rural areas, while adding a small number of top-up seats to ensure proportionality?
 - e. Very familiar 1
 - f. Fairly familiar 2
 - g. Somewhat familiar 7
 - h. Not at all familiar 7

5. Given a choice between keeping the current First-past-the-Post system, or changing it, what would be your preference?
 - a. Keep the current FPTP system based on single-member ridings in which the candidate with the most votes is elected MP
 - b. Keep the current system but add the option of ranked ballots with instant runoff, otherwise known as the Alternative Vote system, which also uses single member ridings and elects a single winner per riding.

c. Replace the current system with some form of proportional representation, where the number of seats in Parliament approximates each party's share of the vote.
17 PEOPLE VOTED FOR THIS OPTION

6. Please indicate how strongly you feel about your choice. How important is this issue to you from 0 to 4, "very limited importance" to "utmost importance"?
17 PEOPLE VOTED UTMOST IMPORTANCE

7. The proportional systems that might be considered most appropriate for a vast country like Canada can be reduced to MMP, STV or a hybrid model involving small multi-member ridings and a small number of top-up seats to increase the proportionality of the system. Based on your understanding of what these systems entail, would you please indicate below your personal assessment of each if these options from 0 to 4, from "don't like it at all" to "would be an excellent choice for Canada."

a. Some version of Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) (retaining single-member seats while adding top-up seats on a regional basis to ensure proportionality).
9 PEOPLE VOTED 4, 2 PEOPLE VOTED 3, 5 PEOPLE VOTED 2, 1 PERSON VOTED 1.

b. Some version of single transferable vote (STV) (grouping ridings to form Multi-member ridings to ensure that voters with different preferences can elect a number of MPs to reflect those different preferences).
11 PEOPLE VOTED 4, 1 PERSON VOTED 3, 5 PEOPLE VOTED 2

c. A rural-urban hybrid option involving a mix of multi-member ridings (larger in urban areas, smaller in rural areas, combined with a small number of top-up seats for increased proportionality)
11 PEOPLE VOTED 4, 3 PEOPLE VOTED 3, 3 PEOPLE VOTED 2