

# Fair Vote Canada Dialogue on Electoral Reform and Proportional Representation



**Fair** **Représentation**  
**Vote** **équitable**  
**Canada** **au Canada**

August 23, 2016, Fort Frances Public  
Library Technology Centre, Fort  
Frances, Ontario

**Date, Nature, and Location of Event:** The event held was a community dialogue open to anyone to provide input as to what they would like to see in our democracy and what democratic values are important to them. As well, it provided an opportunity to share information and learn about electoral reform and proportional representation. The event was held by Fair Vote Canada, a grassroots multi-partisan citizens' campaign for voting system reform. Fair Vote Canada promotes the introduction of an element of proportional representation into elections for all levels of government and throughout civil society.

**Attendance:** The event was attended by 5 people. There was a reporter for the local radio station -- CFOB B93.1 The Border FM -- who interviewed about the event and its purpose. After the interview ended the reporter talked extensively off the record about his views on electoral reform. He left just as four others showed up around the same time. There were two senior citizens with little knowledge on the subject as well as two workers from the local MPP's constituency office there on their lunch-break who were well-versed in politics and moderately well-versed on the subject of electoral reform.

**Brief Description of Event:** The event was an open discussion with some questions provided (by ERRE) to provoke discussion and gain input.

**Dialogue About Electoral and Democratic Reform, Highlights:** The people present at the dialogue made many points and contributed immensely to the discussion even if they did not know much about the topic. One person said that voters were not satisfied because they weren't being represented. Many people's votes go to waste under our current First Past the Post system and that dissuades many potential-voters from heading to the polls. Another person brought up that people were dissatisfied because there weren't any MPs like them. We discussed how this could be alleviated through various forms of proportional representation such as Mixed Member Plurality or Single Transferable Vote where there would be more than one MP. Another person brought up the topic of ranked ballots; he noted that they were better than the current system but that they still lacked proportionality and that they still stifled many voices. He discussed with myself and the group how this would leave many people under represented. He said that ranked ballots were a good feature, but not a good system by itself, saying "ranked ballots are like AC in a car -- nice to have, but by itself - oh your car has AC, big deal, what's under the hood?"

**Democratic Principles and Values:** There was extensive discussion with the group about democratic principles and values. The issue of people having their votes count came up again. All agreed that having their vote contribute to elect someone was

important. There was consensus that the best way to do this was through adopting a form of Proportional Representation. Proportional Representation was the value that was deemed most important as well as local representation. The group discussed anxiety about losing local representation but were put at ease when learning that under many forms of PR local representation would not be lost and could even be better. The value that was deemed least important was the relative stability of majority governments. The group agreed that there was nothing inherently wrong about majority governments but they thought that majority governments should receive a majority of Canadians' votes. They came to agreement that minority and coalition governments had the advantage of forcing collaboration between parties. One person expressed desire to see more accountability and transparency from MPs and ministers, to which the others all agreed.

**Canadian Federal Electoral Reforms:** The group discussed possible alternatives to our current system. Mixed Member Plurality and Single Transferable Vote systems were explained. Desire to change to a proportional system was expressed. It was suggested that a system could be tested in a by-election. An issue that was deemed important for Canadians in geographically large, rural ridings such as Thunder Bay--Rainy River was the issue of riding size. Participants were anxious about the potential increase in the size of their riding. They felt better about that when they learned that it would be possible to obtain proportional representation without increasing the size of our largest constituencies through adding more MPs and increasing the size of smaller, urban ridings. They liked that under Rural--Urban Proportional there would only need to be 15% more MPs or 15% larger ridings. Another issue that was talked about extensively was the issue of education. One person expressed concern that Canadians are not educated enough on the issue and that the government was not reaching out with educational initiatives. Another person replied that since people are hardwired against change they don't understand, many people would be opposed to changes to our current system simply because it's all they know and they do not know its flaws and what the alternatives are.

**Conclusion:** Through this consultation it is apparent that many Canadians are disillusioned with our democracy. They do not vote or engage the system because they feel they are not being heard. Ignorance is also an issue when the government does not reach out to its citizens on issues many people do not know about. When educated about various systems and the principle of proportional representation, citizens are receptive to change and become more disappointed with our current system.

**Recommendations:** It is the recommendation based on the majority of input by those consulted that Canada adopt a form of Proportional Representation; that, as ranked ballots alone do not consult sufficient representation of all voters, they should be used only as a feature within a proportional system; and that politicians should be held more accountable to their constituents and to Canadians.