Electoral Reform in Canada: Lessons Learned

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"2015 will be the last election under first-past-the-post."

The Liberal Party made this promise part of their platform during the 2015 election campaign. After the election, the Liberals formed an all-party Committee to examine the issue. The Committee, as well as the Minister for Democratic Reform, Maryam Monsef, held cross-country consultations, and used an online platforms to gauge Canadian's opinions on reform. Townhalls were held by local MPs and nonprofit organizations across the country. Heated debates on whether reform should happen, and what that reform should look like, occurred on Parliament Hill, in academic conferences, in townhalls, and informally across the country.

On February 1, 2017, in his mandate letter to Karina Gould, the new Minister of Democratic Institutions, Justin Trudeau stated that "A clear preference for a new electoral system, let alone a consensus, has not emerged. Furthermore, without a clear preference or a clear question, a referendum would not be in Canada's interest."[1] Therefore, the PM concluded: "Changing the electoral system will not be in [the] mandate."

The Prime Minister's claim that reform was impossible due to public opinion came as a surprise to those parliamentarians and civic activists who were involved in the process to moving the reform agenda forward. His decision was not the recommendation of the parliamentary committee.

A large part of the reason for the failure of reform seems to lie in the processes set-up to create consensus around reform. The Liberals stated they wanted "broad" consensus for reform.[2] Such consensus, especially on a more technical issue, is rarely happened upon. Instead, it requires a meaningful and well-designed process of public deliberation and participation. The process the Liberals put into place simply did not live up to this.

The Liberal government relied on townhall meetings and Internet surveys before the parliamentary committee could produce a concrete proposal. These meetings and surveys did not serve to sufficiently educate

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1   Trudeau, Justin. (2017). Minister of Democratic Institutions Mandate Letter. Government of Canada. Accessed here: http://pm.gc.ca/eng/minister-democratic-institutions-mandate-letter

2   Globe and Mail. (2016). Committee report to call for referendum on electoral reform. Globe and Mail. Accessed here: https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/committee-report-to-call-for-referendum-on-electoral-reform/article33115404/

the public. Moreover, the parliamentary committee was not given the time necessary to generate a proposal. All of this did move the agenda forward, but not enough, and it certainly did not certainly did not educate citizens.

Whether the lack of attention to the design of the process of public deliberation was due to inexperience or a change of heart on the part of the Prime Minister is hard to know. What is clear is that a major public policy commitment of a newly elected government has been abandoned. That is an outcome worthy analyzing, if only for the purpose of better understanding the obstacles to democratic reform in countries like Canada.

This report summarizes the debate around the electoral reform—including such issues as whether reform would have been an improvement over the status quo, what kind reform would have been best, and how such changes might have been implemented. We will look at what the Liberals and others did (or did not do) to advance the issue. Finally, we will consider some of the lessons learned from this electoral reform attempt, and what we can do going forward.

WHY REFORM?

2015 was not the first time electoral reform had been discussed in Canada. A Law Commission study recommended switching to a Mixed-Member Proportional system. Ontario held a referendum on reform. Prince Edward Island had a plebiscite and a referendum. British Columbia held two referenda after a Citizens' Assembly. The NDP and the Green Party have advocated reform in their platform for years. Various civic organizations and non-profits have been advocating for, and working towards, reform for years. Reform has also been the subject of academic research and debate. 2015 was the first time, however, that a political party formed government in Canada after explicitly advocating for reform.

Several members of the Liberal Party have been vocal advocates of reform for years. Stephane Dion had advocated for a form of proportional representation numerous times as an MP. Robert Asselin, a senior advisor to Justin Trudeau, was a proponent of Alternative Vote. Trudeau, himself, argued for AV in 2013. At the Liberal policy convention in 2014, it was agreed that reform would be in the Liberal's platform. Ultimately, the Liberal's 2015 platform promised that they would reform the electoral system to "make every vote count." They promised to convene an all-party Parliamentary committee to examine the issue, and table legislature within 18-months of forming government.

Why the prolonged interest in reform? Ultimately, changing our electoral system has the potential to change our politics. Electoral reform might affect what political parties form, what platforms they adopt, and what voters they target. It can affect what parties are elected, what governments form, and what policies they adopt. Depending on the system, it might also affect turnout, and the number of women and individuals from minority groups who are elected.

Specifically, electoral reform can have an impact on the following aspects of politics:

PARTIES AND PARTY SYSTEMS: The number of parties that form, and what kind of parties form, are both impacted by the electoral system in a country. Some electoral systems create incentives for the creation of "catch-all" or "big tent" parties -- the types of parties that don't have a strong or specific ideological bent, but try to appeal to as many voters as possible. Systems like this tend to have a few parties that are all fairly centrist. Other systems encourage the creation of niche parties that have a specific ideological or policy bent.

MAJORITY/MINORITY/COALITIONS: The electoral system also impacts what kinds of government form in Parliamentary systems. Some electoral systems create "false majorities," where a party that didn't win 50% of the popular vote still wins over 50% of the seats in Parliament.3 In systems that do this, we get more majority governments. In systems where the popular vote translates directly into seats -- when a party that wins 30% of the votes, wins roughly 30% of the seats -- it's less likely that a single party will get 50% seats. There will be more minority and coalition governments in these systems.

REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN AND MINORITY GROUPS: The number of women and members of minority groups who are elected can be affected by electoral systems. Systems that allow for party lists" can make it easier for women to be elected. Systems with party lists can also make it easier for some minority groups to get elected, although this is less common. Other systems make it easy for minority groups that are concentrated in one location to be elected.

LOCAL REPRESENTATION: Some electoral systems allow for stronger local representation than others. That is, some systems have one representative per riding. That representative is accountable to residents of that riding, and residents of that riding can go to their representative directly with any concerns. Other systems do not have representatives specifically assigned to a riding, or there are several representatives for a single riding. In these cases, it might be less clear who constituents should contact, or hold accountable.

VOTING: There is some evidence that the electoral system influences how many people vote, and how they vote. Systems that given voters more choices, or makes them feel that their votes matter more, might induce higher turnout. Additionally, systems that force parties to appeal to a wide variety of voters, and not just microtarget their bases, might get more diversity in who turns out to vote.

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3   Russell, Peter H. (2008). Two cheers for minority government: the evolution of Canadian parliamentary democracy. Emond Montgomery Publications Limited.

THE COMMITTEE

In May 2016, the Special Committee on Electoral Reform was formed. The Committee was mandated to "conduct a study of viable alternate voting systems to replace the first-past-the-post system, as well as to examine mandatory voting and online voting."[4] They were instructed to take the following five principles into consideration when looking at different systems: effectiveness and legitimacy, engagement, accessibility and inclusiveness, integrity, and local representation. The committee was also instructed to "consult broadly" with experts on the issue, as well as the Canadian public.

The committee was initially made up of six Liberal members, three Conservatives, and one NDP member, alongside with Elizabeth May and a Bloc Quebecois member, neither of whom would have voting privileges. This composition was in line with standard procedure for House Committees, where membership is determined by the share of seats a party holds in Parliament. However, the composition of this particular committee received criticism. It was noted that it was composed in relation to seat shares in parliament, not the share of the popular vote won.[5] Additionally, this composition gave the Liberals a majority on the Committee, meaning that they could make a proposal to change Canada's electoral system without inputs from other parties. The fear here was that they would unilaterally decide to change the system to something that benefits them.

Nathan Cullen, an NDP MP, proposed changing the composition of the committee to be proportional to the share of the popular vote. On June 2, Monsef announced that the Liberals would be supporting his motion. The composition of the committee was changed so that there would now be five Liberal members, three Conservatives, two NDP members, Elizabeth May, and a Bloc MP, all of whom would have voting privileges.

Through this change, the Liberals gave up their majority on the committee, and would no longer be able to come to a decision without the support of other party members. While this decision was largely applauded, some worried that this would make it too difficult for the committee to reach any kind of consensus or decision.

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4   Special Parliamentary Committee on Electoral Reform. (2016). "Mandate." Parliament of Canada. Accessed here: http://www.ourcommons.ca/Committees/en/ERRE/About

5   Globe and Mail. (2016). "Liberals kick off push to change Canada's electoral System." Globe and Mail. Accessed here: http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/liberals-electoral-reform-1.3576472

The committee held their first meeting on June 21st, 2016. They continued to hold meetings throughout the summer and into the fall. They heard the testimony of numerous witnesses, including academics, members of civic organizations, officials from Elections Canada, officials from countries that had different systems, or had changed their systems, and other interested individuals. In September, the committee started a cross-country trip, in which they flew to different cities in the provinces and territories, consulting with more experts, and allowing Canadians in that area to attend the meetings and speak in townhall-style portions.

While this was going on, the committee also urged local MPs to hold their own townhalls with their local constituents. Numerous townhalls were held across the countries in which MPs attempted to inform citizens on the reform process, and allow citizens to register their opinions. MPs wrote up reports of what was discussed and concluded and these townhalls, and sent these to the committee.

Finally, the committee started an online questionnaire that Canadians were invited to fill out, and was intended to gauge what kind of reforms Canadians would like to see.

SYSTEMS CONSIDERED

The Committee looked at numerous possibilities for new electoral systems. Below are 5 of the major ones.

MAJORITARIAN/PLURALITY SYSTEMS

Majoritarian and Plurality systems are winner-take-all ones. There is one candidate per riding. To win a riding, a candidate must either win over 50% of the votes (for a majoritarian system) or more than the other candidates (in a plurality system).

FIRST-PAST-THE-POST

FPTP is the electoral system Canada currently uses, and has used federally since Confederation. In Canada, FPTP works by dividing the country into ridings (338, currently). A single candidate is elected from each of these ridings. To win a riding, a candidate does not need to get 50%+1 votes. She only has to win more votes than her opponent.

FPTP has several results.

PARTIES: FPTP encourages the creation of big-tent or catch-all parties. That is, FPTP encourages parties that try to appeal to as many voters as possible. Single-issue parties, or parties with very strong ideological positions tend to not do as well.

GOVERNMENTS: FPTP tends to lead to majority governments. These majority governments are often called "false majorities," as the party with the majority of the seats usually won less than 50% of the national vote.

DIVERSITY IN REPRESENTATION: FPTP does not allow for the same mechanisms to increase diversity in representation like other systems do. Minority groups that are geographically concentrated tend to be elected under FPTP, but those that are geographically disperse tend to be disadvantaged. Countries with FPTP tend to elect less women than countries with proportional systems.

LOCAL REPRESENTATION: FPTP allows for strong local representation. A single candidate is elected from a riding, and is expected to represent the views and interests of that riding. Because of the strong party discipline

within Canadian parties, however, some Canadians feel as though their local representatives cater to party interests, more than those of their constituents.

VOTING: Some argue that FPTP tends to depress turnout. Indeed, countries with a proportional system tend to have higher turnout than countries with FPTP. Some argue that this is because FPTP leads to "wasted votes" and "strategic voting."

Because FPTP only elects one candidate per riding, anyone who didn't vote for that candidate essentially wasted their votes. This might discourage individuals from voting for third-party candidates, who aren't seen to be competitive. It might also discourage voting in safe ridings, where one candidate is projected to win by a large margin.

A concern for wasted votes can lead to strategic voting. In strategic voting, voters believe that their preferred candidate has no shot at actually winning the election. They then decide to vote for one of the candidates who does have a chance of winning. For instance, many Green and NDP supports were told to strategically vote for the Liberals, to ensure that the Conservatives did not win again.

ALTERNATIVE VOTE

AV is similar to FPTP. The country is divided into ridings, and a single candidate is elected from each riding. Unlike FPTP, AV allows voters to rank their candidates, from first to last choice. To win a riding, a candidate must win at least 50%+1 of the votes. If no candidate wins this on the first count, the candidate with the least number of votes is dropped, and the second preferences of whomever voted from her are counted. This happens until a candidate has won 50%+1 votes.

AV has several results.

PARTIES: Like FPTP, AV encourages the creation of big-tent or catch-all parties.

GOVERNMENTS: Like FPTP, AV tends to lead to majority governments. Some argue that these majority governments are more legitimate than the ones formed under FPTP, because the party that wins has at least 50%+1 of voters' second or third preferences.

DIVERSITY IN REPRESENTATION: Like FPTP, AV does not include the same mechanisms to increase diversity as PR systems do. Geograph-

ically concentrated minority groups tend to be represented in Parliament, while geographically disperse ones are disadvantaged.

LOCAL REPRESENTATION: Like FPTP, AV allows for local representation, with one MP representing a single riding.

TURNOUT: Arguably, AV does not encourage strategic voting. Ranking ballots allows voters to vote for a third-party, knowing that, even if this party doesn't have a shot, their second choice will then be counted. Supporters of this system argue this eliminates wasted votes, as well. Alternatively, it can be argued that both strategic voting and wasted voting both still exist -- voters can still be strategic in how they rank their ballot, and their first choices can still be wasted.

PROPORTIONAL SYSTEMS:

Unlike plurality or majoritarian systems, portional systems are not winner-take-all. Under a proportional system, parties win seats in proportion to the percent of the vote they won. If a party wins 30% of the votes, they win 30% of the seats. There are different ways to ensure this proportionality.

LIST-PR

This is the most straightforward method of PR. Under list PR, you vote for the party you prefer. The share of votes that party receives directly translates into the share of seats that party wins in parliament.

There are some variations on list-PR. For instance, you can choose to have a closed or open list system. In closed list systems, the party determines the order of their candidate list. That is, parties decide which candidates get priority, depending on how many votes the party receives -- the higher up on the list a candidate is, the more likely she is to get a seat. In open-list systems, voters get to vote for a party *and* rank the candidates on the party's list. The priority or likelihood a candidate has of getting elected is therefore determined by voters.

List-PR has several results.

PARTIES: List-PR, like all proportional systems, tends to result in the creation of more parties than majoritarian or proportional systems. Additionally, parties do not have the same incentives to be big-tent, and there more more issue-based or ideological parties in under list-PR systems.

GOVERNMENTS: Because list-PR systems tend to have more parties than majoritarian/plurality ones, and because parties only win seats in proportion to percent of votes received, it is much less likely for a single party to win more than 50% of the seats in Parliament. This means that, under list-PR, there will be less majority governments, and more minority and coalition governments.

DIVERSITY IN REPRESENTATION: List-PR allows for mechanisms that make it easier to have more women elected. Some countries with list-PR ensure that the party list includes an equal number of men and women, which increases the number of women elected.

LOCAL REPRESENTATION: Because list-PR does not contain ridings, there is not the same level of local representation under list-PR as there is under other systems. Some argue that list-PR should be done by province in Canada. That is, each province would be allocated a certain number of MPs, and then the popular vote in that province determines the makeup of these MPs. In this case, the MPs elected in each province would be supposed to represent that province. However, it would still not be the same level of local representation as other systems.

TURNOUT: Turnout tends to be roughly 7 percentage points higher in countries with PR than in countries with FPTP.[6] Proponents of PR argue that this is because PR eliminates both wasted votes, and strategic voting. Because seats are awarded to parties based on the percent of popular vote, PR systems are said to make every vote count. You can vote for a third party knowing that, even though this party has a low chance of getting the most seats in the House, it will at least make up some percentage. Because of this, it also eliminates strategic voting.

Others argue that wasted votes and strategic voting still happen in PR systems, just in a different form. In a Parliamentary system, most, if not all, decisions come down to who forms government. If a party has seats in Parliament, but not in the government, it ultimately might not have much impact. Voters want to vote for people who will have an impact on governmental decisions. This means that, rather than vote for their first choice, who might only get, say, 10% of the seats, they will still strategically vote for a party who has a chance at forming government.

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6   Blais, A., & Carty, R.K. (1990). Does proportional representation foster voter turnout? *European Journal of Political Research*. 18:167-181.

STV (SINGLE TRANSFERRABLE VOTE)

Single Transferable Vote is another PR system. Like list-PR, STV results in parties receiving seats in proportion to the percent of votes received. It achieves this result using a different method, however.

In STV, the country is dividing up into ridings, but multiple candidates are elected from a single riding. Voters rank candidates according to preferences. To win a seat, a candidate must receive a certain percent of the votes. If no one reaches that percent, the candidate with the lowest number of votes is dropped, and the second preferences of those who voted for her are redistributed to the other candidates until someone reaches the threshold, similarly to AV. Alternatively, if a candidate wins with more than the necessary votes, the second preferences of the excess votes are redistributed to other candidates.

STV is not used as widely as list-PR, so there are fewer examples of it. However, from the examples we have, STV has generally similar results to list-PR.

PARTIES: Like list-PR, STV results in the creation of more parties, and allows for more ideological and issue-based parties.

GOVERNMENTS: STV also tends towards more minority and coalition governments.

DIVERSITY IN REPRESENTATION: STV does not use party lists, so cannot use that as a method of increasing diversity in Parliament. However, there is some evidence that STV still encourages the election of more women than FPTP or AV.

LOCAL REPRESENTATION: STV maintains local ridings, unlike list-PR. These ridings are larger than in FPTP or AV, however, and there are multiple candidates elected from each riding. This means that the lines of accountability might be less clear than they are under FPTP or AV, where there is only one candidate elected per riding.

TURNOUT: Because of limited case studies, it is unclear whether the benefits to turnout are the same as those under PR.

MIXED SYSTEMS:

Mixed systems combine aspects of proportional and majoritarian/plurality systems. They've been touted as the best of both worlds.

MMP

Mixed Member Proportional is a system that combines elements of FPTP and list-PR. Under MMP, voters vote twice -- once for an MP in a riding, and second for a party list. The first vote they case is identical to the one they'd cast under FPTP. The country is still divided into ridings, and candidates run and are elected in these ridings just like they are elected under FPTP, by winning the plurality of the votes. For the second vote, voters choose a party. The results of this vote determines how many seats in Parliament this party gets. For example, if a party wins 40% of the party vote, it's entitled to 40% of the seats in the House. If the number of seats the party won from local ridings does not match this, top-up candidates from a party list are given a seat in the House.

MMP HAS SEVERAL RESULTS.

PARTIES: Like other PR systems, MMP tends to result in more parties being formed.

GOVERNMENTS: Like other PR systems, MMP also tends to result in more minority and coalition governments.

DIVERSITY IN REPRESENTATION: The party-list component of MMP operates the same as list-PR. This means that it is possible to institute measures that make it easier for more women to get elected.

LOCAL REPRESENTATION: Because MMP still maintains ridings, it has a similar local representation aspect as FPTP. There is one member that represents a specific riding. To accommodate the fact that there will be "top-up" MPs, however, the ridings might need to be bigger than they are under FPTP. There is some evidence and worry that MMP creates two "classes" of MPs, local ones and party ones, and that this has an impact on representation and accountability.

TURNOUT: MMP has similar impacts on voting and turnout as list PR and other PR systems.

HOW TO REFORM

Some have argued that how we get reform is as important as the reforms themselves. Because electoral reform has the potential to significantly affect our system, change the rules of the game, and who plays, it is crucial that the decision is made with the approval of Canadians, and not just the politicians who stand to benefit from certain changes. Indeed, the Liberal government has promised that they will ensure that any reforms they enact have the "broad" support of Canadians.

In addition to listening to proposals on the different systems, the Committee heard proposals on the best way to engage Canadians on this issue, and hear their perspectives.

Ultimately, there are three main ways reform could have been enacted.

CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY

Citizens' assemblies have been held by British Columbia and Ontario when they were determining whether or not to change their electoral system. They have also been held in Canadian provinces and municipalities to come up with policies related to healthcare, and municipal planning. Citizens' assemblies bring together a representative group of everyday Canadians, kind of like a jury. These Canadians are then taught about the different systems, and given time to discuss and deliberate amongst themselves, before coming to a proposal on the system. Citizens' assemblies include a diverse and representative group of Canadians in the discussion. The BC Citizens' Assembly was 50% female, and included members from every riding in BC. It also gave participants a stipend for their time in the assembly, which ensured that those from less-affluent backgrounds were not precluded from participating.

REFERENDUM

Referendums have been held in ON, BC, and PEI on electoral reform, and nationally on several major issues. Referendums allow the entire voting population to vote on a single issue. In this sense, they are extremely democratic. To be effective, however, referendums need to be accompanied by an extensive educational campaign, to ensure that Canadians actually understand the issue they are voting on. Moreover, turnout is a concern in referendums, as certain demographic groups might be more likely to turnout than others. Finally, referendums generally suffer from status-quo bias.

PARLIAMENTARY VOTE

A Parliamentary Vote would mean that a proposal on electoral reform would be simply voted on in Parliament like any other bill. This would be the least costly, and quickest way, to deal with the issue. It would also not give Canadians a chance to influence the decision as directly as a citizens' assembly or referendum would. There are concerns that MPs would just vote according to their parties interest, as well.

THE REPORT & THE AFTERMATH

On December 1st, 2016, the Committee presented their report to Parliament. Ultimately, the majority report recommended that electoral reform be put to the Canadian people in a referendum. It was recommended that the government ask Canadians whether they want to keep FPTP, or change to a PR system. The Committee did not specify a particular PR system, leaving that up to the government.[7]

This recommendation was supported by the Committee's Conservative, NDP, Green, and Bloc members. The Liberals on the Committee offered a dissenting view, saying that the issue was "too complicated" to be put to a referendum yet. They recommended that the government not try to reform the system by 2019, but slow the process down and allow for more review.

The Committee also recommended that mandatory voting and online voting not be implemented at this time. They also recommended that any change made to the electoral system be made to with a view to increase the representation of women, youth, Indigenous individuals and groups, those with disabilities, and other marginalized and disadvantaged groups.

The Committee also recommended that, regardless of broader reforms, the government should review policies that would work to achieve some of the goals of system reform, under the current system. They recommended that more money be given to groups trying to engage youth, and to civic education programs. They also recommended that the government review lowering the voting age to 16, so that youth can register and vote while still in highschool. In terms of women's representation, the Committee recommended that the government "examine" source policies that would encourage political parties to nominate and run more female candidates.

The government's reaction to the report was less than positive. Minister Monsef expressed her dissatisfaction that the Committee had not actually stated what system they believed would be best for Canada. She said the government needed time to review the recommendations and respond. In the meantime, the government launched an online survey platform,

7   In a supplementary report, however, the NDP and Green Committee members proposed that the PR system on the referendum ballot should be either MMP, or a combination of AV and STV, depending on whether the riding is urban or rural.

mydemocracy.ca, that was designed to gauge Canadian's attitudes towards the values relevant to electoral systems, and what Canadians believe their democracy should look like. This survey was met with fairly strong criticism.

In January, Trudeau replaced Monsef with Karina Gould, as the Minister of Democratic Institutions. A few weeks later, the results of the mydemocracy.ca survey came out. The survey found that Canadians were generally satisfied with the quality of their democracy. At the same time, however, they were open to changing the system. Minister Gould stated that the government would review the findings in the weeks ahead.

On February 1st, Gould's mandate letter was shared publically. In it, Trudeau stated that there was no consensus on reform. Therefore, reform would no longer be pursued by the government. Outcry against this decision was swift from the opposition parties, activists, and concerned Canadians. Nathan Cullen started a petition, calling on the government to reverse its decision, which quickly gained hundreds of thousands of signatures. Activists held days of protest, and vowed to make sure this issue stays on the agenda.

As of now, however, it does not appear as if electoral reform will happen in Canada any time soon.

LESSONS LEARNED

While the reform process did not lead to the expected outcome, there is still much to be learned from it.

FOR POLITICIANS: From the beginning, skeptics argued that reform would never happen, because it wasn't in the Liberals best interest. FPTP had benefited the Liberals, and given them a majority government with only 40% of the popular vote. What incentive did they have switch to a system that would give them less seats?

Ultimately, every party's position on reform was in line with what would benefit them. The Conservatives wanted to maintain the status quo, as they consistently get 30%-40% of the popular vote, yet, because of FPTP, still win majorities in the House. The NDP and the Greens wanted PR, as that would give them more seats in the House. When the Liberals were in third place in the polls, they wanted reform. When they won with FPTP, they decided to maintain that system.

This self-interest of politicians creates a conflict of interest when deciding on electoral systems. It also means it's harder to get reform -- the party in power, who could enact reform, has no incentives to, and every incentive not to.

Because of this, many argue that reform should be decided on by an independent group -- either an expert panel, or a CA, or even through a referendum.

FOR ACTIVISTS: Civic groups and activists were very present during the electoral reform debate, and were successful in pushing the issue. None of the major groups working on electoral reform picked a system to advocate for, however. They were in support of PR -- but never threw their support behind a specific subset of PR. Instead, they tried to educate Canadians on all the options.

While this was an admirable attempt at education, it made the debate extremely complicated and unclear. Instead of structuring the issues as between FPTP and, say, MMP, it became FPTP versus maybe MMP, maybe STV, maybe list-PR, maybe a hybrid of all three. This required Canadians to learn about the nuances between each system, and ultimately complicated the messaging.

FOR ENGAGEMENT: The Liberal government's method of public engagement appeared impressive, but it was fraught from the start. MPs were encouraged to hold townhalls across the country, to educate and engage their constituents. The Liberals mydemocracy.ca survey reached a large number of Canadians. At the same time, there was a huge problem in who actually was being consulted. Women were vastly underrepresented in the mydemocracy.ca survey, as were Canadians from rural areas. The Committee also invited a significantly smaller number of women to testify in front of them than men. In townhalls, youth, those with lower-incomes, Indigenous persons, and individuals from various ethnic groups were underrepresented.

Thus, while the consultations were broad, they did not reach individuals from groups who are historically marginalized, and who would have an important and unique perspective on reform. Something like a citizens' assembly would better represent these groups and views.

A SUCCESSFUL COMMITTEE?: The Committee was remarkable in that it was composed roughly according to the popular vote rather than the parliamentary distribution of seats. The governing party surrendered

its absolute majority. It was also remarkable that this committee was able to come to some kind of compromise and agreement. Ultimately, each party had their own interests, but had to work together to produce an output, so were forced to compromise. Indeed, one of the arguments for PR is that it will produce minority and coalition governments that will force parties to work together and compromise.

This seems to be what happened in the Committee. All the members ultimately acted in ways that furthered their parties' interests. The NDP and the Green members pushed for PR, as that would benefit their party. The Conservatives pushed for a referendum, as they believed that would lead to a maintenance of the status quo. Committee members all had their own interests, yet were put into an institutional framework that required compromise. So they did that.

The Liberals were the outlier. As they had a majority government, they felt they did not need to compromise. Moreover, the lack of a well-designed process of public deliberation left the reform initiative vulnerable to derailment by the Prime Minister. Without the need for compromise, the Liberals self-interest won out. Although their decision was not framed in terms of partisan calculations, the abruptness of the decision, and the lack of serious attention to the design of the consultation process, makes this interpretation hard to dispute.

GOING FORWARD

Given how this reform process played out, it is easy to succumb to cynicism. It is easy to see all this as simply another example of the self-interests present in politics, and how politicians don't keep their promises.

This past year of electoral reform presented Canadians with an opportunity to seriously consider what they want in their politics, however. It opened up a discussion of what we do well, and what we want to improve. This is worthwhile. Although the federal government may be ready to move on from it, we argue that these discussions should continue. Canadians should continue thinking about how to improve, and the best way to do it.

To that end, we see a few immediate ways forward.

DEMOCRATIC REFORM
WITHOUT ELECTORAL REFORM

Some of the goals of reform can still be accomplished without the broader reform of the entire system. For example, the goal of electing more women, Indigenous people, and people of colour can be achieved through other means. Parties can lead by example, and start nominating more candidates who are female, Indigenous, or people of colour. Alternatively, several MPs and advocacy groups have recommended policies that would enforce gender parity in nominations.

Similarly, local representation and cooperation in Parliament could be strengthened by breaking the strict party discipline that has been enforced recently. If MPs were empowered to follow their conscience and constituents' preferences, instead of their party's platform, we might see better outcomes for ridings, and more cooperation across party lines. There have been several proposals to this effect that would work within the current framework and not require large-scale reform to the electoral system itself.

Other goals are not as easily achieved within the current system, however. The concerns of "false majorities," the number of parties, and strategic voting seem to be tied to FPTP. Without reforming the electoral systems, these concerns will likely continue to be a part of Canadian politics.

It should be noted that, unfortunately, the Liberals seem to have disre-

garded these goals altogether. In Trudeau's mandate letter to Minister Gould, he did not mention any of these areas. Rather, he stated her focus should be on ensuring the security of our elections from hackers. This is disappointing, as it seems in his haste to abandon electoral reform, Trudeau let go of a broader opportunity to improve our democracy, or at least continue the discussion.

LOCAL REFORM

Some have argued that reforming the electoral system at the local level should be the goal moving forward. Provincial and municipal politics affect the everyday lives of Canadians as much, if not more, than federal politics. Thus, the benefits of reform might be felt even more strongly on a local level than the federal one. Moreover, reforming local politics allows for more tailoring to individual regions' needs. Rather than having to come up with an electoral system that works for all of Canada, local reform allows for different systems in different places, depending on what works best in each context.

For these reasons, some advocates for reform have refocused their efforts to municipal and provincial politics. There have been advancements in this area. PEI held a plebiscite on reform, although the turnout for that was abysmally low. The Ontario provincial government passed legislation that allowed municipalities to change their own electoral system. London, Ontario became the first one to use this power, and changed to a ranked ballots system. The BC provincial election saw two of the three major parties campaigning for reform. With the uncertainty still around the election, and the very real possibility a coalition could be the result, reform might end up being a major issue and possibility going forward.

Thus, reform at the local level presents an opportunity for advocacy groups and citizens alike. Caution is still required, however. Many of the pitfalls that existed with the reform process at the federal level can still play out at the local levels. Partisan self-interest, poor advocacy organization, and lack of proper engagement and deliberative mechanisms for the public can still doom reform. Reformers should thus look to the federal example and learn from it going forward.

CONCLUSIONS

Contrary to the Liberal's promise, 2015 will not be the last election under first-past-the-post. The failure of the Liberals to keep this promise seems to stem from a poorly designed consultation process, and the Liberals' own self-interest.

While in many key aspects a failure, the electoral reform process that unfolded over the past year contains important lessons going forward. The processes illustrated the need for well-designed consultation and educational processes. It also showed us how easily these processes can be twisted to support the position of the government. The work of the Committee showed how an institutional framework that induces cooperation can force parties to come together. At the same time, partisan self-interest never went away. And ended up winning out.

Perhaps most importantly, the past year gave Canadians a chance to seriously consider what they want from and in their politics. It gave space for Canadians to think about what we're doing well, and what we can do better, and *how* we can do that better. It provided opportunities, albeit flawed, for Canadians to voice these concerns and ideas to their government.

This should not end after this year. The conversation about what goals we want from our government, and how these goals can be achieved should continue. Whether by reforms within the existing framework, or broader reforms to local politics, Canadians should push for better, more representative, more cooperative, and more effective politics. And they should demand that their government takes notice.

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