

*When you change the rules of democracy,
everyone gets to have a say.*

- Rona Ambrose



CONSERVATIVE PARTY CAUCUS

submission to the
Special Committee
on Electoral Reform (ERRE)
14 October 2016

ON BEHALF OF CONSERVATIVE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT:

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Introduction.

In June 2016, the House of Commons adopted a motion establishing a special committee on Electoral Reform (hereafter ERRE). The terms of reference of ERRE include two instructions which are of key importance:

1. [T]hat the Committee be directed to study and advise on additional methods for obtaining the views of Canadians;

And

2. [T]hat the Committee be directed to issue an invitation to each Member of Parliament to conduct a town hall in their respective constituencies and provide the Committee with a written report of the input from their constituents to be filed with the Clerk of the Committee no later than October 14, 2016.

The invitation to study and advise on “additional methods for obtaining the views of Canadians” means that it is entirely within ERRE’s mandate to recommend that Canadian voters be consulted, by means of a referendum, to determine in advance whether they endorse any specific proposal for a new voting system.

Since the requirement for such a referendum has been a part of Conservative Party policy for over a decade¹, Conservative MPs concluded it would be reasonable to consult with their constituents to determine whether this cross-section of Canadians feels that a referendum is necessary or desirable.

This report is, therefore, the response of the Conservative caucus to the invitation to report back on this important part of ERRE’s mandate².

Town Halls: An Imperfect Method for Obtaining the Views of Canadians.

Some Conservative MPs held town halls, and others did not. Attendance at these events was consistent with what has been reported to have taken place at town hall meetings held by MPs from other parties, and with what was observed at the “open mic” sessions held by ERRE in its travels across the country: turnout at each meeting ranging from a few dozen to one or two

¹ *“The Conservative Party believes the discussion of possible changes to the electoral system is valuable in a healthy democracy. In reviewing options for electoral reform, we believe the government should not endorse any new electoral system that will weaken the link between Members of Parliament and their constituents, that will create unmanageably large ridings, or that will strengthen the control of the party machinery over individual Members of Parliament. A national referendum must be held prior to implementing any future electoral reform proposal.”* Conservative Party of Canada Policy Declaration, section 10. As of May 28, 2016.

² This report is not an exhaustive list of all consultations Conservative caucus members have used. Many Members have used additional forms of consultation such as door-to-door canvassing, ballot box questions, petitions, and phone surveys to solicit feedback from Canadians.

hundred, consisting primarily of a self-selected group who are typically middle-class and upper-middle-class individuals, normally in late middle age or early retirement, disproportionately of European ancestry, all of whom had the free time to adjust their schedules in order to attend, almost all of whom possessed a means of independent transportation, and virtually none of whom lived beyond a reasonable drive of the downtown locations at which most of the meetings were held.

Individuals coming from the groups that Minister Monsef has stated are being left out of Canada's electoral process were in noticeably short supply at these meetings. This is an important consideration, as the inclusion of marginalized groups is at the heart of the minister's case for electoral reform. In the course of her July 6, 2016 presentation to ERRE, the minister stated,

I believe we need to reach out and engage those who have previously chosen to remain silent....

A study conducted by Statistics Canada after the 2011 election confirmed that many groups—sometimes the most marginalized—do not participate in elections. The study found that those under the age of 45 vote in lower numbers than those over 45; those with a high school diploma vote in lower numbers than those educated in college or university; that single parents vote in lower numbers than married people; and that those who immigrated to Canada in the last five years, or even 15 years, vote in lower numbers than those who are Canadian born; those who rent their homes vote in lower numbers than those who own their home; those who live in rural areas vote in lower numbers than those who live in cities; and that those who are unemployed vote in lower numbers than those who are employed.

Unfortunately, this is a nearly picture-perfect description of the problems that characterized both the town hall meetings and the meetings of ERRE. So striking was this problem that on September 28, at the ERRE meeting in Vancouver, Conservative MP Scott Reid noted,

in Canada's most diverse city, a city which I believe has just under or just over a 50% non-white population, out of 60 people in the audience—and I counted—five are not white, and the age demographic is also not typical of the age profile of the city. That's not [meant] to be disrespectful—with [the] board of directors in my riding association, there is a similar problem—but it is to say that we have a self-selection problem here....

In short, town hall meetings are a useful way of gathering creative input from citizens who are already actively engaged in the discourse on public issues, but such meetings are the worst possible way of engaging the citizens to whom Minister Monsef was directing the committee's special attention.

The problem of selective engagement at town halls and open-mic sessions was pointed out to ERRE even before the committee started its road trip. On August 31, in witness testimony before the committee, Dr. Darrell Bricker of IPSOS reported on his organization's then-recent poll results:

[A] combined 81% [of Canadians polled] thought consultations hadn't started yet, or were unsure. Only about one in five said that they believed this had happened, that something was going on.”

Of those who were aware that it's actually happening, 16%, or 30 people in 1,000, said that they were following the consultations very closely. Another 68%, or 129 people, said, a bit here and there, and 16%, or 31 of the people who we interviewed, said, not at all.

Those most likely to be following the process were older, more educated, more affluent, men. Therefore, the audience closely following this process today is about 3% of Canadians, and it's an elite group. In my experience, this shouldn't be a surprise.

Mail-Back Consultation: A More Inclusive Methodology.

Over the summer and early autumn, many Conservative MPs undertook consultations with their constituents by means of mail-out questionnaires that, while differing somewhat from one riding to the next, were substantially similar in both form and content. We anticipated that this would produce a higher number of participants than town hall meetings, and that the self-selection problem would be significantly reduced, albeit not eliminated, by the use of a mail-out instrument.

The mail-out instrument suggested to and used by many Conservative MPs was designed to be impartial, and contained the following features:

- An introductory letter from the MP for the riding, outlining the ERRE committee process and explaining how the feedback mechanism works;
- A series of quotations, taken from public statements made by advocates both for and against holding a referendum. The goal was to select the most convincing arguments both for and against referendum. Thus, for example, the longest quotation against referendum is excerpted from Minister Monsef's July 6th testimony at ERRE.
- A review of the ERRE timeline.
- Polling data from two recent polls by different organizations, as to the merits of holding a referendum.
- Instructions on how to fill out the ballot (particularly if more than one voter resides at that address). It was clearly indicated that respondents could return their surveys and comments to their MP, postage free.
- The ballot itself. The question varied somewhat in some of the instruments sent out by some MPs, but the majority asked the following question: “*Before changing how we elect our MPs, should the government hold a referendum to get the approval of Canadians?*”

Results.

More than 81,000 Canadians from 59 electoral districts took the time to respond to surveys sent to them by their Conservative MP³. Canadians who responded voted overwhelmingly in support of holding a national referendum on a proposed change to how MPs are elected. As of Thursday October 13, 2016, just over 90% of respondents, 73,740 of 81,389 Canadians, told us they wanted a referendum⁴.

Results received by electoral district are as follows:

Electoral District (<i>Riding</i>)	Votes	Yes	No	Undecided
Total <i>(59 Electoral Districts)</i>	81,389	73,740	6,622	1,027
Banff—Airdrie	889	798	91	-
Battle River—Crowfoot	872	845	27	-
Battlefords—Lloydminster	1,123	1,071	52	-
Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix	14	10	1	3
Beauport—Limoilou	25	16	8	1
Bow River	1,404	1,348	45	11
Brantford—Brant	1,504	1,389	95	20
Calgary Confederation	2,002	1,475	429	98
Calgary Nose Hill	1,310	1,204	106	
Calgary Rocky Ridge	202	161	41	
Calgary Shepard	1,711	1,626	53	32
Calgary Signal Hill	2,123	1,906	197	20
Cariboo—Prince George	87	87	-	-
Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek	1,168	1,086	60	22
Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola	4,057	3,490	513	54
Chatham-Kent—Leamington	1,655	1,530	106	19
Chilliwack—Hope	1,480	1,319	130	31
Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa	916	804	92	20
Dufferin—Caledon	1,886	1,658	222	6
Durham	126	101	23	2
Edmonton Riverbend	404	338	50	16
Edmonton West	852	788	52	12
Flamborough—Glanbrook	1,214	1,082	116	16

³ Only survey responses that were substantially similar in both form and content are included in this report. Results from other forms of consultation have not been included in the reported figures.

⁴ The survey was designed to allow each respondent to indicate a “yes” or “no” answer. A survey that was returned without a clearly marked answer was counted as “undecided.” A survey that was returned completely blank with neither name nor preference was counted as a single undecided response.

Foothills	3,968	3,741	180	47
Grande Prairie—Mackenzie	87	82	3	2
Haldimand—Norfolk	2,406	2,190	156	60
Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	2,446	2,127	286	33
Kitchener—Conestoga	1,178	1,058	114	6
Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	5,499	5,300	84	115
Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston	1,471	1,315	156	-
Langley—Aldergrove	564	504	58	2
Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes	1,547	1,451	96	
Louis-Saint-Laurent	1,116	1,004	98	14
Markham—Unionville	41	32	7	2
Mégantic—L'Érable	680	579	89	12
Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup	499	448	51	-
Niagara Falls	2,161	1,970	160	31
North Okanagan—Shuswap	2,627	1,933	660	34
Oshawa	1,404	1,290	96	18
Parry Sound—Muskoka	2,372	2,034	302	36
Peace River—Westlock	1,529	1,472	40	17
Perth—Wellington	147	120	15	12
Portage—Lisgar	644	620	24	-
Prince Albert	1,038	975	50	13
Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies	99	86	11	2
Provencher	1,476	1,401	73	2
Red Deer—Lacombe	2,759	2,572	132	55
Red Deer—Mountain View	2,011	1,831	138	42
Richmond Centre	572	495	70	7
Saskatoon—University	721	597	124	-
Souris—Moose Mountain	1,488	1,388	74	26
South Surrey—White Rock	187	124	63	-
St. Albert—Edmonton	1,150	1,051	91	8
Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	1,794	1,726	68	
Sturgeon River—Parkland	2,671	2,540	92	39
Thornhill	1,062	992	62	8
Wellington—Halton Hills	2,301	2,033	268	-
Yellowhead	1,915	1,822	92	1
Yorkton—Melville	735	705	30	-

Totals as of 2016/10/13.

The response rate to this mail-out instrument was four to five times higher than what we would expect to see from a typical “householder”---that is, a specific form of House of Commons’ sanctioned mail-out designed to be sent to each household in an MP’s electoral district.

Conclusion.

The results of this consultation speak for themselves. Regardless of what province they lived in, or whether they were rural or urban voters, respondents to our surveys voted overwhelmingly in favour of a referendum.

Support for a referendum across Canada has been shown to be both broad and persistent. The response to our surveys simply follows what we’ve come to expect from the multiple public opinion polls showing Canadians want the final decision on any new voting system. Between February 9, 2016 and September 28, 2016, public opinion polling firms Ipsos, Insights West, Forum Research, and EKOS Research all released polls showing that consistent majorities of Canadians, ranging as high as 73%, think that a national referendum is necessary before changing how Canadians elect their MPs⁵.

Six of eight such polls show that a majority of Canadians in every province think that any change to how MPs are elected should be put to a referendum. Five of eight show that between 65% and 73% of Canadians support a referendum at the national level. Support for a referendum is consistent across genders and age groups, and while it is true that support for a referendum is higher among Conservative supporters than among supporters of the NDP and Liberals, a clear majority of supporters of both parties also support referendum.

Polling also shows that no more than 8% of Canadians are strongly opposed to holding a referendum.

Based on these highly credible demonstrations of consistent widespread support for referendum, we strongly recommend that the Special Committee include a recommendation to put any proposal to change how MPs are elected to Canadians in a national referendum prior to its implementation, and encourage the government to do likewise to give Canadians the final decision.

⁵ **Ipsos:**

May 21 - <http://www.ipsos-na.com/news-polls/pressrelease.aspx?id=7244>

Aug. 31 - <http://www.ipsos-na.com/news-polls/pressrelease.aspx?id=7355>

Aug. 31 (alternate) - <https://ipolitics.ca/2016/08/31/one-in-5-canadians-aware-of-electoral-reform-pollster/>

Insights West:

Feb. 9 - <http://www.insightswest.com/news/most-canadians-want-a-referendum-on-electoral-reform/>;

Jun. 28 - <http://www.insightswest.com/news/half-of-canadians-want-proportional-representation-in-federal-elections/>

Sep. 28 - http://www.insightswest.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/ERRE_Presentation_MC_28Sept2016.pdf.

Forum Research:

Jul. 6 - [http://poll.forumresearch.com/data/7a81eadd-7949-4c22-9d71-1cc0d93af267Referendum%20\(2016%2007%2006\)%20JC.pdf](http://poll.forumresearch.com/data/7a81eadd-7949-4c22-9d71-1cc0d93af267Referendum%20(2016%2007%2006)%20JC.pdf)

EKOS Research:

Apr. 19 - http://www.ekospolitics.com/wp-content/uploads/full_report_april_19_2016.pdf

Jun. 10 - <https://ipolitics.ca/2016/06/10/canadians-still-evenly-split-on-electoral-reform-referendum-ekos/>