



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Special Committee on Electoral Reform

ERRE • NUMBER 018 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, August 30, 2016

—
Chair

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia

Special Committee on Electoral Reform

Tuesday, August 30, 2016

● (0930)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)):
I call the meeting to order.

Good morning, colleagues. Good morning to the witnesses today.

We have three witnesses: Professor Eric Maskin, Professor Peter John Loewen, and Jean-Sébastien Dufresne.

[Translation]

If I may, I will take a few moments to tell you a bit about each of them, starting with Mr. Dufresne.

Jean-Sébastien Dufresne is the president of the *Mouvement Démocratie Nouvelle*, a non-partisan organization working toward the adoption of proportional representation in Quebec through public education initiatives.

Mr. Dufresne holds an MBA in community economic development and was recently named one of the top 30 under 30 by the *Journal de Montréal* for his impact on the business world.

Welcome, Mr. Dufresne.

[English]

Professor Eric Maskin is an economist and a professor at Harvard University. In 2007 Dr. Maskin received the 2007 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics for laying the foundation for a mechanism design theory. He has also made considerable contributions to the fields of game theory, contract theory, social choice theory, and political economy, as well as other areas of economics.

As a former student of economics, I am familiar with some of these terms. We look forward to hearing a bit more about them during testimony.

Previously Dr. Maskin was a post-doctoral fellow at Cambridge University as well as a faculty member at MIT and the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey.

Welcome, and thank you for being present here in Ottawa.

Peter John Loewen is an associate professor of political science at the University of Toronto. Dr. Loewen wrote his dissertation on political behaviour at the Université de Montréal. He recently co-authored a book entitled *The Behavioural Foundations of Partisanship, Participation, and Political Preferences in the Anglo-American Democracies*. He is a frequent recipient of Social Sciences and

Humanities Research Council grants and awards focusing on political behaviour.

Some of his professional affiliations include being an associate member at McGill University's Centre for the Study of Democratic Citizenship, an associate member at Simon Fraser University's Centre for Public Opinion and Political Representation, an assistant editor of the *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, and a member of Experiments in Governance and Politics, otherwise known as EGAP.

To provide a bit of an outline for how we proceed, each witness will present for 10 minutes. Then we will have two rounds of questions. In each round each member will get to engage with the witnesses for five minutes. That means the five minutes will cover questions and answers.

If, for some reason, there's a question asked at the four-minute, 30-second mark, and there's no opportunity to answer—and this happens quite frequently—it doesn't mean you can't answer at a later time when you have the floor. We're very flexible about that. If you want to finish your thought as you're answering a question at another time, please go ahead.

[Translation]

We will start with Mr. Dufresne.

You have the floor and you have ten minutes.

● (0935)

Mr. Jean-Sébastien Dufresne (President, Mouvement Démocratie Nouvelle): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I would like to thank the committee for inviting me and giving me the opportunity to address you today. I should also mention that we will be submitting a brief which you will receive by October 7. I will be referring to it several times. It will include additional sources of information.

My presentation today pertains to four points. First, I will tell you a bit about the *Mouvement Démocratie Nouvelle*. I will then talk about the extent of mobilization of civil society in Quebec, and share some of our observations on the multiple...

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Dufresne, could you speak a bit more slowly please? The interpreters are having trouble keeping up with you.

Thank you.

Mr. Jean-Sébastien Dufresne: Certainly, thank you. We have a great deal of respect for them because they play a very important role.

Here are the four points that I will be presenting today. First, I will briefly describe the *Mouvement Démocratie Nouvelle*. I will also speak about the extent of mobilization of civil society in Quebec. I will then share some of our observations on the multiple public consultations held in Quebec. Finally, I will present our vision of the process that could lead to electoral reform at the federal level.

First of all, the *Mouvement Démocratie Nouvelle* or MDN is a citizen-based, non-partisan or rather, “tri-partisan”, organization because it reaches out to citizens with different political views. It also reaches out to people in different sectors, including education, unions and business. These people are all volunteers working toward electoral reform. I am a volunteer myself.

In my daily life, I am an entrepreneur and president of an international agency that represents publishers. So I am not an expert on electoral systems, nor am I an academic or a professor. I am however a person working with my colleagues on the cause of electoral reform.

The MDN was founded in 1999 in response to the 1998 election when the popular will was overturned in Quebec, that is, when the Parti Québécois formed the government although the Liberals had placed first in the polls. Our organization brought together a number of stakeholders in civil society and participated in several public consultations in Quebec. The estates general on the reform of democratic institutions were held in 2003, in which 1,000 citizens from all regions of Quebec participated.

In 2006, a parliamentary committee was tasked with studying a draft Liberal bill pertaining to a mixed-member proportional system. More than 2,000 people expressed their views and 86% of those people rejected the status quo and called for electoral reform.

In 2007, we saw among other things the report by Quebec's chief electoral officer regarding a mixed-member proportional system. Close to 20,000 people signed a petition that was presented to Quebec's National Assembly. At each of these steps, the MDN mobilized social actors to take part in the deliberative process. In a way, the MDN became a catalyst for key stakeholders in civil society, including union groups, youth, women, students and communities. The main actors in civil society were involved in this work.

I am talking about organizations that represent close to two million Quebecers, or a third of voters in Quebec. It was a true deliberative process. These organizations worked out their positions and then engaged their members in a dialogue on the issue. This happened over several decades in Quebec, so it is not a new issue.

We can make some general observations on the MDN's consultations and work. As several witnesses have said, the system must be changed. There is clear consensus on that. The unanimous preference is for proportional representation. Everything pertaining to a two-round majority ballot and a preferential ballot was removed from the advice we received from the main actors in civil society. We are looking for an appropriate solution in a context in which the political parties, it must be noted, all receive minority support in our society. A proportional system seems to be the best option.

We have even revised the guiding principles for our initiatives. This spring, we conducted an initiative involving the key actors in

civil society and all provincial political parties, including the Liberal Party of Quebec. A number of important principles emerged.

First, we determined that any reform must reflect the popular vote as closely as possible. That of course means a proportional system. We then determined that there must be a strong link between voters and MPs. We also stressed the importance of equitable representation of the regions, or at least, maintaining the regions' political weight. This is a very important factor. Government stability must also be promoted. As other witnesses have said, other countries have ways of managing non-confidence motions to prevent governments from being suddenly toppled in proportional systems.

● (0940)

Moreover, it emerged that the system must be easy to implement and understand. This is important to citizens. We heard overwhelmingly in our work that the representation of women, youth and ethnocultural communities must be improved.

The MDN is also engaged at the federal level with the *Alliance pour que chaque électeur et électrice compte*. This organization brings together stakeholders from across Canada. Its principles are essentially the same as those I have just stated.

You have heard a number of objections in recent weeks. People have raised concerns about the trust between voters and MPs, the risk of creating two classes of MPs in mixed systems, double candidacies, the proliferation of parties, and accountability. The witnesses who have presented their work before you rely on conclusive data and empirical studies of the way things are done around the world. In places where proportional systems have been in place for years or even decades, these concerns no longer exist.

There was an event in Montreal a few weeks ago. We invited organizations like ours, but from different countries, to share their experience of electoral reform. The organizations from countries with a British tradition were all in favour of proportional representation. None of the organizations were in favour of maintaining a first past the post system or were in favour of maintaining that system in other countries. Internationally, there are none.

I would like to share our position on the process for electoral reform. In our view, legitimacy among voters should be the primary consideration in any process. It is very important for voters to be able to express themselves, but they must have confidence in the choice they make. They must be fully informed in making their choice. The best way to achieve this, in our opinion, is to educate voters on how an alternative system works, to allow them to consider the benefits and drawbacks of any proposed solution. Then, after two or three elections, the electorate must be consulted by referendum or some other way, to see if they would like to keep the proposed system or revert back to the previous system. In our view, that would enable voters to confidently make their choice.

How do we arrive at the proposals? Expert panels could examine the various existing models to determine which most closely match the principles the electorate supports. There could also be a citizens' jury. Those citizens could then provide their opinions and advice to the committee so they could be implemented for the next election.

In closing, I think you have a unique opportunity to fulfill a social vision, one that could shape Canada's history and benefit generations to come. You have the power if not the duty to ensure that no Canadian will ever doubt the value of their vote again. In our view, when democracy prevails, it does not matter which party forms government, because all citizens come out ahead.

Thank you.

• (0945)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Dufresne.

[English]

We will now go to Dr. Maskin, please.

Professor Eric Maskin (Adams University Professor, Department of Economics, Harvard University, As an Individual): Thank you very much, and thank you for the invitation to be here this morning.

I'd like to begin by mentioning five serious problems with first-past-the-post voting, the method currently used in federal elections.

The first problem is that it's often the case that the MP representing a particular electoral district is a minority MP, in the sense that most voters in the district didn't vote for that person.

Second, first past the post often leads to a serious discrepancy in Parliament, by which I mean that the majority party often receives much less than a majority of the votes. For example, in 2011 the Conservative Party had 53.9% of the seats but only 39.6% of the vote. There are many other examples of such discrepancies.

Third, the candidate elected in a district can often be wrong. I will say exactly what I mean by that in just a minute.

Fourth, a voter is in effect disenfranchised if she votes for an unpopular candidate, a candidate who is not likely to win the seat. If candidates A and B are the candidates who have a serious chance of winning, and I vote for candidate C, then in effect I have no say in the choice that really matters. I'm wasting my vote. I could vote strategically—that is, even though I prefer C, I could vote for A or B—but strategic voting itself is problematic for reasons that perhaps I can come back to in the question period.

Fifth, unpopular candidates or parties may be discouraged from standing. For example, suppose I'm a candidate on the right but one who disagrees with the Conservative Party on some important policy points. I may hesitate to stand for office, because if I do stand, I run the risk of splitting the vote on the right, and by doing so I may help to elect a left-wing candidate. For that reason, I may deliberately not stand, and through that decision I'm not only depriving myself of a political candidacy but I'm also depriving the electorate of another political voice.

Those, I think, are five serious problems with first-past-the-post voting.

It turns out that there is a simple voting method that solves all five problems. In fact, there is only one voting method that solves all five problems, and that is majority rule.

Under majority rule, voters now have the opportunity to do more than just vote for a single candidate: they're allowed to rank candidates. Candidate A is best, candidate B is second best, and so on. The winner is the candidate who is preferred by a majority, according to the rankings, to each opponent. The candidate is the true majority winner. The candidate would beat each opponent in a head-to-head contest.

I have a slide to illustrate this. Let's imagine that the electorate divides into three different groups: 40% of the electorate likes candidate A the best, then B, then C; 35% put C at the top, then B, then A; and then the remaining 25% like B best, then C, then A. This is just an example. It's not meant to correspond to any real-life situation.

• (0950)

What happens under majority rule? Under majority rule, candidate B beats A by a majority because the group in the middle, the 35% group, prefers B to A, and the group on the right, the 25% group, prefers B to A. That's a majority. That's 60%.

Candidate B also beats C by a majority because the first group, the 40% group, prefers B to C, and the third group, the 25% group, prefers B to C. That's 65%, so B is the true majority winner.

Let's contrast that with what happens under first past the post. Under first past the post, you just vote for a single candidate. Presumably the people in the first group will vote for A, the people in the second group will vote for C, the people in the third group will vote for B. A is the winner because 40% is the highest vote total, and so we get the wrong candidate elected. A is elected under first past the post, but a majority, 60%, prefer B. For that matter, in this example, a majority also prefers C to A, so A is really quite a terrible choice from the standpoint of majority will.

Majority rule solves all five problems that I described because the winner represents a majority of voters.

One of the problems in Canada is the discrepancy between the proportion of seats that the majority party wins in Parliament and the proportion of the vote that it gets. That discrepancy is very likely to fall under majority rule, because now the majority party will have a majority in every district it wins.

Furthermore, a voter who favours an unpopular candidate will not be disenfranchising herself if she ranks that candidate first, because if there are two other candidates who are the real contenders, she can have a say between those two other candidates by ranking one above the other further down her list. She has every incentive to vote according to her true preferences.

Finally, a right-wing candidate who somewhat disagrees with the Conservative Party or a left-wing candidate who somewhat disagrees with the NDP doesn't have to worry about splitting the vote on the right or the left by standing because, to take the Conservative example, voters on the right are likely to put both this candidate and the Conservative candidate above any left-wing candidate, so there's no vote-splitting.

For all these five reasons, I would suggest that majority rule is a good deal superior to first past the post as a voting method. I don't propose to go into proportional rule. I'm happy to discuss it in questions, but I'm not doing so here because it's clearly a much more radical departure from the current voting system.

Thank you very much.

• (0955)

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Maskin. That was very interesting.

Go ahead, Dr. Loewen, please.

Professor Peter John Loewen (Director, School of Public Policy and Governance and Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Toronto, As an Individual): Thank you very much.

Should we change the way we vote in Canada? This is the principal question that's occupying this committee. It appears to me that the committee has decided that reform is inevitable. This is apparent in the unwillingness of most parties to consider a referendum on any proposed systems, as such referendums are hard to win. It's perhaps apparent too in the testimony before the committee, for while there's been refreshingly broad, evidence-based, informative testimony, there's been little in defence of the status quo.

Today I hope to make four observations, and my overall objective in making these observations is to induce some pause among members of this committee and your colleagues. I hope you will reflect on and give equal weight to the known benefits and drawbacks of our current system, as you do the known and unknown benefits and drawbacks of other systems.

My four observations are the following: first, there is a potential upside to electoral reform, but it seems limited; second, the downsides to electoral reform are unknown and potentially substantial; third, Canadian democracy already functions—well, perhaps; and fourth, for most of the problems ailing our democracy, there are potential fixes at hand that do not require fundamental institutional change.

Taken together, these observations suggest that the committee should not engage in wholesale reform of our electoral system. Instead, I argue, it should consider and recommend smaller, targeted reforms that might address the problems that currently beset our political system.

My first observation is that there is a potential upside to electoral reform, but it is limited. The best evidence we have for this are the many well-constructed cross-national studies that seek to isolate and identify the empirical effects of electoral systems on various outcomes of interest. The basic conclusion, following testimony already given by André Blais, is that in PR systems turnout is higher, though by not much more than three percentage points on average. Citizens also feel elections have been more fairly conducted in PR systems. Those are the benefits.

On the other hand, PR systems do not eliminate the need for or the rate of strategic voting; they merely induce a different kind. They've asked voters to make other compromises, in other words. Most importantly, while PR systems may broaden representation, they do not improve the match of policy outcomes and citizens' preferences. What Blais did not note, Leslie Seidle and others have in their presentations, which is that electoral reform would likely increase gender balance in our Parliament, and in my estimation this is an unalloyed, unqualified good.

My own reading of the literature is that claims about greater economic performance, better fiscal management, and better policy are probably attributable to factors other than the electoral system. Of course, advocates of PR systems might argue that such studies somehow underestimate the benefits or the good effects of PR. I think it's a reasonable objection that cross-national, econometric estimates don't tell the whole story. A reasonable alternative approach would be to look to a country very similar to our own that has experienced a change in electoral systems, and observe the pre-reform and post-reform averages on several outcomes of interest. By doing so, we could perhaps say something about how electoral reform might change the politics of a country.

New Zealand, of course, provides such a case, for obvious reasons: it shares a colonial heritage with Canada and it has a long history of uninterrupted democratic rule, with power alternating between a small number of single parties that regularly commanded majority governments. In 1996, after a series of referendums, New Zealand moved to a mixed member proportional system and has held seven elections under this system since then.

I'll point interested readers to my written submission, in which I go through the data in more detail, but I'll list the top-line results. Electoral reform increased the effective number of parties in New Zealand, both the effective number of parties contesting elections and the number of parties winning seats. That's an unquestioned result. It also marginally increased the average number of parties in government, though it now seems that single-party governments are the norm. It certainly didn't induce large, broad coalitions after elections. It did not increase voter turnout or even arrest the decline in voter turnout in New Zealand, and it did not increase citizens' expressions of democratic satisfaction. Rather, these appear to have declined under the new system. The number of women elected in the last election is just five percentage points greater than in the last election in Canada.

For the things that matter, there is more difference between countries that share an electoral system than there is in the average across electoral systems. In short, PR systems make some things better, but they're hardly a cure-all.

My second observation is that there is some downside to reform, or at a minimum, there are some likely effects that could be normatively undesirable. It's for the committee to decide whether these things are normatively undesirable, but there are some likely effects.

First, reform will create a potentially permanent role for small regional parties. I'm happy to expand on that.

Second, small parties will potentially have outsized influence in government. If it is objectionable that a single party can hold 100% of government power with 40% of the vote, why is it okay that a party with 10% of the vote might hold 20% of the government power? It's a normative question, but it's one that should be answered.

• (1000)

Third, there will be increased incentives for political entrepreneurs to exploit social divisions. Some comparative data is helpful on this matter. If we compare the 15 western countries with the greatest foreign-born populations, we'll find in the last election in each country that the average vote share for parties in favour of reducing legal immigration is 3.5% in majoritarian countries; in PR countries, it's 8.7%. The average seat share of such parties that want to reduce legal immigration is 0.1% in majoritarian countries; it is 10% in PR countries.

Finally, a proportional system will invite greater government instability, in which governments survive for shorter periods of time and in which governments are more regularly introduced without an election. Whether this is normatively desirable is an open question; the empirical regularity is not.

My third observation is that Canadian democracy functions well. My own reading of testimony to the special committee and questioning by the special committee has suggested that the functioning of Canadian democracy has not been sufficiently appreciated.

Certainly there's much with which we can take some issue. Our country has experienced one-party dominance rivalled only by Sweden and Japan. We have, as in most other countries in the world, experienced significant decline in our rates of voter participation, though this saw a large correction in the last election. Perhaps most importantly, we do frequently experience parties winning outsized majorities on much less than the majority of the ballots cast. None of these are particularly good things, and they're all certainly well rehearsed as critiques.

What's noted much less frequently are at least four measures on which our democracy has performed well.

First, our democracy has experienced more than 40 federal elections in dozens of peaceful transitions of power, both between leaders from different parties and between leaders within federal parties. This is a basic standard of democracy, and it's one that sets Canada apart from most other democracies. Indeed, Canada's run of uninterrupted democratic rule is among the longest in the world, surpassed by fewer than a handful of other countries.

Second, by the standards of their times, our elections have been fairly and freely conducted and our franchise has been liberally composed. Save the Canadian Pacific scandal and relatively pedestrian turnout buying in early elections, Canada's democracy has been a model of well-run elections.

Third, our democracy performs well in the political representation of minorities and indigenous peoples, especially compared to Anglo-American counterparts, and I refer you to Leslie Seidle's testimony in his written submission on that point. More historically, our political parties have a long track record of representing the broad diversity of our country, whether linguistic, confessional, or ethnic, without the emergence of explicitly ethnic or confessional parties. I wish to note especially that this has happened against the backdrop of founding groups and later waves of immigrants, who at various times viewed each other as unfit for common purpose and interaction. Put starkly, our country has long held the potential to be a tinderbox of identity. For the most part, we've avoided all but the smallest of fires.

On this, much has been made of the point that we are not Italy or Israel. This cannot mean that we are not a country that is characterized by competing economies, often deep religious and ethnic differences, and different ways of life. I assume that those who make this argument must mean that despite having the makings of a deeply divided and dysfunctional polity, we are not one. Our electoral system just might have something to do with that.

Fourth, our country has a long record of protecting the rights of minority groups. In more recent years, this has largely been the work of the charter, but before its advent it is still the case that protections were extended often because of an electoral logic. At other times they were extended because of the goal of broad coalition-building that is the norm within our political parties.

My fourth observation, and I'll close on this, is that for most of the problems ailing our democracy, there are potential fixes at hand that do not require fundamental institutional change. I wish the committee would take at once a broad and modest approach to reforming our democratic institutions.

There are, to be sure, shortcomings in our system. There are turnouts that are lower than we like. We don't yet have an even balance between female and male members of Parliament. Party leaders seem perhaps too strong vis-à-vis their members. Local party members don't enjoy real control over the selection of candidates. Parliamentary committees are sometimes weak and sometimes have neither the time nor the capacity to properly study and deliberate over policy.

This list is not exhaustive, yet there are potential solutions at hand for all of these problems, and they do not require a fundamental change to a central institution. Instead, the committee and the members' parties can explore a number of changes to parliamentary procedure, administrative law, and party rules that could address some or all of these problems. It seems more judicious to engage in a systematic and iterative process of improving our democratic institutions than it does to engage in wholesale reform.

Our electoral system is a central democratic institution. It exists in concert with a myriad of other institutions. It informs our politics not only through its rules, but also through the norms and practices which have evolved alongside and within it. We should carefully consider not only the upsides and drawbacks of reform but also the merits of our current system. On balance it is a system worth keeping.

•(1005)

Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Loewen.

I would like to thank the witnesses for their excellent presentations. You have given the members of the committee a great deal to think about, which will no doubt lead to interesting and stimulating discussions.

We will now begin the first round of questions. Ms. Sahota, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): I'd also like to thank all of you for being here today. Those were very interesting presentations.

I have questions for all of you. I don't think I'll have enough time, but in my two rounds, hopefully I'll be able to get them all in.

I would like to start with you, Dr. Maskin. You've given us something to think about that we haven't really talked much about.

There has been a lot of criticism about majoritarian rule or alternative vote. I was wondering if you could address some of that criticism. Some of it is that you would be favouring one candidate over another and it would carry on that way for a long time to come, or one party would be favoured over another in this system.

You've recently talked a bit about the primaries in the United States and how this voting system could have potentially changed the outcome in those primaries. Can you shed some light on whether that would be the case, whether we would always have a predicted outcome under that system?

Prof. Eric Maskin: On the question of whether majority rule favours one party over another, I think it's a pretty even-handed method: that is, it insists that the candidate who wins in an electoral district is truly favoured by a majority, in the very strong sense that this candidate could beat every other candidate.

As to your question on whether it changes the outcome relative to the current method, it certainly could. Under the current method, first past the post, as I illustrated on the screen, you can very well elect the wrong candidate. You can elect a candidate who has a plurality of the vote, 40%, but in fact there could well be another candidate who is the true majority winner and would beat the first-past-the-post winner by a majority.

There have been many examples of American elections in which, if only majority rule had been used, history would have been changed. In looking over recent Canadian elections, I can see many seats that probably would have had different outcomes had majority rule been used rather than first past the post. The outcome would have been fairer in the sense that a majority winner would have been chosen rather than just a plurality winner.

I'm not sure if that answers your questions.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Just to make a little comment, I should also state that for all of the systems we've been talking about, we've had a lot of experts come in and say it's very hard to predict what the outcome would be because parties would behave and act differently within a different system. If this system were to be adopted, or if MMP were to be adopted, or if any other system were to be adopted, we would probably see everyone change their strategies, change how they campaign and how they work together. They might co-operate more or we might have more partisan, divisive politics, let's say.

The style of politics would change. How do you think this system would affect the style of politics?

•(1010)

Prof. Eric Maskin: One way that things might well change is that there could be more parties. As I was suggesting at the end, one problem with first past the post is if you are a left-wing candidate who, say, disagrees with the NDP.... Let's say you're a Green candidate. You might hesitate to stand under the current system because you're worried about fracturing the vote on the left and ending up with a right-wing outcome. Under majority rule, you don't have to worry about that. There's no such thing as vote-splitting anymore, so that will embolden more political voices to come forward and be heard. They're not going to endanger the more popular parties, and so I would expect a broader range of political voices.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Could it possibly solve the problem of strategic voting, which has been raised as a problem?

Prof. Eric Maskin: Oh, absolutely. Under majority rule, voters have no incentive to strategically vote anymore. They have every incentive to vote according to their true preferences.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Mr. Reid is next, for five minutes, please.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

All the witnesses were very interesting, but I'll be directing my questions to Professor Loewen.

Professor, to some degree your concerns reflect my own concerns. I think I'm less an enthusiast of the existing system than perhaps you are, but I do think that while the current system is not the best that can be imagined, it is most definitely not the worst that can be imagined. I fear that the worst is actually a realistic scenario. I would define the worst scenario as an electoral system that has a predictable outcome in the next election in terms of causing one party or possibly two or three parties to do better than would be the case under the current system, and others to do worse, given the same universe of preferences as were expressed.

To do this knowing that this would be the outcome effectively systemically disenfranchises or reduces the value of the franchise of some votes and increases others in a predictable manner, not for every election but certainly for the next election. That, I think, is the underlying problem.

I get a sense that you share my view on this. In addition to what you've said today, I have some quotes from previous things you've written.

However, an alternative scenario was presented by one of our witnesses yesterday. Ed Broadbent argued that since several parties—the Greens, the NDP, and the Liberals—advocated some form of electoral reform in the last election, that would be sufficient to legitimize a new system. He argued that if the approval of those parties was achieved in the House of Commons, it would be a kind of supermajority, and there would be no need for some other approval mechanism to legitimize whatever new system came forward, regardless of its implications.

I wonder if you could give me some feedback on what you think of the argument that a multi-party majority legitimizes an electoral system in the absence of any other approval mechanism.

Prof. Peter John Loewen: I think it's a troubled argument, and I think it's a troubled argument for a couple of reasons.

On the facts of the case, I don't think we had an election that was fought over electoral reform. I think it was a long, long way down the list of issues on which votes turned and on which discussion occurred. The particular facts of the election suggest to me that it wasn't one in which there was a lot of discussion.

For the most part, we don't have elections that are typically fought over particular issues. That's the exception, and I think that's a normally defensible way of having elections. We choose leaders and parties and then we evaluate their performance. On the facts of the election, I'm convinced by that argument.

On the second point, I think this is a major institutional change. I'm not sure a convention has emerged that these changes have to be met by a referendum, but it seems to me that because it is such a fundamental change and because self-interest has such a clear potential to contaminate the debate, since parties are talking about the rules under which they'll be elected, perhaps there ought to be more of a check than just parties voting on it now.

To the third point, to be very bold about it, if you'll allow me, I've yet to hear an argument about the incapacity of voters to make a decision during a referendum that doesn't also condemn the decisions they make during elections. That is to say, the simple-minded, manipulable, easily confused voter who apparently won't be able to make a reasoned choice during a referendum is also the voter who elects everyone in the House of Commons. I think it's a dangerous discussion if we start to believe that voters are unable to make informed decisions on fundamental matters.

In sum, I don't think there is a constitutional convention preventing you from having a referendum, but I think that if 60% of voters in the last election were in favour of electoral reform, as seems to be claimed, surely it must be easy to win a referendum in that case.

•(1015)

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

I assume I'm out of time.

The Chair: You have about 40 seconds.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay. I have 40 seconds.

I just want to be clear on this, then. You said that you don't think there's a constitutional convention that there shouldn't be a referendum. Did you get your words backwards in terms of the constitutional—

Prof. Peter John Loewen: It's not clear to me that there is a convention that there needs to be a referendum.

Mr. Scott Reid: Ah, that's what you were saying. Okay.

Prof. Peter John Loewen: But I'm not an expert on the Constitution.

Mr. Scott Reid: Right. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Reid.

Mr. Boulerice is next.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for being here today for this important study. They have presented various positions that are all very interesting.

My first questions are for Mr. Dufresne.

Your initiative is quite interesting because there seems to be quite a large and powerful movement in civil society in Quebec calling for electoral reform. The desired change is quite profound and the preference is for a proportional system. You did not refer to a specific system, but there appears to be a consensus among all the groups you mentioned earlier.

They are various types of proportional representation. One type, such as in Germany, involves voting for a local representative along with a list system. In another type, the ridings are larger and have multiple candidates, with three, four, five or six elected members representing the same region.

In light of Canada's geography, which of these two systems do you think would best be able to meet citizens' needs?

Mr. Jean-Sébastien Dufresne: Thank you very much for your question.

I will not give you my personal opinion or views. I will instead talk about the outcome of the debates in organizations in civil society that represent close to two million Quebecers.

There seems to be a consensus in Quebec civil society for mixed-member proportional representation. This system has the greatest support among organizations in civil society. This is also the system that has been studied most extensively in all the work done in Quebec, including by Quebec's chief electoral officer. He evaluated the implementation of this system at the provincial level. In Quebec, there are some ridings that cover a very large area. A parallel can be drawn with Canada in this regard.

There is a concern about the representation of regions and of ridings. In a mixed-member proportional system, the same number of seats could possibly be maintained for ridings that should be a bit larger and have additional seats.

I would also point the Committee to the work of one of our sister organizations, Fair Vote Canada. In its brief, this organization presented an alternative system that would maintain the size of regional ridings as much as possible so as not to put them at a disadvantage. Fair Vote Canada talks about increasing the size of regional ridings by no more than 10% to 15%. It also mentions a combination with a single transferable vote in urban communities. These possibilities could be considered.

In our view, it is very important for each region to retain its political weight. This means MPs representing the riding and MPs for the regions to provide some balance. In other words, the regions would retain the same number of MPs in order to maintain their political weight.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: You mentioned representation, political weight and the presence of the regions. People are often apprehensive about changing the current voting system.

Another fear that is often raised, rightly or wrongly, is that the direct link between voters and their local representative would be lost. As people like to say, they want to know whom to call when they want to complain.

From your studies and what you have heard, would it be possible, in a mixed-member proportional system, to preserve that almost physical link between voters and their MP?

• (1020)

Mr. Jean-Sébastien Dufresne: There is nothing in the studies we have read or in what has been said here that suggests that the link is lost in countries with that kind of system. There is no indication of that link being lost. We believe that the system can actually give voters more power. In a region with compensatory seats for different parties, for example, voters have access to several elected representatives. It is of course a question of political culture to some extent, because this would change the relationships between voters and their elected representatives a bit, but it is in voters' interest because it gives them more power and greater access to their elected representatives. We think that is in the interest of society and of voters.

The Chair: Thank you.

Over to Mr. Thériault.

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Thank you Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for your contribution to our work. It is very helpful. It is interesting to hear different points of view.

Mr. Maskin, you attach great importance to the issue of an absolute majority. In your view then, as regards federal elections in Quebec, the only time when the right members were elected without a shadow of a doubt was in 1993, when 54 Bloc Québécois members were elected and only three of them did not have an absolute majority?

[*English*]

Prof. Eric Maskin: That's right.

Under the current system, the first-past-the-post system, there are many, many cases of MPs being elected without absolute majorities. What's worse is that we don't know, because we aren't finding out from voters, whether there are other candidates whom a majority would have preferred.

That's why switching to a voting system under which voters can express themselves more fully is a way to ensure that the right MPs get elected.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Thériault: I'm not sure you answered my question, but that's all right.

If we are going to change the democratic rules in society, it must be done properly. The Bloc Québécois's position is as follows. We want change, but not just any change and not in any old way. Time must be taken to do things properly.

All the experts have said that no system is perfect and that each has benefits and drawbacks. We must not play around with representation on such an important issue, claiming to know what is best for the people. In our view, a debate on this is absolutely necessary. We can only do so under this mandate, which is unfortunate because there is not much time. If we had a debate and were able to agree on a model that we could present at the next election, that would be a sign of success. That would likely be much more effective than acting too quickly. In that case, there might be differences in positions.

In other words, why should we say that this experience will lead to agreement on a model that the people must in some way be able to approve in order for it to stand the test of time?

Mr. Jean-Sébastien Dufresne: Thank you for your question, Mr. Thériault.

As you said, a choice must be made that will stand the test of time and that will have a profound impact on the exercise of democracy. It is important, for both Quebec and Canada, for citizens to be as confident as possible when they choose between the system we have used for centuries and another system that has proven effective in other parts of the world.

In our opinion, the best way of doing this is to extend voters as much respect as possible by giving them the opportunity to make a fully informed choice. No matter what explanations we provide, the best way of course is to test the system to see what the benefits and drawbacks are. We have to try a system in order to be in a position to say that the proposed system, which is the result of much work ...

• (1025)

Mr. Luc Thériault: I'm sorry to interrupt but I would like to hear from other witnesses.

The Chair: Mr. Thériault, the five minutes are nearly up. Could you pick up on this later on?

Mr. Luc Thériault: Do I have a minute left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: No, you have about 25 seconds left.

Mr. Luc Thériault: I will wait for the next round of questions.

The Chair: That's fine, thank you, Mr. Thériault.

[English]

Ms. May is next.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses

[Translation]

I would like to thank the witnesses for their observations. They are most interesting.

[English]

It's difficult, I find, when we have panels with differing opinions. Diving in becomes more difficult.

Professor Maskin, you may be the only witness proposing this voting system, so I want to ask you some questions for clarification.

I think you'd agree with me that this would be, in Professor Lijphart's definitions, one of the majoritarian oppositional systems, as opposed to PR consensus.

I think you've put your finger on the difference, for me, in the very last line of your brief, so I want to dive in there. It's that while the first-past-the-post, majoritarian, and alternative vote objective is to select the "right" MP for a district, under proportional representation the goal is to select the "right" composition of Parliament. That really helps me.

I'm one of those very fortunate and honoured MPs who, at least in my second election, had 54.4% of the vote. Your system wouldn't change the result for any of the MPs in our Parliament who have over 50% of the vote in their ridings. Is that right?

Prof. Eric Maskin: That's right.

Ms. Elizabeth May: The concern that voters would have.... In my case, I had 54.4% of the vote, but as much as I don't like to dwell on it, 45.6% of the electorate in my riding wanted to pick somebody else. In this new system, they wouldn't see any relief from the Green dominance from which they suffer. Am I right?

Prof. Eric Maskin: That's right, not in their district. There will be MPs elsewhere who might be closer to their political position.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Yes. This is where it doesn't seem, to me.... Is it at least theoretically possible under your voting system, although I know it's unlikely to occur, that you'd have as much as 25% of the electorate wanting candidates in a party that never managed to crest into a majoritarian group?

Prof. Eric Maskin: Yes, that's possible.

As I suggest in my brief, if what you want is a perfect match in Parliament to political opinion, if 25% of the people think this way and they will have 25% of the MPs, then proportional representation is the way to do that.

There are many strong points to be said for proportional representation. The reason I didn't dwell on it at length in the brief or in my comments today is that it would be a far bigger change. It would be a radical change, moving away from single-member electoral districts, etc.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Yes, in a two-party system such as that in the U.S., or even in your examples from the article in *The New York Times* back in April on the U.S. Republican primaries, we see that this would have had an immediate impact there that would have been more salutary than in our more Westminster-based system here.

Would you agree with that?

Prof. Eric Maskin: I'm not sure that I would agree. Even in a parliamentary system, moving away from first past the post and toward something like majority rule or alternative voting would be salutary in the sense that it would ensure that the single member who's elected in that district is closer to what the majority wants.

• (1030)

Ms. Elizabeth May: I have about a minute left, which isn't enough time to get to the questions I have for you, Professor Loewen, but I'll start with a question I received over Twitter.

Some of what you've presented to us today seems to oppose some of the more detailed empirical studies around patterns of democracy, such as Professor Lijphart's work.

A tweet came in from Fair Vote Canada, saying that the information they had was to the contrary around anti-immigration parties and representation in PR countries versus majoritarian countries.

Do you have any additional data you could give to the committee later to support that?

Prof. Peter John Loewen: The written submission has all the data that backs up the claim I've made. It lists—

Ms. Elizabeth May: Whose?

Prof. Peter John Loewen: My written submission has all of that data.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I have your written submission.

Prof. Peter John Loewen: Sorry, there's a 10-page written submission as well, in addition to the comments that I made, which I'm happy to forward to you.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Okay.

Prof. Peter John Loewen: I'll tell you my view more generally of this as a political scientist. I did a lot of cross-national studies. The estimates that are derived about the effects of PR, both negative and positive, are all very subject to case selection, to how we model things, to the exact estimators that are used.

It's a very muddled debate at the academic level, and pointing to a single book and saying this single book is the authority on the matter really misrepresents the diversity of viewpoints in that debate.

The Chair: Ms. May, I'm told by the clerk that this 10-page additional document was distributed this morning.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I'm sorry, but I don't have it.

The Chair: It was done at the last minute.

Go ahead, Mr. Aldag, for five minutes.

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): I'll continue from where we left off with Ms. May and Professor Loewen.

As you were going through your brief, the piece that really jumped out at me was the comment on the exploitation of social divisions. That is something we haven't seen as we've explored any sort of PR system, so I want to talk a bit more about that. You ran out of time in your response to Ms. May, but I would like to get your additional thoughts on it. You might have had more to say.

The observation I had is that we already see this kind of social division in the first-past-the-post system. As we saw in the last election, there was a fairly strong anti-Muslim narrative that entered the discussion, so I'm curious to see, in your research, what the effects are within a proportional representation system.

Could you give us some comments or expand on what you were saying?

Prof. Peter John Loewen: Thank you very much for the opportunity. Let me make two points on that.

One is that there was a furtive and, I think, ultimately unsuccessful attempt to stir up anti-Muslim sentiment in Canada in the last election. Ultimately it's difficult to sustain that when, as a party, you have to have more than one issue on which to win and you have to convince people across a large number of constituencies that you are a candidate worth voting for. It's easier to sustain in countries in which the electoral system is more permissive. I don't hold the belief that the people of the Netherlands, for example, are inherently more racist than Canadians, are inherently more anti-Muslim, but I do see, for example, that Geert Wilders' party is garnering a very large share of the vote right now in the Netherlands, particularly because he doesn't have to face up to the difficulties of winning a large number of constituencies. He can simply appeal to a small group of people with, frankly, bigoted views across his whole country.

More generally, I don't want us to paper over the achievements of our country and how difficult it was to assemble it. There was a time when if you were the Prime Minister and you were composing a cabinet in Canada, you needed to have an anglophone minister and a francophone minister from Quebec. Not only that, you needed to have an anglophone minister who was from one of the mainline churches; you needed to have an anglophone minister who was from the Presbyterian Church, for example. You had to worry about representing Irish Quebecers and you had to worry about various diversities within Quebec, not to mention all the other diversity that exists in our country.

We are a country that's been assembled together by people who are at various times really at odds with each other and don't have a certain degree of mutual understanding. Our electoral system created incentives for parties to paper over those differences, and in fact smother them and integrate people into parties as well as they could. I think it has a lot to do with the success of our country. At the baseline, we're probably a country that shouldn't have worked out, yet we did. That may be by accident, it may be by dumb luck, or it may have something to do with the electoral system that we had in the past.

My final point, I guess, would be that perhaps it's not the case that we have that degree of social enmity today, that we have these differences that could be exploited, but when I look at the rise of anti-immigrant parties in otherwise developed countries, I worry that such divisions might be exploited in our own country, not to mention regional divisions that still exist as well.

Those are my concerns.

• (1035)

Mr. John Aldag: Thank you. I have a second question for you.

You've outlined a number of more modest reforms that could deal with some of the issues that you've identified. We've also heard from Professor Maskin that other majority systems could deal with some of these issues. Are there shifts within the first-past-the-post system to something like a ranked ballot? Would you consider that too radical, from your perspective, or does that start dealing with some of the issues without getting in and really shaking things up?

Prof. Peter John Loewen: I think there's a qualitative difference between shifting to an AV system or a ranked ballot system, however it gets operationalized, and shifting to a system in which we create different types of members of Parliament or we use a fundamentally different rule to convert votes into seats. Is a move to ranked ballots a fundamental change? I'm not sure. I think there is an argument that it could be. You could argue against it, I suppose. It's not the shift that would occur under, for example, MMP, or certainly open-list PR.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Richards is next.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I have some questions for all of you, but I have a couple of rounds, so hopefully we'll get some opportunities.

Professor Loewen, I think I'll start with you.

In front of me here I have a few comments that you've made. For the benefit of everybody else, I'll read them—they're very brief—and then I'm going to have a question based on that.

It was actually last summer, I think before the election was even completed, that you made the comment, and I quote: "Those who wish to reform [our voting system] should do so with a clear mandate over detailed plans and with broad public approval."

Here's another comment you made, and I quote:

Whatever one thinks of the merits of different electoral systems—and there is much to recommend a variety of different systems—it seems remarkable that this decision would be left to parliamentary committees and then a simple vote of the House.

I sense that your use of the term "remarkable" wasn't meant to have a positive connotation.

Then following the election in December, you also wrote:

In short, one cannot argue at once that we need reform to address false majorities and that this government has a mandate to change the electoral system.

I would certainly agree with your comments. There are good reasons for those comments, but I wondered if you could explain a bit further for the committee, and for the record, what your reasoning

is for why the current plan of committee study, and then a vote in the House, is, as you've said, "remarkable", and I presume in not such a positive way.

Prof. Peter John Loewen: I think the thing that's special about the decisions that the committee is making is that they have a direct impact on how you are elected, which is to say they have a direct impact on whether you'll remain in your roles and whether you will have better or worse chances after the next election of being returned.

This is another way of saying that you're not disinterested parties in making this decision. I think there are any number of decisions you make from which you would remove yourself if you were an interested party. That's a principle, for example, that governs how cabinet ministers can make decisions over financial matters. It seems to me that it's a very important decision and it seems to me that it's one for which, because you all have such a self-interest in it, you ought to get the approval of the voters.

There is a secondary consequence, and there are two scenarios that I can imagine. One is that you choose a new electoral system, and for whatever set of electoral dynamics, it locks itself in. You never get a group of parties that want to change it again. However, Canadians don't like the system. That's seems to me to be relatively undesirable as an outcome.

The other outcome, I suppose, would be that you might come back to me and say, "Don't worry; we can just change it again." Then we start to get into the territory of the electoral system becoming a continuous election issue, with parties always looking for advantage after the next election. They're always changing and redesigning the system to their advantage. I think that's a worrying state of affairs and a worrying potential.

It seems to me that one way around that is to say that you have to have all-party consensus on how to change an electoral system. That two years ago, when Parliament was considering changing issues around what piece of ID you could use to vote, I heard some members, and certainly many academic colleagues, say that you have to have all-party consensus if you want to change a matter even that small. I can't imagine that we can then change the electoral system without all-party consensus. If you believe the first thing, you ought to believe the second.

The other point is, why not just ask voters?

• (1040)

Mr. Blake Richards: Sir, can I stop you right there? It's because I have a follow-up question and we have less than a minute.

It's on that very point. What is the best way to ensure that we do have the public's buy-in and to ensure that it isn't done with political self-interest? Is it a referendum? How do we ensure that the Canadian public has bought into any changes that are made?

Prof. Peter John Loewen: My own sense—and this is something on which I've changed my view over the years—is that the most desirable way would have been for you to draw up a citizens' assembly to come up with a recommendation and to even put the design decision in the hands of a disinterested group and then to leave the decision to a referendum.

This would be done with a full effort on an education campaign to people about what the options are, with evidence and with balance. That would have been my desired outcome. However, I think the absence of a citizens' assembly doesn't mean that you then don't have a referendum. Even at this point, it's sensible to put this decision to people and ask them whether they approve of the rules that you're setting for yourselves.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Ms. Romanado.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoynes, Lib.): Thank you so much.

I'd like to thank our panellists for being here today.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much for your presentations.

[*English*]

Yesterday we heard from the Broadbent Institute. We talked a little bit about a report that was issued, called “Canadian Electoral Reform - Public Opinion on Possible Alternatives”. This study was conducted right after the last election. The report states that in choosing the five goals of a voting system that are most important to them personally, 55% of Canadians polled noted the goal that the ballot should be simple and easy to understand. Some 55% of them said that was important to them. Then 51% said it was important for the system to produce stable and strong governments.

You can see that based on this poll, folks want something that's simple and folks want something that's going to provide stability. As soon as you hear of a minority government or a coalition government, people start thinking, my God, perpetual elections.

Given that, Professor Maskin, can you talk to us a little bit about how your proposed system would address those specific values that Canadians, according to that poll, have said are important to them?

Prof. Eric Maskin: Yes.

First, on the issue of ballot simplicity, which I agree is important, at the moment a ballot lists candidates who are standing. What I am proposing is that instead of just checking off one of those names or filling in a circle or pushing a button for one of those candidates, a voter would have the opportunity to do more and actually rank the candidates.

However, I think it's very important that voters not be required to rank candidates, or at least not be required to rank any more of the candidates than they want to. If there are eight candidates on the ballot, perhaps they'll choose to rank three or four of them, or a voter could just continue to vote for a single candidate. That would be putting one candidate first and basically announcing that the others are in a tie for second. That would be fine too. In any case, it would be up to the voter. That kind of ballot, I think, would be agreeable,

because in principle voters could continue to do exactly the same as before, but they would have more opportunity for expression.

As for stability and strong government, when I propose moving to majority rule or, for that matter, alternative voting, both of which are majoritarian schemes by contrast with PR systems, majoritarian systems tend to produce majority governments. That's not a guarantee, but they are more likely to do so than proportional rule. If voters want stability, they're more likely to get it under one of these majoritarian systems.

• (1045)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you.

Further to that comment, Professor Loewen, you mentioned that some of the guiding principles that we're looking at and some of the things that are wrong with our current system could be addressed by a federal solution. For instance, if we want to increase participation, it's not necessarily another electoral system that can do that. We could implement mandatory voting, or civic education outreach, and so on, and I agree with you that we've been hearing from various witnesses in that regard.

However, in terms of feasibility and cost, and in terms of having a less radical solution to address some of the issues and problems we're facing, what would you say to Professor Maskin's recommendation of moving into an AV system, or something similar, to address some of those issues without such a radical change?

The Chair: Answer briefly, please.

Prof. Peter John Loewen: I think it's a less radical change than PR, and on the issue of implementation, I think you should take the chief electoral officers at their word when they testify about the difficulty of implementing new electoral systems in short order.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Cullen is next.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Happily we have time to consider our options.

To Professor Loewen, I just want to get a definition of a term you have in your testimony today. What's an “unalloyed good”?

Prof. Peter John Loewen: Oh, it's unqualified. It's absolutely a good thing.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: The idea of an unalloyed good is then dismissed later on, in terms of having a system that better represents our population—not just by numbers, but if 20% of Canadians want a certain thing, then Parliament should more or less reflect what they want. I think people like choice, and they like to have their choices honoured by the electoral system.

Is that a fair statement? Is that a good desire to have?

Prof. Peter John Loewen: Well, to be sure, what I was saying in my testimony was that having a more equal balance between men and women in our Parliament is an unqualified good, and it's one that we should pursue. That's the point I was making.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Then if we have strong evidence that says there's causality, there's connection, between proportional systems and an enhanced representation of women, why wouldn't we consider that? Why wouldn't we, in fact, more than consider it: why wouldn't we implement it?

Prof. Peter John Loewen: Because you have to make trade-offs. Because you have to design an electoral system that optimizes a number of goods at once, not just one.

Look, if your only concern is that we ought to have a balance between men and women in Parliament, there's an easy solution: pass a law that says you will refund election expenses for only—whatever the number is—169 men and 169 women, and in the next election you will have an equal number of male and female candidates.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: To be fair, we have such a proposal from Mr. Kennedy—

Prof. Peter John Loewen: I know you do, and it's a wonderful one.

Mr. Nathan Cullen:—which is a wonderful proposal, yet it has been rejected by the current government, I guess because it's 2016.

The question I put to you about mandate I think is important. The mandate of this committee, and I'll read from the House of Commons resolution, is “to identify and conduct a study [on] viable alternate voting systems to replace the first-past-the-post system”. We're not engaged in whether or not we should change the system; this is a “how” question. As you say, there are trade-offs with every system. As Mr. Dufresne has pointed out, as well as Professor Maskin, there are some advantages.

I guess to my question about improving the quality of Canada, to defend the status quo and say it's worked to this point is not a strong argument in this sense. We wouldn't have made any reforms to the way we vote in Canada if we simply relied on the idea that Canada's pretty good right now. Women wouldn't be voting and aboriginals wouldn't be voting, because Canada up to that point was working pretty well. There were those who at that time said—and I'm not suggesting you align yourself with this—that first nations people shouldn't have the vote because Canada is working out fine as it is, and before that women, and in between that Japanese Canadians.

I won't hold that argument as a reason to stay with the status quo. I take some of your other positions.

Mr. Broadbent was here yesterday and said a weakness of the 1980 Liberal government was that while they got about 23% to 24% of the vote in western Canada, they had virtually no representation, yet they were considering a dramatic change to energy policy, to oil and gas policy in particular. He invited Mr. Broadbent and some others from the west and from the NDP to come into cabinet—that didn't happen—and brought in a policy that was incoherent to western Canadians.

Is that a fair assessment of that moment in time?

• (1050)

Prof. Peter John Loewen: Yes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Yes. Mr. Broadbent's point was this, and I would wonder if you would argue against it: having a mix of representation from different parts of the country, both in government and in opposition, is healthy for both sides of the debate? Is that fair?

Prof. Peter John Loewen: I want to go back to the first point you made, which is that we would never make changes.

We can make distinctions between issues of rights versus issues of how we decide to have an election. Our court has not said—quite the opposite, actually—that we have to have PR as a matter of rights. That's quite different from saying whether aboriginals should vote. Yes, it's a matter of rights. Should women vote? Yes, it's a matter of rights. My point would be that there's a fundamental institution at the core of this, and we can change things around a parameter, such as who votes, when we vote, how many days we vote, what kind of encouragement we give people, to give us better democratic outcomes—more goods—while not changing the central system.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: But—

Prof. Peter John Loewen: Now to your point—sorry—of whether there should be political representation across the country, yes, there should. I should tell you that my view is that it's failed in our country on several occasions, as you've noted.

That said, if we are concerned about the permanent regionalism of our politics, it seems to me that one way of doing that is to introduce electoral incentives that tell a party that it never has to break out of its region. The Reform Party is not in Parliament today because Reformers understood that to win government, they had to broaden across the whole country.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Yet first past the post gave us the Reform and the Bloc Québécois as the official opposition in Canada, so regionalism is not exclusive to proportional systems. That's fair. We've had many instances. We had the example from Mr. Dufresne in which a party with less than the popular vote ended up forming government, so there are distortions that we're trying to correct, and those distortions, I would say... Are you living in Toronto? I didn't want to assume.

Prof. Peter John Loewen: I live in High Park.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: High Park, very good, or fortress Toronto, as it is often referred to now, and before.

The Chair: We're not going to have time for—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: What does a Conservative voter or a New Democrat voter or a Green voter in Toronto do at those times when there is absolutely zero representation of their voice in Parliament, along with the nine million Canadians whose votes are not reflected in our Parliament today?

The Chair: We're going to have to turn that into a rhetorical question and go to Mr. Rayes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to thank the three witnesses with us here today.

My first question is for you, Mr. Dufresne.

You used some strong wording in your introduction. You said you have not found anyone who is willing to defend the status quo. I think you have found someone today.

You also used the word “unanimous” in saying that everyone you consulted at various events, debates or discussions was in favour of proportional representation. Just to your left, though, is someone with a different point of view. I find it quite unusual that you claim that your organization represents a broad majority of Quebecers who are in favour of the system you are advocating.

I have a very simple question for you. My colleague to my left asked you earlier but you did not have the time to finish your answer.

Once this committee has completed its work and a proposal has been put forward, do you definitely think that we should consult the entire population by way of a referendum to ensure that the proposal is the right choice and that it is necessary to change our voting system?

Mr. Jean-Sébastien Dufresne: Thank you for your question.

Yes, I should clarify a few points. When I said there was a broad consensus, I was not talking about individuals but about organizations in civil society. We work with organizations that have deliberative processes and that adopt positions further to debate within the organization.

I know that individuals may have their personal opinions, but I am talking about organizations in civil society. That is why I said there is a broad consensus on this issue.

Furthermore, I used the word unanimous in reference to organizations seeking electoral reform and specifically proportional representation. All the organizations that are engaged on the issue, in Quebec at least, have a clear position in support of proportional representation. I want to make sure that is clear.

As to the consultation process, I was very interested by the comments made earlier about conflict of interest. As our colleague indirectly said, our elected representatives who are debating the issue here, but whose reelection is directly influenced by the outcome of this debate, must be able to remove themselves from the final decision and engage the public in the process.

As I was saying, I have not heard any argument opposed to the idea of allowing the public to try out a solution supported by a broad majority of civil society before making a choice.

•(1055)

Mr. Alain Rayes: Thank you, Mr. Dufresne.

I have a very simple question for you and then I would like to hear from the other two witnesses.

I heard what you said, but do you think it would be advisable to consult all Canadians at the end of the process before a new voting system is implemented?

Mr. Jean-Sébastien Dufresne: We maintain that the public must be respected and the best way of doing that is by enabling them to make a confident choice. To that end, there is nothing better than weighing the benefits and drawbacks of a reform based on the observed impact on political culture.

As noted, it is an important change and we have to know what impact it might have on the way politics works. That would take at least two elections, but first we must determine how it can be implemented before we can make an informed choice. We fully agree that the people must be given the opportunity to express their views.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Before we hear from the other witnesses, I would like to pursue this.

What do you think of the various surveys that show that between 60% and 73% of the population, including over 60% in Quebec, are in favour of a referendum?

You said earlier you are not an expert and that you represent a group of university professors and experts in the field. Yet more than 50% of expert witnesses support or strongly support holding a referendum before the system is reformed.

You describe your organization as democratic and as seeking more public consultation and participation. Yet you are not in favour of that before implementing a new system. You say that the question should be asked again in a few years, after two or three elections. Is that correct?

The Chair: Very quickly, please.

Mr. Jean-Sébastien Dufresne: With respect to surveys, yes ...

Mr. Alain Rayes: Is that a yes or a no?

Mr. Jean-Sébastien Dufresne: The public must be able to make an informed choice. That is the best solution, in our opinion.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Perfect, thank you.

Mr. Loewen and Mr. Maskin, quickly ...

The Chair: Unfortunately, your time is up, Mr. Rayes.

You have the floor, Mr. DeCoursey.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Fredericton, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to thank the three witnesses for the different points of view they have expressed here this morning. Personally, I like diversity in points of view. It is important for the committee's work and must be reflected to Canadians when we engage them in this discussion this fall.

[English]

I want to begin with a number of questions directed at Professor Loewen. They relate to an article that appeared on Friday that is generally consistent with your testimony this morning. In the article you concede there are potential benefits, though they may be limited, to electoral reform and particularly to PR systems, including the potential for a slight increase in voter turnout.

I note the table citing New Zealand and the relative view that citizens feel there is fair conduct in the way the election is run. When we talk about strategic voting, we're talking about shifting the compromise or the strategy elsewhere, and that there may be an inconsistency or an incoherency between policy outcomes and citizens' preferences.

I'll cite exactly what you said:

Claims about greater economic performance, fiscal management, and better policy are probably attributable to other factors.

As we present these options to Canadians, what are some of these factors that we should be mindful of, given that we've heard plenty of testimony that the electoral system is caught up in a larger system of a Parliament style of governance and political culture?

Prof. Peter John Loewen: Thank you. It's a very good question.

I think the committee shouldn't be too hopeful that changing an electoral system is going to have a large number of effects, either positive or negative, on things like macroeconomic outcomes or budget management. It seems to me that these things are largely baked in, depending on a country's place in the global economy, on the nature of its resources, and on the democratic dynamics of its population. When we look at studies that extract cross-national differences and then attribute causality to the electoral system, I think we should view them with a fair amount of skepticism.

By the way, I could probably, with some ease, point you to some studies that would show that majoritarian countries have some better outcomes as well on some of these measures. For the most part, I think those things are pretty far down the chain, and they're probably not affected by electoral systems too much.

The things that will be affected in a beneficial way by changing the electoral system are probably a bit more with regard to voter turnout, and, as you say, a better sense of fairness with the election outcome. Those are good, right? We'll likely have more women in Parliament, which is good, but they trade off against other things.

• (1100)

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Do you see other factors contributing to increasing women's representation in Parliament? Is that something we should consider as well—the political will to put women on the ballot to ensure they have a chance to run?

Prof. Peter John Loewen: If this committee and members of Parliament more generally feel that it's important to have an equal

number of men and women not only running but winning seats, there are administrative changes you can take to that effect.

Frankly, you can do what the NDP has done for a long time, which is to make very strong efforts to recruit women and to make sure that nomination races have strong, viable, female candidates. You could change administrative law around election expenses, for example, to make it strongly incentivized for parties to run more women than men.

We don't have to change the electoral system and then hope that some strategic logic leads to these outcomes. We can pass laws to try to bring them in place now.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Great.

Dr. Maskin, I noted in your testimony that you steered away from talking about proportional rule and calling it a radical change.

Can you talk to some of the aversions you have toward the pursuit of proportional rule, given the time that is left?

Prof. Eric Maskin: Here I think I share some of the concerns of Mr. Loewen.

Proportional rule has worked very well in many countries around the world. However, for Canada, it would represent a very substantial departure, a much bigger departure, from the current system than majoritarian systems, such as alternative voting and majority rule.

In particular, proportional rule would presumably eliminate the current system of single-member electoral districts. Canadians are used to the idea that in their district they will be electing an MP. That would change under proportional rule. Also, there is the idea that a majority government could well go by the wayside. Many countries using proportional rule today patch together coalitions to form governments. That's a much more likely outcome under proportional rule than under a majoritarian scheme.

My own philosophy in these matters is to make reforms when there are clear directions of improvement, but not to take a bigger step than is necessary to accomplish an improvement.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll start the second round with Ms. Sahota, please.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I'm going to carry on from the discussion about coalition governments.

We've had some witnesses say that a coalition government can be a great thing, that we can achieve a lot with coalition governments and that we have done so in the past, and that great ideas have come out of that, but there have also been those who have suggested that coalition governments could also cause a person to think that this isn't what I voted for and this is not the platform that I clearly saw and that I voted for. Then you end up with a mishmash of a lot of things.

Professor Loewen, I found it quite interesting—and I hadn't thought about this—when you said in your presentation that 10% of the vote can result in 20% of the power, or it could be leveraged to have even more effective power than that. Can you elaborate on that?

Now that you have brought this up, one concern that really comes to mind is the anti-immigrant sentiment. We in Canada pride ourselves on the fact that we had a different outlook and uptake on the Syrian refugee crisis. Perhaps they weren't able to get here as easily as in some of the European countries, but the response to it was quite different in Canada, and internationally that was recognized as a departure from how the European countries were handling the situation.

Could a system like this create small parties that may leverage that type of anti-immigrant sentiment or other things that may become divisive in the future?

• (1105)

Prof. Peter John Loewen: I have two comments.

To start with your second observation, my only observation is that if you want to look at cross-national evidence and take all the good things that are higher on average in PR countries, you should take the negative things as well. It appears to me that you're more likely to have anti-immigrant, anti-legal immigration parties winning seats in PR systems in largely diverse countries than you are in majoritarian countries that have largely diverse populations.

To your first point, I think that this is a normative question, and the question is really this. You can imagine an array, after the next election, in which.... New Zealand hasn't completely fragmented as a system. The two principal parties, Labour and National, are still winning 40% of the vote or thereabouts in each election, but imagine an arrangement in which one of our traditionally larger principal parties wins 45% of the vote and forms a majority coalition with a party that wins 6% of the vote. They now hold the majority of the seats in the Parliament in that coalition.

Gamson's law would tell you that the power that would go to that other party would be proportional to their contribution to the seat share, so why is it that a party that got 5% of the vote ought to have 10% of the power within the cabinet? Why is that more desirable than a party getting 100% of the power on 40% of the vote, or 100% of the power on 45% of the vote? That's a normative question. I think it's one that the committee needs to explore, but the reality is that in PR systems, coalition governments are more common than in majoritarian systems. Coalition governments have some good that is attached to them, but they have some drawbacks, not least of them blurred accountability and behind-door compromises that occur after an election and between elections, not before elections.

These are normative trade-offs that have to be made, and the committee ought to consider them, but I've yet to hear a very convincing argument—and I'm open to being convinced—about why a party that has a very small percentage of the vote should receive such an outsized share of cabinet power when they're in a coalition, and why that's desirable—and perhaps it's not, right? I've yet to hear an argument as to why it is, and that's more likely to result in a PR system than in a majoritarian system.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Do any of the other panellists have any input on coalition governments and how you feel about them in terms of the balance of power?

Prof. Eric Maskin: First, I agree with Mr. Loewen that a small party that becomes part of a coalition will tend to have an outsized proportion of power by virtue of keeping that majority alive.

However, by the same token, small parties that are not part of the governments in proportional representation end up essentially with no power. That can give rise to an incentive for strategic voting on the part of voters.

Again, suppose I favour a small party that is not likely to be part of the majority. If I vote for that small party I'm essentially throwing away my vote. Proportional representation does encourage, in general, more voting for small parties than a majoritarian system, but only for small parties that are likely to be part of a coalition.

• (1110)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Reid is next.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you, Mr. Chair. This time I'll be directing my questions to Professor Maskin.

Professor, much of—in fact, virtually all of—the discussion that's gone on relating to your proposal has taken place in the context of American politics. One obvious difference between American and Canadian politics that occurs to me is that you have the primary system, and one of the discussions that I'm sure you've seen is about whether your system would have had the effect of changing the Republican primary process.

It strikes me that this difference, the primary system, is pretty significant. It seems to me that effectively what it's done in the United States is create two parallel systems that are roughly equivalent to the French presidential runoff. Essentially, you have two runoffs occurring at the same time, or if you like, the runoff is in reverse. As a result, some of the analysis is not easily transferable to the Canadian system.

Are there other parallels that are perhaps a bit closer? Are there any jurisdictions—for example, municipal jurisdictions in your country—where your system is actually being put in place and has operated for one or more election cycles? That would seem, to me, to be a closer parallel to the Canadian situation.

Prof. Eric Maskin: Majority rule, as I've defined it, is not currently used in cities, largely for historical reasons. Until fairly recently, we haven't had the ballot-counting technology to make it viable. It is used by many professional societies, but those are smaller groups than cities.

However, alternative voting, which is very similar to majority rule, with ranked-choice ballots, has been used in many American cities. It's used in, for example, San Francisco, in Minnesota, and in my own town of Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Mr. Scott Reid: It's used in Berkeley as well, I think, right?

Prof. Eric Maskin: Yes, Berkeley too.

The evidence suggests that it's worked pretty well, so we do have experience with it.

Mr. Scott Reid: If I'm not mistaken, in most of those municipal jurisdictions it was implemented following a referendum in which the local residents chose to implement it, and was not, in fact, put in place until subsequent to that referendum. Am I correct in my recollection of the history of those municipal jurisdictions?

Prof. Eric Maskin: I'm not sure about Cambridge, because it's been using alternative voting for so long now that I no longer recall exactly how it came into being, but for the cities that have more recently adopted it, yes, that's right.

Mr. Scott Reid: Yes, in the California example in particular, I'm pretty confident of that. That's helpful.

Of course, the concern you've probably heard here is a public choice problem with having the interested parties make the decision as to what system should be adopted. The argument that my party has been presenting is that the safeguard to prevent the interested parties from designing a system for the purpose of determining the outcome of the next election is to require that the citizens approve it. It would force us all to design something that meets with voter approval, or else we would have to suffer through another election under the current system.

Is my public choice concern, in your view, a legitimate concern, or am I imagining something that's not a real threat?

Prof. Eric Maskin: This is not something that I've studied closely enough to have a well-informed opinion. At the national level in the U.S., state legislatures are empowered with the right to change the electoral system, so at least at the national level, we don't throw things open to a referendum when reforming the electoral system. At the municipal level—

Mr. Scott Reid: I don't think I'd be wrong in saying that is a highly imperfect way of doing things, based on some of the congressional district boundaries I've seen.

• (1115)

Prof. Eric Maskin: Yes. I'm not proposing that it's the right way of doing things, but it's the mandated way of doing things.

Mr. Scott Reid: Right, yes.

Thank you very much, Professor.

The Chair: That's perfect. We're right on the button.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Boulerice, you have the floor.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Professor Maskin, but first I have a few introductory remarks.

During the last election, the Liberal Party said it would be the last one to be held under the first past the post system, the voting method that has been used for 149 years. This committee's mandate is to explore the various options available.

From the outset, Mr. Arend Lijphart provided information about the two main types of voting systems, the majority system and the consensus-based or proportional system. The alternative voting

system you are proposing today is part of the same type of voting system that we have now and that we want to do away with—which is what the Liberal government promised—because it causes distortions and leads to false majorities.

It seems that the alternative voting system you are proposing is another way of creating a majority. That is problematic though for people like us who want Parliament to represent citizens' choices and voices. The only comparable example in a western democracy is Australia. The alternative voting system there produces very marked bipartisanship that quashes the voices of citizens who do not vote for these major parties.

Consider the most recent election in Australia, where the main parties are Coalition and Labour. In 2016, these two parties won 97% of seats. In 2013, they won 97%, in 2010, 96% and in 2007, 99%. There is a 15% to 25% distortion in the votes cast.

It is as though, in your system, someone whose first choice was the Green Party but, knowing that the Green Party will probably not win, decides to vote NDP as their second choice, Liberal as their third choice and Conservative as their fourth choice, because that is the last party that they want to avoid at all costs. There is a good chance they will end up with a Liberal MP, which is neither their first nor their second choice.

Suppose you go to a dealership to buy a car. Your first choice is an electric car. They tell you it is a very good idea but that it is not possible. So you decide to buy a hybrid. They tell you it would be a good option also, but there are none available right now. Since you don't want an SUV, you choose a van as a third choice, but that is not what you set out to buy and you don't want a van. Why should a voter be stuck with a van if that is not what they want?

[*English*]

The Chair: That's not an automotive question, by the way.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Prof. Eric Maskin: The difficulty is that when the electorate is not homogenous, and yet a decision has to be made, a majority must be found one way or the other. That's inevitably going to mean that some voters' views are not taken into account. Even under proportional representation, which comes closer than the majoritarian systems to representing non-majoritarian views, it will be the case that many voters, and perhaps most voters, are not going to be represented in the sense of having their political aspirations implemented, because the majority coalition, whatever that turns out to be, will not include their party. There is no way, no voting system, that ensures that everybody ends up having his or her view incorporated into government decisions.

• (1120)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

It is Mr. Thériault's turn now.

Mr. Luc Thériault: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

After hearing from various experts, it is clear that every electoral system involves some bias due to strategic voting. It is a question of values. Values determine our choice. All of the systems have drawbacks.

There is something that annoys me. One would expect that a voting system would not distort reality and the real political dynamics of geographical area. The minister or my colleague on the right says that what happened in 1993 is one of the reasons why we must change the voting system, because it led to regionalism.

It is a good thing in a way that this happened though. That is perhaps the only positive effect that the current system has had in Canadian history. After the failure of the Meech Lake and Charlottetown accords, it meant that, at these important junctures in Quebec and Canadian history, the two voices expressed were reflected in Parliament.

Reducing the realities of Quebec to a geographical region is a mistake, I would argue. In 1867, in the discussions that led to our form of parliamentary government, the Fathers of Confederation stated that the national identity of Lower Canada must not be obliterated. If we are looking for an electoral system tailored to Canada, we have to be clear about which Canada we are talking about. Is it the Canada after 1982 or Canada in 1867?

That said, when you talk about ideological pluralism, I can see a problem. You say there is a discrepancy and that a small party could form government with a larger core. That is what ideological pluralism is. Perhaps that will be what the population chooses so it can have a voice in governance. If a small party represents the people who voted for it and if its election platform is compatible with a bill implemented by the largest party which has the largest vote share, I don't see how this poses a problem mathematically speaking.

Ideological pluralism cannot be reduced to mathematics however. We have to go further. I sympathize with the *Mouvement Démocratie Nouvelle*, but I don't understand why its representative skirted the issue twice with regard to involving the population. In my opinion, for the population to be confident, it must henceforth become a participant in the decision. That way, it could judge what happens over the next four years. This would allow us to break away from partisanship and the aura of experts and insiders.

Mr. Dufresne, you represent the insiders. That works perfectly for our democracy because you will enlighten us. When I'm out on the street and visiting people though, they have no idea what we are doing here. Our mandate is to consult them and not to decide for them. Some experts have said—and this is scarcely an exaggeration—that democracy is too important to be left up to the people.

For my part, I think you should reconsider your position. Even if we are pressed for time, we will not achieve anything and we will remain entrenched in our positions. Electoral reform will not go anywhere if people are not involved, and to get them involved, we have to let them decide.

The Chair: Mr. Dufresne, you have a minute to respond.

Mr. Jean-Sébastien Dufresne: Thank you.

Let me be very clear. We have full confidence in people's judgment and the intelligence of Canadians.

Do you not agree that it is preferable to give people the choice under the best possible conditions and to allow them to weigh the ins and outs of the proposals on the table as best as possible? Do you not agree with that?

Mr. Luc Thériault: Absolutely.

• (1125)

Mr. Jean-Sébastien Dufresne: So you agree with our proposal?

Mr. Luc Thériault: No. The goal is to complete the first phase by December 1. We would continue the whole process in order to agree on a specific model before the people are consulted. People will have the opportunity to decide in the election. This has been done in other countries. People on the ground would have the time to get voters involved. We are not doing this for the insiders or the experts, much less for politicians. It is for the people.

Mr. Jean-Sébastien Dufresne: A citizen jury could be a compromise. I invite you to consider this. It is a type of process that allows random groups of citizens to express their views on these matters. That would fully address your concerns and those of Conservative members.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dufresne.

Let us turn now to Ms. May.

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth May: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As much as I want to dive into some more questions for Monsieur Dufresne and Professor Maskin, I want to go back to the quality and quantity of data on which we draw conclusions about PR systems versus majoritarianism.

With your permission, Mr. Loewen, I'd love us to have a seminar at U of T someday where I would attempt to persuade you that there's something wrong with a concentration of absolute power with a minority of the vote versus sharing of the vote with majority power, but in my five minutes, I'm not going to do it.

Prof. Peter John Loewen: You are welcome any time at the School of Public Policy and Governance.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I want to make sure, first of all, that I apologize for the confusion I had in the last round when you referred to 10 pages. What apparently happened was that with the font changes, we have six and a half pages. I have in front of me everything you've submitted thus far.

I want to know whether you ran analyses of the 15 countries you looked at over more than one election. Is there more data in your background material?

Prof. Peter John Loewen: No, there's nothing.

In either the case of that table that I compiled for you or the New Zealand case, there are no tests that I've excluded. I just wrote down on a piece of paper before I did my testimony which tests I would do, and I did them.

Ms. Elizabeth May: When you referred to one book, you did not identify it, but I presume from the inferences that this was Professor Lijphart's *Patterns of Democracy*.

Would you agree with me, as an academic, that this one book was a 36-country study with electoral results for every election since the end of World War II, while with regard to table 2 here—obviously this is evidence to the committee, and you did this quickly—this is 15 countries and one election?

Prof. Peter John Loewen: Right.

The point I'm making in that second table is that I'm comparing the 15 countries in the world that have the largest foreign-born populations. I want countries that look like Canada. They're countries of immigrants.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Right, but in—

Prof. Peter John Loewen: Yes, and Mr. Lijphart uses 36 countries.

Ms. Elizabeth May: And elections since the end of World War II.

Prof. Peter John Loewen: Until what year?

Ms. Elizabeth May: The updated book I think takes us into the 2000s. I'll have to double-check.

In this case—and it is very interesting to look at one election only in these countries—I was surprised that you decided that the Australian majority party of the Liberal-National coalition wasn't an anti-immigration party.

For my colleagues in the Green Party of Australia, elections are fought in Australia over immigration policies. The current majority government under first past the post in Australia maintains some of the most horrific conditions for refugees in the settlements on Nauru, but you didn't classify them as anti-immigration.

Prof. Peter John Loewen: No, because they're not opposed—and the definition is very clear in the brief I gave you—to legal immigration.

Now, their politics turn on immigration in a way that we should hope ours never do.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Exactly, and that's why in looking at this, we see that New Zealand, Ireland, and Spain, all with PR, have no factional party opposing immigration, and under PR in Germany and France, which do have some worrying anti-immigration parties, those parties have no seats.

Prof. Peter John Loewen: I don't regard France as a PR country. I regard France as a majoritarian country.

Ms. Elizabeth May: All right, but in Germany, which is clearly MMP, the anti-immigration forces have not attained seats.

Prof. Peter John Loewen: Yes.

Ms. Elizabeth May: What we're really looking at is a worrying thing, which is that in the last elections in the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Austria, the anti-immigration parties have made some gains.

Prof. Peter John Loewen: Yes, and in other countries as well.

Ms. Elizabeth May: In looking at this, I wanted—

Prof. Peter John Loewen: To be sure, those parties are now in government. They're in government.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Yes.

The initial question I had was whether there was more information. I'm gratified to know that we're on the same page. We know we're looking at the quality of data we have. Thank you for taking the time to put together the information on the last election in those countries.

I have some questions from Twitter that I didn't think I have time to get to, but I do want to ask this question. It comes from Ann, in Nelson, and it's to you, Professor Maskin.

How would majoritarian rule reflect diversity of Canadian voices?

• (1130)

Prof. Eric Maskin: It's by giving voters the opportunity to put their favourite candidates, whoever they might be—even someone who has little chance of winning—first on their ballots. Under the current system, if I vote for an unpopular candidate, a candidate who is unlikely to win the seat, I'm in effect throwing away my vote. My voice in favour of that candidate isn't being heard, and so I have a strong incentive to vote for someone else who does have a chance of winning.

Under majority rule or alternative voting, we can see from how people have voted which parties are truly favoured.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I know my time is up, unfortunately.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. May.

Mr. Aldag is next.

Mr. John Aldag: Professor Maskin, I've gone through your written submission a couple of times. Something that I'm not seeing, and it may be a subtle difference, is the difference between what you call majority rule and alternative voting. You note that majority rule deals with five of the five problems; alternative voting deals with only four of the five.

I'm trying to figure out how nuanced the differences are. Is it a mathematical calculation? Ultimately what I'd like to hear from you is how important the shift is overall from the first past the post system we currently have to something else within a majoritarian system, as opposed to making a dramatic shift into something like proportional representation.

There are three pieces there.

Prof. Eric Maskin: Let's take your first question first.

I think the easiest way to see the difference between alternative voting, which is sometimes called instant runoff voting, and what I was talking about, majority rule, is to use the example that is on the screen.

Mr. John Aldag: I've been looking at that.

Prof. Eric Maskin: As I showed you in that example, candidate B is the majority winner because B beats A by a majority, and B also defeats C by a majority.

However, if we use alternative voting, instant runoff voting, then we'd look only at first-place votes, so 40% vote for A, 35% vote for C, and 25% vote for B, we notice that B, who is actually the true majority winner, is eliminated under alternative voting. That's because under alternative voting, if no candidate gets a majority of first-place votes, you eliminate the candidate who has the fewest first-place votes, and that's B in this case.

This example encapsulates the difference between majority rule and alternative voting.

Mr. John Aldag: I think where it leads me is that there are a number of options or permutations within systems. Are you making that there are enough flaws within the current system that we should look at something else, yet not go so far as to invent a completely new system, such as a proportional system?

Prof. Eric Maskin: Well, proportional representation is not an entirely new system. It's used widely around the world, and very successfully.

Mr. John Aldag: I mean new to Canada.

Prof. Eric Maskin: It would be a much bigger change than moving to alternative voting or majority rule.

Alternative voting, in this example, doesn't work very well, because it eliminates the majority winner, but by and large it's a much better system for capturing the majority will than first past the post. I think either alternative voting or majority rule, or some other similar variant in which voters have the opportunity to express themselves by ranking rather than just voting for a single candidate, would be a considerable improvement over the current first-past-the-post system.

• (1135)

Mr. John Aldag: Thanks.

The other question I wanted to ask you, Professor Maskin, is about legitimacy of process.

I don't know how familiar you are with the process we've designed. It involves various consultations, a national road tour, and online consultations that are open for an extended period of time. We've heard the thoughts on a referendum, and that's one way of lending legitimacy.

From what you've seen of our process, as somebody looking at it from outside, do you have thoughts on things that we're doing that will contribute to the legitimacy of this process and things that you would like to see us add or refine to get there?

Prof. Eric Maskin: I don't feel, as an outsider, that I'm sufficiently expert on that question. I was asked about whether a referendum would be necessary to make this legitimate. I don't have

a well-informed view on that point. I would have to know more about the details of politics in Canada.

Mr. John Aldag: I just wanted to give you the opportunity if you had something beyond referendum, but that's fine.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. Good.

Mr. Richards is next.

Mr. Blake Richards: Professor Maskin, I'll start with a couple of questions for you.

Essentially I see this majority rule that you have up here as really just a.... If I'm not mistaken, it's a different way of counting a ranked ballot, essentially. That is what I see there. I've never seen it before and I've never heard it discussed before, so I'm curious about it.

One of the things that come to mind for me, and maybe I'm mistaken, is a scenario in which you wouldn't be able to determine a winner. There wouldn't be one candidate who would beat all the other candidates in the various head-to-head counting mechanisms, especially if you have seven or eight candidates.

What happens? What is the method to determine a winner in that scenario, when you don't have one who's beaten each of the other candidates in a head-to-head competition?

Prof. Eric Maskin: You're right. There is a possibility that no candidate will emerge as the true majority winner in the sense that the candidate beats each of the other candidates by a majority. This was a possibility recognized by the creator of majority rule, the Marquis de Condorcet, who was an 18th-century philosopher and political theorist who proposed majority rule but noted that it wouldn't always produce a majority winner.

If that should happen, then there would have to be a tiebreaking mechanism. One way to break the tie, perhaps the simplest way, is then to apply first past the post. You wouldn't have to have voters re-vote. You already have their ballots, so you would just take the first-past-the-post winner. There are other tiebreaking methods that could be used as well.

The point I'd like to make, though, is that from what I understand of the Canadian situation, the possibility of not having a majority winner is quite remote. Practically speaking, I believe you would almost always have a true majority winner emerge for each seat.

Mr. Blake Richards: You mentioned a number of municipal examples in one of your previous opportunities. Are you aware of this being used for national elections anywhere?

Prof. Eric Maskin: Where a majority rule is used, or alternate....?

Mr. Blake Richards: Yes, majority rule.

Prof. Eric Maskin: No, majority rule has not yet been used in national elections. Of course, alternative voting has.

Mr. Blake Richards: Sure, yes.

No, that was majority rule specifically. I was pretty certain I was right, but I knew you'd know.

Prof. Eric Maskin: As I was suggesting before, I think an important reason that until fairly recently majority rule, rather than alternative voting, was not on the table is simply that counting ballots under majority rule was somewhat more complicated. You have to look at all pairwise comparisons. With modern computers, that's not a problem, but before modern computers were around, it certainly was.

• (1140)

Mr. Blake Richards: That was certainly one of my questions. I can certainly see that it would take a longer period of time to count ballots.

The other aspect I wanted to address was strategic voting. You mentioned strategic voting and how you see it as a potential solution. We've heard from a number of people who have come before the committee, and I would agree with them, that there isn't any system that really eliminates the idea of strategic voting.

I just wanted to put my thoughts out on strategic voting and strategic acting, and whether the candidates, as you've mentioned, would act strategically based on the choices ahead of them. I don't there's any system that eliminates that, and I wanted to explain how I'd see a voter applying strategic voting to your system and get your comments or your thoughts on it.

For example, if you've decided that you really want to elect candidate A but you definitely don't want to elect candidate B, and you think that's probably the candidate who's the most likely competitor for your candidate.... Actually, pardon me; I should take out that you definitely don't want to elect candidate B. Candidate B actually might be your second choice, but you know they're the competitor for the candidate who's your first choice, which is A. Then you might actually place candidate B as your third choice, even though B may have been your second choice, just to make sure you've created a greater gap between the two.

Would that not be a strategic voting scenario for your type of system?

Prof. Eric Maskin: It would not, because under majority voting the gap between two candidates is irrelevant. If you rank A over B, that's the only datum that matters, and the size of the gap is not taken into account.

Mr. Blake Richards: So under your system it wouldn't make a difference. I guess it would with other types of counting methods, such as for an alternative vote, but not for—

Prof. Eric Maskin: Yes, for alternative voting that kind of consideration is important, because it might determine which candidate gets eliminated first, but for majority rule....

Let me step back. You're right that theoretically there is no voting method that is always immune from strategic voting. In fact, there is a mathematical theorem to that effect. However, it can also be shown mathematically that majority rule is less immune to strategic voting than the others.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

Ms. Romanado is next .

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you.

I want to comment on something that was brought forward earlier in terms of women in politics. I want to highlight that this side of the table has gender parity on this committee.

Anyway, that said, I want to talk about the other guiding principles that we haven't really talked about today: engagement in the democratic process, accessibility and inclusiveness, integrity, and local representation. We've talked a lot about a voting system that would address some of the distortion, but I'd like to have your recommendations on how we can address some of those other things.

Professor Loewen, you mentioned that there are other tactics that we can be taking. I know you've talked a little about mandatory voting. Could you elaborate?

Prof. Peter John Loewen: I don't want to speak to the normative merits of mandatory voting. I'll only tell you that I think the empirics are relatively clear that it increases voter turnout and that it's not clear that there is a commensurate increase in voter knowledge or engagement in other parts of civil life as a result of being compelled to vote, though I think the empirics on that aren't super clear.

There is a remarkable story in Canada, which is that over the last 15 years Parliament has made real efforts to make voting more accessible by increasing advance days and by being shrewd about where advance polling places are put. I think that's had an important effect and I think it actually put a floor on how low turnout was going to go over the elections since 2000. I think all those things are laudable. I think there are any number of smaller things you could explore that would increase the quality of our democratic experience.

The final thing I'll say is that I think a lot of those criteria are well put and are things that are worth considering, but I don't think most of them are going to help you decide between electoral systems. We're going to have ballot integrity no matter what system we use and we're going to have accessibility to our polling stations no matter what system we use, so any arguments that try to leverage one of those points for one system over another are probably specious. Those are good principles, but I don't think they help you make the big decision that's before you.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: What about online voting?

Prof. Peter John Loewen: The evidence is unclear to me that it increases turnout very much. That's partly because of the way the evidence gets presented.

Maybe my own opinion is not worth something, but for what it's worth, I quite like strolling down to my polling place and standing in line with other Canadians, and I think there is something to be said for that. That said, it's a pretty small good, so if we can increase turnout by securely increasing online voting, then maybe we should pursue it.

The only qualification is that you can't easily get back people's sense that there is integrity in the electoral system. We've a pretty foolproof system right now for counting votes, for making sure that it's secure. You can imagine an election in which things go a bit pear-shaped with online voting, and in that case the invitation to have distrust in the system and the invitation for political actors to appeal to that may not be worth the risk. On balance, it's not clear to me that it's a solution that doesn't invite more potential problems.

• (1145)

[Translation]

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Professor Dufresne, do you have any comments on that?

Mr. Jean-Sébastien Dufresne: I would certainly like to be a professor but unfortunately I am not.

As to the principles you mention, our organization does not have a firm position on mandatory voting or online voting and my personal position may not be very helpful to the committee.

I would, however, simply repeat that there are many studies of the systems in other countries. As to what we have heard thus far regarding proportional representation, there are some drawbacks, but they are minor. We do not really have any data pointing to major drawbacks. This can vary from study to study, but the variations are really quite minimal. There are also some positive effects that are minimal. That is the situation.

In our view, there is no great risk in implementing an alternative system and testing it. We have to draw on experience. With due respect to my colleagues, my organization and I believe that we must really build on experience. We have to see which models have been proven effective. This is not something where we can test things out and improvise. Let us take the best practices out there and build on them. As Canadians, we can aspire to a system based on the best practices. The experiences of other countries can help us.

People say that our current system has a lot of strengths, but we must remember that over 85% of industrialized OECD countries have proportional representation. We must also recognize that many countries that are world leaders with thriving economies have a form of proportional representation that we can draw on.

In closing, some people say it would be too great a leap. I would point out that other countries, including New Zealand, have made that leap. Otherwise the message would be sent that Canadians are not able to make that leap. I think Canadians are as good as New Zealanders and can also adapt to another model as long as it is based on best practices.

The Chair: Thank you.

You have the floor, Mr. Cullen.

[English]

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Maskin, the equation is simple: power rests in the people, and they transfer their power in nominal ways, through their vote, to elected representatives.

You said there's no system that allows everybody to have a seat at the government table. I don't think that's necessarily the point, is it?

Is it not the point that everybody should have their vote reflected in Parliament under our system? Right now, if you looked at the last election, nine million votes that Canadians cast at their polling stations are not reflected in our Parliament under the current system. Is that a fair statement?

Prof. Eric Maskin: I think that's a fair statement.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: So no more is that true under your system than in the version proposed by the Prime Minister. How satisfied am I meant to be if my first choice is not reflected in Parliament and my second choice is not reflected in Parliament, but I should be content that my third choice is nominally reflected in Parliament? I'm not sure the experience leaves me feeling all that more content, no more than when a person trying to buy a hybrid ends up with a pickup truck. I did get a vehicle, but I didn't get what I wanted, and I did get to vote, and my vote was partially reflected, but it isn't the vote that I wanted to be reflected, and it wasn't for the policies I wanted or the representation that I wanted.

Why is it so “radical”—the term you used earlier—to suggest that voters should get the vote that they want?

Prof. Eric Maskin: At the risk of repeating myself, let me repeat an answer from before: under proportional representation you may get precisely the MP or the party you most prefer, but that party may have no power.

• (1150)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Oh, right—but they're still reflected in our legislature, which is a form of—

Prof. Eric Maskin: Yes, they're in a legislature without power.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I would argue that some of the greatest things that have come about in our legislatures have not originated with those who happened to win government at the time, as is healthy.

I want to go to Professor Loewen for a second.

On the stability question, I heard this from a Liberal colleague. We've gone through the numbers in the OECD, at least, and in developed countries in the world there's virtually no difference since the Second World War in the number of elections that have been held between proportional systems and majoritarian, winner-take-all systems.

Prof. Peter John Loewen: That's not the relevant metric, or rather, that's not the only metric in this case—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: That's not the only metric, but in terms of stability of voters going.... It's suggested that if we go to a proportional system, we're going to have to vote again and again and that governments will fall all the time. In terms of the voter experience, you cast a ballot for a set of policies that you hope for, and some of them end up in opposition and some of them end up in government. We go on. There is no great instability in terms of the voters' experience and having to go to the polls over and over again. In fact, in the developed world's experience, according to the OECD, which I trust, under proportional systems there has been slightly more stability.

Prof. Peter John Loewen: Sure. My claim is not that there are more elections under PR. I've never said anything of the sort. My claim is that there are more changes in government because there—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Right.

Prof. Peter John Loewen: Hold on. Excuse me; sorry. It's because there are more—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I was agreeing with you. It's weird to get interrupted.

Prof. Peter John Loewen: Okay. Isn't that nice?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Yes.

Prof. Peter John Loewen: It's because there are frequent negotiations. It's not that you're changing governments every six months, but there are more frequent negotiations.

The result is the following. You can have a change in government in essentially in three ways. You can have an election that changes the composition of Parliament under government reforms, or you can change a leader, the head of a coalition, or you can change the parties that comprise a coalition. Especially that third type of government change is one in which you inevitably get more distortion between what voters voted for and the policies that result, because you end up having policy bargains that weren't in the discussion in an election, but instead are the backroom negotiations among parties to try to cobble together another government.

All I'm saying is—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Allow me to interrupt—

Prof. Peter John Loewen: —that this is the empirical regularity. Now, whether you think that's normatively desirable, again I'm open to it, but it doesn't suggest to me a system of stability; it suggests a system of constant bargaining.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: You would not suggest that the previous government we just had was not internally a coalition of sorts, or that the Mulroney government of the past was a coalition of nominal federalists in Quebec who turned out not to be so federalist in the end —

Prof. Peter John Loewen: Not at all. I concur—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It's the idea that somehow the open negotiation between parties, in that we seek to form a coalition with X, is somehow worse than the real behind-the-scenes coalitions that have happened within the two large parties in Canada since Confederation.

I guess my question is for the voters who are simply looking to have policies promulgated that they wish for. To have that choice and to see that choice represented as a voice in Parliament is what proportional systems seek to do.

I wondered if you could help us with Professor Maskin's earlier comment that proportional systems don't allow a link between voters and direct representation. Under pure proportional, that is maybe the case, but no one's suggested that.

Prof. Peter John Loewen: I think the trouble, Mr. Cullen, is that you're conflating two things. You're conflating the composition of Parliament and then the composition of government and the policy that results.

It is true that if we have a PR system, we'll have a composition of Parliament that more accurately reflects the party preferences of voters. That's a normatively good thing. I take no issue with it at all. The principle of good is another issue.

But then governments are formed. The point is that it can be a single-party government, as is now the norm in New Zealand, or it could be a coalition.

By the way, since New Zealand changed to MMP, it's now a single party that typically rules. They don't even have supply motions supporting them anymore, so that's worth noting.

The point is that the policy output is something else entirely. That's a debate in the academic literature, on which I think the evidence is actually relatively muddled, about whether the policy that comes out of government is closer to the preferences of voters under PR or first past the post. The principal reason in majoritarian countries is that single parties can move to the policy median swiftly, but they're not able to when they're bound by coalition agreements.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: But our experience in this country has been that in those minority governments—

The Chair: Mr. Cullen, we're at six and a half minutes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: —we've produced some of our most progressive and enduring legislation.

The Chair: Mr. Cullen, we're at six and a half minutes. I let it go because it was really fascinating—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Sure.

The Chair: —and I thought it was very enlightening for the committee and its report, but we'll go to Mr. Rayes now, please.

• (1155)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Dufresne, I have another question for you.

You visit New Zealand regularly. You have said that many people from various organizations in your circle are calling for proportional representation. What you forgot to say, however, is that New Zealand did in fact hold a referendum first to legitimize the process and the change in the voting system that was implemented.

Do we agree on that?

Mr. Jean-Sébastien Dufresne: Absolutely.

Mr. Alain Rayes: You said earlier that we should test out a voting system and then, I assume, ask citizens for their opinion after two or three elections. Is that what you are proposing?

Mr. Jean-Sébastien Dufresne: It is a combination of various elements, but yes, that is partly what I am proposing.

Mr. Alain Rayes: In short, your proposal to the committee is to hold a referendum after two elections to ask the people if they want to keep the new voting method or return to the current system, a first past the post system.

Mr. Jean-Sébastien Dufresne: Yes, exactly.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Why should the committee study the voting method you are proposing any further? We have heard solid arguments from experts who have given us references and examples. They have stated that no voting system is perfect. Should we try out a new system? Should we not instead get the public's go-ahead before we change the voting method?

Mr. Jean-Sébastien Dufresne: You are perfectly right. Once again, we believe that the question must be put to the people.

As I said earlier, there is a combination of elements to be considered. I think we can agree on one thing. You seem to feel strongly about the public making an informed choice and that it should not be up to MPs only. That is a very important to us as well. It seems clear that we agree on that. We want to see what the best way of doing that would be.

In New Zealand, a certain approach was taken. In Japan, it was a different approach. Different approaches have been used in various places. As many people have said, the reality in Canada is different. In that case, why not have a different process?

In our opinion, the best way would be to fully involve citizens in the decision. We think that the idea of creating citizen juries could come out of the committee's work. Citizens could be chosen randomly to examine the committee's recommendations. This would provide some objective information.

People have often said that there could be different outcomes to a referendum.

Mr. Alain Rayes: That's right, in favour of the people. In favour of the people.

Mr. Jean-Sébastien Dufresne: It could depend on how the question is phrased. A citizen jury that evaluates the situation objectively...

Mr. Alain Rayes: Can you give us an example of a country that changed its voting method based on a jury system? Can you name one?

Mr. Jean-Sébastien Dufresne: We are looking for a Canadian way of doing things. In Canada, that could be a way of ensuring that the decision is not solely in the hands of MPs, which is a concern; the final decision should be up to voters, which is also your concern. We are looking for some kind of arbitration.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Is there any country in the world that has changed its voting method based on that kind of consultation system?

Mr. Jean-Sébastien Dufresne: I don't know any place where that combination has been used.

Mr. Alain Rayes: In short, you would like us to use that combination to change the fundamental aspect of our democracy instead of consulting the entire population. I would like to highlight the following from all the surveys that have been conducted.

You say your organization wants to conduct consultations in order to gather public input and foster civic participation. More than 60% of Quebec's population and more than 70% of Canada's population are in favour of a referendum on whether or not we should change our voting system.

Mr. Jean-Sébastien Dufresne: We are in favour of that.

Mr. Alain Rayes: If you really want to achieve your objectives, why don't you advocate for something that has been proven elsewhere instead of your approach to something that is so fundamental?

Mr. Jean-Sébastien Dufresne: The real question is what do we have to fear. Are we afraid of letting citizens try it?

Mr. Alain Rayes: Why are we afraid of trusting citizens after properly informing them and after the committee has completed its work? Why not give them the chance to express their views? We are not in California where there is a steady stream of referendums. To my knowledge, there have not been a lot of referendums in Canada. Why are we afraid of that? If you are confident that the system you have just proposed is sound, why are you afraid to ask citizens that question?

• (1200)

Mr. Jean-Sébastien Dufresne: They have to be asked the question under the best possible conditions. We are looking for the best way to proceed.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Yes, we should have the resources. Let us recommend that the committee give the government the resources to do the necessary outreach. Let the public decide after that. If one party believes in it, it will advocate for it as well.

The Chair: Thank you.

To end this round of questions, I will give the floor to Mr. DeCoursey.

[English]

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Professor Loewen, I want to return to the six-and-a-half-minute conversation that was taking place around the importance of political parties and the way that they collect or coalesce around certain ideas, and the value that we place on platforms and on visions for the country.

In your mind, what value does our current political culture place upon the ability of parties to coalesce, to collect around ideas, and to present those to the electorate?

Second, what system or systems may reflect that value, and should that be something of importance that we should present to Canadians as we engage them in this conversation?

Prof. Peter John Loewen: It's a very good question.

My sense is that what keeps every country going is different, so it doesn't always help to look at other countries. When I look at Canada in particular, what I see is that parties that have aspired to power have been forced to reconcile themselves to the fact that we're a large, diverse, complicated country. They've had to often put some water in their wine and figure out, from a pragmatic perspective, how they present a platform to Canadians that speaks to often-competing interests in different places. That's very difficult, and we've seen parties blow up as a result of being unable to deal with those coalitional demands, in some sense, or those brokerage demands, but I think it is a method that has plainly worked in our country, and we are an improbable country that has continued to have an uninterrupted turn of elections since 1867.

By the way, there are other countries in the world that we esteem as democracies that are regularly revisiting their electoral institutions because they couldn't find a formula that worked. France now is onto its fifth broadly constituted constitutional system as a democracy because it couldn't make the other four work. The fact that we've been able to make it work in a complicated country suggests to me that we've done something right.

I think our parties have played a role in that. I think our electoral system has played a special role in that, and that's generally why I'm a bit reluctant to recommend change. It's exactly the same reason that I wouldn't go to the Germans and say, "I really think you ought to change your MMP system to first past the post." I think MMP works in Germany. It works for their unique political circumstances.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: That's a fair enough comment.

I am citing an article that you opined on in April around the differences between coalition or consensus-building taking place in order to develop a platform versus the coalescing and the collecting of ideas taking place behind doors. You talked about different systems valuing one set of coalition versus the other, and perhaps either status quo, AV, or STV forcing political parties and political actors to work together out in front of people before the platform is set, versus an MMP or a pure PR system forcing backroom negotiation to take place.

Do you think there are modifications that we should consider that will help enhance consensus-building, help enhance finding common ground with and on behalf of Canadians?

Prof. Peter John Loewen: The degree to which you find common ground is a normative question. Parties divide people—they always have—and there is a model in which we say we want a democracy in which a smallish number of parties compete for power on relatively clear platforms and with a leader at the head. They are then put into Parliament, and they're given, often, extraordinary power to implement those policies, and then those policies are judged by the voters.

Mr. Cullen is certainly right, for example, that we've had good policy, even bold policy, in minority governments, but we've also had majority governments that have been able to move to the centre and have been able to take on pretty bold policies, knowing that they would have enough time to then put them before the electors.

I think about Mr. Mulroney and the HST, and free trade, which he put before the electors. I think about Mr. Chrétien's deficit-cutting

policies through the 1990s, which required political courage, certainly.

My sense is that we have seen minority situations in which we've had good government and we have seen majority situations in which we've had good government. We don't have a lack of political courage or change in this country. In fact, our parties have often almost drastically changed direction. Whether that is normatively good or not is another thing you have to decide on.

What's clear in all of this is that we've created a system that has incentives for parties to build broad coalitions before elections. By my reading, it's held together a country that's relatively improbable.

• (1205)

The Chair: Thank you.

This has been extremely insightful. We've had some good debate around new and existing ideas.

I don't take this opportunity very often, but I have one question for Dr. Maskin. It wasn't the principal point of your presentation—I understand that—but it's been working on my mind these last two hours.

You said that under the current system of first past the post, some people feel discouraged from running because they don't want to split the vote. I can see that readily in a U.S. primary system in the case of intra-party competition, in which someone says, "Look, I'm not going to run to become a presidential nominee because I don't want to split the vote and then the front-runner who's acceptable to me won't get in," but I see that more as an issue of party power brokers applying pressure on a candidate who has a personal interest in being on the correct side of that party for long-term reasons. I can see it applying when the operating principle is sort of Sam Rayburn's famous saying, "If you want to get along, go along", but when it comes to people in a riding deciding whether they want to run for a party or not, my gut sense tells me their decision not to run is not because they don't want to upset their ideological cousin; most likely it's because they think they can't win. I've seen election campaigns, and this is counterintuitive, in which one candidate really goes hard after their ideological cousin.

Is there empirical evidence around this idea that first past the post causes people to think twice about running because they don't want to split the vote?

Prof. Eric Maskin: There is such evidence. The U.K. provides some interesting examples on that point.

You may remember that in the early eighties a new party, the SDP, arose in Britain. It was basically Labour Party members on the right and Liberal Party members who thought that they could rewrite the electoral map in Britain by joining this new party.

In the first election, Labour and the SDP split the vote on the left, and the Conservative Party, which had only about 40% of the popular vote, got a huge majority in Parliament. In the next general election the SDP decided to not even send candidates to certain electoral constituencies precisely because they were worried that the same thing would happen again.

There have been many examples in Britain.

The Chair: I understand your example. It seems to me we're talking at the power broker level.

I can see that if two parties, whether it be the Conservatives or the Reform Party, decide that's enough of—

Prof. Eric Maskin: It has the effect of reducing the set of political options for voters, and also the set of political ideas that are out there.

The Chair: Yes.

Prof. Eric Maskin: It may arise out of power broking, but it also has muting effects on—

• (1210)

The Chair: What I'm saying is that at the individual riding level, where there's no decision by the top brass in any party to not run

candidates, it's not clear to me yet that somebody would say they would not run for the Green Party because they want to make sure that the NDP wins, if that's the scenario. I don't know if that's the case, but I take your point about higher levels making strategic decisions not to split the vote.

Thank you for your fascinating testimony. All of you have brought a lot of original thinking to this committee.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much.

I would like to remind the committee members that there will be another meeting at 2 p.m. this afternoon. We will not be in this room, but in room C-110 of the Wellington Building.

Thank you.

[*English*]

Thank you, everybody.

The meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <http://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante : <http://www.noscommunes.ca>