Special Committee on Electoral Reform

EVIDENCE

Thursday, September 22, 2016

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Chair

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia

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● (1335)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)): The meeting is called to order.

We are very happy to be back in the wonderful city of Québec, on this glorious fall day.

For those of you who do not know, this is the committee's 28th meeting, and its fourth in its cross-Canada tour which begin in Regina on Monday. We were in Winnipeg on Tuesday, in Toronto yesterday, and now we are in the lovely city of Québec. Our tour will continue for two and a half weeks.

I will explain to the witnesses and the members of the public how the meeting will proceed. The witnesses have 10 minutes to make their presentation. We will begin with Mr. Dutil and Mr. Rémillard.

The presentations will be followed by a question period during which each MP may speak with the witnesses for five minutes. That includes the MPs' questions and the witnesses' answers. Through these exchanges, we learn a great deal about electoral reform, what kind of electoral system people want, and why they would like to see changes.

Without further delay, I invite Mr. Dutil to take the floor for 10 minutes.

Mr. Yvan Dutil (Consultant and Tutor, Université TELUQ, As an Individual): Mr. Chair, ladies and gentlemen of the committee, thank you.

I acquired a fair amount of experience with voting methods during the provincial consultations in Quebec. I have not worked on the issue as much in the past few years. The last consultation was in 2007. I am however quite current on the research in the field.

To begin, the study of voting methods dates back to the year 105 AD. Voting methods were first studied by Pliny the Younger when it was noticed that a plurality of votes was problematic if there are more than two candidates. That is the subject of a fairly well-known legal judgment.

This problem was forgotten for many centuries. In the 14th century, the Catalan philosopher Ramón Llull began studying the issue, followed by his disciple Nicolas de Cues in the 15th century.

After being forgotten for a few centuries, the Marquis de Condorcet and chevalier de Borda rediscovered the problem of the plurality of votes during the French Revolution, in the 18th century.

Finally, the English mathematician Lewis Carroll also studied the issue in the 19th century.

The purpose of this field of study, known as the social choice theory, is to determine how to choose the best possible candidate.

Another branch of the same field is equity theory, which pertains to proportionality or determining how to distribute seats in the fairest way possible. This was debated at length by the Americans in drafting their constitution in order to determine how they would distribute seats. They worked on this a great deal.

There is something very frustrating about all of this research. Each time, people started over from scratch because none of them knew of their predecessors' work. In the 1950s, the serious work began and mathematicians and political scientists made their contributions.

Once again, the problem is that these are two completely different branches of knowledge. In the field of political economy, people worked on voting methods, and in political science, they studied the effects of the various voting methods. We have everything we need to create a good voting method. The knowledge is there, but it is spread out in three or four fields whose experts do not speak to each other.

As a physicist, interdisciplinary barriers are not a problem for me. So I gathered parts of all this knowledge to get an idea of what should be done.

Official research began in the 1950s. The last original voting method that was invented is the German compensatory system, which dates from the roughly same period. Clearly, not a single voting system in the world right now has benefited from the research done in the last 60 years.

I have also read that the Society for Social Choice and Welfare, a group that works on the social choice theory, had only been consulted once, by the government of Mongolia, during an electoral reform. I will try to explain a few general rules to give you an overview.

There are two main groups of voting methods. There are the methods used to elect a candidate, either a mayor or a president. In our case in Canada, it would perhaps be the Governor General or the Speaker of the House of Commons. This group includes 20 or 25 voting methods such as the transferable vote, the N-round, the Condorcet and the Borda methods and so on. A bit later on, Mr. Côté will tell us about majority judgment voting, a recent innovation that I find very interesting. In short, these methods are used to elect one person, so if you want to elect a president, they are the best methods to consider.

In order to elect an assembly, Montesquieu favoured a method that would best represent the population. That is a completely different kind of voting method and is part of the proportional voting group. There are twenty or so of them, and they also have their share of problems.

As well, there are limiting factors owing to the limitations of the human brain. For example, we can work with series of seven items. We cannot do more than that. In an experimental vote I held with a number of candidates at Laval University in 2007, people lost sight of the seventh candidate. He no longer existed. In France, a similar experimental vote was also conducted. There was a tremendous number of presidential candidates. People were not able to evaluate more than seven candidates. It was beyond their abilities. Regardless of the voting method, we cannot exceed those limitations of the human brain.

Voting methods have an effect, and I doubt I am the first person to tell you that. In a plurality system, there is an economic incentive that encourages you to invest your money in the best candidate and, on voting day, there are just two main parties or two candidates left. For example, if you don't like one of the candidates, you will vote for the candidate who is most likely to defeat the candidate you don't like. This is a purely economic mechanism, which is disappearing though. Some disillusioned people will say, in their disgust with politics, that people will vote more sincerely. We see that in Quebec where this electorate keeps growing.

● (1340)

In proportional systems, there is a distribution known as Lefebvre's law. In plurality systems, it is Duverger's law.

In proportional systems, there is Lefebvre's law, a law in psychology, which corresponds roughly to the distribution of any good or service. Even ice cream flavours follow this law. People vote much more freely. As seen from the outside, a voter who votes freely is someone who votes almost randomly. The factors that a voter considers when voting are extremely complex. They can range from the tone of voice of the person speaking to him to what he ate six months ago—just kidding. A voter can even consider a political act from 20 years ago. So we have this exponential distribution.

This has repercussions. Let us consider the last election to try understand the impact of a voting method.

If we change the voting method, the outcome will not be the same. In the interest of transparency, I should say that I have been a Green Party candidate in the past. The Green Party could win votes, but the bigger parties would not win as many. Parties we have never heard of could emerge, such as a federal party similar to the wildrose party. The number of parties will increase.

When we do simulations, we cannot take the results from the last election and fit them into the new voting method. You would not get the same results.

With proportional voting methods, the best way to do the distribution from a mathematical point of view is what is known as the Webster—Sainte-Laguë method. In a purely proportional system, it is essentially the usual rounding. Mathematically, the simplest method is the best. The only drawback is that the usual rounding "fails" from time to time. From time to time, two parties will have

the same ratio, although one party has twice the number of votes as the other party. As a result of division, both would go from +1 to -1 at the same time. We cannot get the exact number of MPs. Assume there are 338 seats. We would go from 337 MPs to 339 MPs, and there is no way of arriving between the two.

In the past, I built measurement instruments. In the United States, it happens once every 3,500 years when they do the seat distribution. It is clear that it would happen after two elections. Elections in which two candidates win the same number of votes are not supposed to happen, but it does happen all the same. That is something that will have to be included in the elections act because it can fail.

Lefebvre's law means that when there is an electoral threshold, for each percent of this threshold, 3% to 3.5% of the ballots go into the garbage. It starts getting complicated when the threshold is above 5%. In Turkey, the electoral threshold of discarded ballots is 10% to 40%. It is proportional, but it is not very different from our system. So we need to aim for low thresholds.

In a proportional system, everyone thinks you need 50% of the votes to get a majority. That is not the case though. Typically, if a party wins 44% or 45% of the votes, it will have 50% of the seats and form a majority. Here, it is 38%. That does not change the dynamics very much. The only difference is that, in a proportional system, coalitions can be formed more easily and there will be more majority governments. Just because it is a proportional system, that does not mean that a party needs the majority of votes to win the majority of seats.

This works relatively well on the whole, except for the stability problem with proportional systems. Problems can arise in two cases: if it is too stable or if it is not stable enough. It is really a combination of two factors, the degree of fragmentation of society and the degree of proportionality. This requires some thought. In a proportional system, the largest party wins about 30% of the votes. If Lefebvre's law applies in pure form and it is a uniform society, the biggest party will get 30% of the votes and will form a coalition with another party. The problem is that there have to be several parties in order to form a coalition. Otherwise, the same party is always in power with the coalition party on the other side. Then things freeze up.

● (1345)

There has to be enough parties. If the system is not proportional enough and if there are not enough parties, the situation remains completely stable and nothing changes at all. If there are really too many parties though, unstable coalitions are formed between three or four parties. The way society is organized is what determines the success or failure of proportional systems.

We have a fragmented society in Canada, but not as fragmented as elsewhere. We have the equivalent of four or five major political regions. In Belgium, for example, society is divided in two and Lefebvre's law applies twice. Moreover, Belgium has completely ridiculous electoral laws, resulting in an incredibly large number of parties. This complicates matters. Italy has the same problem. We tend to forget that Canada is an old country that has been around for 150 years. Countries in Europe such as Germany or Italy have a much shorter history. These are further considerations.

There is another important aspect. In a regional proportional system of whatever type, if there are fewer than six MPs, it is no longer proportional. The electoral threshold is based on the number of MPs and even with rounding off, you can only get half. With six MPs, you would have about 6% of the electoral threshold at most. It would be better with seven or eight MPs.

In Canada—you know Canadian geography as well as I do—, that is problematic. Prince Edward Island, for example, does not have six MPs. I mention that because in Zurich, Switzerland, someone went to court arguing that there were three candidates in his electoral district and that he would be voting for a party that has less than 10% of the seats. He pointed out to the court that the constitution declares everyone to be equal, yet his vote would never count and there is no possibility that it would in the future. The court found in his favour and that is why a mathematical solution to the problem had to be found.

In the Parliament of Canada, we have just about the right number of MPs. Theoretically, the optimal number would be 327, but we have 338. So we are very close. We do not have too many MPs and we do not have too few either. The opposite is true in some provinces in Canada where there should ideally be more. Moreover, a proportional system does not really have an impact on the representation of women.

In Canada, we have one of the worst contexts ...

The Chair: You have only a few seconds left, but what you are saying is very interesting.

Mr. Yvan Dutil: Okay.

We have one of the worst contexts in which to introduce a proportional system.

I will suggest a solution that was submitted to me by a researcher from France called the "mixed equitable majority" voting method. It is a proportional system in which the existing electoral districts are maintained. Compensation is achieved by changing the weight of the votes. Each vote for each party is given more or less weight in order to achieve proportional representation. It is used in Switzerland for the reason mentioned earlier. Someone had gone to court complaining that the system in force did not work. It is used in Zurich and in two Swiss cantons. I have done a few simulations but have not yet studied it in detail. It is challenging working with algorithms, I have to say. I have them, but I have not used them yet.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Chair...

The Chair: Are you talking about the equitable majority voting method?

Mr. Yvan Dutil: Yes, that's right.

The Chair: Very well, Mr. Dutil. That is quite a different way of looking at things. This information is in addition to the testimony we have heard so far.

Thank you.

We will now move on to Mr. Rémillard.

Mr. Jean Rémillard (As an Individual): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the committee for this opportunity to share my research findings about a voting system that I call "rationalized majority". The word "rationalized" means two things. First, it means "appealing to reason and not only to mathematics". Secondly, it means "that uses ratios".

The concept of ratios is familiar to everyone; we see it in finance and in other fields. Ratios are mathematical results applied to phenomena and that include an element of constancy. The definition of ratio I am using here is essentially the percentage of elected representatives in relation to the percentage of votes. It is quite simple.

There are historical ratios that have been identified by various researchers. I mention a few of them in the brief I submitted. Generally speaking, historical ratios are based on the party's role. For the party forming government, that is, the party that has the majority and is elected, it is about 1.2. That is the percentage of MPs in relation to the percentage of votes. For parties forming the official opposition, it is approximately 0.8. For third parties, it is about 0.5, but with many exceptions. The numbers are sometimes much higher.

We do not have to stick with these ratios. The ratios for third parties, for instance, can be much higher, which could be very interesting to examine in certain cases. For a parliament with 300 seats, for instance—we are not far from that—, a party could win 5% of the seats and 20% of the votes. This is of course true for a number of third parties, which is embarrassing and frustrating. In this case, the party's ratio would be determined by 5% of MPs to 20% of the votes. The result is 0.25. The party forming the official opposition would have a ratio of 0.8. So the number of MPs there should be is calculated as follows: $0.8 \times 20\% \times 300 = 48$. If by chance the party already has 5% of 300, that would be 15. So the party would be awarded 33 more 33 MPs.

If a party is one of the third parties, the ratio is lower. For example, $0.5 \times 20\% \times 300 = 30$ MPs less the 15 it already has. So the party would be awarded an additional 15 MPs. Depending on the party's role as determined by the results in a first-past-the-post election, additional seats are awarded to certain parties.

I have studied the federal elections from 1963 to 2015 and the ratios obtained are pretty much in line with what I just told you. There are some outliers though. Since 1984, for instance, the ratio obtained by the party forming government ranged from 1.5 to 1.22, for an average of 1.28 since 1963. This is very close to the historical ratio. For the party in official opposition in Canada, the ratio is 1. In the end, it is nearly proportional. That is an average. For a third party, the ratio in Canada is 0.85, but can be as high as 1.6. It varies from case to case. In 2006 and 2008, the ratio was 1.6. The third party with the most votes had a ratio that was as high as that of the party forming government, which is rather strange. This is one of the unpredictable aspects.

Secondly, MPs are awarded by rationalization, that is, people vote the same way they do now without any change. Mathematical adjustments are made after the fact. Theoretically, we could take the 2015 election results and apply this system by awarding MPs based on the ratios.

I have also calculated the number of MPs that would have been added to the Parliament of Canada if we had applied the rationalized system since 1963. I will not go into the details, but 111 MPs would have been added over these 17 elections. That is an average of 6.5 more MPs per election, which is not that many. All the same, it is more interesting than what is happening in Germany.

I also did a comparison with the mixed system in Germany.

● (1350)

It should be noted that initially, in 1949, there were two votes. Each voter had two votes, one to elect a riding representative by simple majority, as in our electoral system, and another that was purely proportional.

The German parliament was initially divided in two in a way. Some representatives were elected by simple majority and some were elected proportionally. This led to appalling imbalances in some cases. Many excess representatives were elected, exceeding the proportional ratio. This led to a very elastic house of representatives, which could have a highly variable number of representatives from one election to another. Above all, it contradicted the fundamental rule of proportional representation in that some political parties had far too many representatives.

Fifteen years ago or so, the Karlsruhe constitutional court decided to apply full proportional representation, but by offsetting the excess representatives elected by simple majority by reducing the number of representatives elected proportionally. I hope you are following me. So, for the overall result to be proportional representation, a political party with too many representatives elected by simple majority would have fewer than it should have by proportional representation.

Here, too, there is a problem. Some parties had so many representatives, even in excess of what the proportional system took away from them. The German house of representatives is therefore still elastic. Some people say it could reach 700 representatives, although in principle there are 598 seats. That has not happened yet. Right now, there are about 630 representatives. That is how Germany's mixed system works.

I wanted to transpose this system to Canada based on the results of federal elections since 1963 to see what it would look like. The

simulation is not exact. It is not possible to transpose the percentage of votes obtained by the various parties in a first-past-the-post system to a mixed proportional system, especially not the German mixed system. As a result, one has to bear in mind that the calculation cannot produce exact results. It does give some indication, however.

There is an interesting point in defining a proportional system. There is a purely proportional system, which has incredible limitations that I will not go into.

Let us look quickly at Italy, which has that kind of system. It has the same drawback as all purely proportional systems, namely, that the parliament becomes completely ungovernable. To counteract that, the number of parties must be reduced or the governing parties must be given a true majority of representatives. Italy decided, however, that, in the case of a minority government, the party was awarded representatives. That is quite unusual. Since a majority is needed, the party is awarded more representatives.

That said, the current German system does not work that way. I made that point earlier and I do not need to repeat it. In my simulation of the German system in relation to Canada's system, I used our current Parliament. It has 338 seats at present, although the number of seats has been much lower. Two calculation methods can be used, either divide by two or multiply by two so that part of the House is elected by simple majority and the other part by a strictly proportional method with compensation, as is the case in Germany's mixed system at present.

● (1355)

Under this system, there are no additional representatives if a party does not have at least three representatives with a majority. So under this system, the small parties get their wings clipped. The system I am proposing, however, really gives the small parties an extra chance, without impeding the governing majority or the official opposition. This has many benefits.

● (1400)

The Chair: Mr. Rémillard, do you still have a lot of points to cover?

I think the members of the committee would really like to delve into the details by asking you and Mr. Dutil some questions.

Mr. Jean Rémillard: I would like to make one or two more brief points.

The Chair: That's fine.

Mr. Jean Rémillard: It is said that, strangely, the mixed system in Germany is very stable. It is stable in the sense that it has had the same party in power 14 times out of 17. That is the CDU/CSU group, which ultimately represents 40% of the vote. Yet it is always required to form an alliance with the smallest party in order to have a true majority. There have only been three elections when this parliamentary group was not in power.

Canada is much more flexible in this regard. The party in power alternates between the Liberals and the Conservatives. The Canadian system is therefore much more open as to the party that forms the official opposition.

The Chair: I have to interrupt you there, Mr. Rémillard.

What we have heard from these two witnesses is really quite different from the testimony we have heard up until now. In the proportional system itself, there can be different dynamics depending on how the system is designed. At this stage of our proceedings, I must say that is quite an original idea. I would really like to explore the ideas you have presented.

I will now turn it over to Ms. Sahota for five minutes.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for being with us here today.

[*English*]

I'd like to start with you, Mr. Rémillard.

I found your comparison with other countries intriguing, but I'm a little bit lost as to what you would advocate in Canada. Given the large size of our country and the large size of our ridings, what would you recommend as the system we should adopt?

Mr. Jean Rémillard: Very simply, keep our present system, because it's not a bad system—and there are various reasons for that—but amend it a little after each election so that small parties get a bigger voice. This is what many parties, such as the *Parti vert*.... They don't agree with that, because they're so left aside, whereas in my system they would have received many more *députés*.

All of the details are in the big document.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Well, Mr. Dutil says there should be a threshold, and you were saying that Germany has perhaps too high a threshold at 5%. Mr. Dutil was saying that 5% is perhaps a good threshold to have; otherwise, we would have far too many parties in this country.

First, do you think we should have a threshold, and if so, how much should that be? As well, what would be far too many parties for this country?

● (1405)

Mr. Jean Rémillard: It is not necessary in my system to have a threshold, because we have a

[*Translation*]

gift for the winning party.

[*English*]

The government party has a higher percentage of *députés* than percentage of votes, and we give to the other parties—like the opposition party and a third party—ratios that are under 1%, whereas the government party has an actual ratio over 1%, at 1.2% or 1.3%.

The historical ratio for an opposition party is about 0.8%, whereas the same ratio for the third party is about 0.5%, so it's half. If a party has 20% of the votes, multiplied by 0.5%, it gives them 10% of the *députés*. If they have only 3% of the *députés*, we give the party 7% more *députés*. Do you understand?

Therefore there is no need for a threshold, because the majority of the government and the importance of the official opposition party will never be certain.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Would you like to add your comments?

Mr. Yvan Dutil: The issue of threshold is tricky because, I would say, the issue is how you put it and whether you have a regional threshold or a national one. If you ask for a 5% national threshold, it is harsher than a 5% regional threshold.

In many countries they have a double threshold. A couple of those might be up to 10% in some cases, but if your party has more than 5% nationally, you will have an MP in Parliament.

I'm not very happy with the idea of the threshold. Let's say the threshold is 5%. If you get 5.1% of the vote, if you throw out all the votes below the 5%, you end up with roughly 6% or 7% of the members of parliament. Following that, if you get 4.9%, then you get zero.

That's why I think what I call a "round threshold" would be better. A round threshold is simply that we take the percentage of the vote and we remove 2%—it can go lower—and then if you have 3%, you get 1% of all the votes. It's smoother, because it's from zero to 1%, and not zero to 7%, so you have a smoother curve. For the small parties it avoids what has happened many times, and the Green Party knows that everywhere. You have 10 MPs and then you end up with two. You have crashed, because you have lost 1% of the vote. This is what I would like; it would be better.

The issue I have—and I have not simulated it much—is that my concern is for government stability. We have a prescription and we can calculate roughly how many months a government coalition can survive. If we know the size of the membership, we can simulate that, but I have not. What I am saying to you is my gut feeling for the moment, and I have to be rigorous.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Rayes has the floor now.

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

I would like to thank the witnesses for being with us here today. My first question is very simple.

Mr. Rémillard, at the start of your presentation, you said you had submitted a brief. I do not have a copy of it.

The Chair: Apparently it is being translated right now.

Mr. Alain Rayes: So we will be able to see your brief because, initially, I was a bit confused by all the figures you presented. I would like to be able to look them over quietly. I would also like to say good luck to the interpreters, who I look at from time to time. We will take the time to look over your brief because I am very interested in your calculations.

I have a question for you, Mr. Dutil.

You referred to an equitable majority vote. Based on our meetings with various experts and members of the public, two main themes emerged from the testimony of those who are unhappy with the status quo. First is the lack of interest in politics. There are all kinds of reasons for this depending on who you talk to. Some voters say their vote does not count while others says they do not vote because they do not have the time, due to medical problems or because they were outside their riding on voting day. I will not get into all the details on that. There is also the question of representation in Parliament which, in their view, does not reflect the percentage of the vote nationally. Some voters are also very concerned about local representation. You also touched on that briefly.

As to your equitable majority system, as I understand it, MPs are added if necessary. Could you please go over that part of your presentation again?

●(1410)

Mr. Yvan Dutil: The mechanism is fairly simple. Instead of adding, you multiply. In compensatory systems since the 1950s, representatives have been added to reach a given number. In an equitable majority system, the method is as follows. Consider the Green party, for example, which is always the worst case ...

Mr. Alain Rayes: I would rather have a comparison with the current system. Would people still vote the same way under your system?

Mr. Yvan Dutil: There is no difference.

Mr. Alain Rayes: If there are four or five candidates, people vote and the candidate with the most votes is elected.

Mr. Yvan Dutil: There is no difference.

In terms of the vote, the Chief Electoral Officer tallies the votes the same way as he does now. In converting the result to the number of MPs, he considers all the votes cast. I will not go into more detail about the algorithm, but it is a formula used to balance the matrices. For example, there must be enough Liberal MPs in order to have proportional representation. For the Liberals, for example, the person with the most votes gets a ratio of 1. The Conservatives, who placed second, get a ratio of 1.2. For the NDP, the ratio is 1.27, and it is 3.32 for the Green Party. Then all the local elections are calculated. It could happen that the party that places third in a constituency is ultimately elected. That is the unpleasant part, from a psychological point of view.

Mr. Alain Rayes: That means that, on election night, the candidate who won the most votes is not necessarily the one who is elected to Parliament.

Mr. Yvan Dutil: Exactly.

There is a combination of factors. It is the best compromise between having a local representative and a national representative. The more votes a candidate garners in the constituency, the greater their chances of being elected.

There is something else I mentioned that in my brief but did not have the time to tell you. All the candidates who win 50% of the votes can be excluded from the calculations, because it would not make sense to bump them after they had won. This method, which has the benefit of absorbing all the distortions by balancing the factors, was simulated for the United States where arbitrary constituency boundaries is a major problem.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Consider my case, for example.

I was elected with 32.7% of the votes. On election night, I beat my closest rival by more than 5,000 votes. Depending on the calculation method, I might not have been declared elected by the Chief Electoral Officer. I imagine that calculation is not done instantly.

Mr. Yvan Dutil: It takes just a few milliseconds to calculate.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Milliseconds because there is a machine that calculates the algorithm. The new result is announced and my closest rival is declared elected.

Mr. Yvan Dutil: It makes for interesting elections. I have lived in Spain before ...

Mr. Alain Rayes: Very nice! I do not have any more questions about this voting method. I will stop you here.

Mr. Yvan Dutil: It is a secondary effect of the proportional system. The elections are incredibly boring. I experienced that in Spain. A certain number of representatives are elected and the night is over.

Mr. Alain Rayes: In your opinion, with respect to the issues that concern people and that you have surely heard before you made your calculations, are there other methods that would yield better representation and generate more public interest in voting, without necessarily changing the voting method?

Mr. Yvan Dutil: From what I have read, there are many myths surrounding proportional system. Even in Europe, in the countries that have the system, public interest is dropping off. In political economy, we wonder why people vote because, statistically speaking, the chance of being able to change something is infinitesimally small. People rationalize it all by saying that it will be a catastrophe if they don't vote. In other words, people rationalize about going to vote.

I think a better way of generating interest in the right to vote is through education. In northern Europe, they have achieved high rates of voter turnout. People visit schools to tell young people how the system works. It starts at all levels, municipally, provincially, and at the other levels.

●(1415)

The Chair: That is an interesting point.

Mr. Alain Rayes: I have one final question for you.

If I understood correctly, you said that your studies and the documentation available to you do not necessarily indicate that proportional representation has an impact on the equitable representation of men and women.

Did I understand that correctly?

Mr. Yvan Dutil: That information comes from a master's thesis from the early 2000s, as I recall. The author was Rob Salmond, from the University of Southern California. I have it somewhere in my notes. He compared all the states.

As I recall, the Scandinavian countries were the first to give women the vote.

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

Mr. Alain Rayes: I would like to know if that information could be provided to the committee. It does not necessarily correspond to what we have heard.

The Chair: Okay.

It is Mr. Boulerice's turn now.

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

I would like to thank the two witnesses for being here with us. They are very interesting, if not somewhat upsetting.

I have a brief anecdote for you. In a store in Old Québec where I went to buy an electronic device, the cashier asked what I was doing there and whether I had said the wrong parliament. I told him that we were holding consultations on reforming the voting method. The three young employees in the store looked at me right away and said, "Yes, go ahead. Do it.". We hear that people are not interested, but then there are experiences like that.

Mr. Dutil, your system is fascinating. Some people will share my view, I think, that voters will not accept it if we tell them that a vote for the Liberals is worth 0.8, a vote for the Conservatives is worth 1.3, and a vote for the Green Party is worth 3. That is not consistent with the way people perceive a fair vote.

I would, however, like to talk about multi-member districts and the objective of achieving a degree of proportionality. Yesterday, Professor Stephenson told us that the number varies from three to seven. For its part, Ireland has a transferable vote. The number usually varies, as I recall, from three to five or three to six. For your part, you have placed it at six.

Given the geography of the Canadian federation, ridings with six MPs could be problematic. The population has to be represented equally.

How do you see that?

Mr. Yvan Dutil: I have not done simulations for Canada yet because it is a lot of work, one week of full-time work, in fact. I did do tests for Quebec though. When there were fewer than six, there were serious problems with electoral thresholds. It was like a staircase. Actually, it is regional variation that creates proportional representation in such cases. Sometimes there are up to three.

The problem, however, is that a person can say that their vote will never count in their riding. The number three will occur frequently in Canada. It will even be one in some places.

I can understand that people are not happy with this. I had the idea of applying less proportional representation in rural regions because, with a majority vote, the degree of proportional representation can be varied, with more proportional representation in urban centres. We would be closer to the regular vote in rural regions and further away from it in the cities. That is one possibility.

I know that, in Canada, having six or more is not feasible. As I said, it is one of the worst places in the world for it. It was not easy in Quebec either. In Canada, 50% of the population lives on 1% of the land area.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: We have to deal with that reality.

Mr. Yvan Dutil: People who live in the regions really want proportional representation. If you increase the surface area of their riding, they will head to the city with iron bars. They might not do that, but they will certainly come by bus to protest.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Rémillard, you said your mathematical model fails once every 3,500 years. For my part, I would say the status quo fails regularly, especially when the party with the most votes loses the election. That has happened three times in provincial elections in Quebec. That concerns me much more than mathematical changes.

You say there are 338 federal MPs, that we will continue voting the same way in the ridings and that, using the ratio you have developed, we will add MPs. My question is very simple: where will you find those additional MPs?

Are they in a big bag under your desk at Elections Canada or are they the best second parties in certain provinces?

Who are these people and how will they be chosen? As to the number, that is fairly simple.

● (1420)

Mr. Jean Rémillard: Personally, I would not stop at just one specific method.

There is a series of criteria that could be ranked by importance. For example, one of the criteria could be the regional representation of a party. If a party has no representation, it would be a priority to give it an MP.

The parties can also make choices. In any given party, there are candidates who make a very good showing but usually do not win. That is another avenue to consider.

There are other criteria. I covered them in my full brief. I also studied the Quebec elections. There is a hierarchy of three or four criteria that could be used as a way to designate additional MPs that would not be arbitrary, that would not depend solely on the party, as do votes based on proportional lists, and so on. The party often calls the shots in this regard.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Ste-Marie, you have the floor.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Hello, gentlemen. Thank you for coming today to present your positions.

I would like to thank the team travelling with us that has done an excellent job since the start of the week. I would also like to thank my colleagues, especially Mr. Deltell, who joined us today. Thank you also to those in attendance.

My questions are fairly technical and I will start with you, Mr. Rémillard.

Mr. Boulerice asked you a question and your answer has left me even more confused.

Let's say we keep the current system with 338 MPs. You said we could add an average of six seats per election by way of compensation, based on the criteria of your rationalized majority system.

Mr. Jean Rémillard: Those are my findings so far.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Those seats will not be among the 338 other seats. So that would mean 338 + 6 seats. There are certainly other ways of establishing criteria to designate them, but they would not necessarily be attached to a riding.

Mr. Jean Rémillard: Not necessarily.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Jean Rémillard: I would like to add something in that regard. Six seats is an average. In some cases, there could be up to 20 or 23 seats.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: So, in one election, we could have 338 + 2 MPs, and 338 + 20 MPs in another.

Mr. Jean Rémillard: That is based on the simulation I did using the 1963 election results for the Parliament of Canada.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Parliament is currently under renovation. Under that system, we would have to have a room with fold-up or fold-away seats.

The Chair: You would need moveable walls.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Dutil, I find that the system you are proposing is very interesting. As my colleague Alain Rayes said, specifically, in terms of the basic politics, the fact that a candidate who is the second or third choice in a constituency might end up being elected could cause riots. You talked about iron bars, but—

Mr. Yvan Dutil: The Brits sent me their codes. Over there, they have had the fifth candidate declared the winner. That might indeed cause riots.

Switzerland has a system like that. It is an irritant, but people understand it. For them, the system is already proportional by region. In addition, the coefficients are either 1.0 or 1.1. The adjustments are small and it is much less of a shock. It can also be done in a hierarchy. We can take a province and do it in a region with three or four members. It ends up proportionally, but with fewer shocks. The multiplication coefficients are less scary.

In England, they had no electoral threshold. I think there were 12 parties. Their proportional system was adjustable between 0 and I, meaning pure plurality and pure proportionality. Halfway along, the top three were in play, which was already less of a shock. There is also a question—

● (1425)

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Let me interrupt you, because my time is slipping by. Thank you very much.

The fact that they use it in Switzerland does not convince me that it is acceptable. Switzerland is a curious country made up of a number of nations. For their system to work and for things to happen, all parties need to be unanimous. That means things move slowly.

I would like to ask each of you to do a brief critique of the compensatory mixed-member proportional system, as it has been debated in Quebec. Why did it not convince you as a system?

Mr. Yvan Dutil: The problem is that if you increase the number of members by 30% or 40%, it may well be unpopular. Previously, I proposed 10 more members in Quebec and that caused a problem. In addition, you are going to have to increase the size of constituencies by 30% or 40%, which may be very unpopular too.

The other limiting factor is that it cannot be done before the next election. You need at least two years to draw up a new electoral map. And there is always drama because some constituencies in Canada are the size of a country.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you.

Mr. Rémillard, what do you think?

Mr. Jean Rémillard: The mixed voting system in Germany is definitely seen as a pure proportional system. A proportional system comes with problems. For example, if there is no quorum, no internal limit, there will certainly be a large number of parties. Quite often, you will end up with an elected parliament that is absolutely impossible to control. That is what allowed the rise of Hitler, by the way. It can go that far. But the Germans understood something at the time.

With a pure proportional system, there is a real danger that there will be confusion in the parliament. At times, there will have to be a "referee", someone who really holds the power. So, at the time, the Germans decided to give the president of the republic the power to make decrees. It was as a result of that confused situation that Hitler began his rise. That is not a good way to go.

The other way is to cut from underneath. I think we can do better than that. There is no reason to cut off the Green Party. In the German system, the Green Party would have no seats, unless they got three members elected.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Speaking of the Green Party, we are now going to ask Ms. May to take the floor.

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

My thanks to the witnesses for joining us today.

I am really delighted to be here. This is not a good thing to say politically, but Quebec City is my favourite city in Canada. I am really happy to be here because it is magnificent.

In my opinion, today's testimony contains the most innovative proposals that we have heard since we have been working on this task of finding a new voting system that will benefit Canadians and Quebeckers.

I have difficulty understanding all the proposals you presented because French is not my mother tongue. However, I do understand that your two presentations contain some absolutely unique features. Presenting unique proposals is not a bad thing, but I would like to understand them better.

Mr. Rémillard, thank you for thinking of the Green Party. In my opinion, it is important for each vote in our electoral system to be equal. I think that Canadian voters expect each vote to be equal.

In your view, is it possible to explain to voters that a system may change the weight of each vote, but that each vote remains equal, such as in Zurich, Switzerland, specifically? Has any research been done to determine whether or not voters in Zurich actually think that their vote will be equal in a system where votes have different weights?

● (1430)

Mr. Yvan Dutil: I don't think there is real research. I have a comment on my blog, as I mentioned previously, from another blogger, a Swiss scientist. He told me that there was a problem with the interactions because their proportional system is global. So there is interaction between the local and the global. That is an irritant, but for others, as Apple or Microsoft would say,

[*English*]

it's not a bug, it's a feature.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvan Dutil: The algorithm is a little difficult to understand but people can certainly be assured that it provides the right result. The electoral officer issues an Excel file with the correction coefficients and people can check that the result is correct. The proportionality is easy to calculate; everyone can do it with Excel at home, and it gives the right result. So people have a degree of confidence.

In the canton of Geneva, it was proposed but not accepted. The argument from the politicians was that, in that canton, there was no electoral threshold and if they were to proceed, they would need an electoral threshold. They had never had one and they did not want one. An electoral threshold would mean that some parties would fall below the threshold.

This has been studied in a number of places. Everyone has the same concern. It's not super-complicated but it comes as a bit of a shock. Votes are not equal at the moment. So you are making them equal again. If you understand that, everything is fine. The algorithm is not very long—20 to 30 lines—but it is a bit mysterious, which is where the psychological barrier lies. When you talk about compensating with a second category of members, it is more intuitive. You add members in order to achieve balance. The advantage is that you can keep the geography much more precisely. In the case of Canada, that is more of an advantage.

It has been debated in the United States, but not very publicly. In England and in the Faroe Islands, it was examined a little. Often, it is in countries that already have a regional proportional system. They have a problem because there are never fewer than three members in an electoral district. That creates distortions because the small parties in three… The psychological distance is less because those places already have a proportional system. The others see no proportionality because the electoral thresholds are too high.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Are the proportionality algorithms decided before or after the elections? That is not clear. Is it before the elections? I feel that it is only afterwards. It's difficult to calculate algorithms afterwards and to explain the decisions to the voters. For me, that is a bit of an obstacle.

Mr. Yvan Dutil: The algorithm in question could be in the public domain a long time in advance. People can do simulations. It took decades before it was done successfully. The algorithm is used to create balance. Originally, it was used to make nice statistical tables that provided results at 100%. With whole numbers, it is more complicated. It took decades to establish the algorithm that provided exactly the right number of members.

It has been in existence for about a decade. There are three or four versions. I am in contact with all the experts in the world. They have told me that, if ever I need help, they would be happy to provide it.

The real difficulty is in making sure that people trust it. Of course —

The Chair: We understand. Thank you.

Your turn, Mr. Aldag.

[*English*]

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): I'd like to thank both of our witnesses for being here today.

As I was listening to your presentations, the place my mind went to is that there is an element of complexity in the calculations that would be used. That's fine, and I accept that some systems, in order to get proportionality and other things, need the mathematical calculations. I will tell you that I thought it would be perfect to give it to Elections Canada to sort out and do all the algorithms and things that are needed.

I've spent a lot of my career in the communications field, and what I've been struggling with is how I would sell the systems you've put forward to Canadians. What is the benefit?

Without wanting to put you on the spot, I wonder if you could give me your 30-second pitch on how we could make this understandable to Canadians and why the various changes you're proposing are a better way to go. Then we could allow Elections Canada to deal with the behind-the-scenes calculations. From a communications perspective, would you be able to give me a pitch on why we should make this change and why is it best for Canada?

● (1435)

Mr. Yvan Dutil: It changes nothing, but it is proportional.

You would still have your MP. The trick is that in our system, your vote does not have the same weight as everyone else's. You just change the weight, and everything returns to one-to-one. That's the deal.

Our system is not proportional; we just twist the curve to make it proportional.

Mr. John Aldag: So there is actually an element of simplicity in the messaging, and—

Mr. Yvan Dutil: Except for the result of the election, the elector votes exactly the same way, he has an MP, and the campaign is the same. You have to be good locally, because it would be throughout. The only issue is the change in local election, which will create some frustration, at least in the first election. After two or three, the system will probably stabilize. If you change the voting system, it takes three elections to have the whole political system adjust. Don't cry after the first.

That would be my pitch—it's just the same thing, but proportional. We just correct the system.

Mr. John Aldag: Fair enough.

Monsieur Rémillard, what would you say to that? Why this change? How do we explain it simply to Canadians?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rémillard: My colleague said something quite interesting: it changes nothing. It just goes about things in a different way. If that is the case, why change?

[*English*]

If it ain't broke, don't mend it.

[*Translation*]

My thinking is slightly different.

I am not looking for mathematical precision. Are people looking for mathematical precision. Some of them yes, because it would be in their interest. When I use the word "rationalize", I do not mean that we need to look only at the calculations. We also have to consider human psychology, certain political data, and people's political knowledge. The election result still has to be intuitive enough to be accepted.

Everything does not have to be about complicated political mathematics that perhaps 1% of the population will understand. The result really has to correspond to the will of the majority. In that sense, the current plurality system actually works well most of the time, but it has to be corrected at its margins. It does not have to be changed completely, just corrected at the margins while keeping what is relatively well accepted and making sure that the parts of the situation that are a little more unfortunate are made less so. It is not a matter of changing everything.

The Chair: Thank you.

We now move to Mr. Deltell.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Quebec City, the most beautiful city in the world. If there is something that brings us together, from the Green Party to the Conservative Party, it's certainly our love for Quebec City.

Ms. May, I knew that, one day, there would be something we would both agree on completely. Do not think that I will be reminding you of the last election results in Quebec City. That would disrupt our harmony a little.

Gentlemen, welcome to Parliament.

Mr. Dutil, first and foremost, you have my congratulations and thanks for becoming involved in politics and wearing the colours of a political party, no matter which one. I remember your campaign against Dr. Bolduc, in a provincial byelection right here in Quebec City. I was a reporter at the time. I salute you, sir.

I'd like to say something about your story of winners who are losers and losers who are winners. We are all open-minded here, but I can assure you of one thing: I will never defend that position and I will never run in an election where a loser can become a winner and a winner can become a loser. Nor will I ever run in an election where the vote of one citizen would be worth 0.99% while another would be worth 3.8%, as you said just now.

That goes against all democratic principles. It may fit with some things in the Bible. In Matthew 20, it says: "So the last will be first and the first will be last." I won't go on because people will say that the Conservatives are talking about the church again. So let's forget that.

Mr. Dutil, how can we accept someone's vote being so disproportionate, especially when it is arithmetic, an algorithm, that turns fifth place into first place?

I know that all my colleagues are curious about that. As concisely as possible, try to give me a good argument that will convince us that such a system is a good one.

●(1440)

Mr. Yvan Dutil: Votes are not valued equally at the moment. In a constituency election, there are four chances out of five that a person's vote will not count. That is how a lot of people interpret it. If candidates are defeated, the votes cast in their favour are not considered. If they get less than 10% of the votes, the chances of them being worth anything are basically zero. The system is already warped. You have run in a number of elections in a warped system and it has never caused you a problem.

Certainly, the result in a first past the post system is a natural one. The problem is that, in a proportional system, whatever the variable, something similar is going to happen. Whether because of the lists or anything else, distortions will naturally appear at the regional level. I am telling you that no system can prevent that. It is certainly an irritant. I do not know how many constituencies it occurs in, though. I don't know whether it's in a third of them or not. If we consider a fifth of them, there is perhaps 2% difference in the votes for the one who comes first and the one who comes last. That is what I do not know yet. I have not done any simulated calculations, because it is a lot of work. As I said, you can ignore all the constituencies where the result goes over 50%. I believe that a third of constituencies might be affected. Perhaps that is acceptable. I know that people are probably going to complain, to react badly, but the overall result will be closer to reality. Locally, it may be a little bit more frustrating.

There is another factor that I forgot to mention. Because of the vote-splitting, plurality includes a margin of error. In the case of Quebec, I calculated that it was from 20% to 25%. I do not have the figures at federal level, but I have calculated them for Quebec. In 20% to 25% of the cases, the one who won, who obtained most votes, who came first, was not the people's choice. It would have been different if the voting system used had determined the Condorcet winner, who is supposed to be the one who would beat everyone in an individual election.

The margin of error is 20% to 30% currently; we are used to it, we find it acceptable. People are elected, are welcomed into Parliament and represent their constituents. You are perhaps thinking about people who won because the vote was divided between three or four parties. There are some like that and I am sure that they make good members of Parliament anyway. Some people may feel that it makes no sense. However, I have noticed that, once someone is elected, people tend to consider that they are in the position legitimately. Those of you who received fewer than 50% of the votes, those who were elected with 31% or 32% of the votes, are very likely to have won indirectly. You came first but you were not the people's first choice. We handle it; that's the way things have worked for 200 years.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: You say that, with 50% plus one, people are elected directly. Great, that works for me. I have run in four elections and I have won three of them with more than 50%. The MP for Quebec City, who is with us today, is now a senior minister in the current government and he was elected with 28% of the votes. That makes him no less duly elected. He himself acknowledges that he is not a minister for Quebec City, but that is another issue.

In the conditions you describe, no democracy can work.

Take the second round of voting in France as an example. There is a candidate A and a candidate B and one of them has to get an absolute majority. If we start from the principle that there is no balanced voting system because one vote means nothing, it means that, for 48% of the people who do not vote, those who vote for the losing candidate, their vote is lost. No, in democracy, no vote is lost. Each vote expresses an opinion. Just because the candidate of our choice lost does not mean that our vote is lost.

The Chair: We have to move to the next speaker.

Mrs. Romanado, please. It is your turn now.

Mr. Dutil, you can still answer the previous question. There is no rule against that.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): Thank you very much for being here today and for your testimony.

Before I ask my question, can I ask you to answer Mr. Deltell's? Thank you.

● (1445)

Mr. Yvan Dutil: The problem with integrating votes is that votes are lost. Plurality discards votes whereas other voting systems do not. One voting system that I like very much is approval voting, which is really very simple. People are not forced to vote for one candidate only. I am not suggesting forming a Parliament in that way, but it could be appropriate for byelections in the Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. In those places, strategic voting tends to disappear into thin air. People vote for the candidate they like the most. The one with the most votes really is the one supported by the greatest number of people. For the mathematicians amongst us, it would not necessarily be the Condorcet winner. Nevertheless, with plurality, the margin of error is frightening, between 20% and 30%.

There are other methods. The N-round system is a little better. The margin of error is from 10% to 15%. If you want a voting system that really determines the local winner, and makes sure that it is the right one, it might still be fine. However, I know that, by so doing—and Raymond Côté is going to propose something along those lines in a moment—you end up with centrist parties. You eliminate some options. It is always a matter of choice. You either want some diversity in Parliament or you want people in the centre. There are two types of voting systems, depending on what you want the result to be.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Let me stop you there.

You mentioned diversity in Parliament. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, which prepares a ranking list of the number of women members of national Parliaments, Canada currently ranks 64th. At the moment, 26% of our federal MPs are women.

How will your two proposals help to convince women to run for election and to get themselves elected? I would like your explanation of both parts of my question. Thank you.

Mr. Yvan Dutil: I do not see how it can change anything. Even proportional representation does not change a lot. The reason why there are more women members in countries that use proportional representation than in others is that the Scandinavian countries were the first to adopt that kind of representation. In the 19th century, the Scandinavian countries gave everyone the right to vote, including women. They were 50 years ahead of other countries.

A few years ago, Quebec ranked among the best in the world in the rate at which women were progressing in politics. For some reason that I do not understand, we slammed on the brakes. The voting system has little effect.

The problem that women have entering politics is often attributed to the fact that, once elected, members get themselves reelected for decades. I can think of constituencies where the same politicians are elected over and over again. Mr. Gendron, in Quebec, for example, has been an MNA for 25 years. So, as long as members, most frequently men, do not lose or do not leave their seats, access to women will remain closed.

If the voting system changes, 30% of members will lose their jobs automatically and, if there are enough female candidates, the proportion of women should increase, as it did in New Zealand. Then, the normal course of society will resume its rights.

I know that some people would prefer the list system they have in Rwanda, where positions are alternated between a woman and a man and a woman and a man. It is the only country in the world with that system. Almost all other countries that have a quota increase it by 2% a year, setting it just under the number of women that, according to the forecasts, should be elected if the trend is maintained.

Countries like Norway ended their quota because they could not get enough women. The Green Party in Norway, because of the rule requiring a third of women, could not get as many women as they wanted. So the rule was abolished.

I am very hesitant about quota systems. Some swear by them, but I do not.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Great.

I want to leave a little time for Mr. Rémillard so that he can explain to us how his system can help women in politics.

Mr. Jean Rémillard: I pretty much agree with Mr. Dutil.

Basically, the system itself will not promote women in politics. Women have to take the initiative themselves and run for election.

However, the system must provide a real chance of being elected. We need a system where votes are not lost, even for candidates obtaining a low percentage of the votes.

In the system I am proposing, candidates with 10% or 20% of the votes in their constituencies will not be elected. However, candidates with 1% of the national vote will be appointed as members because, if you multiply 1% by 0.5, let's say, that gives one half and if you multiply one half by 300, you get one and a half. One and a half gives you a member. So, with that system, the higher percentage of votes a party gets, the more members it gets. The calculation is easy.

● (1450)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Sansoucy, the floor is yours.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): My thanks to the two witnesses.

As some of my colleagues have mentioned, your perspectives are quite original. You remind me how bad I am at mathematics. So you will understand that my questions will not deal with the models that you are proposing.

You brought up points about human and psychological factors, which I find very interesting. I'd like to discuss them.

I have been in politics for nine years and I have been interested in voting systems for the same length of time. As Mr. Rayes pointed out, it is not the only reason why not everyone goes to vote with conviction on the morning of an election, but for me, it is one of the factors at play.

For me, going to vote is an exercise in civic participation of the highest importance. One of the reasons that motivates me to be in politics is to get people feeling involved. I believe that the status quo, the current voting system, contributes to cynicism and the rise of strategic voting. Although it is in Quebec culture to not want to lose elections, the numbers game has its limits.

Mr. Dutil, my first question goes to you, but if you have something to add, Mr. Rémillard, feel free to do so.

You very briefly brought up some psychological theories and human factors that explain why people feel concerned and decide to go and vote. What I find interesting is precisely that you cannot take the results of the 2015 election and analyze them in terms of a new voting system, because the voting system itself influences the way in which we vote.

Could you expand on that?

Mr. Yvan Dutil: That's the strategic voting calculation.

Mr. Deltell said earlier that the most popular sport in the world is soccer. Why is that? Because soccer is the sport where chance plays the greatest role. There are a number of examples where outsiders or third-division teams have beaten national teams.

When you know the results in advance, there is less temptation to get up in the morning to go and vote. When the member in our constituency has been the same for four elections and he is not a candidate in the party of our choice, we are perhaps less tempted to go and vote.

Not being too sure about what is going to happen is a factor too. The 1995 referendum is a classic case, as is the Brexit in England. No one knew what the result would be. The power of a vote was not much greater than normal, but, from a psychological point of view, it meant a lot. Not knowing what the result will be counts a great deal.

I have seen purely proportional elections in Spain, and they are pretty dry. The difference between the result of the last opinion poll and the result of the election is minimal, a few percentage points. I am not sure that more people would go and vote if we moved to a voting system like that.

People are very interested in what is happening locally. Elections are also one thing among many. People do not think about politics all the time. People do not naturally participate in parliamentary committees or municipal council meetings. Either they do not have the time or they tell themselves that nothing is going to change. But I myself have done it several times. This is my fifth or sixth consultation, and I have always felt that I have made a contribution.

● (1455)

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Some of my colleagues have brought up the importance of local representation; that is part of all of our lives as members of Parliament. For people to feel involved, they have to be convinced that they are choosing someone who will speak for them, someone who will represent them. Those who represent them really are the reflection of their votes. In my opinion, it is one of the motivating factors for having a proportional voting system.

Mr. Jean Rémillard: I quite agree with what you have just said. In my terms, I would say that there has to be a link between the voter and the elected representative and the link must even be quite close. Today, the link is quite loose. Who calls their MP or goes to see him or her? When and how do MPs manage to reach not only the voters, but the general public? There are various activities, agreed, but there is some disillusionment with politics. In my opinion, it is a societal problem, not just a political one.

That said, strategic voting quite often happens in reaction to something. People are fed up with the government. People do not agree with this decision or that decision. People then vote strategically in order to bring about a change. It is not that they vote without motivation; they may be highly motivated. It is just a pure calculation.

There was something else I wanted to say but I have forgotten it.

The Chair: That's fortunate, because the time is up.

Mr. Maguire, the floor is yours.

[*English*]

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Chairman, I want to thank both of our witnesses for their presentations today.

Mr. Dutil, you said earlier that the human mind can only rank about seven candidates. I'm wondering if you could elaborate on which system you were speaking of. Without being too facetious, I would agree with my colleague that the first word that comes to mind here is "complex". That's why I make that comment, only partly sarcastically. I wonder if you could help us understand how you came to that conclusion.

You also mentioned that economics helps narrow ideas to two parties. Is that correct?

You also said that a proportional system leads to an increase in the number of parties. Could you comment on that?

Mr. Yvan Dutil: Ranking seven persons or seven anything in order is known in psychology as a human limitation. I think Raymond Côté will speak more about that in a few minutes. It's just a limitation of the human brain.

I saw this in the French election, an experimental election they did. They asked people to use other voting systems, and in one of those you ranked your candidates. People were pretty reasonable for the first seven, but then the system crashed and it became random. At that point, it was more than what the human brain can do. It was just too hard.

I have a post-doctoral person in my university who is living in India, and they have sometimes tens of candidates on the voting tickets. They are that large, and it's just impossible to do. Some people say we could just have a cut-off and order the first five. Depending on the voting system, some might allow that and some might not.

As for the voting systems using some kind of ranking, there are about 20 of those. There is one, STV, which is used in Ireland, but I don't have much expertise on that. One that is very good is the Borda count, in which you give points depending on the order. I think it's done the way journalists might find the best hockey team. It's five points for the first one, four points for the second. It's very simple arithmetic. You find the best candidate defined as the most central one, the guy or woman who is most average. It's very nice if you want to elect a president or you want someone who represents the population.

There is a philosophy here. Do you want that for an MP, a member of Parliament who represents a riding? Do you want the best average guy, or do you want a Parliament that is very diverse? If you go for that, you willl end up with the most central parties. In Canada, in most cases, it would be the Liberal Party or the Conservative Party. In some regions the NDP might be considered more central. You end up with a concentration.

I did a simulation in Quebec. I've never done it in Canada. In Quebec I ended up with Liberal, PQ, and three or four members of the ADQ. It usually wipes out those who are somewhat less central

and it converges towards two parties. That's what we are supposed to fight against now.

I would use this in one case, though: the case of partial elections. At that point, you might want to reset the system to get a replacement guy. We're replacing the actual MP. We'll use one of those sophisticated methods to find the best average guy for the rest of the term. It might give a chance to another party that otherwise would not be detected by the system.

● (1500)

Ms. Elizabeth May: By "partial election", do you mean a by-election?

Mr. Yvan Dutil: Yes. That's my fault.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. DeCourcey is next.

[*Translation*]

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

My thanks to the witnesses. On behalf of my fellow Acadians and Brayons from New Brunswick, I thank you all here in Quebec City for your welcome. I also thank our team for giving us a little time to find our way around this beautiful city. We made good use of the time.

Mr. Rémillard, in your system, could it happen from time to time that the party that won the election and formed the government would be given extra seats?

Mr. Jean Rémillard: No. In the plurality system that we have in Canada, the party that wins the election usually has a higher percentage of members than their percentage of votes, except in cases when a government is elected with a minority of members. That requires a coalition government.

In Canada, contrary to what people think, we are very open to coalition governments. In fact, 40% of the Canadian governments have been coalitions. Since 1963, they have been in power about 20% of the time. One government that worked very well was Pearson's. It was not a coalition government but a government supported by the NDP. It was elected twice and it worked very well. It has been called one of Canada's best governments.

In Canada, when a party has a majority of the elected members, it forms the government. Personally, I favour parliamentary functions to be assigned according to the percentage of votes won rather than according to the percentage of members elected. At the moment, what counts is the number of members elected. In some cases, a party wins a majority of seats with a minority of votes while the official opposition has more votes in percentage terms than the governing party.

We have to turn that around.

Those kinds of situations have often happened in Quebec. With the system I am proposing, we could have turned things around, that is, we could have given the government to the party with the highest percentage of votes, rather than to the party that officially won according to its number of seats. However, there is one case in the history of Quebec where that logic was completely impossible. It was when the Parti québécois was elected and the Liberal Party, I believe, came second. The Parti québécois got so many MNAs that, even applying high ratios—like 1.2—the PQ could not be moved.

I don't think that a situation like that has happened in Canada, probably because we are playing with bigger numbers. In that case, the danger of such a problem happening is less in Canada. In general, the government elected with a good majority stays in place, just like in Germany.

● (1505)

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Thank you very much for those clarifications.

Mr. Dutil, I would like to leave you with the last word.

You mentioned that a psychological barrier for voters is seeing their vote manipulated, one vote counting less than others, that is.

You and Mr. Rémillard mentioned the challenges involved in a proportional system. What kind of psychological barriers do you see in the various electoral systems we have discussed with all the witnesses who have appeared before the committee?

Mr. Yvan Dutil: Everything that changes people's way of voting a little is not going to go over well.

In 2007, I did an experiment with some students at the Université Laval. We simply asked them to put candidates in order and to provide an evaluation. We used three voting methods: approval voting, evaluation voting, where candidates are given points, a grade, and preferential voting where they were asked for an order of preference. Ten per cent of the students were not able to do the exercise; they made mistakes, they got things wrong, they reversed the candidates, they didn't enter the points. We were able to observe that, because the results were inconsistent from one voting method to the other.

So, the further we move away from the current voting method, the more problems there will be. In practice, at least in the first election, it will be very difficult. But that does not mean that we can't do it.

Another factor is that we are used to having majority governments. People do not like minority governments and they do not last long. So that means coalition governments.

There is one more important factor to note that is not so much psychological as operational. The Governor General has to have the moral authority to be able to say that he prefers a coalition government to a minority government, if that proposal is made to him. If an election is called for frivolous reasons, for the Governor General to say no, he would have to be elected by Parliament, not appointed by the Prime Minister's Office. It is like that everywhere in Europe where they have proportional systems. At a certain point, a judge needs to decide. If one party is not capable of forming the government, the Governor General has to be in a position to ask the party with the second highest number of members to take power.

That does not exist in our current system, especially since our Queen does not operate politically. So that is something we would need. Of course, that kind of thing could shock people. At the moment, the Governor General is a figurehead, but he could become important. That also could turn out to be a little problematic.

The Chair: Thank you.

I have a question to bring this part of the meeting to a close.

We have talked a lot about the stability of parliaments elected by proportional representation. Up to now, we have been told that proportional systems create compromises and consensus and give rise to a measure of stability, because people have to get along. I assume that, with too many parties, it could be difficult to reach compromises but that alliances could form.

Depending on the context, do you feel it is possible, in a proportional system, that we could find ourselves looking at two major parties, sometimes diametrically opposed, with the result that the possibility of an election is always hovering over us?

Ever since I was elected to Parliament, I have gone through a number of similar situations. The government was in a minority, but that did not mean that parties got along. It meant that they were waiting for the right time to trigger an election.

Do you think that, even with a proportional system, we could end up with two ideologically opposed parties, resulting in alternance and waves of change? Is that possible, or does it not happen anymore once proportional representation has been adopted?

● (1510)

Mr. Yvan Dutil: A situation like that is becoming much less likely. Fragmentation is not impossible. However, everywhere in the world, we are seeing the number of parties increase. So a danger arises in the first or second elections because, if there are not enough parties, coalitions have to be formed in an intelligent way. Let me explain.

At the moment, we cannot imagine a lot of coalition combinations that can possibly form a majority government. To form coalitions, there have to be enough parties. So, with no fragmentation—there may be some, but it may only happen after at least three elections, the equivalent of 12 or 15 years—we still may have those two blocks bumping into each other for several years. That could end up falling apart.

I know that there were still two major blocks in Spain when I was there in 2000.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Rémillard, do you want to comment?

Mr. Jean Rémillard: I want to point out that, in Germany, the situation is very strange. Yet the country has a proportional system. The CDU-CSU alliance has formed the government since 1949, except in three elections. Those two parties form coalitions with other different ones.

The Chair: The same people are always in power.

Mr. Jean Rémillard: The same party is always at the centre of power.

The Chair: Yes. So that can result in a kind of monopoly.

Mr. Jean Rémillard: It's worse than in Canada. At least here we have some alternance.

The Chair: Right.

Mr. Jean Rémillard: In Quebec, it is even better in a way, because the alternance is at the head of the system, meaning that the government party can be something other than Liberal or, back in the day, something other than the Union nationale, and so on. It also affects the party that forms the official opposition. There is a certain progression and, eventually, you really get to form the government.

The Chair: Thank you. That was very interesting. As I mentioned at the start, we have moved in a new direction. We have learned a lot from your points of view; they seemed very original to me. Thank you very much.

We are now going to take a short coffee break. When we come back, we are going to hear from two other witnesses. After that, we will have an open mic session as part of the meeting.

Thank you.

●(1510)
_____ (Pause) _____

●(1525)

The Chair: Colleagues, let's start our work again.

I would like to welcome two other witnesses. First, we welcome Raymond Côté, whom we know well, since he sat in the House of Commons with Mr. Boulerice, Ms. May and myself. We also welcome Professor Jean-Pierre Derriennic, associate professor in the Department of Political Science at the Université Laval.

I imagine that the witnesses know how a session unfolds. Each witness makes a 10-minute presentation. The presentation is followed by a period for questions in which each member has an equal amount of time to interact with the witnesses.

We will start with Mr. Côté.

You have 10 minutes.

Mr. Raymond Côté (As an Individual): Thank you for allowing me to speak, Mr. Chair.

I must confess that I am a little frantic at the idea of being on the other side of the fence. It's my turn to be grilled, after having perhaps terrorized some witnesses who appeared before four House of Commons standing committees on which I sat for four and a half years. I am ready to answer your questions.

My thanks to all the members of Parliament who are here to participate in this committee. This is a fundamental topic that I have been passionate about for a long time. It was one of the many reasons that led me to become active in politics.

I had the great privilege of being a member of Parliament for four and a half years. I was defeated in 2015. It was a great privilege for me to participate in four federal elections, in 2006, 2008, 2011 and 2012. I mention that because, in 2006 and 2008, my chances of being elected were very slim. That was a huge sadness for my mom, who also wondered why I was running for the NDP.

That said, I always campaigned in the streets, and I knocked on an enormous number of doors. By so doing, I also had the great privilege of observing the voters' behaviour. From then on, I got clues that led me to understand the extent to which our voting system influences their behaviour.

In my first campaign in 2006, I remember that we were trudging around in snow. I'm sure you will remember the never-ending, 56-day campaign; the one in 2015 was not the first. Voting day was January 23. In Quebec City, it snowed practically every two or three days; it was horrible. At the time, Jack Layton, my leader, was not too well known. I actually had to give voters an idea of who he was by describing him as the man with a moustache who was smiling all the time. People then recognized him and told me that they liked him very much. That allowed people to see me, not as a candidate, but as a representative of that party leader.

So, in 2008, in most Quebec homes, Jack was already a member of the family, so to speak. That allowed me to make a very important, very interesting observation. People already were extremely fond of Jack Layton. However, most people's reaction was to tell me that they wanted to vote for me but they didn't believe that I had any chance of being elected at all.

That behaviour is widespread. From square one, it is caused by our first past the post voting system.

For most people— by which I mean my mom and that group of voters—what is important is that their vote should have some use, by voting for the winner. During an election campaign, the real challenge is to consider who will win the election and how one's vote can go to that winner, even if the candidate in question does not necessarily reflect the interests, the needs and the objectives of each voter. It's a flaw in our current voting system, it is very imperfect and we cannot keep it. The status quo forces us to continue to live with results that do not reflect the will of the people.

This is also the case for a simple plurality voting system with two or more rounds. France operates with a two-round system, which has led to absolutely extraordinary distortions. Though my memory is very short, I might mention the surreal results of the presidential elections in 2002. Jean-Marie Le Pen, the Front national candidate, slipped into the second round. He was then humiliatingly crushed by obtaining only 17.7% of the votes, while Jacques Chirac obtained more than 80% of the votes. That showed that a huge number of French voters were absolutely not inclined to support Jean-Marie Le Pen. As a candidate, he even repulsed them.

That election was the catalyst that lead two French researchers to come up with the voting system that I am going to present to you. It convinced them that it was really necessary to give people another option.

●(1530)

I also went through the briefing note on voting systems. The preferential system has more or less the same problems as the simple plurality system. Arranging people in a hierarchy, ranking them, can lead to distortions that result in the candidate who, by all objective measures, should be the winner not necessarily ending up as the winner. That is because, by playing with the second and third rankings given to their candidate, voters can basically arrange for an unexpected candidate to come out on top.

We have been using the first past the post system for 150 years now. We could very well keep doing so. Up to now in Canada, to my knowledge, there have been no riots after the results of an election. The system seems to be accepted, even acceptable, for a good many people. However, unfortunately, it is a system that does not necessarily reflect the diversity of the voting and the opinions expressed. I repeat that it also gives results that can even be contrary to the interests of the majority of the voters, either within a constituency or nationally.

Today, I am introducing the majority judgment system. It was developed by two French researchers, Michel Balinski and Rida Laraki. The system breaks the hierarchical approach and the distortions that can be seen in the various voting methods around the world. My brief—which the previous witnesses mentioned—contains thoughts on election results. This has been studied for many years. Borderline cases have been considered by mathematicians, by great thinkers, who have shown the extent to which the result cannot reflect the will of the people. The majority judgment voting system really brings everyone's opinion together.

In my brief, I explain that Kenneth Arrow's theorem gives three very important criteria that a voting system must meet. It must always declare a winner for all voters, which our current system does not do. Then, it must prevent the addition or removal of a minor candidate from influencing the final result. Third, it must ensure that all votes are treated equally. I would go even further and say that it must ensure that the vote of each and every voter is considered in the result.

Let me explain how the majority judgment voting system works. Instead of creating a hierarchy or choosing a winner, voters express a judgment on each candidate. The judgment can range from "excellent", which is really good for the ego, to "reject", which can be very hard for a politician trying to survive personally.

I am exposing you to danger by proposing this voting system. You can get even later on when you ask me questions.

The two French researchers I mentioned conducted very interesting experiments during the presidential elections in 2007 and 2012. One of the things the experiments revealed is what I call the hidden thinking that a country's entire electorate does not see. We will consider the experiment in Orsay, a suburb of Paris; it was conducted as people left three polling stations in the municipality. Voters were invited to try the majority judgment system as they saw fit. The results were obtained both nationally and for the municipality of Orsay. Those results were very different. I kept five candidates in the Orsay experiment, but we must remember that, in 2007, there were 12 candidates.

● (1535)

In the first round of elections in France, Nicolas Sarkozy came first; Ségolène Royal, second; François Bayrou, third; and Jean-Marie Le Pen, fourth.

For the purposes of the exercise, I also chose a candidate from the Green Party—not necessarily as a tribute to Elizabeth May—simply because the difference in the percentage of votes for her was truly remarkable: she came in eighth. In France, she was still seventh in the town of Orsay. If you look at the results of the experiment with

1,752 voters, you will see that the hierarchy changes. With the majority judgment voting system, François Bayrou comes first; Ségolène Royal, second; Nicolas Sarkozy, third; and the first major change, Dominique Boynet, the Green Party candidate, is fourth. As for Jean-Marie Le Pen, the leader of the Front national, ranked twelfth, so last. In his case, over 70% of the 1,752 voters graded him as "reject". This made it possible to clearly show—which I find particularly important—the opinion of all the voters.

I did not want to tell you about the mechanics of this voting system. I especially wanted you to think about the fact that people can see their will truly and fully reflected in an election through a radically different voting system, which may well prompt a significant change in the behaviour of voters and politicians.

Mr. Chair, I see that my time is up. Thank you.

Anyway, I look forward to being grilled by members of the committee.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your presentation, which was very eloquent.

We will now turn to Professor Derriennic for 10 minutes, please.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Derriennic (Associate professor, Department of political science, Université Laval, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for inviting me.

I submitted a brief summarizing the findings of a small activist book that I wrote and that was published at the start of this year. It is called *A Better Electoral System for Canada*. I will summarize the conclusions of my brief.

In my submission, I drew your attention to the flaws of the voting system we are using before telling you about the two reforms that should be avoided and the two reforms that would significantly enhance our political life. They can work harmoniously together.

The flaws of the single member plurality voting system are well known. In my book, I mention some very striking figures. Last year, the House of Commons was elected by 48% of people who voted; 52% of people voted for candidates who were defeated. The Liberal Party won 39.5% of the votes, one-third of which went to Liberal candidates who were defeated. So the Liberal majority in the House of Commons was elected by 26% of the people who voted, and if we factor in abstentions, 18% of Canadians of voting age. If we did the math for previous elections, we would sometimes find even more distressing figures. I think that leaves significant room for improvement to reduce the dissatisfaction of many of our fellow citizens who think that our electoral mechanisms are very flawed.

The first thing to avoid is proportional representation in districts where large numbers of MPs are elected, which allows many parties to have elected MPs in the House and poses a serious risk of political indecision and instability. All the awful speeches given by opponents of proportional representation are partially justified in cases where proportional representation allows the House to have a large number of MPs. However, it is possible to achieve proportional representation without this shortcoming.

I think the second thing to avoid is mixed electoral systems, combining single member districts with some kind of proportional representation. This would have little benefit compared to a simpler, more reasonable proportional system and it would be difficult or impossible to implement before the next election. The thing to have is moderate proportional representation in districts of three to five seats. I stole the term moderate proportional representation from Vincent Lemieux who was one of my mentors on these issues.

So the system to adopt is moderate proportional representation with a preferential vote. The two formulas are not at all conflicting. They could be easily combined and so would their benefits. Moderate proportional representation would not be very difficult to implement because it could be done by joining together the existing districts without changing their limits, without changing the number of MPs in the House of Commons and without changing the number of members by province. It would be less difficult and faster than establishing the new single member districts that would be needed for a mixed system.

Moderate proportional representation allows for a more equitable distribution of elected representatives between the major parties and significantly reduces the number of votes that elect no one. It would also have the advantage of ending the situation whereby it is impossible for major parties to have elected representatives in one province or region of the country. This is the case today, such as the Conservative Party in the Atlantic provinces. We have known for a long time that this regional concentration of elected officials is one of the most negative effects of the voting system on Canada. This is a very old and justified idea.

Thanks to the small number of elected MPs in each constituency, these benefits would be achieved without the risk of government instability caused by the proliferation of parties able to have elected representatives. Moderate proportional representation would ensure local representation, which is so important to so many people in Canada, as well or even better than the current system or a mixed system.

● (1540)

In a mixed system, some of the members do not have a home base whereas in constituencies with three to five seats, all members are elected in a territorial division. They share it with other members. Some may be allies, others may be opponents. The number of MPs relative to the population would remain the same. Members would not be further away or more difficult to reach. Sometimes, the physical distance would be somewhat greater in cities. If there were a single constituency in Quebec City, it would be no problem to meet with a member about the situation today.

This would not be very problematic in densely populated rural areas either. In Gaspé, there would need to be a constituency that goes from Montmagny to Gaspé. There perhaps distance might become an issue, but there would be four MPs who have their offices in the same place.

In the northern territories, we could keep three single member districts, where distance becomes a very unique problem. This would not change the overall logic of the system.

For constituents who want to approach an MP, I think multi-member districts with three to five members would be a tremendous advantage for them. First, most of them would have the choice of going to either a member of the majority government or a member of the opposition. Today, they do not have that choice at all.

Today, in the case of more than half of those who voted, when they meet their MP, they meet a member they voted against, whereas in the new system, they would almost certainly be able to choose between their three, four or five members. I am confident that the voters of Canada would love to have that opportunity.

To the moderate proportional representation, we have to add the ranked ballots. Preferential voting is the most effective way to ensure that every vote counts. They are never fully equal. I do not think that's possible. We can have a voting system in which every vote counts. In terms of being exactly equal, I don't think there's a system that produces that result anywhere in the world today.

Preferential voting should be a sort of ethical obligation, not in the voting system, because it allows voters to vote sincerely without fear of wasting their vote or of being forced to vote strategically. Strategic voting is not immoral. What is immoral is maintaining a voting system that requires a large number of voters to choose between voting strategically or casting a vote that is completely useless at election time. I think that's what's immoral, not strategic voting, which is a logical thing for voters to do.

Preferential voting places voters in a much better intellectual and moral position when deciding how to vote. It also has the advantage of allowing small parties to know what their real popular support is and to play a bigger role in public debate without the risk of proliferating parties in the House. It encourages major parties to address the concerns of those who voted for smaller parties, which they know had elected representatives through their second or third preference. Small parties do not necessarily have more elected members, but they play a much bigger role in public debate through ranked ballots. This might encourage the major political parties to produce less simplistic propaganda, because they always know that they may need their opponents' second or third preferences in a given constituency.

With moderate proportional representation, parties that get less than 17%, 20% or 25% depending on the size of constituencies or votes, cannot have elected representatives. So it makes sense to have ranked ballots between parties. For the supporters of those parties, the need for strategic voting does not completely disappear with proportional representation. We must add the ranked ballots. We can also have a slightly more complex system in which voters indicate their preferences not only from the parties, but also from the candidates. This complicates the counting of votes a little. I don't think it complicates the casting of votes for voters.

There is an electoral system like this in Ireland, which has its merits or flaws. For Irish voters, the system is not difficult to apply.

● (1545)

It is simply that we will have to wait for the results until the next evening because of how long it takes to calculate the results. This is something that can be extremely justified.

Do I still have a minute? I would like to conclude.

The Chair: Yes, you still have one minute.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Derriennic: If the reform you are studying leads to a moderate proportional representation system with ranked ballots, there will be a number of benefits for the citizens of Canada.

The members of the House of Commons elected by 48% of the citizens who voted will be elected by almost all voters. If preferential voting is applied and if everyone completely lists their order of preference, members will be elected by all the people who voted and listed their order of preference. The majority of MPs will really represent a majority of voters, instead of a little over a quarter as is the case today. Voters will be able to vote honestly, without having to make assumptions about strategic voting decisions. Political parties will be encouraged to pay more attention to the concerns of all citizens, and the public debate will become less simplistic and less confrontational.

Thank you.

● (1550)

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Derriennic.

We will now go to questions. Ms. Shota, go ahead.

[*English*]

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you.

Thank you to both of our witnesses for great presentations.

My first question is for Mr. Derriennic. How is your proposal, your system, different from the single transferable vote, the STV system that we've been hearing a lot about? It sounds very similar to me. Within those systems, we've also been hearing about ranked ballots being proposed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Pierre Derriennic: It is similar to the Irish single transferable vote if we have a preferential vote both for parties and for individual candidates. It is possible to vote only for parties. The objection some politician friends made to me is that the Irish single transferable vote may lead several candidates from the same party to

campaign against each other. That may be good, but perhaps parties would rather avoid that.

So the idea is to figure out a vote in which the candidates cannot campaign against each other within the same party, but we can still apply the transferable vote to the choices between parties. My preference is a simplified Irish single transferable vote, with less competition between the candidates from the same party and a less complicated way of calculating results. In my little book, I explain this more fully than I am able to do now.

[*English*]

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Then how many candidates would there be? You'd have one candidate run from each party in this larger size of riding that would result from combining a few, you said. How many candidates would you foresee on the ballot in one of these ridings?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Pierre Derriennic: There would be as many candidates for each party as there are seats to be filled in the constituency. We can imagine that a party would have the right to present fewer candidates. I don't think it's a good idea, but I would have to think about it. That might create distortions.

In a proportional system, political parties usually prepare a list of candidates equal to the number of seats in the constituency. That's what probably should be done. If you want to run candidates in a constituency with three seats, you will have to submit three. You have to make a list of three, four or five candidates, depending on the size of the constituency.

[*English*]

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Then essentially you would have candidates of the same party running against each other.

For instance, my city of Brampton currently has five ridings. We would take away those riding boundaries and, let's say, take the city boundary instead and have five of each party competing against each other.

I'm not quite clear. You said that in your system you wouldn't have candidates competing from the same party, but you would, essentially.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Pierre Derriennic: If the Irish system is applied, there may be competition between the candidates from the same party. It is possible to adopt a moderate proportional system with ranked ballots, with closed lists, and people choose only from the lists. If a party is entitled to two elected representatives, they will be the two elected at the top of the list. That's what many countries with proportional representation are doing.

A choice has to be made. In my view as an activist for changing the voting system, if you choose one or the other, it will be very good, and perhaps a little better if you opt for the Irish system. However, people will be tearing their hair out, saying that it is too complicated. That's not true; it is not so complicated if we make an effort to explain it clearly.

[*English*]

Ms. Ruby Sahota: In the earlier panel we heard that the human brain will not go beyond computing seven candidates. For the city of Brampton, with five ridings and five candidates for each party—and we had five parties running one time, so it would be five times five —you end up with quite a long ballot.

How do you get past the confusion voters would have going to the polls, not knowing how to make an educated judgment on that many candidates? The selection is just....

●(1555)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Pierre Derriennic: If you ask the voters to choose between closed lists, they will have five boxes in which to indicate their first choice, second choice, and so on, for the parties. If they vote as they do in Ireland, there will be 25 boxes, or five candidates per party, for a total of 25 candidates. We must certainly not allow voters to fully list their order of preference. This is done in Australia and I don't think it's a good idea. It's not the case in Ireland. People voice their first three or four choices and they do not express an opinion on the rest. Their vote counts in the case of the first three, four or five choices. In almost all instances, this will not have a significant impact on the results.

I do not think this will result in huge ballot papers.

The Chair: Thank you.

So under the single transferable vote, we vote for the candidates.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Derriennic: Yes, that's it.

The Chair: We don't vote for the party.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Derriennic: By voting for the candidate, we vote for the party.

The Chair: It's the same thing.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Derriennic: The Irish system produces a result that is roughly proportional between the parties.

The Chair: However, in terms of the system you are talking about, we always vote for the candidate. Is it always the same?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Derriennic: Not necessarily.

I may be repeating myself, but it can be done with closed lists. In that case, we just vote for a list. Clearly, this will result in the candidates on the list being elected. However, we can give voters a choice not only of parties but of party candidates, if we want them to express a preference between the party candidates—

The Chair: So we could vote twice.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Derriennic: Not necessarily.

In Ireland, there are 25 candidates, assuming that there are five parties and five candidates per party. The parties are ranked. A candidate of a party is ranked first; then in second place comes a candidate of the same party; in third, a candidate from another party, and so on. This affects both the results of the candidates and the results of the parties.

The Chair: Under this system, can we vote both for the party and for the five candidates? I personally don't see the difference between

the single transferable vote and this system, when you arrive at the polling station.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Derriennic: Take the example of a ballot paper that indicates: "Liberal Party: candidate A, candidate B and candidate C; NDP: candidate A, candidate B and candidate C", and so on, with boxes to record numbers. There is one for the Liberal Party, but not for the candidates. There is one for the NDP, but not for the candidates. Voting takes place between closed lists.

The Chair: Yes, I understand.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Derriennic: The question is whether you decide to choose one system or the other. I don't think the political difference is huge. So if you opt for one or the other, I would be very happy.

There must be ranked ballots between the parties because of the small parties and because it is very unfair to be in a society where 20% to 25% of the people want to vote for political parties that they rank first, but don't do so because they know it's a wasted vote.

We must put an end to that. We can improve things by also providing the choice between the candidates individually, but we don't have to.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Rayes, the floor is yours.

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

Mr. Derriennic, one of the things that strikes me about this matter, and based on my political experience, is the importance for the citizens of Canada, or at least of Quebec, to vote for a local representative. In my view, if we asked the people what is the most important consideration in making their choice, this would be one of the predominant factors.

You talked about a closed list system, and I understood it fully from your last explanation. I personally don't think it's so simple, but perhaps people could grasp it if it were explained to them.

Take, for example, Quebec City, which has seven federal ridings. So there would be one block of seven Conservative MPs, one block of seven Liberals, one block of seven New Democrats, one block of seven Green Party representatives, and so on. People would make their choices in order of preference, from one to five, for example.

By doing that, I feel that we would be overlooking the candidates' skills, experience and background. Once the calculations are done, some candidates might wonder how this or that candidate will be appointed. For example, the names of which seven candidates would appear on the Conservatives' list? In your view, would that be done from a list predetermined by the party?

●(1600)

Mr. Jean-Pierre Derriennic: Closed lists are exactly the same as the current situation. Right now, we don't choose the candidate in a constituency. We either vote for the person because we are happy with their party, or we vote for the person and ignore the party they are representing—I think very few people do that—or we vote for the party, regardless of the candidate. Instead of having one candidate imposed by the party, we would have five.

Mr. Alain Rayes: By the way, the candidate is not imposed by the party but by the party members in the constituency—

Mr. Jean-Pierre Derriennic: People on the list will be appointed by the party members in the constituency.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Let me go back to the same exercise we did for Quebec City. In my region, in central Quebec, there are three MPs. In this region, people vote primarily for the Conservatives. When my constituents are going to vote, they have a choice. Some people vote for the platform, others vote for the party and others vote for the leader—in our system, we seem to give a lot of power to the leader. However, I have to say that other citizens vote for the individual. I think people win an election because of their reputation, their experience, in particular. Suppose we bring together candidates from the various parties on their respective lists, and a person wants to vote for the Bloc. It is possible that the candidate of their choice, who lives in their riding, finishes in sixth or seventh place, and therefore is not elected.

I want to get this straight. I'm not judging the model you are proposing. I feel that grouping the individuals devalues the vote, compared to the current system. People who voted Conservative in my constituency did not do so for the leader or the platform, but for Alain Rayes. They made an informed choice. It would not be the case once the candidates were grouped into a list. Am I wrong?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Derriennic: So you would prefer ranked ballots to be applied as they are in Ireland, and allow voters to pass judgment on both the person and the party, and possibly—

Mr. Alain Rayes: Ultimately, yes, if I have to choose between the two options in your system. However, I am not sure I would opt for this system.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Derriennic: My preference would also be for the Irish system. People who say that the Irish system is dangerous for the cohesion of the party may obtain a concession. It is possible to have ranked ballots between the parties, without—

Mr. Alain Rayes: Okay, it is very clear, Mr. Derriennic.

I want to make sure I understand. In your system, there would be the same number of members as right now. There would not be more or fewer members. This system would allow MPs to rack up a higher percentage of votes. People who are in favour of proportional representation claim that, in the case of the Conservatives... We always give the example of the Conservatives and the Liberals, but I often like to say that, in Alberta, the NDP has a majority with 39% of the vote. Distortion is everywhere.

Would your system allow us to be closer to a percentage of seats rather than a percentage of votes?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Derriennic: Of course. This would not lead to perfect proportionality. No electoral system provides a perfectly proportional result. It may be more or less proportional. The determining factor is the number of elected representatives in constituencies.

In the Atlantic provinces, where 30% of votes were for the Conservatives, there would clearly have been more Conservative MPs elected if we had used this system. I would have to do the math. It would not be exactly proportional, but it would be much less unbalanced than it is today.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Do you want to connect your model to a regionalized preferential system?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Derriennic: No.

To me, Vincent Lemieux's term "moderate proportional representation" is excellent. If you want to develop a system proportionate with the size of Canada, it is sufficient to obtain one-third of 1% of the vote to be elected. It is also possible to implement a proportional system based on the size of the provinces. In Ontario, it is sufficient to garner 0.8% of the vote to be elected. In Quebec, it takes a little over 1% of the vote and about 10% in New Brunswick. Proportionality depends on the size of the constituencies.

Vincent Lemieux's argument is that, by creating small enough constituencies, we avoid the proliferation of political parties. This is a fundamental political issue.

●(1605)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Boulerice, the floor is yours.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That is a fascinating discussion.

Mr. Côté, we were talking about voter behaviour earlier.

When I was a candidate, in 2008 and 2011, people often told me that they agreed with me, that they liked me a lot and that I was a very good guy, but that they would not vote for me because they believed I had no chance of being elected. I always answered that they were absolutely right because, if they did not vote for me, I had no chance of being elected.

At some point, it's simply the build-up of changes in intellectual or psychological paradigms that makes things happen. You told us about the principles underlying your preferred, majority judgment model, but you did not talk about the mechanisms. I would like you tell us about that.

When the term "excellent" or "gross" is selected, how is that quantified in terms of the numbers of members? I guess there's a point system.

Do you win four points with "excellent" and lose 10 with "completely reject"?

How does it work?

Mr. Raymond Côté: Thank you, Mr. Boulerice. That's a very good question.

Basically, the system is very simple and requires a relatively simple mathematical operation.

For each grade, we compile the votes, the percentages. Whether we start with the worst grade, "reject", or the best, "excellent", we count the votes to reach a threshold of at least 50%. That's how we determine the majority grade. That's how the system got its name.

There are a number of aspects I have not mentioned, including the major advantages of this electoral system. Mr. Derriennic talked about the preferential voting system, which I personally loathe. Just like the first past the post system, that system is easy to manipulate. However, the majority judgment system is practically immune to external manipulation.

To illustrate the point simplistically, say that someone with a lot of money can buy their election by renting buses and surrounding themselves with many volunteers with cars, in order to give voters rides. In a close election, this would ensure the candidate has 500 or 1000 more votes in order to beat an opponent.

In the majority judgment system, since there is a threshold, the sole interest in filling up the buses is to engage more voters. The system completely prevents candidates from choosing voters to tip the balance in their favour. The people the candidate would transport and who would vote for them would be in the 50% of voters. That may be a bit difficult to understand, but this system is extremely transparent and prevents manipulation.

There are other aspects we can talk about, but I'll let you ask other questions.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you, Mr. Côté.

Mr. Derriennic, I started studying the Irish electoral system as well. Along the lines of your proposal, the Irish have three to five members per multi-member constituency. The Irish, instead of choosing the party only through closed lists, can choose their candidate without having to make 25 choices. They can choose their preferred candidate from a given party. This would answer Mr. Rayes' question. A voter who wanted to vote for Mr. Rayes would ensure that he is at the top of their list. That selection would mean that the voter was voting specifically for that individual.

I admit that the two systems are an improvement over the archaic system we currently have in Canada. Someone even said that this system was designed for England in the 16th century, while we are in Canada in the 21st century. Jason Kenney said that.

Why three to five members per district? Yesterday, Professor Stephenson suggested three to seven members. Earlier, Mr. Dutil said that it takes at least six to achieve better proportionality. The debate is about the number of members that we want for our region.

● (1610)

The Chair: Please provide a quick answer. We are running out of time.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Derriennic: I tend to think there should be three or four. To avoid having too many parties in the House of Commons and compensating for small political parties, the transferable vote helps them find out where they stand and helps them look after their voters. Having three or four members per district would be a huge improvement over the current situation. It is the way to minimize the danger of instability that is always condemned in the case of proportional representation. However, I would not be upset if there were six or seven.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Ste-Marie, you have the floor.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, gentlemen.

My questions are for Mr. Derriennic.

To begin, as you just repeated for Mr. Boulerice, we need to avoid ridings with several members that would be too large to prevent the proliferation of small parties. If I understand correctly, you are of the opinion that Parliament shouldn't have too many parties. Your preference would be for three to five members per regional riding. To that, you are adding the preferential system.

Have you done a modelling exercise for some or all of Canada to see what the system you're recommending would look like? Modelling is possible because there are polls about the second choice candidates. Since the committee has already discussed the preferential system at previous meetings, I think we will need to see the outcome to properly assess the quality of the model.

Take the Maritimes, for example, where the Liberals won all the constituencies. Theoretically, in a proportional system without preferential votes, the Liberals could still win all the constituencies, but it would become impossible in a preferential system. So it's possible that the first choice of the electorate would not be respected if we had to rank all the parties, right?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Derriennic: I think the opposite would be true for the Maritimes.

If we held a proportional election without preferential votes, the Liberal Party would lose seats in the Maritimes. I don't know which ones or how many. If preferential voting was added, since the Liberal Party is the centrist party, I think it would lose fewer. But I haven't done any modelling, and I doubt that modelling would be entirely useful because people don't always vote the same way.

We can do a modelling exercise. It gives an indication, but it is very uncertain because people would understand very quickly how a preferential system works. The political parties that use it to designate their leaders wouldn't have any difficulty making their voters understand how it works.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: I have nothing against your idea about regional constituencies with several candidates, but I am against the preferential aspect because, you said, it benefits the centrist parties. In the current system, it gives the Liberal Party a direct advantage because it will probably be the second choice of New Democrat and Conservative voters.

Yesterday, I think it was, one witness said that he did not feel that the elected candidate was the second choice for everyone, while the first choice wasn't. I think that's a problem. Can you briefly respond to that?

Afterwards, I'll have a question for Mr. Côté.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Derriennic: The example of the 2002 presidential election that Mr. Côté used is very interesting to see the merits of a preferential vote. Le Pen got in just ahead of Jospin, the socialist candidate, because 25% of voters voted for other leftist parties.

If there had been a preferential vote instead of a two-round vote—two-round voting is partial preferential voting in which voters can give only two preferences, for which they must vote twice—from the early counting of the results, Jospin would have beat out Le Pen. Perhaps Jospin would have won the election, or Chirac would have won the election, but with a normal figure opposite Jospin.

The kind of drama that the French pretended to play in 2002 is entirely the result of a flawed electoral system. The French didn't know what a preferential system was.

● (1615)

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: I'm going to interrupt you to ask Mr. Côté a question.

Having said that, thank you. It's clear. I remember the situation well. I was studying in Toulouse at the time when this shockwave happened.

Mr. Côté, the concern I have about the majority judgment voting process is the matter of strategy. Suppose candidates A and B are neck and neck, and they are both good candidates. If I support candidate A, I will be inclined to choose "reject" for candidate B. If good faith was at play, I would be in favour of this principle.

Convince me very quickly that we can trust this strategy.

Mr. Raymond Côté: Certainly, Mr. Ste-Marie. Thank you.

I'll take this opportunity to make a comment. Mr. Derriennic spoke about territorial proportionality, namely, many candidates in the same territory. A vote by majority judgment would be quite suitable in this case.

My short brief includes a bibliography. In the summary of the Orsay experiment, French researchers give details on the transfer of votes. For example, if someone wants to fill the ballot boxes and convinces friends to choose "reject", those votes would be lost in the bulk of the 50%. So there would be no impact on the final result. That's the beauty of this system. To really manipulate the results in a majority judgment system, you need to draw thousands of voters. That's so significant because it's practically impossible.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: I'm not convinced. As a strategy, the Liberals could give the message to select "reject" for Conservative candidates and vice versa.

A voice: I understand.

The Chair: Ms. May, you have the floor.

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

I'd like to thank our guests. It's a pleasure to see you again, Mr. Côté.

The next question is for Mr. Derriennic.

Thank you very much for the work you have done with your book. I'd also like to thank you for sharing it with the members of the House of Commons. I've read it, and I think I understand your position. My question is similar to the previous one.

What would you do in the case of large constituencies like the territories?

Would you amalgamate the three?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Derriennic: I think the reasonable decision would be to establish three single-member seat constituencies in the northern territories. I think these people would become frustrated with the others, which would have the possibility of having several MPs. After two or three elections, they would ask to be grouped together to establish a single constituency with three seats.

In any event, the fact remains that three single-member seat constituencies would have little impact on the balance of political parties in the rest of the country. The fact that three out of 338 constituencies don't obey the same rules as the others cannot create an imbalance in the system. However, it may influence the choice that these people will eventually want to make.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Did you hear Jean-Pierre Kingsley's testimony?

I think your ideas are similar to those of the former Chief Electoral Officer. It is easier to group neighbouring constituencies in urban areas. As in the Irish system, the results aren't as proportional as in the case of the list system.

Is that what you think, as well?

● (1620)

Mr. Jean-Pierre Derriennic: Yes, that's my opinion, too.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Okay.

Mr. Côté, I find the majority judgment voting system a little difficult to understand.

Are the votes cast on the same day as the ones in the regular voting system?

Could you explain this to me?

Mr. Raymond Côté: Ms. May, I understand very well that you may have difficulty following me. I introduced two resolutions as part of my activism in the Quebec section of the NDP. The resolution was defeated both times, probably because the NDP activists weren't able to follow me on this.

The first thing is that majority judgment voting is a single-vote electoral system in which the results arrive as is. To add to what Mr. Ste-Marie said, the beauty of this system is that everyone has a voice. People also speak out about the candidates that they particularly dislike. Perhaps it isn't very good to encourage this kind of behaviour, but it might be worth using.

The other element is the lack of manipulation with respect to a first past the post or exhaustive ballot or preferential voting. In reality, if you really want to influence the vote of a candidate, there must be outrageous scoring and we need to convince voters who have a rather mixed or weak opinion of the candidate we want to defeat to issue an even stronger opinion. I can't imagine a single political party that would waste money trying to conduct an operation of that magnitude.

My friend, Yvan Dutil, who testified before me, and I studied physics together at Laval University. That's why we've known one another for so long.

I see the mathematical beauty of it, but also its simplicity, once you understand the basic principle. However, I know it's very different compared to other voting systems. Most people are unable to follow me on this. I keep on anyway. The great interest of this voting system compared to the others is that, strictly speaking, it is true that all votes count.

In fact, in the articles of the two French researchers, you can examine the results for each candidate: excellent, very good and so on. Voters can see, for example, that Raymond Côté obtained such-and-such a score, when they had rejected that candidate initially. They can also see that 15% of voters also rejected him in the end. Voters can also conclude that several people found that the candidate did not make sense.

I think this voting system will have a positive impact on our elections. At the least, it will bring a lot more fun than the other voting systems. That's one reason why I'm trying to convince you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Aldag, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. John Aldag: Thanks to both of our witnesses for being here and for the thought that you've obviously put into electoral reform.

I've done a number of town halls. I've taken the approach of trying to understand what values Canadians bring, my constituents bring, to electoral reform, and what things they hold dear, so that we can apply that to whatever decisions we make in going forward to new systems.

In this case, we have systems that have been given to us, ones that you've given thought to, so I'm almost trying to reverse-engineer it to understand the values and the principles that you've applied.

I'm sure you've seen that we have five to seven principles that we're working with. They include things like effectiveness and legitimacy, engagement, accessibility and inclusiveness, integrity, and local representation.

I would like thoughts from both of you. Do you feel that those general principles are reflected in what you've presented? Are there other values that you feel Canadians hold dear that are also reflected in your systems that will help us as we do some sort of grid to see which system meets this or that criterion and how many of those we are checking off?

Essentially, do your recommendations meet the principles the committee is working with, and are there other values that you've applied in the formation of your recommendations?

● (1625)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté: It's quite obvious.

You know, the majority judgment voting system gives voters significant freedom. First, voters must vote on all candidates and don't need to rank them in order of preference. A very generous voter who finds four of ten candidates excellent checks "excellent" four times. So much the better if the voter doesn't find any candidates to "reject". However, a very critical or downright disillusioned voter is

free to check "reject" beside the names of eight of the 10 candidates, and that choice will be reflected in the results.

The other element, which is why I insisted on the aspect to protect the system against manipulation, is that both the political parties and the voters see their behaviour change dramatically. Above all, voters, candidates and political parties have to play much more fairly. We are left to make calculations with other voting systems.

In the 2011 election, even before it was called, I was convinced that I might be elected. I invited the candidates for the Quebec region to my home to tell them, "Get ready to become MPs. We need to run a campaign based on the fact that we will win." That was just a few days before the start of the 2011 election campaign. I knew that the NDP was the second choice for a large number of voters, and I knew that I could be elected MP. In a case like this, we put aside electoral calculations to better focus on how to reach voters, to affect them with its comments, to find arguments to convince them of its value. The situation was radically different from what Canada currently has.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Derriennic: It's not too easy to design a voting system that takes into account all the requirements of your mandate —I don't know what to call it. I haven't tried to add to it. I'm happy to work with that.

The Chair: You have a minute left. You don't want to use it?

[*English*]

Mr. John Aldag: I think I'm fine.

The Chair: We were discussing Mr. Côté's system; that's why I was a little....

[*Translation*]

Mr. Deltell, the floor is yours.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Derriennic, welcome.

Mr. Côté, welcome. I am happy to see you again. We've crossed paths a few times, quite often during the elections. Thank you, and congratulations on having served your fellow Canadians for four years, and also for having been a candidate twice, in 2006 and in 2008, before becoming an MP. I mean it sincerely when I say that I have great respect for those who are candidates for election because it's a steep hill to climb. You had to have a lot of faith to come to the NDP in Quebec in 2006, and I congratulate you.

I know what I'm talking about. I have been the leader of a provincial party, where it wasn't smooth sailing in some ridings. I have great respect for those who run on principle, even if they know from the start that they are likely to be beaten hands down. Mr. Côté, I congratulate you on your political commitment. As for your comments about your NDP colleagues, I'll leave them to you; I wouldn't dare repeat them.

Now, my question is for both of you, because you have each expressed your point of view. I may be wrong, but from experience —I've been in politics for some time—I think that Canadians have three questions when it comes time to vote: "Who do I want to be prime minister?" "Which platform do I like the best?" and "Who do I want to see as MP?" Sometimes, the answers form the right trifecta: the leader, the party and the candidate, but other times, it's A, B and C. There is no perfect system, as you said so well just now.

Considering these three choices that Canadians have, how can voters benefit from the system you're proposing?

● (1630)

Mr. Raymond Côté: That's a very good question, Mr. Deltell.

It reminds me that my mother wondered how profitable it was for me to get into politics at the time. I always hid from her the fact that I was spending a lot from my own pocket for my activism. Let's try to keep that between us, if you don't mind.

We need to go well beyond the voting system, if not the method of representation. I would say that what we are seeing now is that the federal and provincial governments are being run by a bunch of "bossy pants". The Prime Minister's Office concentrates a huge amount of power, which is one reason voter behaviour often means they vote based on the party leader.

In 2011, I was aware that it was mainly Jack Layton who had brought me to serve my people. This afternoon, I was eating on a patio on First Avenue, and two ladies stopped to talk to me. They asked if I was going to run for the next. That's the result of my work, my sweat and tears. It's important that I deserve it.

Having said that, voter opinion, as with politicians, will change with the voting system I'm presenting. In terms of knowing how it will minimize the importance of the party leader as a future prime minister, I can't answer beyond a certain point. However, I feel that this could especially help to again develop the representative's role in the House, based on representation. That is one of the very important goals I'm seeking.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Derriennic: I don't know what the answer to your question is. I think, regardless of the voting system, the three criteria you mention play into people's decision. And they don't do it the same way for everything. I don't know if there is a voting system that favours the criteria of the party leader, the program or the local personality—or personalities.

In the case of a riding with three or four seats, local personalities obviously continue to influence voter motivation. Suppose the voting system ends up creating coalition governments. I don't think coalition governments are a calamity, a disaster. Some of the best governed countries in the world today are run by coalition governments. We can know which conditions of coalitions are good and which are bad.

The conditions are bad when voters think they are scandalous. They are good when they correspond to the choice of the voters. Coalition governments are probably the most effective way of reducing the exaggeration of the prime minister's role. If we want governments to be more collegial and less quasi-presidential, as is the tendency these days, coalition governments might be the way to do that.

The Chair: You may ask one last question, Mr. Deltell.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Do you think the federal model should take a cue from the municipal model, where people vote for the councillor, alderperson and mayor?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Derriennic: I think the opposite, actually. Our municipal electoral system isn't good. If we had a parliamentary system at the municipal level… In Quebec City, people cast two votes. They vote for Mayor Boucher, but don't vote for anyone who wants to support her on municipal council because they don't want to direct their two votes to the same choice. Trying to reproduce the municipal electoral system at other levels of government would be a grave mistake.

● (1635)

The Chair: We have to move on to Mrs. Romanado.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the two witnesses and the participants who are with us today.

My first question is for Mr. Côté.

Along the same lines as Mr. Boulerice's questions, I'd like to know with regard to your criteria—"excellent", "very good", "good", and so on—if the result is the median, the average or something else.

Mr. Raymond Côté: You consider the percentage for each cumulative qualifier. You count from the "reject" qualifier, and when you reach 50%, you get the qualifier that is applied to the candidate. When you have the "excellent" criteria, you calculate up to 50%, and you get exactly the same qualifier. That's the beauty of the system, basically.

From there, the candidates are determined primarily by their median grade, in other words, as you see in the examples in my brief, "satisfactory", "acceptable" or "poor". From the majority criterion, you make the determination based on the remaining distribution outside the median grade.

For the 2012 election, you can see that François Hollande came first with the grade "good +". In fact, he won a larger percentage, beyond his median grade, compared to the more disgraceful or less inclusive qualifiers.

It's very simple. As I said to Ms. May, the other advantage of the system is that the winner, or at least the person who will be the representative, is determined in the first round. I personally don't like systems with two or more rounds.

Moreover, when the results are posted, voters can say that they gave a "very good" grade to the person who will represent them and be very happy with that. This aspect of the dynamic will significantly change voter behaviour.

As a future candidate, I'm aware that I have no choice but to tell my fellow Canadians that I will continue in politics. But the observation can be very cruel.

As you can see, a poll conducted in France in 2012 indicated that Marine Le Pen, who came third in the first round under the traditional system, came eighth out of 10 candidates because 47% of voters rejected him. His grade was "poor -". This brings to light to what extent voters want nothing to do with extremist candidates like Marine Le Pen or his father.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: How can we inform the public? What does "excellent" mean? Does it mean that the person will work hard, that the person is educated, already has experience? How will we explain what an "excellent" or "very good" grade means?

Currently, the public simply chooses from the candidates.

What criteria are used to award an "excellent" grade, rather than "very good"?

Canadians will have to be educated on this.

Mr. Raymond Côté: Thank you for the question, which I would describe as "excellent".

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: So, what makes a question "excellent"?

Mr. Raymond Côté: Educating the public won't even be necessary. In reality, there will be what voters determine in their heads. The system is already widely used by household surveys, particularly to describe laundry soap or the quality of the service at their banks. People are very comfortable with it. As part of the experiment in Orsay, researchers were concerned that people would be confused or would take more time to vote, but they didn't take more time and adapted very well.

One of the things I've learned from the work I'm doing in the field, as a politician, is to have great respect for people's intelligence. I think this voting system uses it much more than the others.

● (1640)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Soucy?

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the two witnesses.

Mr. Côté, I won't ask any questions. I, too, believe in the intelligence of Canadians. I can understand that researchers are doing this as part of a pilot project, but I think it would be difficult to apply, given that it is a far too significant cultural change. Voters no longer make a selection; they make a judgment. We aren't there yet. I think we first have to make some progress. In 60 years, we'll say that we're there and that we were talking about it in 2016.

I was surprised when I heard one of your comments. You said that the status quo might be okay were it not for diversity. Could you come back to that statement, which I'm sure has a broader meaning. I guess the word "diversity" refers to something that is fairer, more inclusive and more representative.

Mr. Raymond Côté: Yes.

Thank you, Ms. Soucy.

I have great memories of the 2007 election campaign, during which I helped you out.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Yes, you certainly did.

Mr. Raymond Côté: I must say that we have a choice as a society to make. Essentially, the discussion we're having is really very important, and it seems unfortunate to me that the media is not giving it more attention. After all, you came to Quebec City to meet with us, and I hope the journalists will be present tonight. But that's another matter.

The status quo might be acceptable if that's what the people wanted. A friend told me frankly that she wanted to be able to vote for the winner. If that's what the public wants, we will keep the first past the post system because people know this system and are comfortable with it.

Furthermore, that I'm being described as a revolutionary doesn't surprise me. I'm an extremely patient man, very persistent, too. Quite frankly, it's true that I am appealing to a certain revolution and especially to innovation. That's what I spoke about in my brief. Frankly, Canada has the opportunity to be a leader, to be downright innovative and to adopt a voting system that is truly new and different, compared to what the rest of the world uses. Canada, which has been a leader in the past, is currently lagging behind. It's shuffling along in its comfortable, old slippers. I'm calling on people to toss out their worn-out slippers.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Thank you very much. I still love Canada.

Mr. Derriennic, your conclusion was brief, but a wealth of information. Could you go into more detail about the last two aspects that you raised? The first reminded us that every vote counts—I understood that fully—and the second had to do with the need for a more sincere, rather than strategic, vote.

Could you clarify how moderate proportional representation with preferential voting would enable the parties to be more attentive to the needs of Canadians, and would make the debate easier and less conflictual?

I'd like to hear what you have to say about those two things.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Derriennic: Thank you.

First, the less conflictual effect potentially results, or should result, from the preferential vote given that, these days, the political parties exaggerate the differences between them. They do this all the time. We have proof: six months after an election, there are always commentators who say that the new government is acting just like its predecessor, and is itself doing what it criticized in the past.

Political discourse in our electoral system leads to the exaggeration of differences between the political parties, which isn't good for voter intelligence. I think Canadians are able to understand a lot of nuances in politics and understand that it's better to have a political discourse that's a little less simplistic. That should be an effect of preferential voting, in which we aren't just interested in voters convinced of the party, but where we know that we need to hold a discussion to get the second or third preferences of the others. That is a less conflictual aspect of the political debate.

Second, there's the regional question. The first Canadian political science article I read, when I was still French, was written by Alan Cairns in the 1960s. He explained that our voting system exaggerated the regional conflicts and gave the illusion that the Quebec of the time was fully Liberal and Alberta was fully Conservative, while that wasn't true at all.

So by allowing the representation of ideological minorities in the various provinces and regions, moderate proportional representation would also reduce the level of conflict. In terms of discourse, what strikes me in Canada is how society is much less conflictual than the political discourse. Let's take political discourse, particularly in Quebec, which pits the English, the French, the independantists and so on against each other. When we look at people's behaviour, we see that they are much more understanding and cooperative, even with people with different political views and who speak a different language, than the impression given by the political discourse. It's very unfortunate.

It would be good for us to have a political discussion that is a little more intelligent, a little more nuanced. This new voting system could help with that.

I think I've forgotten the beginning of your question.

● (1645)

The Chair: I'm sorry but, since the six minutes are up, I will have to give Mr. Maguire the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I welcome the two witnesses today, Mr. Côté and Mr. Derriennic. Thank you for putting your views forward and for the models that you have pointed out.

I didn't take the opportunity earlier with the previous two witnesses to say that as a Manitoba member of Parliament, it's a pleasure to be here in Quebec City again. I don't use the opportunity to get here enough. It is a great part of Canada, and my two colleagues here will certainly agree with me.

Mr. Côté, you just mentioned that the status quo is acceptable if that's what people want. Mr. Derriennic, you were talking about time frames and the implementation of a changed system. I would like you both to comment on the timing of changes from the point of view of acceptance by the Canadian public, by Canadian voters. As well, I wonder if you could elaborate more on your comment about the status quo, Mr. Côté.

We've had many witnesses come before us who said that it would take a very clear education process on the options for people to understand what they were voting on in the future. I wonder if you could provide your thoughts on the best way to do that education and how to get that message out to people.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté: Thank you very much, Mr. Maguire.

You and I, we've had some sparring matches in the House.

Your question is quite relevant.

As for the status quo, just because I say it's acceptable doesn't mean I approve of it.

● (1650)

Mr. Larry Maguire: No?

Mr. Raymond Côté: It isn't that I approve of the status quo. On the contrary, I consider our system should be canned, the sooner the better. But obviously the public will be able to express its willingness on the matter. Such an outcome would be disappointing; I would be disappointed. It wouldn't be the first time in my life that I've been disappointed. I've already survived election results.

That said, I've certainly launched a radical position, in the sense that I am definitely making a call for freedom. I am a son of the Quebec region, where we are in love with freedom. It's a blunt call to break the chains of strategic voting, voting oriented to the election winner.

In addition, I'll share another beauty of the system I prefer. I fully endorse a system of proportional representation that would remain to be determined. I think Mr. Derriennic's proposal, aside from preferential voting, which I don't like, is entirely valid and should be studied very seriously.

Applying the majority judgment voting system would require amendments to the details of barely a few sections of Canada's electoral legislation. The Trudeau government could fulfill its promise for the next election. It's really very simple. So I think it could almost be done with just a snap of the fingers.

Mr. Jean-Pierre Derriennic: As for the deadline, I'm not sure. I started with the government's statement of intention to carry out a reform that would apply in the next election. I don't think you will manage to implement a mixed system before the next election, as I feel that we would either have to double the number of members in the House of Commons—an unreasonable task—or revise single-member constituencies, a very complicated endeavour. However, if we were just to regroup them without changing their boundaries, it could be done fairly simply and quickly. That's all I have to say about the time frame.

Concerning the way to make Canadians aware of how important the reform and the entire issue are, I think we have to stop telling them that it's extremely complicated. We have to stop allowing journalists to tell people that it's not interesting, that it's of no interest to them and that it's too complicated anyway, when it's not that complicated. I manage to explain it to first-year university students. I manage to explain it at conferences held in cégeps. And I have tried to explain it here. Those of you who have read my book realize that you have to pay attention, but that it's not that complicated. Understanding this kind of a thing is less complicated than filing your tax returns.

So we have to consider the main options. I will surely look at Mr. Côté's project, which is of great interest to me. I had not previously heard about it. However, it seems to me that, if this project becomes part of the public debate, it will complicate things for so many people. I think my project is less complicated than his, and I am trying to present it. From there, it's up to you to do the work. I am doing the work on a small personal scale. I am not a member of Parliament or a journalist. I don't have a major platform to have my voice heard.

The Chair: So it's not so complicated that we would have to ask our accountant to vote for us.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Mr. DeCourcey, go ahead.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses.

Mr. Côté, I appreciate the point of view you have shared with us this afternoon. My question has to do with the system I believe the NDP favours. I think you used to be an NDP supporter, and you may still be one. The party has its own history, and I believe that it prefers the mixed member proportional system.

What do you think?

Mr. Raymond Côté: I have been an active NDP advocate for 12 years. I have actually been supporting the NDP since I was a teenager, and this is one of the proposals I fully support. We need a proportional representation system. As Mr. Derriennic said—and maybe we should go for a beer together to resolve the issue of the majority judgement system—the system's complications mustn't be a deterrent. Beyond that, representation must be much more proportional. The current system, with its distortions, must be rejected.

The voters have gotten used to the current system, sort of like people get used to shoes that hurt their feet, but they tolerate them because they cannot buy new ones or they think they do not have the means to do so. People are stuck with that and continue to live with it. To add to Mr. Derriennic's comments about complexity, I think that a using a voting system's complexity as an argument creates a false debate. I will totally demolish that argument, and blood will flow.

Take for example a sample of 100 drivers on René-Lévesque Boulevard. A few drivers in that sample definitely won't know that the engine needs oil to operate properly. However, an engine contains a 1,000 moving pieces, and it's terribly complicated. Some people don't know the first thing about mechanics and still drive their car every day. I think that's awful, but what can you do? I won't stop anyone from driving their car. My first car was on three wheels when I picked it up. I had it towed to my parents' home and repaired it to get it on the road. My approach to the voting system is similar. I look at the mechanics of the voting systems, and the status quo seems untenable to me. However, if that is what the voters want, I will accept their decision. It wouldn't be the first time I am uncomfortable in a system I despise.

● (1655)

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Great job with the metaphors

My question is simple. If you think the mixed proportional system is the best option, why did you talk about majority judgment voting today?

Mr. Raymond Côté: I wanted to focus on majority judgment voting because, with my support for mixed proportional systems clearly known, I did not want to reiterate my stance. Thank you for giving me an opportunity to do so.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Professor Derriennic, one of the reasons you proposed the mixed proportional system in your testimony is that it could be implemented as of the next election. If we had no deadline to implement a new system, would you still feel that a switch to other proportional systems—or even a mixed proportional system—could be beneficial?

Mr. Jean-Pierre Derriennic: I don't think that the mixed proportional system has any advantage over what I refer to as moderate proportional representation. I don't believe that maintaining single-member constituencies is better than having constituencies with three, four or five members. I think that voters would like to be able to choose their member and choose to which member they can reach out. I cannot prove that. We would have to apply it to see. I am convinced that local representation is necessary, that local representation comes from a member with a stronghold because they are competing with others in the election. After the election, they are alone in their riding and no longer have rivals. That may be easier for the members, but I don't think it's preferable for Canadians.

I think Canadians would like that. I believe the only justification for the mixed proportional system is having a proportional overall result while maintaining single-member constituencies. It is more complicated and more difficult to do in our current situation. I think that moderate proportional representation is a bit better than the mixed proportional system and much easier to implement. That is my opinion.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Raymond Côté: Mr. DeCourcey, since you like imagery, I must say that I completely agree with Mr. Derriennic on this. This is not so much about whether we prefer chocolate cake or strawberry shortcake, as both are cakes, but rather about whether we will continue to settle for cake. I think that, whether we choose the mixed proportional system or the system Mr. Serriennic is proposing, we will have to settle for one or the other, but it will still be an improvement over the current situation.

The Chair: I want to thank the witnesses. We have had a good....

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: You are trying to say that it's not about choosing between a lager and an ale. I hope we will go celebrate together.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: We are having a very thought-provoking discussion this afternoon. We have learned new things. We were not familiar with those two systems. So far, we have been talking about more known options. You have put forward some new ideas, and we thank you for that. It was a pleasure to see you again, Mr. Côté, and it was a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Derriennic.

We will now move on to our open microphone session. We have eight witnesses. I will explain the procedure to follow for interventions. We have two microphones. Interventions are limited to two minutes, so you have two minutes to speak. This process has worked very well in the other cities we have visited this week.

I will try to always have one speaker by each microphone. That way, even if only one speaker has the floor, the other one will be ready to comment as soon as they are done.

I invite Blanche Paradis and Esther Lapointe to come up to the microphones.

We will begin with Ms. Paradis' two-minute intervention.

● (1700)

Ms. Blanche Paradis (As an Individual): Thank you.

I assume we are all here so that we could some day have a House of Commons that is representative of the Canadian population—in other words, representative of its diversity in terms of gender equality and fair representation of immigrants. As for first nations, I will not speak on their behalf. It's up to them to say what they want. The objective is also to establish a House of Commons whose political persuasions are representative of various parties and political opinions in Canada. It must also be representative of people who live in various territories—local territories—but also in major regions such as the provinces. The current voting system has demonstrated its inability to provide us with such representation. That much is clear.

Around the world, 108 out of the 195 countries have adopted a proportional system, in one form or another. Of those, 58 countries have, in addition to the voting system—as the voting system does not resolve everything—implemented institutional mechanisms to promote gender equality and attract diverse people.

So the voting system issue is an important one, but it will not bring equality and representation to the House of Commons if we don't add institutional mechanisms.

● (1705)

The Chair: Very well. Thank you very much, Ms. Paradis.

Ms. Blanche Paradis: Is that all? That's too bad.

The Chair: You are echoing what we have heard elsewhere in the country, and it's very thought-provoking. Thank you very much.

Before we move on to Ms. Lapointe, I invite Jean Rousseau to come up to the other microphone.

Ms. Lapointe, you have the floor.

Ms. Esther Lapointe (As an Individual): I will introduce myself. I am the director of the Groupe femmes, politique et démocratie, and I am appearing here today on behalf of my organization. Our mission is to educate all Canadians on citizen participation, but especially the women we provide with guidance and support so that their numbers in position of power can grow.

Equal representation trumps everything else in a democracy. It embodies political pluralism, cultural diversity, as well as various peoples' living conditions.

I would like to remind the committee members of what the female situation is at the federal level. Women obtained the right to vote in 1918 and eligibility rights in 1920. Today, 95 years later, 26% of House of Commons members are women.

I have done calculations based on statistics provided on the House website. If we compare the percentages, the proportion of women has not even increased by 1% per election.

I continued with my calculations. I have made some forecasts. It would take 24 elections approximately every four years—so an entire century—to achieve gender equality in the House of Commons. That would take us to 2109.

Last October, after the election, we issued a press release to report on the situation, to celebrate certain advancements, including a gender-balanced cabinet. However, as that is not included in legislation, it will disappear, as the case was in Quebec, where we have already gone through a similar situation.

I would like to bring your attention to the fact that Canada ranked 46th, in October 2015, in terms of women's presence in Parliament and that, so far, as Ms. Romanado said earlier, we rank 64th.

So the message we want to communicate today is that we should find ways or add mechanisms in order to redress that inequality. Women account for 50.4% of the Canadian population. It's a matter of democracy.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Lapointe.

I invite Guy Boivin to come up to the microphone.

We will now move on to a former colleague who was a member for Compton, right?

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group): Yes, I was a member for Compton—Stanstead.

The Chair: Yes, you were a member for Compton—Stanstead.

Go ahead, Mr. Rousseau.

Mr. Jean Rousseau: Thank you very much.

I have two comments. I would have really liked for you to come to Estrie, as that region has some particularities. We have two major universities with applied political science faculties. So the exchanges could have been really interesting, both with students and with faculty professors.

Another particularity of the Estrie region is that it is the forth-largest hub of multicultural integration in Quebec. There are over 40 multiethnic communities in Estrie. Those people are currently somewhat lost in the voting system, and they definitely don't feel well represented.

The anglophone presence is another consideration. Anglophones account for nearly 25% of our population, and 50% of municipalities are anglophone in some of the regions. Those people want to have their rights protected, and I completely understand that. They basically want their vote to carry weight. Numbers have been put forward today that suggest that, if a government is elected with 38% of popular support and the participation rate is 60%, actual support is about 20%, and it's even lower if we take into account members elected with a true majority.

Those communities want to be properly represented. Regardless of the form of proportional representation selected, what matters the most is the weight of the vote. Do Canadians ensure representation in the House of Commons by placing a small cross at the bottom of the ballot? That is what is important.

For decades, when a party came to power, it governed based on its economic and ideological doctrines. So people who have voted for other parties and represent 60%, 70% or 80% of the total, do not feel represented, do not feel protected and, most importantly, do not feel like they have a voice in the House of Commons.

Thank you very much.

● (1710)

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

Mr. Berthelot, could you approach the microphone?

We will continue with Mr. Boivin.

Mr. Guy Boivin (As an Individual): Thank you for consulting us.

Unless I am mistaken, you seem to be proposing a reform that leans toward a mixed proportional system. But wouldn't that be like applying a bandage on a gangrenous leg? Doesn't the reform open the door to numerous potential changes in order to resolve a lot of existing problems?

We currently have a British system in place that has never really represented the popular will. The current system is a dictatorship where the leader imposes the party line and where the members, mainly the backbenchers, become useful window dressing much more in the ridings than in the House of Commons.

Quebeckers like to identify with their members of Parliament, who sort of become their spokespersons without a political party affiliation. I propose that provinces be divided based on their surface area. Two members without affiliation to a political party per riding would be elected for a five-year period—one man and one woman, for true equality in the House of Commons. Ridings would never be orphaned again, and we would never have to start from scratch because everything was tossed away after a general election or when a member changes.

In parallel, a party leader would be elected for a five-year period, in a general election, to become prime minister, select his ministers, run the country and convince the House of Commons to change laws and regulations. The ballot would be split into two sections. In the first section, Canadians would be asked to select a party and, in the second section, two or three party leaders would be proposed. Voters would have to check the name of their preferred leader for each party. Once the votes were tallied, the chief electoral officer would announce the winning party based on the Canadian vote total. For the victorious party, the chief electoral officer would announce the winning leader based on the vote total across the country.

In conclusion, "one person, one vote" is not a democratic formula. A village will always have more elected representatives than more sparsely populated rural areas, so the village ideas will always be first.

Imposing financial penalties so that parties would increase their female representation would not resolve the issue of gender equality.

Furthermore, asking that visible minorities be represented opens up a Pandora's box. If a black person obtains an appointment, does the same have to be done for an Asian person, a disabled individual, a Muslim, a Jew, a Sikh, an aboriginal, a transgender person, a young person? Where do we draw the line in terms of minority representation?

The age of 18 for vote eligibility is when most people are capable of understanding the options available and their consequences. Canada is a country where freedom is a priority. No one should be forced to vote.

In closing, the government should require the municipalities to have a permanent voters list, as they can easily keep track of who lives on their territory. All federal, provincial and territorial services should be connected to that list, so that it would always be as accurate as possible. People would no longer have to contact several services for a change of address. They would inform the municipality, and all the services would receive the information, as it is done in Germany.

The Chair: Thank you very much for touching on all those aspects, Mr. Boivin. We are very grateful. Your comments were pretty thorough.

Mr. Guy Boivin: It only took me two minutes.

The Chair: It was a bit longer than that, but it was worth it. Thank you.

I would like to invite Mr. Saucier to take the second microphone.

Mr. Berthelot, you may deliver your comments.

Mr. Maurice Berthelot (As an Individual): Good afternoon.

I would have liked to hear about mandatory voting, but it has not been discussed.

I represent the 7 million Canadians who voted and do not have a representative in Parliament. I am here for my children and my grandchildren.

We have a democratic deficit in Canada because young people are discouraged by voting. Something has to be done to encourage people to vote. That is our biggest responsibility as citizens. The status quo—in terms of politics, the economy and the environment— is no longer acceptable. We are at a crossroads in human history. We have to do something to make our politicians accountable and to reduce conflict in Parliament. Politics is the art of compromise, but there has been no compromise, or very little of it. It is your responsibility to improve things.

Thank you very much.

● (1715)

The Chair: Thank you.

I see that Gerrit Dogger is here.

I now give the floor to Nicolas Saucier.

Mr. Nicolas Saucier (As an Individual): Good afternoon.

My name is Nicolas Saucier, and I am from Quebec City. I'm a former student of Mr. Derriennic's, and I was employed by the House of Commons through three Parliaments. So I am pretty knowledgeable on these issues.

I was always told that I had been born in a democratic country, but my life experience shows me that this is not the case, as no government has been elected with 50% of the votes since I have had the right to vote. Since I could vote, 1988 was when the elected government had the largest percentage of votes, with 43%. So 57% of people had voted against that government. The worst year was 2006, with 34.5% of the votes, meaning that 65.5%, or two-thirds of the population, had not voted for the elected government. Since my birth, only once, in 1984, did the elected government garner the majority of the votes, with 50.03%, by the skin of its teeth. Before that, in 1958, the figure was 53.6%. So 26 years passed between those two elections where the government was elected with over 50% of votes, and the gap will be 35 years if we assume that the next government will be elected with more than 50% of the votes in the next election.

That's not so democratic. My concern is that the two main parties have been very content with this non-democratic system for a long time. I am worried. I applaud the Liberal Party's effort in proposing this change. I am very worried to see that the Conservative Party has its foot on the brake and is riding almost on the shoulder in order to slow things down.

I have been hearing the nirvana argument a lot. I am a communications professor at the university. In argumentation courses, we hear fallacious arguments, such as the nirvana one. According to that argument, if the proposed solution is not perfect, it must be rejected. That's easy. You find a flaw in a proposed solution and you eliminate it because it is flawed. That's like seeing the mote in your eye when you have a beam in there, and I would even say on your forehead.

We have a system that has not been democratic for years, and people are splitting hairs by saying that all this may not be ideal. Any of the proposed solutions would be preferable to the status quo or the current system.

In closing, I wonder whether any of the members around this table were elected by more than 50% of the voters in their riding.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: I was, and what's more, I am a Conservative.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Nicolas Saucier: That's great. I congratulate you because, at the very least, you are representative.

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

I would like to invite Richard Domm to come up to the second microphone.

We will now hear from Gerrit Dogger.

Mr. Gerrit Dogger (As an Individual): Thank you.

When we are trying to define what democracy is and to separate highly democratic states from less democratic ones, we first look at the representation system a state has chosen for itself. Therefore, the key criterion for assessing the democratic nature of that representa-tion system is the representativeness of Parliament relative to its voters. Although Canada has a reputation as a model democracy, a cursory review of its democratic institutions indicates that it does not pass the most basic test. Our voting system is not representative. Each election is another reminder of that. The composition of our Parliament does not reflect voting intentions. In the last two federal elections, the government secured an absolute majority with about 40% of the voting intentions.

Canada has undergone major changes over the course of its democratization. It has become a diverse society where the expression of numerous and differing opinions is not only accepted, but actually encouraged, and I can attest to this as an immigrant. However, it is extremely unfortunate that the diversity of opinions that is our strength is not represented in Parliament. Let's look at a simple example. In the 2015 general election, only Liberal candidates were elected in the Atlantic provinces. All the citizens of that province with no ties to the Liberal Party were ignored.

The problems with the current voting system can be summarized in five points. There are probably more, but let's keep it to five.

First, the party elected by a minority of citizens can govern as a majority, as the previous speaker had pointed out by going over past elections.

Second, the system is unstable, as minor changes in voting intentions—variations by a few percentage points, for example—can result in major changes in representation. Once again, in the Maritime provinces, the Liberals went from a few seats in 2011 to all the seats in 2015. Did everyone in the Maritimes become a Liberal? I don't think so.

Third, the voting in each riding is limited to the candidates representing parties. If no Green Party candidate comes forward in the riding, citizens cannot vote for that party. The situation does not apply only to the Green Party, but to all unrepresented parties.

Forth, if a region votes for the wrong candidate, it is not represented within government.

Fifth, a vote consists of three decisions: the election of the government leader, of a party and of a member of Parliament. People generally like to think that they are voting for a member first, but in reality, few citizens know the name of their member or the candidate they are voting for. However, if we are voting for a member, why do we have parties, and why does the number of elected members automatically translate to the prime minister's election?

Similarly, the benefits of the proportional system can be summarized in five points. First, it truly represents the voting intention in Parliament. Second, it fosters a diversity of views and opinions in Parliament. Third, it is more stable for the parties, and their representation in Parliament is more stable. Between 2011 and 2015, we have seen Quebec go from orange to mostly red.

●(1720)

The Chair: Can you wrap it up, Mr. Dogger?

Mr. Gerrit Dogger: Yes, I am getting there. I'm almost done, Mr. Chair.

Contrary to the ideas expressed, the proportional system, such as the one in the Netherlands and Italy, is just as stable as our current system, and all voters can vote for the party that represents them best.

If the system does not change sufficiently to represent my ideas, I personally don't see why I would continue to vote and legitimize a system that no longer has any legitimacy.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now go to Richard Domm.

I would ask Samuel Moisan-Domm to come up to the microphone.

Go ahead, Mr. Domm.

Mr. Richard Domm (As an Individual): Good afternoon.

I want to begin by thanking the Liberal Party for questioning the current system we use to elect members. When I think of the current voting system, I compare it to the evolution of human beings who came from the jungle, then had kings and queens, and finally adopted the first-the-post system, which is a kind of a dictatorship.

I congratulate Mr. Deltell, who was elected with over 50% of votes, but what about the 40% of voters who are not represented? I am favourable to a proportional system, and I like the one Germany uses.

I want to mention that I was a candidate of the Green Party of Canada three times and of the Green Party of Quebec a few times. I ran every time knowing that I would not be elected, but I did so to give Canadians an opportunity to express themselves. I would like us to someday get to a proportional system where the one individual out of 20 who voted for the Green Party would be heard by the government. That is currently not the case.

To give you an idea of how much of a democrat I am, while I was running as a Green Party candidate, I put up signs for the NDP's Raymond Côté, and I would have become a member of all the parties, as that seemed important to me.

Mr. Raymond Côté: Oh, oh!

Mr. Richard Domm: He's laughing because it's true.

Yes, he was elected, and I'm happy about that.

The Chair: He is laughing with glee.

Mr. Richard Domm: The NDP's Mr. Cullen suggested trying the proportional system and potentially holding a referendum afterwards.

It's sort of like someone saying that they have always had the same cake and that, even if it was good, there is better. Let us taste what is better—a proportional system. A number of countries that have adopted proportional systems have progressed. I think that it is time for Canada to progress, as well.

In closing, we often talk about voters' intelligence. They do not lack intelligence, but they lack time. Ask my mother; ask the people around you. They are concerned about democracy, but they don't take the time to look into all the possibilities. It's complicated. They won't do it any more than they will learn to repair their car or a guitar.

As elected representatives, you have the responsibility to act wisely, with the future in mind, in order to represent voters who, like myself, run for office and have never been elected. It's all the same to me, but I want to be heard.

● (1725)

The Chair: Thank you very much. You have been heard.

Mr. Moisan-Domm, go ahead.

Mr. Samuel Moisan-Domm (As an Individual): I am my father's son; I think that much is obvious.

The Chair: We will hear from only one person per family.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I'm kidding. Go ahead.

Mr. Samuel Moisan-Domm: I won't repeat the arguments that have already been put forward in favour of the mixed proportional voting system, in favour of mandatory voting, in favour Internet voting, and so on. I think that is progressive and would be a sign of progress.

I would like to establish a parallel between our society and our voting system. For example, all students in a class have the right to speak and express themselves. At work, when I participate in a team meeting, all of us on the team have the right to express ourselves, since every opinion has value.

It's the same thing in Parliament. There are some 338 members, and each of you has the right to express yourself, as all opinions have value, even if their respective weight may differ. Everyone can speak out. Ultimately, the voting system should make the same thing possible. A person should be able to express their opinion, whether they have the support of 5%, 15% or 40% of the population.

I would like to establish another parallel. In a group, there's often one individual who is more shy and will talk less. In general, an attempt is made to get that person to talk, to express themselves even though they don't really want to. It's the same when it comes to the voting system. It is important to hear from everyone with an opinion, even if the individual talks less.

Conversely, some people may monopolize the conversation and talk a bit too much. We are willing to hear them out, but not all the time, as we also want to hear from others. It's the same thing in a democratic system. If a party has 40% of the votes, we don't want it to account for 65% of the talk in Parliament, to impede the conversation, to dominate the media and to do only what it wants.

I think it is important for everyone's voice to be represented, so as to reflect daily social mores in school, in university, at work and in Parliament. It is important for everyone's voice to be represented, for no one to dominate the conversation and for everyone to be able to express themselves.

The Chair: Thank you very much, sir.

I thank all of you for your excellent interventions.

The committee is going to suspend proceedings for approximately 45 minutes. We will come back at 6:15 to continue our open mike session. Another member of the public wishes to take the floor. We will hear other witnesses afterwards.

An hon. member: I am extremely disappointed. Only two women have spoken, and after two minutes, in a very strict manner, you interrupted the first woman who spoke, whereas you allowed several male speakers to go on for three or three and a half minutes.

The Chair: Do you want to speak on this?

An hon. member: I am not ready to speak.

The Chair: Very well.

An hon. member: I repeat that I am disappointed that you cut off the lady's intervention.

The Chair: I thought she was finished, but if she wants to add a comment, she may do so.

We are trying to show flexibility. I don't want to cut anyone off, but there was a break and I thought she had finished.

Did you want to speak on anything else...

Ms. Blanche Paradis: No, I had not finished.

The Chair: I apologize.

Ms. Blanche Paradis: I had not finished, and I even said that I found it unfortunate that I was being cut off.

I want to emphasize the fact that the voting system is not the only issue that will allow us to have a more representative House of Commons. To achieve that, we have to enact laws containing institutional mechanisms that will allow for greater representativity.

I also want to stress that political parties are going to have to take matters in hand and adopt measures that will allow more women to stand as candidates and to get elected. Moreover, Parliament should oblige political parties to propose action plans to bring the issue of equal candidacies to the fore, that is to say that at least 50% of candidates should be women. We could then have a truly representative House of Commons, with gender parity.

●(1730)

The Chair: In fact, as we speak, there is a bill before Parliament to offer incentives to the political parties that achieve parity.

Ms. Blanche Paradis: Incentives are nice, but coercion is going to be necessary. It's unfortunate, but it is going to be necessary.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your intervention.

●(1730)

_____ (Pause) _____

●(1820)

The Chair: We will officially reconvene the meeting.

This evening, we welcome two witnesses to the committee: Mr. Éric Montigny, Executive Director, Research Chair on Democracy and Parliamentary Institutions, Department of Political Science, Université Laval, and Mr. Bernard Colas, Attorney, CMKZ LLP, former commissioner of the Law Commission of Canada.

I don't know if you were here during the previous testimony, but witnesses have 10 minutes to present their views. This is followed by a question period during which each member has five minutes to speak with the witnesses. Those five minutes include both questions and answers.

We will begin with you, Mr. Montigny. You have the floor.

●(1825)

Mr. Éric Montigny (Executive Director, Research Chair on Democracy and Parliamentary Institutions, Department of political science, Université Laval, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I first want to thank you for this invitation to appear before the committee. The work you do is very relevant, and essential to the vitality of Canadian democracy. It is all the more important because if it leads to a reform of the voting system, it may have a very marked effect on the institutions of other Canadian bodies, because of the tendency of institutions to mimic each other. The choice your committee makes will no doubt have repercussions beyond the federal Parliament.

I thank you for this opportunity to share my views with you. I am not here tonight to discuss my favourite voting system or to share my personal preferences. My objective is mainly to put forward certain elements from the scientific literature concerning voting systems.

In 2015, there was a symposium on democratic vitality in Canada and in Quebec. It was organized by the chair I hold, in cooperation with Elections Canada and the Chief Electoral Officer of Quebec. In the context of that symposium, we surveyed Quebeckers to find out whether they supported certain electoral reforms. This poll was not done Canada-wide; it was only taken in Quebec.

This survey allowed us to see that the population would like to see a change in the voting system. According to the CROP poll done in 2015, around 70% of the population is in favour of some form of proportionality, should the voting system be reformed.

The strongest argument for a reform of the voting system is representation. We want to reduce the distortions that are inherent in the current voting system. There are two factors that could improve representation.

First of all, from a mathematical point of view, this would reduce distortions, stop penalizing the smaller parties, and stop benefiting the party that comes first in a disproportionate way. In the single member plurality or first-past-the-post system, there is a benefit for the one that comes first that encourages distortions. In Quebec, in the fairly recent past, on some occasions political parties that had the most votes found themselves in the opposition.

The second factor is ideological. The various currents that are present in society should also be represented in Parliament. This is why we have seen the integration of a type of proportionality in voting system reforms throughout the world. However, I would add that one of the most frequent arguments raised to maintain the current system is the connection between the member and his or her riding.

A study was done in 2011 which appeared in a scientific publication in 2014. This was a survey of Quebec parliamentarians who sit in the Quebec National Assembly or in the House of Commons in Ottawa. Among other things, they were asked about their perception of citizens' expectations with regard to their work as parliamentarians, either their work in their ridings, or as lawmakers and comptrollers of government. The vast majority of parliamentarians said that they believed that citizens expect them to be highly effective representatives of their riding, that they be very generous with their time, that they be very present on the ground, and that they work hard on resolving the individual problems of the constituents in their riding.

The objective was to see whether Quebeckers' expectations were in keeping with members' perceptions about them. To our great surprise, we discovered that there was a large discrepancy. These were not at all the main expectations of the Quebec citizens who were surveyed in a CROP poll.

The main expectation citizens had of their MP was not that he represent their riding. What they wished for first and foremost was that he be a good comptroller of government, whatever his political affiliation. Citizens want their MPs, even if they are ministers, to be good stewards of government activity and question government policies above and beyond the party line.

● (1830)

So the argument regarding the connection between the member and his riding has to be nuanced. Currently, there is a gap between what the Quebec population expects and the perception members have of the population's expectations. Of course there may be regional variations. In less urban areas, the connection to the member of the riding is considered more important. Be that as it may, there's an important gap in perceptions.

The other element I want to emphasize is whether or not it is legitimate for Parliament to act on this. There is a debate on whether the voting system is a constitutional matter and whether it necessitates a major change. My interpretation, both in my teaching and in my analysis of the constitution, is that there is no constitutional convention governing the voting system. It is true that an electoral law has a particular status and demands that there be a consensus before it is changed. But a referendum on reforming the electoral system would be first and foremost political and not legal. It falls under the purview of the political actors.

I would now like to discuss the limits of electoral reform that would affect the voting system. According to the scientific literature, it is a mistake to think that changing the voting system would increase electoral participation. In fact, the growth in the participation rate that is related to the voting system is marginal. We are talking about a few percentage points. I would add that it is not probable that such a change on its own would diminish mistrust or the cynicism people feel toward the political class.

The Eurobarometer, which measures data within the European Union, has an index on the decline in the level of trust citizens have in parliaments. In Europe, voting systems are often different from the one in Canada. In Germany and the Scandinavian countries, proportionality has been integrated into the systems. According to Eurobarometer data, for about 10 years there has been a decline in the level of trust in all parliaments, whatever the voting system used. The crisis of confidence does not only affect parliamentary systems that use the first-past-the-post system. The crisis of confidence regarding elected representatives and parliamentarians transcends the voting systems.

Be that as it may, a reform of the voting system has to be seen as one measure among others to restore trust in our institutions and elected representatives. In our symposium we discussed partisan discipline. For instance, how can parties make party discipline less rigid? Paradoxically, it is stricter in Quebec than in Ottawa, and it is stricter in Ottawa than in London. There would even be an advantage to reviewing the evolution of the British political system, to see how the members of the different political parties benefit from greater leeway than elected representatives in Ottawa.

Gender parity is also an issue. The poll that was done showed that there is support for that parity. If the committee would like to see it, I could table a copy of the poll that was done at the time.

The Chair: Yes, please. That would be useful.

Mr. Éric Montigny: Very well.

In closing, I would say that we have to see the voting system in context. It cannot be seen in isolation as the sole factor that would restore trust. We have to see it first of all as a factor that would attenuate the current distortions. There is no perfect voting system. Each voting system has its strengths and its weaknesses.

I hope that as parliamentarians, you will work on finding a consensus for the greater good of citizens, above all.

I thank you and am available to answer all of your questions.

● (1835)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Montigny.

I now give the floor to Mr. Colas for 10 minutes.

Mr. Bernard Colas (Attorney, CMKZ LLP, former Commissioner of the Law Commission of Canada, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank you very much for this invitation to appear before the committee. It is an honour to have this opportunity to speak before you.

I understand that I was invited as a citizen, but especially as a former commissioner of the Law Commission of Canada who took part in preparing a report on the reform of the electoral system. I am going to say a few words on the Law Commission of Canada before talking about the content of that report.

The commission was created by an act of Parliament to provide independent advice on the improvement, modernization and reform of the law in Canada. We worked on several topics such as mediation, and we produced reports on topics such as security, intellectual property and family law. We also produced a series of reports on indigenous peoples. These reports were tabled in Parliament so that it could be made aware of them and could implement our recommendations, or not. It was amazing for a team made up of independent persons to be able to contribute to the democratic debate.

Unfortunately, the Treasury Board of the previous government put an end to the Law Commission of Canada by eliminating its budget. May I take advantage of this forum to encourage you strongly to restore the Law Commission of Canada. Those among you who are older will remember that first of all there was the Law Reform Commission of Canada, which then evolved into a different form as the Law Commission of Canada. I think this was a good model, but you need to find one that can withstand the tampering that can occur from one government to the next, and which our voting system may in fact be responsible for.

I will now address the voting system. In connection with electoral matters, the Law Commission of Canada examined the institutions that define our legal concepts and enact our laws. The issue was whether a system that embodied the values of the 19th century still embodied the values of the 21st century. Like you, I listened to the comments of citizens who testified in this regard, and the Law Commission of Canada also heard their criticisms. They were the same in 2002 and 2004. And so I have a good understanding of the situation you are faced with. It was in response to those criticisms of the democratic process that the commission began that project. It saw that there was a level of discomfort with our current system. Since 1945, the results of federal elections have been out of balance, in that they favour the parties whose electors are concentrated in certain ridings, as compared to the parties whose electors are spread out throughout the country.

The commission first produced a consultation paper after having met with experts, such as professors. Afterwards, we held discussions for two years, based on that document. We consulted citizens and experts, and when we had questions about certain aspects, we launched other studies. Two years later, we had a 230-page report containing 23 recommendations, which in our opinion are the best replies to the various complaints you've heard earlier and have probably heard in the course of your work. This work was funded by the electorate. The report was entitled: Voting counts: Electoral Reform for Canada.

We had to identify values upon which to base reforms. We identified a certain number of values, and measured the various political systems in order to determine those that best embodied preeminent values. You will not be surprised to learn that the electoral system should be fair, which means that the number of MPs from each party should correspond to the percentage of votes it receives; that Parliament should better reflect the constitution of society, that is to say include women, Aboriginal people and minorities, and that parliaments should encourage the expression of a wide range of points of view. In addition, people still feel it is important to have a certain relationship with their local member of Parliament, although that value is evolving.

We identified other values such as the need to have an effective government that can manage the state, the need for a responsible government, the need for an effective opposition, and ensuring that each vote counts and that each region is represented in decision-making processes, and that the decisions reflect a variety of viewpoints and are more inclusive. I have listed them rather quickly, but I encourage you strongly to read the document. They are better explained in it.

● (1840)

The system which in our opinion best reflects these values of the 21st century is a proportional representation system under which 66% of members would be elected as they are now, and 33% would be elected from lists. This 33% would allow us to correct the imbalance created by the current system. The idea was to tell the population that we had found a solution. It consisted in offering two votes: one to elect a member in a riding, and another, on the basis of lists, to elect a representative. Of course, these lists would allow us to encourage the inclusion of women, aboriginal people and members of minorities.

The cost of implementing such a measure could be limited by increasing the size of certain ridings in order to limit the number of members elected in them, and by increasing the number of representatives chosen from the lists.

I encourage you again to read the report, because various problems are raised in it. We wondered, for instance, if a member elected from a list should have the same status as a member elected in a riding. Many other questions were raised and we answered them in the report.

In fact, I understand that reforming the electoral system is not easy. You are facing quite a challenge. At the time, I spoke with the Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians, and I felt a certain resistance on their part. Many of those who were elected in a certain system feel that if this worked for them, why change the system that allowed them to get elected? So you are going to have to deal with the political arm that designs the system, but also with the politicians who work with it.

The system we proposed is in my opinion easy to sell to the population. There would be two methods: 66% of members would be elected in ridings and 33% would be chosen from lists. In my opinion, that proportion would correct the imbalance and reflect the values of the 21st century.

I will stop here, and I would be pleased to answer your questions.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Colas.

We will begin with Ms. Sahota, who has five minutes.

[English]

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you.

My first question will be for Mr. Colas.

It's very nice to hear that you understand what we're going through on this committee, because very few probably do.

The Law Commission came up with the MMP recommendation. Yesterday we heard some witnesses during our open mike night in Toronto propose different ideas that use that system but make it a little bit simpler. You would have the same ballots and you would vote for your candidate. I think in one of the systems they said you'd add 33% more seats, or something like that, and maybe make the ridings a little bit bigger than they are right now so that you're not changing the number of members as much.

Basically you would elect the members in the riding, and then to create some proportionality you would simply take the people who did the best in certain ridings and who were already candidates. Those people would then get placed according to the proportional vote.

What is your opinion? Did you have similar proposals that didn't use lists created by the party? We are also hearing about some hesitation in connection with lists.

● (1845)

Mr. Bernard Colas: There are two points here.

The first one is that sometimes a voter will vote strategically. In accordance with our current system, there are strategies—who do I hate, who do I like? With the two votes, you may have to keep on being strategic, but you may also have the chance to elect the one you like. This is why you need the two votes.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Yesterday we heard from a professor that strategic voting only accounts for 3% of the vote. Once people know this new system is in place, do you think people would stop thinking as strategically, supposing that 3% is a true number, because they would know that even if they vote according to their hearts, the vote would end up affecting something?

Mr. Bernard Colas: First, I don't know if the 3% is true. Second, I don't know, because we'd have to ask the voters of New Zealand, Scotland, and other places where they have this possibility.

In answer to your other question, there is a little nuance in the report. We suggest having a flexible list whereby you either vote for the list of the party or you select a specific person on that list.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Mr. Montigny, you talked a lot about trust. You said that trust is declining in Europe, but I didn't quite catch how Canadians feel about their parliamentarians. Is there a higher level of trust, or an even lower level?

Mr. Éric Montigny: It follows the same pattern, I'm sorry to say.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: That's okay. We want to know the truth.

At the end you said that we need to reduce distortions and see the voting system as a whole. You also talked about a gender issue, but you didn't really get to talk about the gender issue very much. You talked about party rigidness and then you got to gender, but you weren't able to complete your thoughts on gender. I would like to know a little more.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Éric Montigny: I will give you some information about the poll I referred to.

Concerning the 3% of strategic votes, may I specify that there is no consensus in the community as to the importance of those votes. In short, I would not give too much weight to that 3%.

The participants in the poll were asked whether they were in favour or not of forcing political parties to present as many female as male candidates in elections, or in other words, of having a mechanism that would constrain or even penalize political parties in this regard. Fifty-nine per cent of respondents were in favour of such a measure, 17% of those were very much in favour of it, and 42% were somewhat in favour. So not many people were very much in

favour of this measure, but there is a favourable bias toward measures that would force parties to aim for parity.

The Chair: Ms. Sahota, you have 15 or 20 seconds left.

[*English*]

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I know you advocated changing a lot of things, and that would be one of them. How about if we are just moving towards a different voting system? If we had a new system tomorrow, what impact would that have on gender issues?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Éric Montigny: In the current system, it is clear that the leaders of certain parties have less power over nominations because of conventions in ridings. If proportionality or the use of a list were adopted, party leaders would then have more freedom to choose candidates that would offset an imbalance in the whole pool of candidacies.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Rayes, you have the floor.

Mr. Alain Rayes: I thank the two witnesses for being here with us today.

Mr. Colas, you referred to the people you heard in Winnipeg, Regina and Toronto. Yesterday in Toronto, there were a lot of people who said, generally speaking, the things you already heard. I know that there are people who are listening to us live, and there are surely some who will attack me on Twitter after I've said what I'm going to say.

We just had an election campaign that lasted 78 days. I can swear on the Bible that no citizen spoke to me about electoral reform. According to a recent poll, this issue is of interest to 3% of the electorate. There are certain people who have an interest in electoral reform, but I doubt that they represent the majority of the population.

I am not at all convinced that people are concerned by the local representation of their MP. In your model, which I have not yet had the opportunity to look at, you talk about a two-thirds, one-third ratio. Are you suggesting that we increase the size of ridings in order to decrease the number of members on the list, or that we add members in order to maintain the size of the ridings?

There are 40 municipalities in my riding. Given that I spend two thirds of the year in Ottawa, without taking into account committee work and other activities, I find it hard to imagine that I could still serve my electors well if my riding were made bigger. Citizens often tell me that they would like to vote for me, but that they do not want to vote for my leader or for my party, which also implies that they object to the party's program. In my opinion, electors will vote either for the leader, the candidate, or the program and the party. I think that electors have a global view of the list of proposals.

● (1850)

Mr. Bernard Colas: Thank you for the question.

Your electors will be happy to hear that when they want to vote for you and not for your leader, they will be able to do so because there would be two votes to express. If they like the leader of the party, all the better, but if they do not like him, they can find another or vote for no one. By having two votes, they may choose one or the other. That is the first point.

The other point that makes the project acceptable is that it would not increase costs. If we do not increase costs, we will have to increase the size of ridings. In large cities, that is not too serious, but it will be more complicated in rural areas. In addition, we would establish lists. There would be two zones in Quebec, three in Ontario and one in the other provinces. The lists would be drawn up by province, and we would not have to effect constitutional reform, nor hold a referendum.

Since there are not enough members from Prince Edward Island, we would have to add a member from the list. In Quebec, there is the Montreal region. The system is flexible and you could find other solutions. In the Montreal region there would be additional candidates on the list. You would not be the only one to have to travel through your riding to encourage people to vote. You would do so, as would the people on the list. The same thing applies to the other regions. There would be lists based on our geography. The objective is also to help the electors who want to vote for members they know, who would either represent the riding or appear on a list.

Mr. Alain Rayes: I see.

What do you have to say about that, Mr. Montigny?

Mr. Éric Montigny: I have two things to say.

First, there is certainly a selection bias. Citizens who go to see an MP have a connection to him. People who come to see you have a connection to you as their MP. It is an important connection. However, in our measures, we also took into account those for whom that is not the case. That is the first point I wanted to make.

There is another point to be considered. You raised a good point concerning the size of federal ridings. We did some research on the work done by members in the ridings. Our initial hypothesis was that the members of the Quebec National Assembly spent more time than federal members in their ridings, because of Quebec government jurisdictions. We were surprised to learn that the federal members spent more time in their ridings in Quebec than the Quebec MNAs, despite the distance between Quebec and the Parliament in Ottawa.

The Chair: Thank you.

I now give the floor to Mr. Boulerice.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you very much, Mr. Colas and Professor Montigny, for being with us today. Your comments are very interesting.

People often say that if we include a certain form of proportionality via the two ballots, that will complicate the system. I am counting on the voters' intelligence. Three-quarters of the OECD countries have a proportional system, and I don't see why Quebeckers or Canadians would be more confused by that than others.

I want to mention Scotland, where there are four levels of government. Each one of those levels has a different voting system.

The Scots must be geniuses, because they manage to cope with all of that.

In 2004, after two years of studies and work, the Law Commission of Canada chose a mixed proportional representation system based on the Scottish model. Why did you choose the Scottish model rather than the New Zealand or Irish model? I would like to hear your point of view on that. Could you also explain the difference between closed lists and open lists?

● (1855)

Mr. Bernard Colas: We basically adapted that a little to the current system and to Canadian reality because we have a huge territory. That is why we chose the 66-33 ratio.

In Germany it is 50-50. In Scotland it is about 57-43. We chose a proportion that better reflected our vast territory.

As for the open and closed lists, the four commissioners came from various parts of the country. We wondered if we should decide on that or not. We thought that for the good of the report, we should make a decision and indicate that we were not in favour of a closed list, as this could generate mistrust on the part of citizens toward the political parties, and even lead people to think that the same people could fix the list, and so on. They could either vote for a list and trust the party, or vote for one of the candidates on the list. However, for a candidate to change rankings, he or she had to get at least 8% of the votes.

We did not choose a completely open list, because people pointed out that they would all be from the same party and would be competing fiercely with each other to change positions on the list. So we stopped the debate and presented that system. There is an example in the report. On your ballot, you can vote either for the list as it stands, or to change the list.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: If we adopted a system combining local members—such as the current one—and candidates from a list, I really like the idea that we would have provincial or sub-regional lists for Quebec and Ontario.

What do you think of having two categories of members, those elected locally, and those who would be elected from a list? People may sometimes feel that members on a list live in the ether, and sort of float above the electors. But in fact, they have offices in cities or towns and also meet people.

I also know that the perception of these members of Parliament changes according to the country and people's experience. In Germany, an MP is an MP. In other places, however, things are more nuanced than that.

Mr. Colas and Mr. Montigny, what have you heard about this?

Mr. Bernard Colas: We heard that these complaints were groundless and that everything depended on the individuals concerned.

I'll stop here so my colleague can have some speaking time.

Mr. Éric Montigny: It is paradoxical, because the distinction seems to be made by the members rather than the electors. The members who are attached to a riding have a greater sense of representing the people there and that region than the members who were selected from a list.

We also noted that the people whose names were on the list were also often people who were close to the leadership of the party concerned. When you think of the ranking given to the people on the list, you have to factor in the closeness to the leaders of the party of the candidates in question.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Ste-Marie, you have the floor.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you Mr. Chair.

Mr. Montigny and Mr. Colas, welcome to the committee. Your presentations were very instructive. I was very happy to hear them.

Before asking my questions, I would like to express some constructive criticism to the committee. Yesterday, in Toronto, we were patting ourselves on the back because we had a group of witnesses that was made up of three women. This was the first time that had happened. Today, however, all of the witnesses were men. Also, there are no women among the few observers present. We'll have to do better in future meetings. I am talking about a representative women's presence.

My first question is addressed to you, Mr. Montigny.

I was surprised by one of the statistics taken from the CROP poll conducted in Quebec in 2015. According to what you said, 70% of the population was in favour of some type of proportional representation.

I'd like to follow up on something my colleague Alain Rayes said. And in fact both Ms. Romanado and myself were talking about this earlier. We were saying that when we talk about the voting system in our ridings, people do not understand the term "single member plurality system", or the term "proportional representation", and so on.

How was that statistic arrived at?

● (1900)

Mr. Éric Montigny: In any case, I will give you the questionnaire and you will be able to see the wording of the question.

First, we are aware that there is an issue with making the language more accessible. In order to do so, we asked the same question in two different ways, and explained the meaning of proportional representation. In both cases, the results were the same. As far as the methodology goes, we were aware of the comprehension issue.

I would add that we must not confuse support for a measure with the profile an issue may have or not have. The fact that people are in favour of something does not mean that they will vote for another party, or that they will talk about the issue morning, noon and night.

Those are the two points I wanted to make.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you. That's very interesting.

Mr. Colas, in your book you suggest a proportional representation system. You have explained it to us in broad terms. The details are in that book, which was written after several years of work.

My question is delicate.

I get the sense that this exercise is being done in good faith. We want to improve democracy while respecting our values, and so on. We could adopt such a system. By the same token, adopting this system would remove some power from the current government, which was elected using the voting system we now have.

What would lead it to agree to curtail its own power, or to lose its majority in order to improve democracy? How could we convince it to do that? Is my vision of politics too cynical?

Mr. Bernard Colas: That is an excellent question.

On the one hand, any electoral reform which mirrors the population's wishes will lead to minority governments—there is a good chance that that could happen—unless more than 50% of the population votes for the same party.

On the other hand, the rules of the game will change to some extent. We wonder whether political culture will not also change and if the people who are elected will be able to work together. Basically what the population wants is for those who are elected to act in a more patient and consensual way so as to arrive at solutions. Bills are often adopted unanimously, but on other occasions it is not that easy. This provides a certain stability, and ensures the party that takes power cannot undo everything the previous government did. What happened to the Law Commission of Canada is a perfect example.

There also has to be a will to do politics differently and to find consensual solutions. In the long run, the country would be the winner.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you very much.

I will take advantage of the time I have left to ask you one last question, Mr. Montigny.

You talked about legitimacy. Legally speaking, a majority government can change the voting system without holding a referendum, and without the support of any other party. In your opinion, what would be the acceptable minimum support to provide legitimacy?

Mr. Éric Montigny: I would not set a percentage for support in this regard.

You have to measure two things: the intention and the will of a government, regardless of its majority, of including the opposition in the process and in the decision, and a large consensus to go ahead, to provide legitimacy.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. May, you have the floor.

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

I thank the witnesses who are here with us tonight. It is really an honour to discuss your experience and your research, and particularly your report, Mr. Colas. Indeed, the 2004 report of the Law Commission of Canada is fundamental for someone who like myself is in favour of a proportional representation system. It may not be exactly the same system, but the research and the 2004 report contain a wealth of information in this regard.

Mr. Montigny, if I understood your testimony correctly, you took part in a symposium here in Quebec. How many people were present? Who was there? Were the participants academics and professors?

●(1905)

Mr. Éric Montigny: In total, 150 people participated in the symposium. There were academics, practitioners, representatives of institutions, and public servants. The symposium lasted two days. All of the parties, including yours, were invited. Unfortunately, no one from your political party came to the symposium. Aside from proportional representation, the whole range of issues involving people's trust in our democratic institutions was discussed at the symposium.

Ms. Elizabeth May: You said that a poll on the voting system showed that 70% of Quebec respondents were in favour of a proportional representation system. Who conducted that poll? Are the results available?

Mr. Éric Montigny: Yes. I am going to give the document to the chair. The poll was carried out by CROP, a Quebec polling firm.

Ms. Elizabeth May: And were Quebeckers the only ones surveyed in that poll?

Mr. Éric Montigny: Yes, the poll was carried out in Quebec only.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Did the poll focus on the proportional representation system?

Mr. Éric Montigny: The poll did not go into detail. What it sought to measure was the interest electors had in some form of proportionality. They did not ask about the preferred system. On this, may I refer you to some research which also took place only in Quebec during the 2012 election. This inquiry, entitled *Vote au pluriel*, was carried out by Marc-André Bodet. In the course of that research, there were simulations of the electorate in real time during the election, with different voting systems. The results obtained were very, very different.

For instance, in 2012, with the preferential vote, the Coalition Avenir Québec would have formed the government.

Ms. Elizabeth May: That is very interesting.

You mentioned that each voting system has its strengths and its weaknesses. It is important that the members of the committee be aware of electors' values and know what they consider to be most important.

I am going to ask both witnesses to tell us what constitutes the most important values of a true democracy in Canada, in their opinion?

Mr. Bernard Colas: At the Law Commission of Canada, we made a recommendation, but we had neither the funds nor the mandate to move it forward. Of course if you have to produce a report and make recommendations, you have to be able to defend your point of view. The simplest idea is to say that something is not working, that electors' votes do not really seem to count and that it can be shocking when a party obtains 20% of the vote and gets 10% of the seats, while another one obtains 40% of the vote and has 60% of the seats. That is one of the strongest arguments.

The second one is that reform can allow you to correct inequalities, that is to say that it could allow more women to be elected to Parliament, and more members of minority groups; it could increase participation and cause more people to recognize themselves in the system, rather than having to demonstrate in the streets, outside of the system.

The third and final objective is to elect a strong government. That is what the electors want. If we are at war with another country, they want a government that will be able to step up and react. If we need to build roads, the government will be able to do so. Often, people are afraid of that factor, because they tell themselves this: "I like it when we have a majority government, I can sit back and let the government act and I don't have to worry". You will have to work with that perception that a majority government is better.

●(1910)

The Chair: Thank you.

Did you want to add something on that, Mr. Montigny?

Mr. Éric Montigny: Yes, very quickly.

In my presentation, I did not talk a lot about the importance of representation. In its various rulings, the Supreme Court does grant importance to the principle of representation, in particular to fairness when it comes to the size of ridings.

The other factor concerns effectiveness. In your questions or consultation criteria, you set certain objectives, effectiveness being one. You can look at effectiveness in two ways. Is it effective to adopt a law rapidly, or rather to adopt it when it reaches legislative maturity that has been achieved through compromise and discussion among the various parties? That question needs to be addressed.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Aldag, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. John Aldag: Thank you.

Mr. Colas, I'm going to start with you. I don't know if you can answer this, but I'm wondering if you could comment on the funding source and cost for the work that was done by the Law Commission.

We've seen the work. It's been referenced a lot. If I understood correctly, you said that there could have been more work done, but there just seemed to be some sort of decision made to end the work.

I'm wondering where that decision was made. Where did the money come from? How much had been spent? How much more would be needed to continue? Is it an annual allotment? Could you provide any insight on the kind of funding and funding source?

Mr. Bernard Colas: There are two elements in answer to your question.

First, we had a yearly budget of $3 million.

Mr. John Aldag: And who was that from?

Mr. Bernard Colas: The Government of Canada.

Mr. John Aldag: Through Elections Canada?

Mr. Bernard Colas: No. The Law Commission was created by a law of Parliament. The MPs voted in favour of its creation back before 2000, with the former Liberal government.

Then there was some sort of commission that was created by the subsequent government. There was some sort of consultation, and the government said it wanted to get rid of the Law Commission for all sorts of reasons. That's when the Treasury Board decided to cut the budget. That's how our activities ended abruptly, without any vote from MPs.

Second, our role is independent. We produce reports and give them to the Minister of Justice, and then the Minister of Justice responds to us, takes the work, and does something with it.

Mr. John Aldag: I find that very interesting. That's a piece of information I didn't have or understand.

Do you feel that there's a role for that kind of ongoing...? If there were to be money, it sounds like there's added value to having that kind of ongoing—

Mr. Bernard Colas: It is a common law tradition. The U.K., Alberta, Ontario, New Zealand, and Australia all have this tradition of having a law commission or a law reform commission.

Mr. John Aldag: Someone raised the issue of legitimacy previously. Do you feel that having that kind of process would add legitimacy to the ongoing discussion related to electoral reform, so that we're not doing this just from time to time, and so that there would be a lens on the world as it evolves? Would that lend legitimacy to what we're trying to do now?

Mr. Bernard Colas: After we produced this report, we worked on other issues, such as globalization and law reform. These were very important topics, but our funding was cut.

Mr. John Aldag: Okay.

My colleague had been talking to you, professor, about legitimacy. I just wanted to know if you had any further thoughts on our process, and what else you would like to see or feel could be added. I had the sense you might have had more to add.

●(1915)

Mr. Éric Montigny: I was in Brussels for a conference last week, where I talked about your process.

Mr. John Aldag: Was it good or bad? Could it be better?

Mr. Éric Montigny: It was good. Actually, having your committee travelling around the country while MPs are meeting with their constituents at the same time is kind of a new process.

We'll see what you deliver. That's the big question.

Mr. John Aldag: It might be just the time of the day or where I'm at mentally, but I cannot recall.... The thought of a referendum does come up from time to time in our discussions. Do you have any comment on a referendum and the legitimacy of the process?

Mr. Éric Montigny: There's no obligation to hold a referendum; it's a policy matter. It's up to MPs to decide whether they would like to hold a referendum or not. It's part of the political debate. I don't

see the fact that there were referendums in some provinces before on that matter as an obligation for the federal Parliament to have a referendum.

Mr. Bernard Colas: I share Mr. Montigny's advice, and this is what we indicated in the report. There's no need for a referendum.

Anyway, it's suicidal to have a referendum. If you don't want it to succeed, just hold a referendum.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Deltell, you have the floor.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, Mr. Colas and Mr. Montigny.

In the interest of full disclosure, I will say that I have known Mr. Montigny personally for a number of years. He was a close advisor to a political party I once worked for. Éric, welcome. Mr. Colas, I extend our welcome to you as well.

I have questions for both of you.

Mr. Colas, you mentioned earlier that in your system, 66% of members would be elected as they are now, and 33% would be elected from a list. In reply to questions put by my colleagues, you briefly mentioned the fact that this creates two categories of MPs, or a two-tier system, if you will.

In your opinion, how would this work in practical terms?

Mr. Bernard Colas: In practical terms, the first point is that very few electors know the MP for their riding or speak to him or her. The person who has a health-related problem will have a tendency to address his concerns to the Minister of Health directly rather than to his MP.

The second point is that electors would have two people in their riding whom they could turn to. They could speak with the MP for the riding and to the MP from the list, or to people from the list. In that way, they would have a greater choice of people to turn to.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Thank you, Mr. Colas.

I appreciate your comments. However, as a practitioner, I must object. I have been in politics for eight years and have worked for two levels of government. I have been elected and re-elected, like all of the other members of the committee. I do not believe that citizens have a tendency to address their issues to the Minister of Health first if they have a problem in that area. They will speak to their MP first. That said, I respect your point of view, even if it does not concur with what I have experienced in eight years of active political life.

However, I do recognize one thing. In politics, we refer to it as the ATSP phenomenon—always the same people. Charity organizations always see the same people, just as we always see the same people in our riding offices. I represent 90,000 people at the federal level, and I may have dealt with 1,000 of those people, at the most. That is the reality.

I must tell you, Mr. Colas, that even if I don't share your point of view, I greatly appreciate that you have documented it and presented it to the committee.

Mr. Montigny, I would like to see the study which concluded that in 2012, if another voting system had been used, the Coalition Avenir Québec would have formed the government. That is news to me. It's unprecedented. I must acknowledge my favourable bias and especially my conflict of interest in this file.

Mr. Éric Montigny: It will be my pleasure to send it to you.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: This study interests me greatly.

Concerning whether or not we should hold a referendum, you said that in your opinion this was not a legal issue but a political one. We agree entirely with you on that. From a constitutional perspective, we are not obliged to hold a referendum. However, we feel as you do that this is a political issue. As you said in English earlier: "It's up to the MPs to decide". It is up to the MPs to decide. It is up to the MPs to decide whether there will be a referendum or not.

Basically, we the members of the committee feel that as MPs, we are in a conflict of interest when we discuss this matter. Of course we have a rather partisan view, and that is normal since we live in this environment. Members also think, as did previous Canadians, that the population should have the last word. New Zealand, which has the same British tradition as we do, held three referendums in 11 years before implementing a change.

Without quoting the Bible this time, I will say that I agree with the following words: "Precedent makes holding a referendum necessary in Canada. Changing the voting system would require popular support". Who said that? You may be surprised. It was the Honourable Stéphane Dion, Minister of Foreign Affairs, the intellectual backbone of the current government and a very experienced minister.

Mr. Montigny, do you share the point of view of this gentleman, who was I believe one of your university professors?

● (1920)

Mr. Éric Montigny: I don't think there's any constitutional convention for holding a referendum. The broadest possible consensus must be sought. I understand your committee is trying to reach that consensus. That's what will be determined that at the end of the exercise. That's the first thing to consider.

The second thing to consider in terms of legitimacy is that in a representative democracy, the political parties that appear before the voters have democratic reform proposals in their political platforms. In a system of representative democracy, if we add up the political parties elected with the promise of modifying the electoral system, it also provides legitimacy to the process.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: We are all also aware that, in its electoral platform, the current government committed to electoral reform. The commitment represented three sentences out of 97 pages. We can't say it was the main factor in the discussions.

Mr. Éric Montigny: I'll let you be the judge.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Montigny, you said there's no perfect electoral system. Why change an imperfect electoral system to another imperfect system, if there's no perfect system?

The Chair: Please keep your answer short.

Mr. Éric Montigny: Good question. I could give a three-hour course on the subject.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Colas.

Mr. Bernard Colas: Mr. Deltell, I don't understand why you say you disagree. It's like you're blocking communication, and, basically, we're not that close with regard to the element of the proposal and the fact the MP is in contact with the public in relation to the system.

What I'm trying to explain is that the constituency would be larger. We took into account the fact that citizens could speak to and contact their MP. So, instead of having 1,000 people contact you, maybe 1,100 people would contact you given that the constituencies would be larger, unless we increase the number of constituencies.

In short, you can't say you disagree. You may be in favour of something more nuanced.

I found it sad that you blocked communication by saying you disagreed when, basically, you're saying we could make things more nuanced.

Thank you.

Mr. Éric Montigny: I want to add one quick thing. I think your meeting will be successful.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Romanado.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you Mr. Chair.

Welcome, Professor Montigny and Mr. Colas.

I did not read the entire document. It contains 232 pages, and we were somewhat busy this week. However, I'll definitely read it. I made an electoral system evaluation grid, and I discovered you did the same thing in table 12. I will therefore compare them.

I want to know whether I've properly understood the recommendation. Take Quebec, for example, which currently has 78 seats. Based on the model, 66% of the seats would be for MPs representing a constituency, and 33% for MPs chosen from a list. Is that correct? So about 62 people would represent a constituency and 16 people would be from the list. Is that right?

The 16 MPs on the list would be for Quebec as a whole. Is that right?

Mr. Bernard Colas: That's an excellent question and it applies to those who are concerned about contact with their MP. The province is large. We therefore divided Quebec in two, but you can find other solutions. Based on the solution we proposed, there's a list for the Montreal region. So, out of 16 MPs in total, eight would be elected from a list for Montreal and eight would be elected from a list for the rest of Quebec. It's very important to go province by province. However, for Quebec, given that it's a large territory with a high population, we established two zones.

● (1925)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: That leads into my next question. I imagine that the eight people from Montreal will live in the city. Their residence will be located somewhere in Montreal.

Since not many people live in the north, I imagine the eight others may be in Quebec City, Sherbrooke or Joliette. We don't know. The citizens living in remote regions or the north may have a single MP, while those living in major cities will have two, three or 16 MPs.

I just want to understand what you're saying. Would it be fair for the citizens in the north to have a single MP if the other citizens have more?

Mr. Bernard Colas: We didn't say there needed to be obligations. The reform could be useful for encouraging the parties to make sure the lists cover members of visible minority groups, people from remote regions, or people in city centres. We even said that a person could be both in a constituency and on the list. The party can say "vote for us, we have a star candidate in eighth place" and therefore have the seven preceding candidates elected. The list can be established strategically.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Okay. I wasn't sure. Personally, I'm worried about the remote regions. It's already difficult for an MP to travel within a very large constituency, so imagine there's just one MP. In Montreal, there are 16 MPs, the population is denser, but there are other factors.

Can you tell me how this will be useful for Quebec?

Mr. Bernard Colas: The party determines who will be on the list, and the voters determine whether or not they'll vote for the party.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Okay, thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Sansoucy.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Your contribution is very important for our committee's work. Thank you all.

First, Mr. Colas, if I understood correctly, you think the current situation, like the situation when you were writing your report, makes it completely necessary to proceed with electoral reform. I also understood that you think the findings from 2004 are still very relevant in 2016. We also spoke a great deal about your proposal for a proportional electoral system.

For the benefit of our committee, which does not have two years to carry out its work, can you tell us how you determined that a proportional electoral system was needed?

Mr. Bernard Colas: That's very important. It's a mixed electoral system, based on the "66-33" method. The voter has two ballots.

We made this finding after consulting people, both citizens and experts, including academics and politicians. The system seemed the simplest and corresponded the best to the values we targeted. We established 11 values or something to that effect on which to base our reform.

Based on the consultations and after comparing the different electoral systems, we came up with this proposal, which best corresponded to the values we established.

● (1930)

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Thank you.

Professor Montigny, Mr. Colas told us earlier that if they had had money at the end of their process and when their report was published, they could have taken to the road and met with the public.

I want to hear what you have to say about your research chair's perspective and the survey. I am sure your analysis helped you determine how electoral reform is really perceived.

Once the decision has been made, in preparation for the next election, what do you think needs to be done to educate the public? In our democracy, we want the public to vote with full knowledge of the facts. What are ways to make the public understand the implications of electoral reform?

Mr. Éric Montigny: I have two responses.

First, and your colleague referred to it, there's the events in Scotland. The population is adapting to the rules established.

Second, in Canada's case, clearly a significant change in political culture would be required. One of the consequences of adopting a proportional electoral system is the more frequent occurrence of minority governments. The population is used to this type of government.

One thing would be different in Canada's case, and that's the occurrence of coalition governments. There's no tradition in that regard here. Sometimes coalition attempts were made that could be surprising, but there was never a real coalition. This could be a significant change in political culture.

Another important factor is how the media will act. Those who cover political life must also adapt to a change in political regime. This will change in particular how they cover MPs. If there's a different electoral system and the party discipline is relaxed, the media would be required to change their ideas and view of an MP's role.

Work must be done not only for the public, but also by the witnesses who cover political life, and that requires information. A factor that was also measured is the importance of having citizenship education courses, which do not really exist in Quebec. The public is largely in favour of this type of course at school.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: As a mother of four children, I completely agree with you. Currently, the integration of this course into the ethics course is at each teacher's discretion.

The Chair: Do you have something to add? We must then turn the floor over to Mr. Maguire.

Mr. Bernard Colas: I want to make a quick clarification.

First, the Law Commission of Canada's job is not to go around selling a solution. After we prepared the report, we stopped working on electoral reform.

Second, the commission has found all sorts of clever ways to communicate with the public. We have already created theatre plays, not in the electoral field, but we have made videos and many other things to reach people.

The committee could also think creatively about how the message could be spread not only through the media, but also through plays, videos, or other means.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Maguire.

[*English*]

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here with their presentations.

Mr. Montigny, I was most interested in some of your quotes, which I took some notes on. They were to the effect that there was a reason for keeping first past the post, and one was the link to members. That would be a portion of what we would continue to do under a changed system anyway.

My colleagues have asked questions about the size of boundaries, how many would be in each, and whether it's an open or closed list. I find all that extremely valuable to this discussion. As well, I think it is important to consider the voting system as only one part of this change.

Of course, I look forward to reading your report, Mr. Colas, as well. I think that would be most interesting. I haven't had a chance yet. Maybe you could expand a little on the making of the lists that you mentioned.

One comment was that the proof will be in the pudding for what comes out of this group, and we certainly need to have the input that you've given for those topics. We know that a referendum is perhaps not legally required, but I think you made the point that consensus is required for legitimacy.

I wonder if you could expand on those points. Could each of you make a few comments?

● (1935)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Éric Montigny: Consensus does not mean unanimity. That's the first thing I want to emphasize. In the case of a consensus, there must be two components. First, there must be a search for a consensus, a process, a procedure to bring together the parliamentarians. That's what I see, I think, with you today. We'll have to see the results of your consultation and what measures will be taken. The second thing is that a significant portion of MPs must support the reform project. Citizens are always a bit suspicious when they see their elected officials fiddling with the electoral system, and they know that partisan interests may enter into play.

That said, the documentation shows us that political parties and governments that tried to modify electoral systems in their favour, thinking that it would benefit them, were wrong. Political figures, on the institutional level, adapt. Things are rearranged. When people thought they could carry out a reform that would benefit them, in the end, that did not turn out to be the case.

I invite the committee to reflect, first and foremost, on the reform proposals based on the improvement of democracy and not on partisan interest. In any case, history teaches us that political parties that attempted electoral reform based on a past result were not always rewarded in the end because the voter and political life evolve.

Does that answer your question?

[*English*]

Mr. Larry Maguire: Mr. Colas, would you comment?

Mr. Bernard Colas: If your committee comes up with a proposal like the one the Law Commission is proposing, it developed independently—there were no politicians in our group or anyone who had been in politics—you would be perceived as caring about the system more than the short-term election perspective. You would be setting up a system that would favour a greater diversity and a greater taking care of the opinions of one another in order to come up with a good policy for Canada.

I don't see how people would think that you have a conflict of interest. To the contrary, possibly they would think that you put aside your conflict of interest, because you were all elected with this system, and if you change it, you take a risk, but you take a risk for the benefit of Canada. I don't think the population would say, "Oh, these guys are doing something in order to trick the system", but rather, "They're doing something to improve Canada."

Mr. Larry Maguire: I have a quick question as a follow-up. We've had chief electoral officers come before us and make comments about the timing and how much time would be required to make the changes. Some have said to get it done before the next election, as the Prime Minister has indicated; others have said we should walk before we start running and make sure we get it right and put things in place.

I took personally your comments about measuring the intention and the will, as well. What would be the best way of discussing this with the public? We're getting lots of feedback here, but once the report comes out with its recommendations, how would you educate the people? A number of people said there would need to be an education process as part of the changes to make sure that people understand what they are voting on. Yes, some say it is very simple and that we can explain it and move on, but my experience is that it is not that simple in the whole country.

● (1940)

Mr. Bernard Colas: One basic instinct of a human being is about fairness. If you have young kids, the kids will say it's not fair. The first question you ask Canadians is whether it's fair for someone to be elected with 30% of the vote, or 40%, or whether it's fair if you have 20% of the vote and you get only 10% of the seats. They will answer "no". Then you say, "Okay, we're here to make a proposal to correct this system and to improve its fairness." I think it's a good pitch to start with.

The Chair: Be very quick, Mr. Maguire.

Mr. Larry Maguire: That's very good, but...that premise works well when you ask that question in a two-party system. We've been very open in Canada and we have multiple parties, so it is possible to win under the present system without 50% of the vote.

I'll just leave it at that.

Mr. Bernard Colas: Right now, you'll get elected if all your population is in one region, so you tell the minority groups not to try to settle in various places but to all go to Saint-Léonard, Outremont, or wherever, and then they will be able to influence politics.

If you want to create ghettos, it's a great system. Otherwise, you can tell people that it doesn't matter where they live because they'll have the chance to elect the person they choose.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Okay.

Go ahead Mr. DeCourcey.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Thank you Mr. Chair. I know you'll give me the same speaking time as you gave my colleagues this evening. I have a long question and I want the witnesses to have the opportunity to respond.

We know that you're not in favour of a referendum. We've heard a great deal of testimony similar to yours, but we've also heard a great deal of other testimony indicating a referendum would be essential. There are also opinions in the grey area between the two positions.

Almost every witness told us that a consensus would give legitimacy to the process, legitimacy that could not be established otherwise. I know we still have work to do. However, I believe the only way to reach a consensus on the new system recommended to the government may be to propose a referendum to the citizens. It's simply the usual practice. We must not forget there are different partisan views.

If the only way to reach a consensus is to submit the question to citizens through a referendum, what should we do? And how should we recommend this to the government?

Mr. Bernard Colas: Good question.

As I explained, if we want to destroy the new system project, we simply have to say we'll hold a referendum, then work to counter the idea of the project, generate fear, and say that it will result in a new system, that there will be chaos, and that there will be minority governments and elections each year. We can very easily alarm the public by presenting a situation that should not occur.

So, if the different parties reach a consensus and present a proposal to improve the running of the country, and steer the public in that direction, we could have a referendum. Otherwise, if a group half-heartedly proposes that a referendum must be held, and the day after the release of the committee's report, the parties separate and turn on each other, then money is wasted.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: If one of the recommendations is to allocate funds to one group but not to another, is that really valid?

Mr. Bernard Colas: I don't know.

We solved the problem by opposing the idea of a referendum.

Voices: Oh, oh!

● (1945)

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Yes, I understand. The committee must focus on that issue.

Mr. Éric Montigny: I find your question interesting because it reflects, I suppose, how you will need to negotiate with each other to reach a consensus.

That said, you also have the challenge of agreeing on a specific electoral system. Based on the experiences of referenda held elsewhere, the challenge is to reach an agreement on a type of electoral reform and on whether you'll choose the mixed, proportional or preferential system.

I don't want to interfere with your negotiations and the committee work, but it seems you must reach an agreement first on the electoral system you want to put forward to the public.

The Chair: Thank you.

I have one more question.

Yesterday evening in Toronto, a citizen—not an invited witness—said he felt traumatized, overwhelmed and torn by the need to vote strategically. This obviously affected me in a way.

In terms of strategic voting, I observed that it was not difficult for voters to vote for the local candidate when they did not like the candidate's party. On some occasions, people have told me they voted for me and not for my party. This did not seem very damaging. In my view, it becomes damaging at the level of the parties. For example, a voter really wants to vote for a party but feels the need to vote for another party to block a third party. In that case, it becomes very difficult, especially on an emotional level.

Do you think adopting a proportional system will eliminate the need to vote strategically?

In other words, even in a proportional system, will there still be circumstances in which the voter will decide to vote for a candidate to prevent another candidate from being elected?

When we speak of political science, we seem to be discussing analysis, and when we start analyzing things, we make calculations. It's normal.

That said, will we eliminate the scourge that is strategic voting?

Go ahead Mr. Montigny.

Mr. Éric Montigny: First, to go back to what I was saying, there's no consensus on the percentage, the significance of strategic voting, simply because it's very difficult to measure. That's the first thing.

The Chair: It's difficult?

Mr. Éric Montigny: Yes. Its significance is difficult to measure precisely. That said, strategic voting actually exists, and any change in electoral system that helps represent voter preferences will limit strategic voting. That's clear to me.

I can give you a document, a summary of the strengths and weaknesses of the electoral systems I present in class. One of the greatest weaknesses of the current electoral system is that it leads to strategic voting.

The Chair: I understand, but I want to know whether in a proportional system there will never be a desire to throw a party out. In other words, the desire for change will be reduced.

Mr. Éric Montigny: In the case of mixed member proportional representation, specifically based on the level of proportional representation included, there is a coalition, negotiation and discussion dynamic. In this context, we can vote for a smaller party that will be part of the government. In exchange, some parts of the party's platform will need to be applied. The political dynamic will change completely.

●(1950)

The Chair: So we'll reduce strategic voting?

Mr. Éric Montigny: Exactly.

The Chair: Perfect.

Thank you.

We'll now take a one-minute break before moving on to the open microphone stage.

●(1950)   (Pause)

●(1950)

The Chair: We'll continue the meeting.

Thank you again to the witnesses. Thank you Mr. Colas. Thank you Mr. Montigny. It's really very interesting.

Mr. Serge Marcotte would like to speak.

Would anyone else like to speak into the microphone?

Go ahead Mr. Marcotte. We're listening.

Mr. Serge Marcotte (As an Individual): Hello everyone.

Thank you for giving me the chance to speak.

If your committee is travelling, it's because you think the electoral system is an important matter. I heard all sorts of comments earlier. It's been said that citizens want this and that, and references were made to major university studies. It's wonderful.

However, if it was said in the last election that there was a desire or no desire to change the electoral system, maybe citizens would have voted differently.

We know the Bloc Québécois and Conservative Party want the government to hold a referendum before changing the electoral system. I am speaking to the MPs on this committee who are members of other parties. We heard comments earlier on a referendum. It was said that a referendum would depend on what is done, and that it could lead to all sorts of results.

However, the same is true for elections. Some advertise and others don't. MPs from the other parties, why would you refuse to consult the public on an issue as important as reforming the electoral system through which, democratically, we elect our MPs? Is it because you don't trust the voters? That's my question.

The Chair: I'll try to answer.

It's a government decision and we'll make recommendations to the government. The decision is not ours. However, we must make recommendations and we have not reached the stage of writing the report. That's the best answer I can give you, Mr. Marcotte.

Does anyone else wish to speak?

Yes, sir. Can you identify yourself?

Mr. Maurice Berthelot: My name is Maurice Berthelot.

●(1955)

The Chair: You were here this afternoon.

Mr. Maurice Berthelot: I want to make a clarification for Mr. Deltell.

New Zealand held its referendum after the implementation of the electoral system. The New Zealanders decided not to move backward and to keep the current electoral system. In fact, I don't know of any government that returned to the electoral system currently in place in Canada.

It's something to think about.

The Chair: Are there any other comments?

Go ahead Mr. Deltell.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: I want to make a clarification concerning history.

The issue went on for 11 years in New Zealand. Three general elections concerned the topic, among other things. Two referenda were held, one indicative and one binding. Once the new electoral system was applied, as Mr. Berthelot said, the decision was ratified by referendum. However, remember that two referenda were held before a change could be made.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead Mr. Boulerice.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: I would like to say a few quick words.

Mr. Marcotte, to clarify the situation, the NDP is not asking for or demanding a referendum, but is not ruling one out either.

The Chair: The brief of Mr. Côté, who appeared this afternoon, has just been published on the committee's website and on the SharePoint application. Professor Derriennic's brief is being translated.

Thank you for your cooperation and for a good discussion.

We'll see each other tomorrow in Joliette.

The meeting is adjourned.