HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Special Committee on Electoral Reform

ERRE • NUMBER 029 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Friday, September 23, 2016

Chair

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia

Special Committee on Electoral Reform

Friday, September 23, 2016

● (1305)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)): Welcome to the 29th meeting of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform. This is the fourth day of our cross-Canada tour, aimed at consulting Canadians about changing the federal voting system.

What a lovely day in Joliette! And what a lovely city! We were very impressed as we entered the city by bus. The downtown area is truly magnificent. It is a cultural hub here in Quebec; the Festival de Lanaudière is an example of that.

It's been a pleasure to have Mr. Ste-Marie with us during the last four days. He also joins us regularly when the committee meets in Ottawa.

We will be welcoming three groups of witnesses today in Joliette. This will be followed by a public comments period, in which members of the public will have the opportunity to take the microphone and share their viewpoints on electoral reform.

Here is a brief overview of how we will work. Each witness will have 10 minutes to testify—that is, to present their ideas and perspectives on electoral reform. The testimonies will be followed by a set of questions from the members seated around the table. Each member will have the chance to make a statement and discuss with the witnesses for five minutes. This includes the questions and the answers. We will then move on to another member, so that each member can talk with the witnesses.

We will begin with Professor Csaba Nikolenyi.

I should note that there are headsets for access to the interpreters. Even if you don't need an interpreter, you can use the earpiece simply to hear the discussion better. That's what I do in the House, where one cannot hear a thing because of the deficient acoustics.

Professor Nikolenyi, you have the floor for 10 minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Csaba Nikolenyi (Professor, Department of Political Science, Concordia University, As an Individual): First of all, thank you very much for having me today and giving me the opportunity to share a few ideas about electoral reform, what I have to say with respect to the five principles guiding the mandate of this committee, and hopefully the choice of an electoral system alternative for the country.

I want to reiterate those five principles: effectiveness and legitimacy, to reduce distortions in electoral outcomes; engagement, to foster greater participation; accessibility and inclusiveness, to make sure no undue complexity is introduced in the electoral process; integrity; and enforced and continued attachment to local representation.

I want to start by saying that I will argue that principle number four should be treated separately. No electoral system alternative that we've been looking at, and certainly that I have surveyed, actually can directly, as an inherent matter of the electoral rules, address and treat electoral integrity.... There are alternative ways, administrative or legislative, that I think would be better considered to promote that.

With respect to the main electoral system alternatives, as you no doubt know, electoral systems fall into major families, proportional on the one hand and majoritarian/plurality electoral systems on the other. The advantage of the former, of course, is that they promote greater participation, and we know—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Sorry to interrupt.

First of all, it's important not to talk too fast, as this can prevent the interpreters from keeping up. I am not saying that you, in particular, would do this. Rather, I am making a general comment, to all the witnesses, that the interpreters can have a difficult time when the pace is quick.

I just want to remind everyone that we'll be following the usual rules that parliamentary committees use on Parliament Hill. Unfortunately, we cannot permit photographs or filming. That's the rule in Parliament.

Go ahead, Mr. Nikolenyi, and sorry for the interruption.

[*English*]

Mr. Csaba Nikolenyi: Yes, I will slow down a bit.

I won't repeat what I said, but what I do want to pick up on is the important distinction between what the two main electoral system families do.

Proportional electoral systems of any kind, and there are many different ways of achieving proportionality, will create greater participation by way of greater electoral turnout. In other words, if that's an important consideration for our electorate to have, to have greater electoral participation, mandatory voting may not be a necessary alternative to resort to. Proportional electoral systems will reduce the number of wasted votes in the electoral process and will lead to, holding everything as equal, greater electoral participation.

Of course, proportional systems do this at the cost of weakening government. Single party majorities will be gone, for all intents and purposes, if you have proportional electoral systems. Countries—Canada will be unlikely to be an exception—that embark on a proportional electoral system will have some type of coalition structure, as the name of the governance game. That's the cost.

Majority electoral systems work in exactly the reverse. They tend to promote and lead to strong single party governments, typically. Of course, they achieve that at the cost of a greater number of wasted votes in the electoral process. Unless electoral competition is tight, which typically gives voters an incentive to turn out in larger numbers, electoral participation and turnout gets lower.

What I would like to do is pay quick attention to three electoral system alternatives, two of which have been around particularly in recent discussions in the media and in general. One is the alternative vote. Another one is a particular version of the mixed electoral system. The third, which gets a little bit less attention perhaps in this round of discussions is the single transferable vote. I'm going to make the argument, with the exception of integrity which I will treat separately, that the single transferable vote system seems to be meeting the other four principles somewhat better than the other two electoral system alternatives. Then I will close the presentation with a pitch, if you will, or at least with a call or an argument in favour of political or electoral integrity legislation, which could be conceived as a compendium to electoral reform.

I want to say a few words about the alternative vote. As you know, the alternative vote is a preferential vote system, which would, of course, be very easy for Canada and Canadians to get used to, because it preserves many of the features of our current electoral system. Specifically, it continues local representation. The constituency feature of the system remains in place. There continues to be one winner per district.

However, it's important to note that the alternative vote is not a proportional electoral system. It's characterized and defined by a district magnitude of one, which means there is one winner per district. If you have one winner per district, you cannot be proportional, because the winner takes all. You cannot divide the one seat among multiple contenders, so it is not a proportional system.

Because it's not a proportional system, it is unlikely to lead to greater participation, greater turnout. It's important to note, of course, that voters would have more choice than they currently have. Currently, voters have a categorical choice, which of course the preference ordering would alleviate. If you look at the literature and if you look at the findings, countries that use AV, and there are not many around, don't tend to have a greater turnout than we have.

Mixed member systems often come across as a very intuitively appealing alternative, because they promise the best of both worlds. A mixed system, bringing together a majority/plurality electoral system with some kind of a proportional component or tier in the legislature, seems to be offering both stable, efficient government, on the one hand, and greater participation through proportionality.

However, electoral reformers need to be very careful about mixed member systems. Mixed member systems come in two main variants. Depending on how you mix those two components, depending on how many proportional seats you have in the legislature, how you allow the proportional and the majoritarian tiers of the system to cross-fertilize and cross-contaminate, you may end up with very unintended consequences.

● (1310)

I also do want to say that while at the turn of the millennium, mixed systems were often considered as the electoral system choice for the next century, if you look around, many of those mixed systems are now gone. It's not a stable electoral system choice. I'm happy to go into the details if there is any interest

Germany seems to be the only one that has had that system on the books for a long time, pretty much since the end of the Second World War, both nationally and at the subnational level. New Zealand switched to the German-style mixed member proportional system, but even New Zealand is seriously considering replacing it, as the referendum a few years ago would show.

Mixed member systems clearly introduce a far greater complexity. Depending on how you design the system, it may ask voters to vote twice, once for a party and once for a candidate. The idea of ticket splitting and cross-party voting may be much more confusing than what we are used to today. Participation would be greater, and if you designed the mixed member system well, then distortions in the electoral process would be reduced.

I have a point about the mixed member system and how it really works. The functioning of the technical design of the system is very sensitive and that requires a lot of technical expertise and attention.

The single transferable vote requires none. The single transferable vote is known in the Anglo-Saxon world, and it is for good reason known as the Anglo-Saxon PR. Ireland, Malta, upper house Australia, it's well known in the Anglo-Saxon world. It preserves local representation. It's complex to administer but fabulously easy to use. It's not more complex for the voter than the alternative vote would be. It would be more difficult for the electoral administrators to actually calculate the votes and take care of the administration of the vote transfers.

STV does lead to greater participation, we also know, largely because it's proportional. It's important to remember that unlike the alternative vote, STV is proportional. It has multi-member districts. It has, therefore, more than one winner per district. The more you increase the number of candidates who can win per district, the more proportional STV can get.

I want to close by saying that if you want to treat electoral integrity as part of this exercise to change Canada's electoral system, I think it would be prudent to take a look at earlier efforts to bring in electoral political integrity legislation that would penalize or at least discourage floor crossing in the House. I say that because when a number of countries changed electoral systems—New Zealand is a very important example—they actually suffered.... When you change electoral systems, the dynamics in parliament change; the nature of governance versus opposition changes; coalition politics is all too rapid, and floor crossing may become too attractive for some of our elected representatives.

New Zealand learned the hard way by introducing later on a political integrity law to penalize defections. It was on the books for five years, which gave enough time for New Zealand's representatives to get used to party discipline cohesion once again under the new system, and under the sunset clause it could expire.

I think that may be something also for our leaders to consider.

● (1315)

The Chair: I forgot to mention that you're at the department of political science at Concordia University.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Breslaw, you have the floor for 10 minutes.

Mr. Jon Breslaw (Professor Emeritus of Economics, Concordia University, As an Individual): Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Quebec, and thank you very much for your invitation.

[*English*]

This commission has been given the mandate of recommending a voting system that both incorporates proportional representation and maintains local representation in a non-complex manner, yet all the many systems that have been proposed to this commission involve unacceptable trade-offs between these two criteria.

Let's take two examples. In the party list methodology, one votes for the party, not the candidate. While achieving proportional representation, many ridings are assigned candidates from a different riding or a different party instead of the candidate the majority wanted. That's an unacceptably high cost for proportional representation.

The second popular contender is the MMP methodology, in which one has two classes of representatives, constituent and list. The list members provide the necessary seats to approximate proportional representation. But the cost here, according to Professor Massicotte, whom you know, is either to reduce the number of constituent members from 338 to somewhere between 160 and 200, or to increase the number of seats to somewhere between 500 and 675. The cost of achieving PR in this context is either a much lower level of representation, or a much larger, more expensive bloated House of Commons. Neither is going to be a political blockbuster; in fact, there would be quite the converse.

Canadians simply don't like these alternative systems. B.C. rejected STV by 61% in 2009. Ontario rejected party list by 63% in 2007. P.E.I. rejected MMP by 63% in 2005. They just don't like it.

So where do we go from here? Winter is coming. December 1 is getting close.

There is a huge number of these methodologies, but ultimately, they are all ad hoc and they all have unacceptable costs, and they all fall into the same trap. The concept of requiring that the number of seats held by a party matches the percentage of votes that is received by that party is not the appropriate metric. The relevant metric is that the voting power of a party in the House matches the popular vote that party received. If a party receives 40% of the vote, then its voting power in the House, its clout, has to be 40%.

This can be easily achieved by simply mandating a weighted vote. If the Conservatives have 50% of the seats and 40% of the vote, then each member of the Conservative Party is given a weight of 0.8 when voting. The vote in each party is simply the percentage of the party vote divided by the percentage of the party seats: 40 over 50 is 0.8.

If the Conservative Party votes as a bloc, it has 40% of the vote, 0.8 times 50%, which exactly matches the 40% it got in a popular vote. If the Green Party receives 5% of the seats and 10% of the votes, then it would have a weight of 2, for each member of the Green Party. This I call fractional representation. It's first past the post with weighted voting in the House: instant, painless, proportional representation.

As for precedents, in Quebec we have 11 agglomeration councils, regional councils, in which each municipality has a weight proportional to the population of the municipality.

The Council of the European Union similarly uses weights, where the weight is proportional to the size of each member state. The IMF and the World Bank—they're significant, aren't they?—have weights, and those weights are proportional to each member's contribution. Of course, in every public company, when you vote in a proxy vote, you have a weight that's proportional to the number of shares you hold.

● (1320)

Weighted voting is something that we are all familiar with, and there's nothing unusual about it. How you assign the weights is simply a matter of what your criteria is. Our criteria here is proportional representation.

The advantages are clear. It is well understood, since there is no change required from the existing electoral system. It's familiar, since proxy voting occurs for every company. It provides a one-to-one relationship between a riding and its elected representatives. It provides exact proportional representation at the party level. It does not require any new administrative structure. It can be implemented immediately and it is far and away the most cost-effective method of achieving proportional representation.

Let me go through a couple of details and then we can take it from there.

Who forms the government? Government is formed in any system by that party which has the most clout. Under our current one, it's the party with the most seats. Under this one, its the party with the highest proportion of the popular vote. Minority governments would form coalitions, as they do today.

Is change complicated? No. At a general election, the weights are ascertained in the way I've described for each party. Those weights are then assigned to each riding and are fixed until the next general election. If there's a by-election, the weights stay the same for that riding. If a member decides to cross the aisle or become an independent, again, the weight is fixed and doesn't provide any incentive for such a move. The weights change once every four years.

Regarding free votes, the government can declare that it will treat a particular item, excluding the budget, as a free vote, and defeat does not amount to a vote of non-confidence. If all parties permit a free vote, then it's no longer a party vote; it's a unitary vote, and that would be appropriate. You can't have some parties having unitary votes and some parties having weighted votes. That's illogical. A free vote with unitary voting would only be permitted if all the chief whips unanimously agreed.

Constitutionality is a good question. Democratic rights are covered by sections 3, 4, and 5 of the charter. Section 3 gives every citizen the right to vote and doesn't change under this system. Subsection 4(2), which permits the continuation of the House of Commons beyond five years, would require a unitary vote. There's no constitutional right to have a vote counted in a certain way, so there's no provision that will make fractional representation unconstitutional.

Every PR system has a threshold. Typically, a threshold would be a minimum percentage of votes, say 5%. If a party receives more than 5%, more than the threshold, and does not have a seat, then a compensatory seat is provided. However, irrespective of the threshold, a party gains representation if it gathers at least one seat.

Let me summarize.

The concept of requiring that the number of seats held by a party match the percentage vote received by that party is not the relevant metric. What is important in proportional representation is that the voting power of a party matches the vote received. A fractional representation system does exactly this. In a simple and direct manner, it maintains the current, well understood system with local representation, without any additional complexity, and at no extra cost. Since it maintains the current electoral system, it does not create dissent, neither from the public who generally don't like change, nor from MPs fearful of losing their seats under the new system. It's politically acceptable.

Ultimately, the recommendations of this committee, if they're to have any impact at all, must be such that consensus is assured.

Each party is going to look to protect its own partisan interests, so anything radical will be rejected out of hand, or at least require a referendum which, based on past history, will also be rejected. By making a small incremental change through a weighted vote, fractional representation presents the best chance of ensuring the consensus that is necessary to make any change to Canada's federal election process, certainly within a realistic time frame.

May I propose to you that fractional representation which is an incisive, intuitive, and innovative solution that satisfies all five principles of your mandate be seriously considered as a viable alternative federal voting system for Canada.

● (1325)

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That was very interesting. You injected a brand new idea into our deliberations. I had seen reference to it in writing, but it hasn't been mentioned yet.

Mr. Jon Breslaw: James Wilson will be testifying before you in Fredericton on the same idea.

The Chair: Right. I think that's where I first heard of it.

[*Translation*]

We will begin this question period with Mr. Aldag, who has the floor for five minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): I'd like to begin by thanking our witnesses for coming today. As was mentioned, we've heard some very different and new ideas, so thank you for that.

I'd also like to thank the community members for coming out and joining us. I look forward to the discussion we'll be having later on today.

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

Really quickly, does the system you've described meet our government's commitment that we campaigned on of making 2015 the last election using first past the post? My understanding is that's the system that would still be used, and I'm wondering if that actually meets or honours that commitment.

Mr. Jon Breslaw: Yes. When the Liberal Party said they're going to change first past the post, what they meant—it's semantics—is the current system, first past the post with unitary voting. I thought about that, too.

Mr. John Aldag: It seems as though it's the same system, and just the weighting is different.

Another question came to mind as you were talking. We have a member who is no longer part of our caucus and is now sitting next to Ms. May in the House as an independent. What would that vote be worth?

Mr. Jon Breslaw: Independents come from a party where the party line is there is no party. When I thought about this, it seemed to me that if an independent were to win, then he or she would get a vote, like every other party where you agglomerate all the independents as a party. That would be my solution. In other discussions, sometimes it's suggested they have a vote of one. But I think about independents as, really, members of the party that says you're on your own. It is a party of sorts, even if the party doesn't exist.

Mr. John Aldag: I'm trying to figure out if I have a weighted vote in the House as a member of the Liberals, we run with.... I'm going to use the number of 40%. So I'd have a 0.4, or some other thing. What's the disincentive for me to leave the party and become an independent to up the value of my vote?

● (1330)

Mr. Jon Breslaw: No, you don't. That's the whole beauty of it.

The votes are fixed at the time of the general election. On going across the aisle, you're still representing your same riding and you're still fixed with your same vote, so you get no advantage from crossing the aisle.

Mr. John Aldag: That clarifies that. I really was struggling with how that would work.

Mr. Jon Breslaw: You are your own party.

Mr. John Aldag: On the issue of floor crossing, again, this is something, the idea of legislation.... Professor, could you give me an idea what that kind of legislation...? It takes away some independence from members of Parliament to say they can't cross the floor. There may be instances where that seems like the right thing to do. How does that kind of legislation work?

Mr. Csaba Nikolenyi: Thank you for the question. The answer depends on the kind of electoral system you have in place. Let me give you two alternatives.

One is an example with first past the post. The example is India, part of the same electoral system, heritage, and political institutional heritage that Canada also inherited as part of the Westminster family. The Indian integrity law, or part of the Indian constitution, simply requires.... It doesn't take away the freedom of the member of the lower house or the upper house to cross the floor, but if a member leaves the party on the ticket he or she got elected on, there has to be a by-election. For an independent, it doesn't say that. That's really important. The freedom of movement is not taken away; it simply carries the cost of defending or re-defending your turf in your new colour as a member of another party, or an independent, depending on how you want to fight in the by-election.

Another case would be Portugal, which is closed list proportional representation. It is a system I didn't address, but it's certainly on the menu. The constitution simply forbids it. If you are elected, because the voting is on clear party lines, you can't leave. If you want to leave the party on the list of which you got elected, you have to relinquish your seat. That's it. Then the next person on the list who didn't get elected gets promoted.

Things get to be more complex in other parts of the world. To keep it a little more manageable, I just wanted to give you the two ranges, if you will: pure PR and first past the post, and how they work with anti-floor-crossing legislation.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Rayes, you have five minutes.

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

Hello. I'd like to thank everyone who has travelled to Joliette.

This is a lovely town, Mr. Ste-Marie. I was just telling my colleagues that I got married in Joliette, in a church that's been converted into a library. I definitely plan to take a picture of that library after the meeting.

Mr. Breslaw, I have two questions for you.

I used to be in municipal politics. There are systems that resemble that, but this is the first time I've heard of a system like that for a federal government, or even a provincial government.

I want to make sure I understand your model correctly. Which party would form the government, the party that got the most votes, or the party that got the most seats? In certain cases, one party might get more votes but fewer seats, or vice-versa.

Mr. Jon Breslaw: The party with the most votes, the party that has the weight, is the party that becomes the government.

Mr. Alain Rayes: So, concretely, a party with fewer seats in the House of Commons could form the government, because of your calculation system, which gives more weight during votes.

Mr. Jon Breslaw: Not at all. The party with the most weight would be the party that got the most votes.

[*English*]

If your party has 60% of the vote with only 40% of the seats, it becomes

● (1335)

[*Translation*]

the government, because it would have more weight than the other parties.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Got it.

I'd like to get a good grasp of the calculation system you spoke about.

Currently, in the House, the Liberal Party, like the Conservatives earlier, has a majority of seats, with 39% of the popular vote. Under your system, the Liberals would have the same number of seats as they do now, but when the time comes to vote on motions, bills or other matters, their votes would be worth 39%. They would therefore have to form some kind of partnership or consensus with the rest of the House to get their bills adopted. Is that right?

[*English*]

Mr. Jon Breslaw: Exactly. It's the Liberals coming in with a minority, with less than 50% of the votes. If proportional representation is the name of the game, if that's our criteria, then they don't have a majority government. They don't have a majority of the votes, and they would need to have a coalition government. That's the way things are in proportional representation. It's not a function of my system. It's a function of proportional representation. It leads to a system like that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: I understand. Many thanks.

Mr. Nikolenyi, I'm a bit surprised by what you've told us, to be honest.

We have heard many professors from universities or political science departments. You said that, in countries with a proportional system, people vote more. I took part in a meeting in Parliament, where Dr. André Blais, a specialist in electoral systems at the Université de Montréal, and Ms. Maioni, from McGill University, told us that this figure—this statistic—is a myth. In countries with proportional systems, the participation rate increased by approximately 3% when the system was implemented. That is not necessarily significant. There is a worldwide trend that cuts across electoral systems: fewer and fewer people are voting. Other factors are causing people to lack motivation to go out and vote. I won't list them all, because you undoubtedly know them.

Is the statistic you have given us documented? Could we have access to it? It seems to run counter to what we've hear from the other specialists.

[*English*]

Mr. Csaba Nikolenyi: Yes, absolutely. I haven't heard the presentation by my colleague that you were privileged to hear, but the very fact that they framed the presentation as whether PR would lead to a higher grade, or is it a myth tells you that it has been an established system for not an insignificant amount of time. These works that Professor André Blais published before showed that PR did lead to holding everything as equal leads to greater turnout. Depending on what was cited, there are studies showing the differences. If there is interest in having literature, I would be happy to oblige.

I do want to say that you have to keep in mind that as a matter of method, depending on the study you're on, depending on what you control for, your results may be different.

I can't give you a more substantive answer, because I didn't see what they said, but it has been an established—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you. Your time is up, Mr. Rayes.

You can send us your documentation, Mr. Nikolenyi.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Yes, I would like you to submit the documentation associated with your assertion.

The Chair: You say that the studies support your observation.

You can send us that documentation through the clerk.

Mr. Alain Rayes: We already have the documentation from Mr. Blais.

The Chair: Mr. Boulerice, you have five minutes.

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

On this beautiful afternoon in Joliette, I would like to thank all those in attendance for having come to hear the committee's work.

Mr. Breslaw, yesterday, in Quebec City, someone described to us a mathematical system in which the weight or value of each elector is modified based on the election results, to achieve a certain proportionality. This was rather shocking for most of us, because that system would prevent each citizen's vote from being equal.

You, on the other hand, are considering the other end of the equation. It's in the election results that you identify a distortion between the weight of the votes and the equality of the members' votes. That's a lot less shocking for the public, but it's still quite shocking for us. I have to say that I would find it difficult for my value, or my weight, to be different from that of Ms. May, for example.

You cited companies and the FTQ Solidarity Fund as examples. Indeed, the weight of each actor is not necessarily equal in these examples.

However, I'd like to know whether this system, in which not all members have the same weight in the House, has been adopted in certain countries.

● (1340)

[*English*]

Mr. Jon Breslaw: Yes. The European Union, the Parliament of Europe, has weighted votes where each member has a weight that's proportional to the size of his country in the same way we do with our agglomeration council here in Quebec. The idea of having different weights in a parliamentary system certainly exists.

Perhaps I could bring it back to you in a slightly different way. Let's go to my example. The Green Party has 10% of the votes and 5% of the seats. My suggestion is that each member of the Green Party receives a weight of two. That clearly gives us proportional representation.

An alternative, which is what we've been talking about with all the other systems, is that somehow the Green Party would have a few extra seats flown in to bring it up to spec. Let's take it simply. We have one member of the Green Party, and now we throw in another member to make it two. Now it's equivalent. Which is better? Frankly, of course, it's equivalent. It's the same as the difference between standing on the planet Earth or being an accelerator in outer space. It's the equivalence principle; you cannot tell the difference.

What would I prefer as a citizen? Do I want a group of non-elected citizens being chucked into the Green Party, who are going to do pretty much what the Green Party tells them to do and bring my House up to 675 members, or do I have this weighted system, which is the one we're talking about? And, yes, you have to be efficient in this.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: I understand your point of view, and it's a unique one. In my opinion, it's possible to achieve proportionality, and a diversity of voices, views and opinions in society, within the existing systems under consideration, whether it be the single transferable vote method, or the mixed or moderate proportional voting systems.

Professor Nikolenyi, in 2011, you wrote an article discussing the incompatibility of majoritarian systems such as ours with the concept of consensus democracy. I see parallels with Arend Lijphart's book.

What do you mean when you say that majoritarian systems like ours are incompatible with consensus democracy?

[*English*]

Mr. Csaba Nikolenyi: Okay. You're right. The whole framework comes from Arend Lijphart's work, *Patterns of Democracy*. There are two main types. He breaks down types of democracy in the advanced industrialized world into two families: the majoritarian and the consensus democracies.

Majoritarian democracies are characterized by institutions. The electoral and the party systems are among those institutions that produce, generate, and favour a political majority. They create efficient, stable, strong governments, which can produce public policies that respond to whatever the perceived needs of the situation in society can be.

Consensus democracies are fundamentally based on a different footing and assumption. Consensus democracies work and are based on institutional pillars that create consensus among different linguistic, ethnic, religious, or whatever groups in society make up the political community. Not surprisingly, the institutions of consensus democracy are typically adopted by diverse, multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multilingual political communities.

If you inject a majoritarian electoral system into such a body politic, you are either going to favour one particular political interest by excluding others—the kinds of distortions we talked about that you want to avoid—or you need to make sure you have other institutions in place that will balance the minority-harming tendencies of the first past the post electoral system. One such institution could be federally created.

● (1345)

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thériault, welcome once again.

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

It's a pleasure to see you all again.

The parliamentary session has truly begun. While my brilliant colleague, seated to my right, was touring Canada, I was performing my duties as House leader.

To avoid myself further worries, I will address you, Mr. Chair.

Earlier, you said that we were following Parliament's rules here. Well, I seem to be on the government side.

Is there a false rumour that I should know about?

The Chair: I have not read the newspaper this morning.

Mr. Luc Thériault: Okay.

I'd like to thank all the residents of the beautiful Lanaudière region who are with us.

Mr. Breslaw, your system tries to remedy what advocates of change and proportional systems call mathematical distortion.

What are the negative effects of your system?

All systems have advantages and disadvantages. You must have examined all the disadvantages.

In your view, what are those drawbacks?

[*English*]

Mr. Jon Breslaw: It's a good question.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Jon Breslaw: Since the system I'm recommending is exactly the same as the current system, with the exception that in the House each MP has a weighted vote instead of the unitary vote, the real drawback of my system is that I'm asking MPs to accept a weighted vote—no longer one man, one vote, but one having a weighting of 0.6 or 0.7 or 1.2, as the case may be. That is a new way of thinking, and a new way of thinking is always difficult to get across.

It actually isn't as bad as it sounds, because if we were to go for an MMP system, your one vote will have become diluted because of the extra 300 people who have just been chucked into the House. Do you follow me? But when you have an MMP system, you would have extra seats that would be used to bring up the votes for each party, so that your individual vote is now diluted. Instead of being 1/334th, it's now 1/625th.

Does that make a lot of difference to you? I don't know, but this is where it gets interesting. The assumption here is that we as a body actually accept the premise that we want proportional representation. If we accept that premise as our starting point; if, without arguing about whether it's good or bad, we accept the idea that we're going to have proportional representation, then there are going to be changes in your effective vote. That's what proportional representation means.

● (1350)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Thériault: That was indeed my understanding. Certain experts told us that strategic voting, in which people vote a strategy rather than an ideology or conviction, is what you intended to remedy.

Could the strategic character have a negative effect on a system such as that?

For example, once a voting base's votes have been allocated, a region might be over-represented. Urban communities might be over-represented in relation to rural communities, for example.

Wouldn't that be a negative effect of the system?

It's an intuition I have. I haven't thought about your model at length, but it seems to be that a member from an urban community might have more weight than a member from a rural community, because of the clientele the member is covering. The demographics would end up being different.

Couldn't that be a negative effect of your system?

Instead of being based on parties, the votes could be based on affiliation x, y or z, which would be unrelated to a political party.

That's a good question, isn't it, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: It's a good statement. Unfortunately, we have really exceeded the time limit.

Could you answer very briefly, Mr. Breslaw?

[*English*]

Mr. Jon Breslaw: We can have any criteria we like. We could have used the weighted system to allow for the disparities in size between ridings, such that if you come from a riding twice the size of mine, you get a vote of two and I get a vote of one to balance the fact that the ridings have different population sizes. That is clearly possible.

I stayed with the question. The question is, how do we have proportional representation? I've answered that question.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

[*Translation*]

Ms. May, you have the floor.

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

I thank our guests as well.

[*English*]

I'm going to try to use my five minutes as efficiently as possible by asking Professor Nikolenyi about Mr. Breslaw's proposal.

I think it's elegant and brilliant. I can see some deficiencies. I don't think it would bring up the diversity within the House—and I'll also give him a chance to respond. I don't think it would naturally lead to more women or ethnic minorities or first nations. It absolutely would eliminate false majorities, which is one of my primary concerns with our current voting system.

I like STV as you described it. It is exactly complex to administer but fabulously easy to use. I wonder whether you feel comfortable contrasting what you came here to propose with what you've heard today.

Mr. Csaba Nikolenyi: Until about an hour ago, I didn't even know that Jon and I are from the same institution, or at least were at some point in time, so it puts me on the spot.

It's an absolutely mathematically and intellectually brilliant alternative, and Jon, you have to forgive me for saying this, but I think it will remain in the classroom or at least in intellectual conversations. I think, just looking at the conversation here, it will be impossible to convince the rest of the Canadian electorate that this is an alternative to adopt.

It puts too much change and too much complexity in how Parliament would operate, and I'm not sure at all how some of those key principles would actually be met. I'm not sure that the examples —you mentioned the IMF, the European Union.... I would look at national comparables, and there is a reason why no country yet has adopted the system that you advocate, because there are all kinds of other considerations that come into the picture: representing different communities; promoting the representation of various groups in our society, be they ethnic groups, territorial-defined groups, gender. It's much too mathematical for the kind of vision that I think the committee, the Government of Canada, is trying to promote.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I would ask Mr. Breslaw to comment on that, but also on the benefits of STV, and then I have another question, if I can get back to Professor Nikolenyi.

Mr. Jon Breslaw: The reason why this is so interesting to me is that it actually asks the Canadian voters to accept the system that they are very happy using. In that sense, I don't think we're going to get a lot of argument from them in terms of changing the system. Change is always disruptive, and this one doesn't involve any change as far as the electorate is concerned.

As for the question of it being too complex for the voters, well, they don't have to care about it because.... And you have been told as a committee that 67% of Canadians are in favour of proportional representation. So how do we have proportional representation on one level and not changing the system at the other level? Well, I've just given it to you.

● (1355)

Ms. Elizabeth May: If I could go to you again, Professor Nikolenyi, you're clearly supporting single transferable vote. I don't want to put you at a disadvantage. Have you seen the evidence before us from Jean-Pierre Kingsley, our former chief electoral officer, about his way of addressing STV and dealing with large rural ridings?

Mr. Csaba Nikolenyi: No.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Okay. Well then, let me ask if you have given any thought to how one would treat, say, the territories when you're doing an STV system for Canada.

Mr. Csaba Nikolenyi: It's a tough question that becomes a question of how you draw the boundaries and how many seats you assign to those particular districts. Other than that, I'm not sure what you're getting at, but the question is whether electoral boundaries need to follow clearly and exactly provincial and territorial lines, or perhaps you imagine district boundaries in a more creative alternative fashion.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Under your proposal, would the number of seats in the House of Commons change to accommodate STV in Canada?

Mr. Csaba Nikolenyi: It doesn't have to, but again, if what you have in mind is to correct for some of the under-representation that currently exists in Canada, but playing with district magnitude and recognizing the fact that some areas, some groups, may be under-represented, district magnitude can address that. But changing district magnitude doesn't mean changing the number of seats in the House. What it means is how many winners, how many representatives, you have from the various districts. District boundaries would have to be redrawn then.

Ms. Elizabeth May: That's my time. Thank you.

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

Go ahead, Ms. Romanado.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like, once again, to thank our colleague Gabriel Ste-Marie for welcoming us in his lovely riding. We are very proud to be here with him today. I would also like to thank the citizens who have come here today to participate. It's something of real importance.

[*English*]

Now, to my two esteemed colleagues who are from my alma mater, it's a pleasure to see two professors in front of me. I feel I need that white board and some explanations, so—

Mr. Jon Breslaw: It's good to see students who have done well.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: My first question will be for Professor Nikolenyi. Please forgive my pronunciation of your name.

Mr. Csaba Nikolenyi: That's been the best so far.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: All right, but now you won't like what I ask.

You mentioned, when talking about MMP, that depending on how many proportional seats are in the House, you may end up with unintended consequences when mixing up those two types of MPs. Can you elaborate a little on what you meant by that?

Mr. Csaba Nikolenyi: That particular aspect is only one of the many variables that define a mixed member system. Probably much more important, or just as important, what is no less important than the number of seats you allocate to the proportional theory is how much cross-contamination you allow.

Look at the German system. The German system is known as a mixed member system, but Professor Massicotte's name has come up before, and he went on the record many times to say that it is actually a list PR system in terms of its fundamental outcome, because the proportional peer, the outcome of the party list vote, determines the overall allocation of seats.

Do voters know that? How many voters will know that when they are presented with the choice of voting for a party on the party ballot and for a candidate on the constituency ballot?

There are all kinds of complications. What if the constituency seats that the party gets entitled to actually exceed the number of seats that the party would be entitled to under the proportional vote? You can correct for all of those, but those need to be also checked and looked at. When I—

● (1400)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I'm going to stop you because I have another question.

Mr. Csaba Nikolenyi: Sure.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I would like both of you to answer this one.

You mentioned there are drawbacks to MMP or proportional systems, so on the flip side—Professor Breslaw, first I'm going to ask you if you can explain your math to me again so I can write it down—wouldn't creating MPs with weighted votes have all the same drawbacks as proportional seats? The reason I'm asking this is that if my vote is only worth, say, 0.4 or 0.8, Ms. May's is worth 2, and someone else's is worth 7, I'm 0.7 of an MP versus how she's 2 MPs.

I'm just saying that in terms of all of the problems that entails in terms of two-tiered MP systems. I'm just throwing that out there because I love the idea—it's simple; I love it—but I'm just wondering what the drawbacks would be.

Mr. Jon Breslaw: You'll get over it.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I would.

Mr. Jon Breslaw: I'll take the two for one because I don't want to cut you in half.

Having extra MPs in Elizabeth's camp keeps her having a single vote, but we have these extra votes lying around. They haven't been elected; they are costly—you have to pay their pensions—and it doesn't serve any other purpose besides the same idea of giving Elizabeth the double vote. That concept is simply the idea of how we get proportional representation in a manner that is realistic.

This committee is doing all this work. It has to report by December 1. The electoral officer has said that a new system has to be in place by the spring if it's going to go into effect for the next general election. Generally, large changes are painful. A small change like this—and it doesn't feel small to you, but it really is—where we're just changing one thing, the actual weight of the voting in the House—can actually occur and can actually have consensus. None of you will lose your seat, because your seats are going to be determined in exactly the same way as they were determined before.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Can you explain the math?

The Chair: Okay. We'll—

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I want to see how he got that.

The Chair: Very quickly.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: How did you calculate the weight of the vote?

Mr. Jon Breslaw: You look at the party and you see how many seats they got. Let's say they got 40% of the seats. You look at the party and you see how much of the vote they got. Let's say they got 50% of the vote. You divide the 50 by 40, and you get a weight of 1.2.

The Chair: That's perfect. Thanks.

We'll go to Mr. Maguire.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Thank you to our witnesses and everyone else who is here to partake in and listen to the proceedings this afternoon and this evening as well.

Professor Nikolenyi, I wanted to touch base. You made a number of statements that caught my attention in regard to some of the three different options you put forward to us. One of them was that the PR system would create greater turnouts but provide weaker governments. Then you mentioned that it's more complicated; it may be easier to use, but it's tougher to administer under an STV. Can you make a few comments and expand on those statements?

Mr. Csaba Nikolenyi: Sure. Thank you very much.

When we talk about a weak government, we need to be careful, so let me nuance that particular claim.

PR typically leads to avoiding a majority parliament. In other words, if there is a party that wins a majority of the votes, PR will reflect that, but that's rare. What normally tends to happen is that you have an undominated legislature, which is a legislature with no single political party having a majority. Then you need to either form a coalition government or have minority governments.

Whether a coalition government is going to be weaker than a single party majority government is a function of many variables. Two or three political parties that are cohesive and that are ideologically close to each other on various policy dimensions may be no less strong and no weaker than a similarly united, strong, single party majority government. Whether a coalition government is weaker or not is a matter of how ideologically aligned the coalition parties are.

What I do want to stress, though, is that the preponderance of such coalition situations is far greater with proportional representation than with the plurality or majoritarian system. It's not that there are no exceptions, because there are.

With respect to the single transferable vote, there is a reason it has been popular as a proportional choice in the Anglo-Saxon electorate and political world. It's largely because it preserves local representation, and largely because the identification of the voter with the candidates continues. That remains, but it gives you choice. In contrast to the alternative vote, it does become proportional because each district has multiple seats assigned to it, so you are able to allocate and offer proportional rewards among the candidates of the various parties in reflecting the number of votes they have received.

The transferring of the votes when you start calculating the votes of candidates who didn't qualify and who are not meeting the electoral quota—which is a term that's used in order to determine whether a candidate is entitled to those seats—becomes complicated, but that's a question for administration. Our colleagues in Australia know more about it than anybody else. You can get around that. Australia offers instructive lessons in that regard by giving the opportunity for voters to essentially entrust their choice to a political party.

● (1405)

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thank you. I have one more question.

There are going to be trade-offs in regard to whatever change might take place, or finally comes out in the report, or is voted on by Canadians, or however it is implemented. You mentioned the coalition governments, and it's my experience that those are weaker than a majority government, as far as direction from the country goes. There's perhaps more enticement for spending and to have some other things get out of control that don't in majorities all the time, although sometimes it does. Do you see the mixed proportional process or any of these other options leading to the formation of more parties? We're talking about present parties that are here now as coalitions, but what about the formation of more parties in society today? What are your comments on what impact that has on future governments as well?

Mr. Csaba Nikolenyi: Yes, the more proportional the system gets, the greater the number of viable parties there are going to be. That means there will be alternative new associations capturing new interests that may proceed, because now there's a realistic chance for them either directly to penetrate the system or by forming coalitions with other organizations to do so. So the answer is yes, I would certainly see a greater partisan fragmentation and proliferation of parties if a more proportional system were adopted. The more proportional the system that's adopted is, the more I think that would be the case.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. DeCourcey now.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matt DeCourcey (Fredericton, Lib.): Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

I thank our witnesses as well.

And on behalf of my Acadian and Brayon brothers and sisters from New Brunswick, I'd like to thank all the people from this lovely community who are with us. I'm very happy there's a window in our room, so we can enjoy the beautiful landscape on offer.

[*English*]

Thank you, everyone.

Professor Nikolenyi, I'll start with you.

In your testimony, you referenced the 2011 New Zealand referendum as demonstrating a desire by New Zealanders to move away from MMP. I note that in the referendum 58% voted in favour of keeping the current system.

Is there more evidence to suggest, in your research, that New Zealanders are seriously considering this, or is it similar to what we hear today where you have swaths of people arguing that we must have electoral reform, and you have many others arguing that there is no need, and you have every shade of opinion in between?

Mr. Csaba Nikolenyi: That is a great question. Thank you very much.

Yes and no. The point there was that New Zealand was an example to illustrate that. Even a country that has adopted the most successful MMP system, that being Germany, and by successful I mean in terms of longevity, seriously considered putting it on the menu of options in the referendum for change. There were reasons why they got to that moment. It didn't start with the referendum.

I mentioned earlier that the first institutional efforts to remedy some of the pitfalls of the new system had to do with the introduction of the electoral integrity legislation, because New Zealand wasn't prepared for some of the intricacies of coalition or governance that paralyzed their parliament soon after the introduction of the new system.

The central point I want to drive home there was less about New Zealand and more about the system. If you look at some of the important publications—and I would be very happy to submit those to the clerk for future reading—they surveyed how attractive mixed member systems were just about 15 or 16 years ago. They don't seem to have that appeal anymore. Many of them are gone and have been replaced. Whether you look at new democracies, and certainly that's where they were the most prominent, or you look at Italy and Japan, the countries that experimented with mixed member systems in the early 1990s, they didn't stay, and New Zealand seemed to fall into that.

● (1410)

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Thank you very much.

You spoke about the electoral integrity and the potential for legislation there. It brings me to a subject that I want to give you a chance to answer on, and then on that subject, I will have a different question for Professor Breslaw.

My colleague Mr. Aldag mentioned this. Is there an element of accountability woven into the idea of a member of Parliament being able to leave a political party on moral grounds or on a matter of integrity that they perceive, and do they have some relational accountability to their constituency?

Also, on the matter of accountability within this system, is there a psychological barrier or a real barrier to the notion that I, as a representative for Fredericton, could vote a certain way and then have to explain to my constituents that I tried my best but my vote was worth only 0.73%, whereas the vote of so-and-so from somewhere else was worth 1.3%? I would contest that there are matters on which parties do not necessarily vote as a bloc and they are matters of regional contestation and of competing interests.

Perhaps we could split the time left equally to answer those two questions.

Mr. Csaba Nikolenyi: Very quickly, thank you very much. That question is very, very dear to my heart and central to my current work, as a matter of fact.

There is good reason why Edmund Burke, a few hundred years back, speaking to the electors of Bristol, actually argued something very similar to what you said. When you elect your representative, he should be free. He should be your agent, representing according to his wisdom of expertise what he thinks is best for the constituency.

You would think, and you should think, that should include the right to cross the floor, to leave a party if that can be defended on justifiable grounds to accord with the changing needs and preferences of the constituency.

The problem is that in the intervening more than 200 years, political parties have developed—functioning, modern political parties. When you have a functioning party system, that accountability, the linkage that you so eloquently described connecting the voter and the representative, gets complicated and becomes triangular, because all of a sudden you have a political party that also galvanizes interest, that also wants to capture the preferences and the interests of the voters, and that also has the representatives to become the representative. That direct connection becomes triangulated.

That's why countries and parliaments around the world, and more and more of them, are grappling with this issue.

The Chair: Thank you. It's a very interesting question.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Could I allow Professor Breslaw to answer it very briefly, around the notion of accountability—

The Chair: He may, but very briefly.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: —and the way the vote is weighted.

Mr. Jon Breslaw: Are you married?

No? Okay. So you've not yet learned the real idea of compromise.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: This could be a much bigger discussion, Dr. Breslaw.

Voices: Oh, oh!

A voice: I think we need more time.

The Chair: Yes. I don't know that we'll have it, though.

Mr. Jon Breslaw: When you vote as a member of the public for a candidate, the candidate has at least two components: his own individual morality, etc., and his affiliation to a party. You don't vote for just an independent, because they're not effective. They're much more effective when they're part of a party. You have to have at least these two components of this basket, and often they don't necessarily match, so when I vote for a member of Parliament, I'm making a compromise, believe me.

● (1415)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Madam Sansoucy.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to salute my colleague Gabriel Ste-Marie, whose riding is hosting the committee.

I salute the participants and the civic engagement they are showing by being with us today.

I also thank the two witnesses for their presentations.

Professor Breslaw, I understand the thinking behind the proposal you have made today. I am in considerable agreement with you that it would be difficult to apply, because, beyond the voting, there is the whole set of parliamentary rules about things like time available for members, and committee work by members. It is difficult to imagine how all this could be weighted.

Professor Nikolenyi, I am less well-acquainted with the single transferable vote. I understand you prefer that model. I'd like you to explain how this type of voting unfolds in practice. You have said that this voting system would be easier, but I'd like you to explain the reasons why you prefer a single transferable vote in the Canadian context. What are the advantages?

[*English*]

Mr. Csaba Nikolenyi: Thank you very much.

I'm in favour of STV precisely because of the Canadian context. If Canada wants to have a more proportional electoral system that changes as little as possible what we are familiar with and that is dear to us as voters and as the political class, which are set out in the five-point mandate, then for the reasons that I mentioned, this is the system that would come the closest, certainly closer than the other two.

The alternative vote is just not proportional. The MMP is too technical. This is the least complex system that introduces proportionality and still keeps those values intact. It's not my favourite system choice, but that's not relevant.

The mechanics of it, as far as the voter is concerned, are really quite simple. You are presented with a ballot, not unlike what we already have in any Canadian riding, except that you can rank order the candidates. Similar to the alternative vote, you are rank ordering the candidates in terms of your preferences.

Because there are multiple seats assigned to the district, political parties will be running multiple candidates. It is possible, as a matter of ballot design, to actually leave it up to political parties to determine how your preferences are going to be handled. That's an important detail that makes is easier for voters who may not be as informed about the choices to figure the system out. However, let's leave that complexity aside.

The system fundamentally works as such. You take a mathematical formula. It can be as simple as V over M plus one. The number of votes cast, divided by district magnitude plus one, which gives you a quota. That quota will essentially determine the threshold, the number of votes that will guarantee any candidate, any party, that gets that many votes from the electorate will be entitled to a seat. However, there will be surpluses and there will be candidates who are well beyond or below that threshold. Their preferences are going to be transferred in the order of the preferences that the voters themselves determine. The choice, fundamentally, in terms of who will be the beneficiary and who will benefit from these vote transfers, is automatically in the hands of the voter. It is proportional because of multi-member districts and because the quota I mentioned guarantees that.

Again, when you have many candidates running, and you have many candidates with a small percentage of the vote, those will still need to be transferred. That's why I said the administration of it can become time-consuming and complex. However, there are algorithms also now to work with that.

I want to stress that the system is not foolproof. If you follow current Australian debates about precisely looking at ways of changing the Australian system in place for the upper house, they are picking up on this issue. Therefore, the system is not foolproof, but given the mandate of the committee, it's still as close as it gets to meeting those principles.

● (1420)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Sansoucy.

Mr. Généreux, welcome to our committee. Thank you for joining us this afternoon.

[*English*]

Mr. Jon Breslaw: May I respond?

The Chair: Very briefly, as we do have time limits.

Mr. Jon Breslaw: Very briefly, it's not that you're going to get 0.8% of an office. Everything stays exactly the same. The only thing that changes is the weight of the member when she or he votes in the House. That is the only thing that changes.

The Chair: That's right. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Généreux, the floor is yours.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank all the witnesses for being here.

And I thank the good people of Joliette for welcoming us to their lovely city.

Mr. Breslaw, you have mainly spoken about the potential system. I find you very original, and I like the "keep it simple and stupid" approach. In essence, that's the approach you are proposing, because you seem to be saying that your system is straightforward, and easy to implement rapidly.

Systems aside, Canada will be 150 years old next year, and the political party that has just been elected as a majority has decided to consider the possibility of changing the electoral system by saying, during the election campaign, that 2015 would be the last year Canadians would use the current voting system.

Do you believe that we 12 members of this committee, who are taking part in roundtables throughout Canada to meet the public, can and should have the mandate to change the electoral system?

Moreover, there are eight weeks to go before December 1, and the Chief Electoral Officer told us that it would take at least two years to implement a new electoral system.

Do you think the time for reflection is a bit short? I think our electoral system can be improved. In fact, everyone agrees with that.

Mr. Breslaw, do you think the time is a bit too short to make all these changes before the next election?

[*English*]

Mr. Jon Breslaw: Yes. It takes you back a bit to the 1960s when we decided that we would go and demolish a whole lot of houses and have highways because it was efficient, and we'd get on with it. In retrospect, that was a mistake. The mistake is not recognizing one's heritage. We have a heritage here in Canada—indeed in the United States and England as well—from England of 400 years of the first past the post concept, and it's worked pretty well for that time.

On the other side, you have this concept of being on the right side of history that asks for more inclusion and for votes not to be wasted. It was in that sense that, yes, throwing out the system on the basis of six weeks of discussion and 12 members sitting around the table is drastic. But at least seeing the idea that proportional representation does make sense, I was proposing this system that keeps our heritage, keeps the local representation, that link, keeps the way that we've been doing things for the last 150 years, and makes just one incremental change that is reversible if we need it to be, but that can actually attempt to satisfy the mandates that this committee has been given, and see how that works.

It's much, much better—and I think you've put your finger on it—to change organically. Don't just throw out everything because that's the thing to do these days, that's the fashion. If we're going to go for a change that seems to make sense, then let's go there gradually, and this is a gradual way of doing it, making one simple change.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Thank you.

Mr. Nikolenyi, go ahead.

● (1425)

Mr. Csaba Nikolenyi: Same question?

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Yes, please.

Mr. Csaba Nikolenyi: That question cuts to the core of politics and the ways of electoral reform. Electoral reforms tend to be stickier, in other words, producing longer lasting results if they have a stronger buy-in. The more inclusive the input, not only are you better informed, but the greater the transparency and the legitimacy of the process.

If I'm asked that question, my dollar is on creating citizen assemblies. There are different ways of doing that. You don't have to poll people, but you can organize creatively. There is fascinating literature that actually looks at how citizen assemblies.... We are familiar with British Columbia in Canada, but they are also in Europe, in Holland, for example. It is sort of the increasingly more preferred way, if you will, or one increasingly more preferred way of doing it, and there are reasons for that. You create more opportunities for public education. Not just the 12 people you mentioned, but a broader segment of the population would really understand the nuances. It also gives greater opportunity to dispel fears about various systems.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

That's the end of your question period, unfortunately. Time flies when dealing with such an interesting topic.

[*English*]

Last but not least, Ms. Sahota.

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

It really is lovely to be here in Joliette, and thank you to Gabriel. It's refreshing, literally, because we have fresh air and scenery to see. It's also refreshing because the content that we've been presented by the witnesses is unique and new, and I like that. I'm getting tired of hearing the same thing.

I have been presented this idea, the weighted vote, by a few individuals from out west and Yukon, so some people have been thinking in this direction. I know you keep saying over and over again that, given the time frame that we have, this is the easiest way to do it, but given another time frame, would you still think that this is the best change for Canada?

Mr. Jon Breslaw: It's not only the easiest, it is the best. Yes, absolutely.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Another question I have is for you, Professor Nikolenyi.

You said that STV may not be your favourite, and it's irrelevant what your favourite is. Why do you state that? What is your favourite?

Mr. Csaba Nikolenyi: Closed list PR is, without any doubt, but it's too drastic for us in Canada. It's the other end of the spectrum. For that you need more than 12 people, as Mr. Généreux said. But by all means, if you want proportionality, go with a reasonable threshold: 4% to 5% closed list PR.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Were you not saying earlier on that some of the countries that have those systems are going through...? What country would you have in mind that has that kind of system right now?

Mr. Csaba Nikolenyi: Spain, Portugal, Israel, Holland have it.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Do you think those countries have a lot of stability in their governments? We've been hearing a lot about recurring elections and constant turnover.

Mr. Csaba Nikolenyi: Some have more than others. Certainly Spain recently has been less stable than before. Israel is always unstable. But you have variation. How much instability PR produces really depends on the nature of parties and fragmentation, which is a function both of the system but also of how fragmented society is. You can have a closed list PR system introduced to a very homogeneous society that will not fragment it all that much.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Perhaps the society is more homogeneous because of the current system they're in, and opening it up to having a lot more smaller parties is what—

Mr. Csaba Nikolenyi: Given the Canadian reality, I agree with you, which is why I'm advocating for that here. The disadvantage or otherwise of list PR, like STV, is that it is going to create more parties. It is going to lead to coalition governments. It does create stronger parties. It creates internally more cohesive, more united parties.

If they are not comfortable with that, parties can decide whether they want to internally democratize their candidate selection procedures or not. That will create greater opportunities for access. But that's really a different matter. That's a question of party, not electoral reform.

● (1430)

Ms. Ruby Sahota: There was one more thing that you mentioned. I just want, in conclusion, to get all the little things that were missing. You mentioned that in New Zealand there have been pitfalls, and that's what coaxed them to have the referendum. What were their pitfalls from MMP? You said that parliament was paralyzed. I think that's the word you used.

Mr. Csaba Nikolenyi: There was a sequence. New Zealand adopted in the early mid-1990s the German MMP. That ended overnight, if you will, the conventional very stable, very solid two party system that had been in place, and you had a multi-party parliament in which coalition governments had to be formed. This is where my argument for electoral integrity legislation came in. Floor crossing fundamentally prevented the functioning of the first New Zealand government, precisely because the dynamics of the system and the new parties that were formed and the new parties that entered weren't habituated to the new style of functioning.

The first institutional attempt to regulate the system was through electoral integrity legislation, with a sunset clause: let's see whether this is going to be enough; let's keep it on the books for five years, and if the problem of floor crossing is not going to continue to remain a problem, we'll let it expire. That's exactly what happened.

But it's not clear. Your colleague, Mr. DeCourcey, quoted the numbers very correctly. There was still support for the current system, convincing support—58% is not unreasonable—but there's a reason that electoral reform is being thought of in New Zealand. It's not at all clear that the two party mentality is really a matter of the past. Here it's important to remember what Professor Breslaw mentioned about heritage.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That ends our round of questioning.

[*Translation*]

We thought we had heard everything, given that this is our 29th meeting, but you have truly surprised us with some new ideas, and that was very stimulating. Thank you for coming here to Joliette to address this committee. I hope you will read our future report with great interest.

Thank you.

We will take a short break for a few minutes to allow the second group of witnesses to set up.

● (1430)

(Pause)

● (1440)

The Chair: Our two witnesses have arrived.

Hello.

We are commencing the second part of the meeting. We welcome Mercédez Roberge.

I believe you're a former president of the Fédération des femmes du Québec—the Quebec federation of women.

Ms. Mercédez Roberge (Campaigner, As an Individual): No, I'm a former president of Mouvement démocratie nouvelle. I recently became a member of the board of the Fédération des femmes du Québec.

The Chair: Pardon me.

Ms. Mercédez Roberge: In this context, it's my involvement with Mouvement démocratie nouvelle, as president, from 2003 to 2010, that is more important.

The Chair: Understood. Thank you.

We also welcome France Robertson, of the Centre d'amitié autochtone de Lanaudière.

You will each have 10 minutes to present your briefs. This will be followed by questions from the members present.

Without further ado, we give the floor to Ms. Roberge.

Ms. Mercédez Roberge: Let me begin by thanking you for your invitation. I should mention that my remarks to you today will be contained in a more formal brief; what you have, for the moment, are merely my speaking notes.

As I mentioned, I have been advocating voting system reform for a long time—at the Quebec level, since 2003—but always with a view to achieving a combination of objectives. The idea is not just to achieve proportionality, but rather, a set of objectives. I have the same democratic aspirations for the Parliament of Canada and the National Assembly of Quebec. In my opinion, for the federal government and parliament, the compensatory mixed proportional model is best adapted to the situation, because it best meets the different objectives you have set as a committee, and best meets the objectives I will present to you.

In my view, all the founding components of a society need to take part in decision-making. That is not the case at this time. We have values of fairness, equality and inclusion, but this is not reflected in Parliament. In order for these values to become a reality, institutional mechanisms—that is, mechanisms that are part of electoral law—will need to be implemented at the same time as the voting system is changed.

Essentially, we are referring to a gender-differentiated analysis, and what might be termed a differentiated inclusion analysis. This implies a multicultural, multiracial vision. In my opinion, this must be included in the analysis of electoral system reform, and in the content of the voting system to be implemented. I will therefore focus on this aspect, which I believe the committee has heard little about so far. I will provide examples of how this is being carried out elsewhere in the world, and of how it could be carried out here.

The proportional family of voting systems offers a better chance of diversifying representation, but in order for the results to be truly consistent, mechanisms that set objectives must be included from the outset. The modalities must be chosen based on their ability to achieve two goals: to respect each vote, and respect each voter. A multitude of countries have implemented proportional systems to achieve diversity. I will present some numbers derived from the analysis of the documentation regarding women. They can simply be transposed for the purpose of applying them to the representation of racialized persons as well, because there is obviously a representation deficit there, too.

My figures are generally for the year 2016, and are for the Commons. We've heard it said, many times, that Canada was in 62nd place for women's representation in national parliaments, but little has been said about what happened in the countries that achieved better rankings. Of the 28 countries in the world that have elected at least 35% women, 25 have proportional systems. This is no accident. Fourteen of those 25 countries have combined the proportional method with other modalities. This includes mixed proportional models. In other words, 14 combine the proportional method with mechanisms aimed at achieving equality. These countries include Rwanda, Bolivia, Senegal, Mexico, Ecuador, Finland, Nicaragua and Spain, to name a few. There are others.

Let's zoom back out to a global view. Eighty-six countries have implemented mechanisms aimed at achieving equality between men and women. That's 44% of the world's nations, or, if you prefer, 37% of OECD countries. So this is not marginal. What characterizes these 86 countries, in comparison with the roughly 100 others that do not have mechanisms favouring equal representation, is that they are much more likely to have proportional voting systems. Fifty-eight of the 86 countries have proportional systems plus those mechanisms. On average, they elected a greater percentage of women than the countries that do not have mechanisms: 24% versus 18%. If one examines the performance of the countries that have adopted proportional systems plus those mechanisms, one finds that they have achieved 27% representation for women.

That's a great deal better than countries with majoritarian systems, where the figure is roughly 17%. The countries that have adopted the combination to which I've referred—that is, proportionality plus a mechanism—have made better progress. From 1999 to 2016, they increased an average of 14 percentage points, compared with 6.7% for countries that did not use such a combination. So this produces much better results than when the mechanisms are combined with a majoritarian voting system, and, needless to say, much better results than when a majoritarian system alone is present—something we would absolutely not propose.

Bear in mind that the global average for women elected is 20.7%. In the countries with a proportional system, one specific combination, namely, gender alternation on lists, achieves 34% female representation, in a context where there are, of course, several types of mechanisms. That's major.

● (1445)

What might that look like here? Broadly speaking, although the systems and mechanisms are varied, there are two major categories of mechanisms: mechanisms that set objectives for the percentage of female or racialized candidates, and are therefore about the efforts made by political parties; and objectives concerning the representation achieved in the election results. After the mechanisms are established, the rules to ensure compliance with those mechanisms must be put in place.

Currently, an elections statute regulates each stage of the electoral process. Everything, including time periods, is addressed. It would make sense to include the rules intended to implement the principles which we, as a society, have deemed important. Given that we allocate public funds to political parties for the good of democracy, it would make sense for us to demand accountability from political parties in terms of the results they attain. It would also make sense for us to demand accountability for their use of the funds. The socio-economic conditions of women and racialized persons are much worse than those of the population as a whole; this must be taken into account when considering the obstacles to running as a candidate.

I will not make some very concrete proposals. We must protect our principles from shifting winds and affirm the principles of equality and inclusion in the important documents; we must include the mechanisms in the elections act. We must act on two fronts, efforts and results, and thus, on both the percentage of candidates and the percentage of persons elected. More specifically, in a compensatory mixed proportional system, women and racialized persons must be encouraged to run for office. In order to do this, we could increase the extent to which their election expenses are reimbursed, and take their socio-economic differences into account. We could encourage political parties to present teams in keeping with the principles we establish. We must ask them to achieve targets and specify rules for that purpose.

In a compensatory mixed model, there are, of course, two components related to seats: the constituency list and the compensatory list. There are mechanisms that are good for both the constituency candidates and the compensatory candidates. If the value of equality is enshrined properly in the statute, we can then include a rule that the parties must present no less than 40% and no more than 60% of candidates of a given gender. This would apply both to the block of constituency seats, and the block of compensatory seats.

A part should also table a fixed percentage of candidates who are racialized persons. This percentage is easy to establish; there are statistics. The statistics vary by region, so the territorial distribution of racialized persons should be taken into account to establish the objectives. This would apply both to the constituencies and the compensations. The target percentage would therefore be based on pertinent data.

There would be specific mechanisms applicable only to the candidates on the compensatory list. I am referring to the alternation between both genders throughout the list. Rules could even be specified. There can be all sorts of variants, each aimed at ensuring that racialized persons are not at the bottom of the list.

In order for public funds to be used to achieve our objectives of equality, inclusion and non-discrimination in a broad sense, the reimbursement of election expenses should be increased based on the performance achieved, the percentage of women elected and the percentage of racialized persons elected.

● (1450)

There would be a way to have mechanisms based on the situation at election time, and a process for increasing the representation of these groups by level, by step.

How much time do I have left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Roughly 30 seconds.

Ms. Mercédez Roberge: Okay.

The traditional modalities of the voting system have to be taken into account as well. We haven't discussed lists sufficiently. The ratio between constituency seats and compensatory seats has an effect on representation. The more the compensatory seats are reduced, the less effective the list-related rules are. This needs to be taken into account. That's a way do to the gender-differentiated analysis of the voting system to be selected.

Voting systems are never neutral, whether politically or in terms of the composition of the governing group. If we want Parliament to be a welcoming place, the electoral system needs to allow for and foster that characteristic via a structural, social and political response.

The parties need to be gathering points for ideas and social projects. They have a role to play and a responsibility to bear. A change to the voting system must improve democracy in a profound way so that each vote and each person counts. I consider it a collective responsibility.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Roberge.

It's your turn now, Ms. Robertson.

Ms. France Robertson (Manager, Centre d'amitié d'autochtone de Lanaudière): Hello.

My name is France Robertson. I am an Innu woman from Mashteuiatsh, in the Lac-Saint-Jean area. I have been living in Montréal, an urban environment, for 23 years. I am the director of the Lanaudière Native Friendship Centre and vice-president of the Quebec federation of native friendship centres.

First of all, I'd like to note that we are on Atikamekw territory. I thank the Atikamekws. The Manawan community is right next door. I think it's important to underscore that.

The Native Friendship Centre movement has been active in Canada for more than 60 years. There are 118 such centres in Canada, including six provincial and territorial associations, as well as the National Association of Friendship Centres, or NAFC. In the province of Quebec, the provincial federation is called the Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec.

The Native Friendship Centre movement has been present in Quebec for more than 45 years. The first friendship centre opened in Chibougamau, in 1969. During the 1970s, centres opened in Val-d'Or, La Tuque, Montreal, Senneterre and Quebec City. The Joliette centre is relatively new; it opened in 2001. These cities were already meeting places for indigenous citizens, who converge there to get access to services, and settle there permanently.

More and more indigenous people are leaving First Nations communities, which you call reserves, to settle in urban communities so they can study, work, or have a better life, or for health reasons. In the Joliette area, 60% of the indigenous population are Atikamekw who still speak their language.

We are the largest First Nations services infrastructure in Canadian cities. The Native Friendship Centres have a shared vision, namely, to improve the quality of life of Aboriginal citizens who live in urban areas or are transiting through such areas. They are multi-service centres in urban environments for indigenous clients—that is, First Nations, Métis and Inuit people—but they have an open-door policy without distinction based on status, nation or place of residence.

We are Aboriginal democratic and non-partisan community organizations, and we work in a spirit of complementarity with the partners in our communities. Our movement's strength is based on our democratic structure, which enables all indigenous citizens to express their aspirations and take part in the decision-making process aimed at achieving objectives, by sitting on our boards of directors and attending the annual general meetings, and which takes their experience as consumers of services into account so that the services can be improved and made more responsive to their needs.

Our management and governance structures are oriented toward indigenous citizens. Accordingly, our primary commitment is to indigenous people who live in or are transiting through cities.

The trend of indigenous people moving to the cities continues to grow: 60% of indigenous people live outside reserves. In Quebec, more than half the indigenous population—53.2%—live in a city. The trend is getting more pronounced. There is a lot of talk about Quebec's aging population, but our own population is young: 55% of us are 25 or younger. More and more young people are settling in the cities.

I'm going to digress for a moment. Although it's considered a civic duty, I've only voted twice. When I left my community, I felt there was no point to voting—that it was not about indigenous people. I saw no interest in doing so, and felt it didn't concern me. I questioned what it would change, given that the candidates who get elected are not indigenous people, and that the Indian Act remained in force. That was always my attitude. But one day, an elder told me that if we want to change something, we have to change our attitude, get involved, and go vote so that things will change. I've voted twice, and am proud of it. I also talk to my children about the importance of voting. I would never have thought that I would talk about voting systems one Friday afternoon in Joliette. Thank you, Mr. Ste-Marie!

● (1455)

I know that you'll be hearing from very few indigenous people, but in my opinion, it is very important to hear them.

I heard Mercédez discuss the voting system in considerable detail earlier. For our part, we are making great efforts to raise our sisters' and brothers' awareness of the importance of voting. But we need the voting system to adapt to our approach—to our way of doing things.

In the most recent election campaign, the 2015 campaign, the Friendship Centre movement put a lot of effort into raising indigenous people's awareness of the importance of exercising their voting rights. We created an elections program to help indigenous people understand that they needed to vote—that it's a civic duty. We really mobilized. At the Joliette centre, we met with the candidates from each party, to ask them questions. We asked them which elements of their election platform affected indigenous people. They shared with us the issues that were part of their party's platform, but they also shared their personal preoccupations about Atikamekws and their families living in Joliette.

Later, we organized a workshop. We invited our members—our families—to come hear the presentations of the various candidates. We analyzed each party's platform. Our purpose was not to tell people to vote for a given person or platform. Rather, it was to present our issues, and to see what importance each party and each candidate was according to those issues. We also wanted to explain to participants how to get on the voter list, and to share with them the reasons it's important to vote and to determine which party is closest to our Aboriginal values. That's the kind of reflection we had with the families.

It's not enough to tell families that it's important to vote, and that it's a citizen's duty and right. That's not how I was made a voter. I was made a voter when I was told that a certain party thinks Aboriginal people are important, that it listens to them, and that, for these reasons, it's important to go out and vote—to cast a vote for a certain party, or a certain candidate. Those are the points we raised, and our people went out and voted.

We knew that Aboriginal voters had to surmount a variety of obstacles in order to exercise their voting rights. We knew they were unfamiliar with the electoral process, and had trouble finding information about parties and candidates. We knew that the cards we could submit as proof of identity do not make reference to a place of residence, and that our nations are still largely nomadic today. Even though we have reserves, many families remain nomadic. So, at the polling station, presenting the elector's card with a residence address is a challenge. Some people lose it, while others don't go and get it, or don't feel like it. Aboriginal people often tend not to vote when an obstacle arises. For all these reasons, we looked for a way to facilitate the process, in order to encourage indigenous voters to exercise their civic duty.

In order to counter the lack of motivation and interest among indigenous people, we invested a lot of effort in motivating them to exercise their right to vote. We shared easy-to-understand information about the way the electoral system and the voting process work. We also used social networks to mobilize our members. This included Facebook, a powerful communication tool. We facilitated sharing of information about political parties and local candidates. I thought that was very important, and I thank the parties and candidates, who were very cooperative. Aboriginal people accord considerable importance to the interest shown in them, and can anticipate the impact their votes will have.

In addition, we offered transportation to the polling station on voting day. It's banal, but important. We generally offer transportation to our activities, and we decided to do that on election day as well, to encourage our members to get out and vote.

You now know how much importance we ascribe to raising indigenous voters' awareness about voting. Friendship centres are non-partisan organizations, and it's important to respect that fact.

● (1500)

The most important thing for us is that people be able to vote.

Few indigenous people vote in federal or provincial elections. According to Elections Canada, 30% of First Nations living in Quebec communities were able to vote in the 2011 federal election, compared to 63% in the rest of Canada. We know that in the last election, there were Aboriginal candidates—there was talk of this—and we were very proud of them.

The important thing to us, truly, was that people be able to vote, and not just for a party running Aboriginal candidates. We certainly hoped Aboriginal candidates would be elected, but it was more important to us that changes be made to programs. For example, right now, urban populations are a growing challenge. This was important to us.

I hope that, one day, by exercising my right to vote, we will achieve nation-to-nation dialogue. This won't happen tomorrow, but I hope that, one day, each First Nation will be told that it can vote and that everything is possible. I know that the Indian Act won't be abolished tomorrow, but if Aboriginal people are called upon to vote, it could happen one day.

● (1505)

The Chair: I suspect we will have many questions for you, Ms. Robertson.

Ms. France Robertson: I thought you were going to ask all your questions to Ms. Roberge.

The Chair: Our questions will be addressed to you both.

Ms. France Robertson: Is my time up?

The Chair: Actually, we would like to move on to the questions.

We will give the floor to Mr. Aldag, who has five minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. John Aldag: I'd like to welcome you to our committee, and thank both of you for coming and presenting. Both of you have presented perspectives that are very important for us to hear, the issues of underparticipation, under-representation of women, visible minorities, aboriginal and indigenous groups.

I wanted to say, Ms. Robertson, I'm really pleased that you took the advice of your elder and have become involved in the process. It's really encouraging to listen to the work that you and your organization have done in vocalizing and informing your community to get involved in the process. That's a very positive thing. With that as kind of the context for what I'm going to say, you both have touched a bit on how important it is to the communities you are working with to change the process to deal with some of these issues versus some of the other things.

Madam Roberge, you spoke about some of the things that could be done outside of going to a PR system. If you would be able to give us some comments on.... If we don't end up with a full-on PR system, it may not fix all the things, so what are the other elements we should be looking at and considering at the same time to continue dealing with the issues that you've raised? You gave us a couple. Are there any other things you'd like to see?

Ms. Robertson, are there specific actions that you feel we need to take to ensure that your community, the indigenous community, is involved in this process?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Mercédez Roberge: The mechanisms I mentioned should not be established outside the proportional voting system; they should be set up within it. It is all the more important that the Committee's findings include thoughts to the effect that, when changing the voting system, the mechanisms that will make it possible to achieve society's principles of equality and inclusion should immediately be made part of the system.

Majoritarian voting systems can, of course, include mechanisms, but they are not as well-equipped as the proportional system to implement them, because majoritarian systems work one riding at a time, each riding being a silo. It's very difficult to intervene comprehensively and have an overall vision. When people vote, they don't have an idea of the party's complete team, or of the proportion of women and racialized persons. It's something you don't see. But in a proportional system, or a mixed compensatory proportional system, it's something you can see. Even the parties will benefit from showing it to us more. That should be taken into account.

However, I'd like to draw your attention to the difference between majoritarian systems and proportional systems. Even if a country that uses a majoritarian system includes institutional measures, it only achieves an average of 17% representation for women, compared to 14% if it does not include a measure. That is certainly not a target. Add 10% to each of those numbers, and you get the effect that they have on proportional systems. It's the combination. So you have to act within the voting system, not outside it.

● (1510)

[*English*]

Mr. John Aldag: I want to give Ms. Robertson a chance to comment as well, because five minutes do go very quickly.

Do you have any comments about what things we can continue to do to support you, along with changing the system?

[*Translation*]

Ms. France Robertson: First of all, the elector's card is a challenge in itself for us.

Why can't people simply show up with a piece of ID?

For Aboriginal families, it would be a lot easier. And as I mentioned earlier, friendship centres are non-partisan organizations. Since it's important to attract indigenous families, why not create polling stations in friendship centres?

Since they are non-partisan organizations, they are neutral places. I think it's an interesting idea. It would make it possible to bring out more indigenous persons, and they could exercise their right to vote.

[*English*]

Mr. John Aldag: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Rayes, the floor is yours.

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

I thank the witnesses for being with us.

Ms. Roberge, we are meeting with a lot of experts, university professors, citizens and organizations that have access to considerable documentation. However, the data often contradict each other. In this context, I'd like to know if you have documents that confirm your figures and assertions.

Just yesterday, a university expert, who came to speak to us about voting systems, asserted with certainty that in the countries that had proportional voting systems, those systems had no impact on the participation of women, or on the number of women elected. He said that it was not that, but the measures deployed to change the political culture, which brought about change.

I remember that, last week in Ottawa, a woman affiliated with a university— in Vancouver, I believe—appeared by videoconference. Each time we spoke about voting systems, she repeated that if we show the will, and impose strict rules, the desired results, including 50% women candidates, will necessarily be achieved.

We are trying to achieve many things. We want to change the voting system. If the objective is truly to obtain 50-50 representation, and the majority of the public is not preoccupied about voting systems—indeed, it has been said that the discussion interests only 3% of people—then in order to truly change things, perhaps we must resort to more modest means.

We are talking about women and minorities. Yesterday, a witness said something that really struck me. It was the first time I became aware of those issues. Based on what he said, we want women to have the same representation as their share of the population, which is 50.4%. There are now more women than men.

He asked whether all religious groups, minorities, immigrants, homosexuals, transgender people, youth, seniors and indigenous people—perhaps a variety of groups in the case of indigenous people—would be represented, and where the line would be drawn so that people can make decisions and take their place.

My question is somewhat broad. I'd like to hear your comments on the subject.

Ms. Mercédez Roberge: There are several aspects. I don't know the source of the information the specialist you met with yesterday shared with you.

Mr. Alain Rayes: He wasn't the only one. A few of them told us it had no impact.

Ms. Mercédez Roberge: Okay.

The people from the Inter-Parliamentary Union, from AceProject and from Quota Project say the same thing as me. They are international institutions that monitor the scores obtained by the various parties. There is a great deal of surveillance worldwide on the subject. The evidence is copious.

The data I have, which are from reliable sources, pertain to 195 countries. As far as the statistics are concerned, I will provide tables and more specific sources in my brief. A panoply of data shows an undeniable effect. There is an increase of at least 10% when measures are applied. That's major.

● (1515)

Mr. Alain Rayes: Very good.

I simply look forward to obtaining the documentation that corroborates your assertions.

My second question is about all the other groups, which you have called "racialized." That's the first time I hear that term. I imagine it's a group that brings together various people. That's good. Sorry about my ignorance in that regard.

Should we break the population down into each and every one of the groups in order to give them a place within the political parties?

Ms. Mercédez Roberge: No. What's important is that we ensure that society's fundamental components are represented; that they not only have the right to vote, but also the right to represent and be represented. When I used the term "right", it's understood that there is no rule that prevents this, but that there are obstacles that interfere. Accordingly, the term "racialized persons" is the term increasingly used to encompass visible minorities who are discriminated against, and people born abroad. They are people who are currently under-represented.

Elsewhere in the world, the term "ethnocultural minorities" is used. "Racialized persons" is the synonym that's being used more and more in Quebec.

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

Mr. Boulerice, the floor is yours.

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

Thank you, ladies, for being here, and for your presentations, which give us a good deal to think about and discuss.

Ms. Roberge, I find it interesting that you say that all fundamental components of society must take part in the decision-making. I think this partly answers Mr. Rayes' question about whether we want to give ourselves a Parliament that reflects the diversity of voices and the socio-demographic, ethnic or gender realities of society, or whether we should continue to leave it to a bunch of 60-year-old white male lawyers to decide society's future and solve its problems.

You mentioned that you support a proportional voting system for several reasons. You are talking about a mixed proportional system with compensatory lists. Should the lists be established by province? By sub-region within the provinces? Or should they be Canada-wide? And should they be closed or open?

Ms. Mercédez Roberge: Naturally, we will not be deciding the shape of the electoral map for the entire country in this committee, but it would make sense for Canada to have a subdivision—certainly by province, but possibly also by administrative region, or something similar to that.

This would make sure, not only with regard to racialized persons —as a group, rather than one by one or any culture in particular— that the system would be aligned with the demographics, with their territorial presence, for allocation purposes. But I don't have a more specific opinion about the number of lists that would be needed. However, it would make no sense not to divide by province, and it might be more efficient to do so.

However, one must ensure that the subdivisions are of an effective size. A subdivision with only two or three seats would not allow for effective compensation. So there is a challenge of efficacy.

If we want the mechanisms included in the lists to be fully effective, we assume it's the political parties' responsibility to draw them up in an order that complies with the rules. That means using closed lists.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you.

Ms. Robertson, your presentation interesting and touching. Like Mr. Aldag, I'm happy you've started to participate and vote in elections. It's heartwarming for me, as a democrat.

Just to put things in perspective, you mentioned that you used to think voting wouldn't change anything, and that your vote didn't count. In fact, the current voting system contributes to that impression. In some electoral districts, people managed to win with 35% of the votes. That means that 65% of the people who cast their ballot in those districts are not represented in Parliament. It would have made no difference if they'd stayed home.

In Canada as a whole, 9 million of the votes cast in the last federal election did not elect a single person. There is no route for the voices expressed in those votes to be heard in Parliament. So it's not just an impression, it's a fact.

You've made interesting suggestions, such as polling stations in Native Friendship Centres. What could we do to improve the participation of the various First Nations, and of Métis, in the electoral process, and perhaps to have Aboriginal and Métis people in Parliament?

● (1520)

Ms. France Robertson: The television ads about participation, citizenship and the right to vote don't work. The Elections Canada ads are certainly cute, but you have to reach out to people. You have to go and meet them. For us, getting people involved so they can be part of the change is important.

We continue to give workshops in which we explain the Indian Act and how it works. Today, I was explaining what this committee and the voting system are about, and I asked the people what they thought. There's an election every four years, but nothing seems to happen between elections. We need to show that something happens between each election.

More and more indigenous candidates are interested in the voting process, or in running. That's because something happened between the two elections. There was interest, and people decided they wanted to be part of the change as well. Roméo Saganash is a good example of this. He wanted to be part of the change. That's why it's important to us. I continue to say that we must go out into the field— into the communities—and reach out to indigenous organizations such as Friendship Centres. We could go to the voting places too.

It's not enough to invite people to get involved, because they will often say they feel a lack of connection to the process, since it's only about non-indigenous people. Indigenous people need to feel they have a stake. This means we must raise awareness. That must start right away. In my view, it's very important.

The Chair: Thank you.

It's Mr. Ste-Marie's turn now.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon, everyone. I'd like to welcome everyone in attendance today.

I should explain that Mr. Thériault is the regular member of our committee who represents the Bloc québecois. However, I'm his replacement for this tour, because we only have one seat, which we share. He spoke during the preceding period, and it's my turn this time. I will have to speak quickly, to make up for lost time.

Ms. Robertson, Ms. Roberge, thank you for coming to speak to us today.

My first question is for you, Ms. Roberge.

You spoke about proportionality, and the importance of additional mechanisms to promote the election of women to Parliament. You also spoke about financial measures such as reimbursement rules, and other matters. The share of public funding that went to supporting political parties has been abolished. Do you think it would be a good idea to restore that funding?

Ms. Mercédez Roberge: Definitely, because it would provide an additional incentive. In Quebec, the voting system reforms sought by Mouvement Démocratie Nouvelle were financial in nature as well. They, too, called for an increase in the annual allowance for parties, which was based on the number of votes. Its abolition was not just an enormous loss for democracy, it also deprived us of yet another instrument.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you.

I will now ask Ms. Robertson some questions. We usually use "tu" in our French conversations, and speak informally, but since the meeting is broadcast and will be archived, I will be using "vous", Ms. Robertson.

You said it's important to increase the number of measures to facilitate voting by indigenous people. You spoke about a card. I'm not sure what you meant. Is it the card made of thick paper?

Ms. France Robertson: Exactly. The famous card is a challenge for our families, because if someone loses the card, they can't vote. Certain people went to the polling station and were told they needed to have the card, and they didn't have it. That alone was a challenge. It's why many families didn't vote. Why not just show an ID card?

● (1525)

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: I think we heard that in Manitoba. A woman who was representing a union, but was also indigenous, told us the same thing.

Ms. France Robertson: So I'm not the only person to mention it.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: There are already polling stations in Joliette. Why would putting one more station in Friendship Centres make a difference for Aboriginal people?

Ms. France Robertson: If you go directly to where they are, the participation rate for Aboriginals will increase.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: It's a place of their own, and they know the location.

Ms. France Robertson: That's right. Some of our families in the area only speak Atikamekw. It's useful to speak English and French, which are the two official languages, but at our centre, when we want to explain the importance of voting, and we want it to have an impact, we do it in Atikamekw. We also have to explain the procedure.

The fact that things take place in French, then, is a reason they don't go to a polling place. An instruction, such as telling someone to go to a certain station and to bring a card, is something commonplace for you, but for them, it's complicated. If someone could explain the procedure in Atikamekw, it would be much easier for them.

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

Would it be a good idea for a Quebec MP to be elected specifically to represent the First Nations of Quebec, regardless of whether we switch to a proportional system?

Ms. France Robertson: An Aboriginal MP who would represent Aboriginal people? Certainly.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: When we asked this question at the committee hearings in Manitoba, a woman said to us that since there are 40 Aboriginal nations in Alberta, it would not be very representative.

In your view, would an Aboriginal who speaks on behalf of Quebec's Aboriginal people be a good idea?

Ms. France Robertson: Earlier, I referred to the "nation to nation" concept. One day, it might be possible. Since we're talking about it now, why not?

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Okay, thank you.

Ms. France Robertson: Thank you.

The Chair: There is a bit more than a minute left.

Ms. Mercédez Roberge: A compensatory system with lists would make it possible for a member elected informally via this method—once they are in the National Assembly or Parliament, it would be the same—to bring a specialty to bear. Even if he is not elected for a specific territory, he might have the Aboriginal nations file to deal with. That's a possibility that doesn't exist in the current system, but it would be advantageous for many topics, including the topic of indigenous people.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you.

I'll be brief. For Manawan and for Aboriginal communities, it would be easy to identify them using their card. Are there other methods to implement in this regard?

Ms. France Robertson: It would be a good idea to go into the communities, and to have polling places there. No doubt about it.

One point should be noted when the vote produces a majority. For example, in the last election, given the national trend favouring the Liberals, Aboriginal people might have wondered if they were going to win their election when it seemed the Bloc would be winning their constituency.

This is why I said, earlier, that every four years, there would need to be awareness raising. Things can change in a riding. One must be careful. There needs to be an effort to raise awareness.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. May, you have the floor.

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

This is the second time we welcome a group made up only of women. It's cause for celebration. Thank you for your work, and welcome to this committee.

My question is for Ms. Robertson.

You might not be aware that in the New Zealand Parliament, there are seats reserved exclusively for Aboriginal persons. Only Aboriginal people can vote for those reserved seats. Aboriginal people can also run for a party in the other districts, in regular elections. New Zealand is the only country in the world where Aboriginal people have a proportion of MPs equivalent to their population.

What do you think about the system used in New Zealand? Would it be a good idea for Canada?

● (1530)

Ms. France Robertson: It's special, because we draw considerable inspiration from New Zealand. For example, our approach, the culturally relevant and safe approach, is based on New Zealand's.

Currently, as you are aware, there is an Assembly of First Nations for Canada, and, an Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador at the provincial level. We're represented by a chief, but he has no seat in the legislature. Early, I referred to the "nation to nation" concept. If that person could have a seat in the National Assembly, it would be a plus for us. We feel that way, and would like to be able to talk on that basis.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Thank you.

I would also like to thank Ms. Roberge for all her work.

I continue to believe that we need a proportional system. One reason for this is that I think women's representation is higher in all national legislatures where there is a proportional voting system.

As part of its work, this committee has heard about different kinds of proportional systems, and their various advantages. They are the systems that foster women's representation the most. You've proposed a mixed system with lists. The system that favours such representation the least is the transferable vote system. The other rules are still in question. Everywhere else, proportional voting systems favour a higher rate of representation for women than Canada's current system, which is the worst in this regard.

What are the other things society must do in order to implement a proportional voting system and encourage women to be MPs?

Ms. Mercédez Roberge: It's important to send the public the message that we need an egalitarian Parliament that respects and favours political pluralism. That's how we will attract more women candidates who have a profile that is not well-represented at the moment.

A change to the voting system is an opportunity to do this, but it needs to be done right the first time. I stress that it's essential to combine a mixed compensatory proportional system, which is a good system, with the appropriate mechanisms. Changing the voting system alone will not be sufficient. Moreover, we know that it will not produce much in the way of results.

When we know a problem exists and do nothing to correct it, despite knowing that a method at our disposal could improve things, we are choosing to allow the problem to continue. I consider that very important, and it's why the documentation about the experience of various countries shows that if we choose not to change the voting system and not to take measures right away, we will be saying to ourselves, as a society, that it's a principle we hold, but one we've chosen not to act on. That would be very unfortunate.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. May.

Ms. Romanado, you have the floor.

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

Thank you to the two witnesses for their presentation and to the citizens here today.

We heard two very important presentations. As an elected woman, I certainly find it important to have more women in the House of Commons.

Ms. Roberge, you spoke of two situations. Do you think the problem is convincing women to run for office or is it that women candidates don't win in ridings where they run?

I am asking you because those are two completely different things. If the problem is that women don't want to run, I don't think the current electoral system will change anything. If the problem instead is that it's difficult for women to win—which was not the case for me because I won—what can we do to solve the two problems?

● (1535)

Ms. Mercédez Roberge: When one woman is elected, we must not assume it will be as easy for others. Structural barriers and obstacles exist. The socio-economic level is statistically lower for woman and racialized people, and for some groups of men in relation to the total population. Therefore, an individual case does not represent the statistics, regardless of your case in particular.

The problem isn't that no women want to run for office. I would encourage you to meet with organizations such as Groupe Femmes, Politique et Démocratie that are working hard in that area and that meet daily with women who want to start in politics. The political parties have an important role to play. If I use only my address book to fill a position, I use only my own network. If I want to look outside my network, I have to make an extra effort. I must browse through other people's books. My book and your book will not be the same. Political parties are completely responsible for looking outside their usual network for candidates, particularly women.

When telephone calls are made, the candidates will show up. I believe the change to the electoral system will also help encourage women to run. Personally, I would not run under the current electoral system. Maybe one day I'll run under a proportional electoral system, but not under the current system. It would be a losing battle. However, it may depend on the location of my constituency. It's not right that my chances depend only on where I live. However, that's how the current system works.

In short, changing the electoral system will also encourage a diversity of candidates, particularly women, but also racialized people.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I am currently working with the organization you mentioned. I know it's different in a woman's case. Women need to be asked a number of times to run before they do so, in comparison with men. We sometimes hear that women run in constituencies where they have no chance of winning. However, would it be possible that women don't run because the working conditions of MPs are not favourable?

Personally, I have two grown children. However, I didn't know there was no maternity leave in the House of Commons. So if a woman plans to raise a family, she must take leave without pay. There is no daycare for children at certain times. What do people do when they have children? Currently, one MP brings her child to the House. What happens when a vote takes place late in the evening and people have no babysitter?

I think work needs to be done in the House to improve working conditions, and not only for women and young families.

The Chair: Your time is up, Ms. Romanado. You were able to ask your question.

Ms. Roberge, you can still respond the next time you have the floor.

Go ahead, Mr. Maguire.

[*English*]

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

I want to thank our witnesses for being here today at this panel.

This is most interesting. I want to pick up on what my colleague just mentioned, and some of the things that you said, Ms. Roberge, from your comments earlier and again just now.

You were saying that reforming the voting process isn't enough in this whole process to make the changes required for gender equality and perhaps other sectors of equality that you'd like to see and that are needed. We went partway in the last election by adding 30 more seats in the House of Commons. That provides a bit more equality, because Canada is based on an electoral system based on representation by population. That won't change, but that provided a bit more equality because we've had more Canadians come into the system, and it was time to bring that to more evenness as well.

You made some comments about the things that were needed for reform, and it wasn't good enough. Can you name some things that you would like to see changed in the reform area that couldn't be done under the present system?

● (1540)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Mercédez Roberge: I didn't say it wasn't enough to change the electoral system. I said it was essential to change it and that it was just as essential, at the same time, to have mechanisms to achieve equal representation and inclusion. It's not the same.

I don't see how, in the current first past the post system, we can achieve the same results as those we could obtain through the combination of a proportional electoral system and various measures. I don't see how it can be done, other than by electing two people per constituency, a man and a woman, a system that wouldn't be very easy to sell. I don't think the idea would be very easy to sell or buy.

I want to go back to the balance between political work and family life. All the other measures and mechanisms are good, but insufficient. They would not replace an actual change in democracy and equality. Of course, the Parliament work rules must be changed, but that alone isn't enough. A combination of approaches must be implemented. My recommendations include approaches I had to set aside earlier for lack of time. Also, by changing the electoral system, Parliament must adapt to its new composition. Since there will be greater representation from more parties, the House will have elected officials whose styles differ from those of the current officials. There will be more women.

We must also change our way of doing things, increase budgets so that MPs can meet more with their constituents, and change the work rules to promote a balance between political life and family life. This should be done at the same time. One does not replace the other. We are at a global review stage. Now is the time to act. We have the chance to do it, and it's the time to act.

[*English*]

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thank you.

I'd like to note as well that I was mentioning to some of my colleagues last night that it was 17 years since my first election and I absolutely know that it was women who got me involved in this process; they thought I should run. So you could use the analogy that I've been running ever since.

You mentioned that 67% of people in some of the polls you've seen like PR, proportional representation. We've also seen that 73% of Canadians want a referendum before anything is instituted in Canada as far as a change in the electoral process is concerned, and that only 3% are looking at strategic votes, and we talk about strategic votes. A number of witnesses have said that we have to be careful that we don't throw the baby out with the bathwater in regard to making a change that may only impact the outcome of the seats in the House by 1% or 2%. I acknowledge that. Others have said we have one of the best systems in the world, but that doesn't mean it can't be improved. I'd be the first one to say that. Those are some numbers that may seem to contradict each other, but I think we need to look at them very seriously in regard to the type of process we come up with.

I appreciate your comments about the OECD countries, and the processes that you've used there.

I guess what I want to say is, would all parties go through some kind of a vetting process to look at candidates before they were finally signed on to run for any particular political party that we have? Do you think we should continue with that?

● (1545)

The Chair: Very, very briefly, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Mercédez Roberge: In what order should we continue? On what same path should we continue?

[*English*]

Mr. Larry Maguire: Well, there's the vetting process as far as already scrutinizing candidates that can run for political parties. There have been quotas suggested, whether it's for race or for gender. Those types of things can be used. I believe they can be used under the present system as well, and I wonder if you think we should continue with the vetting process as well.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: The parties are advised to use positive methods to ensure a certain number of candidates are elected.

Ms. Mercédez Roberge: Therefore, in our proposals, we suggest financial improvements. Parties would be encouraged to increase the value of their reimbursements. We're not using a punitive framework, but an incentive framework. It can help.

The Chair: Okay.

Thank you.

[*English*]

Go ahead, Mr. DeCourcey.

[*Translation*]

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

Ms. Robertson and Ms. Roberge, thank you for your presentations.

You presented many things for us to consider in our proceedings. However, I'm wondering how we'll validate this process with Canadians. The committee must deliberate, reach a consensus on the recommendations and submit the recommendations to the House.

There are different ways to validate electoral reform with Canadians. I want to know your concerns regarding the process under way and its validation with Canadians, in particular with women, members of visible minority groups and aboriginal people.

Ms. Mercédez Roberge: I will expand your question to include the consultation process. I find it absurd that after almost 30 meetings of this committee, we're only the second group made up exclusively of women. That shouldn't have happened. Your committee should have conducted a gender-based analysis at the start of the process.

From an outside perspective, it has been very frustrating to wait for you to be given expertise, because that's the goal of the consultation process. The committee has deprived itself of significant expertise. I'm not speaking only of the presence of women, but also of racialized people and aboriginal people.

Concerning validation, I'm not in favour of a referendum to validate the result of your work. We're trying to work on electoral legislation. Electoral legislation is legislation. Not all legislation must go through a referendum. Why is this legislation in greater need of going through a referendum? I can't find anything conclusive on that subject, especially when people would be asked a question on something they know nothing about and have not experienced. It seems to me like an attempt to wreck everything and maintain the status quo.

I'm not against reviewing, after three elections, whether we've made the right choices. It's different. At that point, we can talk about it again. We can then determine how to improve the situation. For the moment, it's legislation and you're responsible for submitting a report. I hope you will supplement the expertise that was not provided so it contains the analyses I talked to you about, not only my analysis, but other analyses on a larger scale.

I also think you're responsible for suggesting the next steps, not only in terms of validation, but also in terms of reflection. I certainly can't speak for the first nations. However, it would be worthwhile for the committee to show openness to holding discussions to see whether aboriginal people want mechanisms established to improve their representation. I developed mechanisms and others did as well. While doing so, we took into consideration that we couldn't speak on behalf of aboriginal people, but we could ensure that the mechanisms weren't detrimental and were transferable.

So it's important for the committee to raise the issue and establish that any claims made by aboriginal people as part of the current electoral reform should be taken into account. If no claim is made, the committee could still start looking at ways to reach out to the first nations.

● (1550)

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Robertson.

Ms. France Robertson: I'm happy to speak, because I have difficulty when a person addresses certain issues.

Personally, the word “racialized” cuts me to the core. I'm not a race. I think it's important to say so.

I will now speak about consultations with aboriginal people. Today I'm here out of choice, as an aboriginal woman. I took the steps. Ms. Ste-Marie was the one who told me that a consultation was taking place. I think we must also be responsible for demonstrating willingness. I will also talk about the matter with the chiefs and verify their interest and how they view the consultations.

I think it's worthwhile to sit down with aboriginal people. It's a first step in terms of consultations. I don't know whether I'm the first aboriginal women to come here, but I'm happy to be here. I think you'll have the opportunity to hear from other aboriginal people. The door is open.

My role will also be to inform others that the consultations do not end today and that there will be more consultations at some point.

The Chair: We're returning to Montreal on October 3.

Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Sansoucy.

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

At the start, it was noted that, from 2003 to 2010, Ms. Roberge was the chair of the Mouvement pour une démocratie nouvelle. Thank you to the two witnesses for their presentations.

I want to tell my colleagues that Ms. Roberge sparked my interest in electoral reform. If I remember correctly, in 2008 she led a workshop in Sainte-Hyacinthe where I first learned that while we use a certain type of electoral system, other systems could help us ensure that each vote counts.

Thank you, Ms. Roberge, for emphasizing the fact we should take the opportunity to reform the electoral system to increase the number of women in the House of Commons. We currently represent 26% of elected officials.

Esther Lapointe from the Groupe Femmes, Politique et Démocratie told us that if we wait for things to happen naturally, we'll be waiting another 100 years. In addition, there's no guarantee things will be done. We must take the opportunity to establish terms and conditions. Things won't happen on their own. In the last election, the NDP had 43% of the women candidates. Equity rules needed to be established, adhered to and very clearly imposed.

Also, Ms. Roberge was awarded the Prix Réformera in 2014, in recognition of all her work. She took up the challenge and went all over Quebec to speak about electoral systems.

Ms. Roberge, at the end of your presentation, you quickly spoke about the impact of ratios in a compensatory mixed-member proportional representation system. I want to have a better understanding of this notion.

Ms. Mercédez Roberge: A compensatory mixed-member proportional representation system means that we decide on the number of compensation seats and constituency seats. To properly correct the distortion of constituency seats, there must be a sufficient "bank" of compensation seats. This must be monitored at the national level and at each sub-level, whatever it may be.

Statistically, to correct a ratio of 60% constituency seats, 40% compensation seats are required. This affects only the compensation technique. In the event of arbitration and if the number of constituency seats needs to be increased and the number of compensation seats decreased—if the goal is to maintain the number of current seats—issues arise, and not only in terms of effectiveness. The statistical effectiveness of correction may still exist, except that fewer compensation seats means less opportunity to also correct the male/female ratio, despite the measures implemented such as alternating males and females on the compensation lists.

The mechanisms are easier to implement. We can implement alternation on the lists, but we can't implement it in constituencies. The distortion and maybe—we don't know—the population's voting patterns could result in a lower percentage of women elected. The votes by constituency are still cast based on the first past the post system. We must still expect there to be fewer women elected in a first past the post system. It's still a majority system in part. More women would be elected as a result of the compensatory aspect. The compensation list must be consistent overall on a regional and national level.

● (1555)

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Thank you, Ms. Robertson, for speaking of the importance of tools we need to develop to meet with citizens who are under-represented as voters. That's a significant factor, and the committee has a vested interest in including these important tools in its recommendations for electoral reform.

I worked for almost 20 years in community youth organizations. Youth are also under-represented as voters. We should hold workshops such as the Voters in training program. We must focus on providing support, particularly financial support, to community organizations that meet with young people who are under-represented as voters.

The support and tools must be established in our electoral mechanisms. A centre such as yours can take the initiative to do so. However, the government must support you in your role, which involves encouraging under-represented voters to participate in elections. From an electoral reform perspective, where we're concerned about making sure that each vote counts, we have a vested interested in finding each of those voters and ensuring their vote makes a difference. I think it's an important aspect.

The Chair: Thank you.

You can answer the question now briefly or the next time you have the floor.

Ms. France Robertson: I'll say one thing. Imagine if the ballots were written in atikamekw. It would be fantastic.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

Ms. Roberge, clearly you're a woman who is very familiar with the issue. There's no doubt in that regard. You're very eloquent. Ms. Robertson said the word "racialized" cut her to the core. I must say it also cuts me to the core. I don't think it's the proper word to represent all the groups designated by the term.

I didn't do so, but if we analyze the situation of women and all so-called "racialized people," given that currently women comprise 26% of the House of Commons, we probably exceed the 50% representation rate. I may be slightly wrong, but the number must be roughly 50%, if not more.

Would the new electoral systems that may be implemented in Canada improve the situation in that regard? That would be the case only if we imposed new rules. It wouldn't happen naturally. What system would encourage a woman such as you to run for office? You said you think the current system is not democratic enough. I'm trying to express myself clearly. What would make you run for office under a new system, when you wouldn't do so under the current system?

● (1600)

Ms. Mercédez Roberge: I don't want my case to become the centre of attention. Currently, the political pluralism in the population is not reflected in Parliament in Ottawa, at the Quebec National Assembly, or in any provincial legislature. I think that's a major problem on a democratic level. The votes are not equal. My vote may or may not be respected depending on where I live. It may or may not count. I think that's unacceptable.

I want to go back to the notion of “racialized people.” You said that by including women, “racialized people” would represent 50% of Parliament. I'm a bit skeptical. “Racialized people” are not women or aboriginal people. That's the term used.

In Quebec, in the past we spoke of ethnocultural diversity. All the cultures together create ethnocultural diversity. The term “ethnocultural minority” is not necessarily very nice to hear when you're part of a minority group.

The expression comes from organizations such as Québec inclusif that are increasingly suggesting we use the term “racialized people” because it refers to a condition related to racism and to being a member of a visible minority group, an immigrant individual who is foreign-born. The term “racialized people” includes people who are members of visible minority groups and foreign-born individuals. Some people, in particular those of Italian origin, have lived in Quebec for a number of generations. The measures being discussed are not to help those people, but to help those who need it and who are currently under-represented. Individuals who are foreign-born and who are part of visible minority groups fall under the term “racialized people.”

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I misunderstood. I thought that gay people and certain other people fell under that category. Despite everything, I think it would be worthwhile to do the math, in particular since a large number of elected officials, I believe, are racialized people. I don't like the term, but I'll still use it.

Ms. Robertson, I think what you proposed is good. You have taken a step by deciding to come here today. You made a personal choice. In your groups, I suppose there are also men, but they don't seem to have taken the same step since they're not here today. That said, they may appear before us elsewhere in Quebec or in other provinces.

You made that choice out of conviction. Since you started voting, you've considered it important to promote democracy within your group, and not within your “racialized” group.

You alone made the choice. Nobody forced you. That's what I want to say.

Ms. France Robertson: Exactly.

In the last election, we focused on raising awareness. I wondered why, in our centre, we were continuing to carry out this work, when some of the work should be done by Elections Canada. It wasn't easy, but we took the time to do it. For us, it was a positive step.

I decided to come today because I thought it was important. I called a number of women from various regions of Canada to find out whether they would be participating in this meeting, but I turned out to be the only one. I thought I would attend for the Friendship Centre Movement.

● (1605)

The Chair: Your time is up, Mr. Généreux.

Thank you.

Since a cameraman from the MAtv channel would like to take some pictures, I would ask that everyone stay put after the meeting instead of rushing out of the room.

Ms. Sahota, go ahead.

[*English*]

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you.

Ms. Robertson, I welcome your presence here today. You're correct that it's very important for this committee to hear from the aboriginal community and from the female aboriginal perspective.

We've been hearing a lot from different communities, from disabled communities, and from the blind. I think it has really opened our eyes to the barriers that are in place. I know that you've done a great job of taking on this mission to educate the community, and I thank you for that.

We've been talking a lot about figuring out a new system that would diversify our Parliament, be more inclusive, and do a lot of things that we hope to achieve. However, we've also been struggling with over-complicating the system. It has come up from different witnesses about voters being able to understand a simple system when they go to the polls.

You were explaining that you have voted two times now. There are probably many others who have never voted, and we want to reach out to them and get them to vote.

Do you think there are certain pitfalls that we could fall into by having longer ballots, by having lists of 20 or 30 people on a ballot? Do you think that would be feasible for many people to get through? What about having two different ballots? There are different options that we're looking at and that may cause us to move in that direction. Do you think that would be a wise choice for us? What kinds of recommendations would you make?

[*Translation*]

Ms. France Robertson: I will talk to you about my personal experience.

I live in Pointe-aux-Trembles, in the Montreal region. I kept myself informed during the latest election campaign. I was familiar with the candidates in the Joliette riding, where the Centre de l'amitié is located. We made efforts to raise awareness. But when I had the ballot in my hand, I saw candidates' and parties' names. Of course, I voted for my preferred party even though I did not know the candidate. I also didn't know whether aboriginals were part of his concerns.

The party is important, but we first have to know the candidate. I thought it was unfortunate to be voting for a party without knowing the individual. Actually, the person whom I voted for and who was elected has no interest in aboriginals. I found that out later. To my mind, that is something of a failure.

As for ballots, we can sometimes see the candidate's photo or their name, and that's helpful. However, an awareness-raising process must first take place.

Some ridings have very few aboriginals. I smiled a little when I saw that Michèle Audette was running in the Terrebonne riding, which has very few aboriginals. It's a shame, but she certainly had no chance of winning the election. It's sad to see that aboriginal candidates are often chosen in such places.

Why not find her a riding that's made up of mostly aboriginals? We are definitely favourable to aboriginal candidates. I personally believe in that.

[*English*]

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I think that's a great idea. One of our witnesses had mentioned before that sometimes having smaller ridings that include a high proportion of maybe aboriginal people or other racialized persons can really help that candidate succeed, and parties are forced to then perhaps run people from that community all across the board. I think that's very interesting, and that's been happening through our own system right now. I think that's what's causing the numbers to shift a bit, although we're not to the numbers we would like.

I have another question. You have confirmed in a way that you were voting for a party. Under certain systems at times you could have a vote for a party. You can also have a difference under STV, a list of lots of candidates who may all be from the same party and they are running against each other. If you don't know their individual platforms necessarily, or what kind of person they are, it would be quite difficult to rank them.

I saw that with my own nomination. We had a ranking system in our party nominations and it confused a lot of people. They didn't know the order to rank, what it meant to rank, and if they were supposed to put where you were located on the ballot, and they were supposed to indicate that number.

We went through those issues with a lot of people because they were used to a particular system of voting during the general election, and they didn't know how to vote in the nomination process. It was a totally different system. There's going to have to be a huge educational component. I do think it's necessary for us to have polling stations in these communities, just as we've been talking about having polling stations in schools and universities has brought up voter turnout among young people. Having polling stations seems like a no-brainer, and aboriginal communities would definitely make it inclusive.

I thank you for your input.

● (1610)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Could everyone give me one moment and we'll let the cameraman take a video.

[*Translation*]

I would ask that you stay put.

I want to thank everyone for their cooperation.

I will now explain the procedure to follow for the open microphone session. The interventions will last two minutes. Our role is to listen to the people who want to take the floor. We won't really have a question and answer period. Since we have only five speakers, we can be a bit more generous and give you about two and a half minutes or three minutes each. To give others an opportunity to speak, as well, it would be nice if you could limit yourselves to three minutes.

Mr. Battah, you have the floor for three minutes.

● (1620)

[*English*]

Mr. Ken Battah (As an Individual): Thank you. Welcome to Joliette.

With all that I've listened to today, I'm still trying to figure out why we're having this discussion on voting reform. I've become a cynic. How will a change in the voting system impact governing parties from taking decisions in Parliament, such as back in February the vote against the Palestinian occupation? To me, I don't get it. You have human beings who are militarily occupied, and parliamentarians in a majority said that's okay.

How do you vote for a governing party that is planning to support TPP? Ms. Freeland, I understand, wants it. Here you have a trade partnership where Canada's going to give up its soul in exchange for corporations to be able to sue government if ever they don't have the profits they're expecting to get. There are 37 lawsuits right now. Many of you are aware of this.

There's a governing party that supports a justice system which Canadians, for financial reasons, don't have access to. Beverley McLachlin, in a speech to the Canadian Bar Association, said that the system isn't working. People are showing up, they have no representation, they're representing themselves, and they're getting their asses kicked in the court system. It's not fair.

You have a governing party that changes nothing in CRA secrecy and how they operate.

Our Parliament supports an economic system where we have the Bank of Canada, which is our national bank, and instead of using it as we did in the 1930s and 1940s to build Canada, we're now using a dishonest banking system that has fraudulent banking where money is created from nothing.

These are the issues I'm concerned with. How will a modification to the voting system, whether it's proportional representation or another, impact the change and the philosophy of governing parties? That's my issue, and that's what I have to say for my three minutes.

Thank you for your patience.

The Chair: I'm not really answering your questions, but just for general information, there are many who feel—and I'm not advocating for any particular change—that certain issues might be better addressed with a more representative parliament. For many people, this issue of electoral reform feeds into how they might like to see the country governed, but I don't want to get into this. That's essentially the reasoning that some people adhere to.

Thank you, though, for your comments.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rainville, you have the floor for three minutes.

Mr. Claude Rainville (As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair. You are very generous. We usually get only two minutes to speak.

I would like to come back to the referendum issue. I feel that a referendum must be held on the double-majority option—one for Canada's anglophones and another one for Quebec. If that is not done, Justin Trudeau will definitely adopt the preferential formula because it will benefit him. That is how this works. People never want to lose power. They never get enough of it, and the population ultimately always pays for it.

I am trying to get this message across. It is directed specifically to the federal government. This should be based on three pillars so that the population would manage the finances, which would be managed by it and for it. I will give you an example. I am trying to get my message across to Quebec and to the Parti Québécois.

I see that you are listening very carefully. Let's say that 125 members were kept as as a mainstay and there were 125 wise ones, who have proven themselves as volunteers—usually, we don't get robbed by volunteers—and another group of 125 people, who would be elected a sort of a popular jury. In other words, our elected representatives would no longer have any financial authority, and those 125 individuals would make decisions on bills, acts and finances.

Justin Trudeau's spending power is fine, but we see what he has done to raise his image with NATO, the world's biggest war machine. I don't know whether you were aware of that. What will it ultimately lead to? It will protect African mines. Do you understand what I am saying? We don't have enough mines here in Canada. There are no more royalties, and drones can no longer even be used to determine how much material is being taken out per cubic foot.

In terms of forests, for example, when the Coulombe commission was doing its work in 2000, $22 billion was needed to obtain royalties. So $22 billion was needed for a $90 million royalty. In the end, we reforested. Do you see how rotten the system is?

As for Panama Papers, what are they concerned about? Are they concerned about the mafia? There is no more investigation. That concerns all capitalists.

At least you are listening. I must admit that I am hard of hearing, and it is difficult for me to understand what I am saying. It's great that the sound is coming through and you are listening.

There may be another benefit for society. The flow of money has no purpose. Credit cards actually leave a trail. Only change is left in circulation. I don't know what will be done with that mountain of money.

I will give you another example that has to do with the courts and the SharQc operation. The criminals were not sentenced, and they are free. Only honest citizens come before the courts.

I have a feeling that my time is up. Thank you for your generosity and for listening to me.

● (1625)

The Chair: The rule is the same for everyone. Thank you for your comments.

Is Ms. Chaput back?

Is your car working? Is everything okay?

Ms. Thérèse Chaput (As an Individual): I am back, but with a lot less gas in my car.

The Chair: Ms. Chaput had to leave the room to go to her car.

Ms. Chaput, you have three minutes.

Ms. Thérèse Chaput: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to begin by thanking the committee for coming to our region. I think it is very good that you are travelling across Canada in order to find out whether people prefer the status quo. I hope that not many of them will tell you that they wish to keep the status quo.

My goal today is not to suggest mechanisms on the proportional voting system, but rather to make a strong push for you to recommend that a referendum be held when you make your main proposal.

I don't know why that word frightens so many people. Yet, the dictionary defines a referendum as a consultation of the people. Consulting the people is a beautiful thing. You consult the population to get ideas, but unlike the lady who spoke earlier, I feel that the people are intelligent enough to make a decision once you have proposed something to them. That may be one or two scenarios—I don't know what your work will lead to—but when a decision has to be made on how representatives will be elected, I must have my say. I feel that Canadians—be they Quebeckers, Manitobans or anyone else who is part of Canada—must have an opportunity to share their thoughts on this.

I would never use the Americans as an example, but I have friends who live in California, and they are frequently consulted. They are not afraid of the word “referendum”. They even have their say on issues I find silly, but they are consulted and are very proud of it. In Canada, 175 or 200 people will decide how we will elect our representatives who will work for us over four years.

I really hope that the consultation will not be limited to asking us to express ideas. You will do a good job, and it would be nice if you were to put your proposals to Canadians and ask us what we think.

I really hope that will be the outcome, so that democracy would go all the way.

Thank you for listening to me.

● (1630)

The Chair: Thank you for being so eloquent, Ms. Chaput.

We will now go to Linda Schwey.

[*English*]

Ms. Linda Schwey (As an Individual): My name is Linda Schwey. I was born and brought up in Montreal and I came here today because I think these meetings and hearings are just fabulous.

I lived for many years in Denmark where there is a proportional system of voting. This is common in many European countries because they have so many parties. When I came back to Montreal in 2005, Denmark had eight political parties and a population of 5.5 million. Now it's not so terrible. Where I lived we never had an MP who lived in my district, but it didn't really matter, because Denmark is a very small country. It is two and a half times the size of Lake Ontario.

If someone who represented me didn't live in my district, the person lived not too far away. In Canada this would never do. You cannot have a person representing you who doesn't live near you at least. In Denmark there is a list of people who would be voted in as MP if they got all the votes because it's not tied to the place where they come from. I don't think the people in Joliette would like to have an MP who lives in Montreal. This wouldn't be right.

Aside from that, when you find out at the end of an election that you have 40% to achieve proportionality, you would say that the NDP, for example, should have five more MPs. Where do you get these MPs? They are from a list that the party itself makes. It does not have any input from the people themselves. The people have the list of who's going to be elected MP, but it is the party that makes these lists. Usually, the people, the voters, agree with who's on the list; however, sometimes the party gets an idea that they want to reward somebody and so they put that person's name on the list.

It's not just a matter of having your name on the list, there is also competition as to where on the list your name gets put. If you're number 10 on the list, and you're only going to end up getting five extra MPs, then you're never going to become an MP. If you're higher up on the list, you have a bigger chance.

What we're doing is throwing away a system that elects an MP who got 38% of the vote, and we're accepting a system where we get an MP who got zero votes, because the MP came from a list and was not somebody who was elected.

The Chair: Thank you for sharing the experience of Denmark. We appreciate that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Vincent, go ahead.

Mr. Gérard Vincent (As an Individual): Mr. Chair, thank you for giving me the floor.

In terms of the form, I would say that the current system is pretty suitable for the representation of voters in a riding by an elected representative. Although proportional representation would guarantee a better distribution of seats to the parties based on the vote, it would be unrealistic arithmetic for voters. They would see their choice of candidates from the party they chose based on a preferential list.

The only proportional correction I see as an option would be separating the party leader form their riding by having them elected based on the votes cast for the same party. In other words, they would automatically have a seat in Parliament if they obtained at least 1% of the Canadian vote, and the leader would remain the incarnation of their party during the vote.

As for the substance, I would say that the measure I am proposing to remedy the inequality of the vote would be twofold. Although a party would have more chances to form a majority in Parliament, as it is currently the case without obtaining the majority of votes, it would still be required, as much as possible, to have another level of legitimacy by ensuring that it would obtain the consent of enough parties in the House to form a majority based on the election vote for any legislative measure.

The dual approval would increase the scope of the legislation. It would be akin to moral support and rallying that would trump any partisanship. In addition, the speaking time for each party, regardless of which party it is, would be based on the percentage of votes that party obtains in the election. The House of Commons would thereby recognize the equality of the parties without any other privileges assigned, except letting the party that led the ballot maintain its right to govern and to set the stage for legislative measures.

Moreover, as in the case of party financing, research budgets for parliamentary business would be prorated to the election support parties obtained. The parties with fewer elected members, but a strong voting percentage, would benefit through all those measures from larger visibility, would support or denounce government measures and would occasionally get credit for them.

What I have in mind is no less than a true revolution of our political mores. Our differences and our interests aside, could we create a Canadian brand of democracy?

Thank you.

● (1635)

The Chair: Thank you for your proposal, Mr. Vincent.

We will now continue with a third panel of witnesses made up of Danielle Perreault and Fred-William Mireault. Please be seated.

Good afternoon and welcome.

Ms. Perreault is the general manager of FADOQ in the Lanaudière region. Fred-William Mireault is the president of the Regroupement des étudiants et étudiantes du Cégep de Lanaudière.

Ms. Perreault, we will start with you. You have 10 minutes.

Ms. Danielle Perreault (General Manager, FADOQ-Région Lanaudière): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

On behalf of the Réseau FADOQ, I thank you for inviting me to appear before you. I'm very happy that seniors can have a voice in today's consultation.

In 2014, the Réseau FADOQ submitted a brief on the electoral reform, a reform that the former government had already begun. I have drawn heavily on that brief to share a few ideas we have developed. One of the things we want to stress is the importance of the voter information card. Seniors actually often no longer have an ID card as such—in other words, their photo no longer appears on their health card. In addition, many seniors no longer have a driver's license. It is difficult for them to properly identify themselves.

Those people should have a voter information card. I think that it exists, but it is not well-known or used. That could be a democratic way to encourage more people, especially seniors, to vote, even though seniors tend to be the ones who vote the most, as we know. However, the fact remains that some of them may be hindered by the difficulty of identifying themselves.

Seniors often sell their house to go live in residence, and having to travel in order to vote can be very complicated. Establishing polling stations in residences could be a worthwhile solution.

As for the matters of inclusion and accessibility, we feel that anyone who lives in Canada should have an opportunity to vote according to the precept established by everyone—in other words, with the respect due to them.

We at the Réseau FADOQ are also worried about the funding of political parties. As in certain provinces, contributions should be capped. That could help prevent some of the abuse, and parties would be more equal when it comes to the money they can use to conduct an election campaign.

Regarding participation and the promotion of the right to vote, changing the chief electoral officer's role was considered at some point. That idea is of concern to us. I don't know whether it is still planned, but it was in 2014. We feel that the chief electoral officer's role is very important because, over a period of time, that person educates all Canadians about their actions at the polls.

In addition, we would like the parachuting of certain individuals to be better defined because, in some regions, candidates are often people who don't live there and are pitted against the people who do live there, as is the case in Lanaudière, among other places. That is done to the detriment of residents who are rooted in their community and could shed a different light than an outsider might. As the person is prominent, the party decides to send them to a particular riding because that is to its benefit. However, for the region in question, it's not as beneficial to have someone who is not from the community and is not familiar with all of the constituents' needs.

The Réseau FADOQ submitted a social contract in support of seniors two years ago. That social contract was backed by the World Health Organization because that body felt that the four pillars set out—well-being, health, security and a sense of belonging—are important.

● (1640)

Of these four pillars, three can easily be implemented in the electoral reform we are talking about. Easy access to polling stations should be provided for everyone. That access, as I said earlier, has to be facilitated.

There are many seniors who live in Lanaudière, especially in the northern part, and they find it more difficult to get around. Public transport is different here. We are not in Montreal and there are no subway cars or trains available. There are various factors that prevent many people from voting. Access to polling stations is another topic we would like you to address.

It is important to include everyone, to make sure that everyone's voice can be heard and that this is not just an occasional thing, as the lady was saying earlier. Today we have your attention, but we should also have it during the election.

I also spoke about being able to count on the Chief Electoral Officer to ensure that the voting and balloting process is well overseen and monitored. The voting period may be very short, but it can also be very long if things are not done properly.

Basically, we feel it is unfortunate that very few people avail themselves of their right to vote. When you see the percentage of Canadians who vote as compared to number who are entitled to do so, it is deplorable. If there is one right that belongs to us as individuals in a democracy, that has to be our right to vote. There might be a way, without making it mandatory, to encourage people more strongly to avail themselves of their right to vote.

This could provide a different outcomes than what we have seen over the past few years. People were elected and that is a good thing, but if everyone who has a right to vote exercised that right, we might see some changes. The results would probably not be the same. There may be some mechanism you could consider to encourage citizen participation.

Let me go back to access and to the possibility of having polling stations close to where people live. Students could vote on campus. That is done in certain places. Why could senior citizens not vote in their environment? This would probably encourage more people to vote and to be more concerned with their democracy.

I may not have used the 10 minutes I had at my disposal, but my statement is complete. That is what I wanted to share with you.

Thank you.

● (1645)

The Chair: Very well. thank you.

That was very clear. We all understood you and you did not go over your time. That's perfect.

We will now go to M. Mireault.

Mr. Fred-William Mireault (President, Regroupement des étudiants et étudiantes du Cégep de Lanaudière): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I thank the committee for allowing the youth of Joliette to express its opinion in this consultation.

This debate has gone on for quite some time at the Regroupement des étudiants et étudiantes du Cegep de Lanaudière. We consulted several organizations that advocate electoral change, such as the Mouvement pour une démocratie nouvelle. We also listened to the point of view of the students of the Fedération étudiante collégiale du Québec, the national federation we belong to. We came to the conclusion that the current voting system is no longer representative and adapted to current needs. After consulting our members, we decided to advocate the implementation of a compensatory mixed proportional system with regional compensation. I will provide further details about that.

We are opposed to pure proportionality, for the simple reason that that system is ideal in a country with a homogeneous population. However, since in Canada there are anglophones, francophones and first nations people, we felt that that system would negate the weight of each group.

We decided to add the preferential system because it favours bipartisanship. Often, the two parties that alternate in forming government are the second choice of electors. The use of a preferential system would ensure the continued existence of the two parties that have been in power in turn over the past 50 or so years.

As for the mixed proportional voting system, we chose a system whereby one-third of members would be elected from electoral lists and two-thirds would be elected as they are now, that is to say through the use of a single member plurality system. They would represent the local riding.

As for the regional lists, we do not want a single electoral list for all of Canada. As in a strictly proportional system, which we do not advocate, we want to avoid seeing Canada's language groups drown in the critical mass. The idea is to make room in Quebec for anglophone communities and first nations.

Each province would adopt an electoral list containing a certain number of members prorated according to the province's population. The lists would be drawn up by each party at a provincial convention. A given party would hold a convention in each province and the members of that party would adopt an electoral list for the province. That list would provide the order in which members would be elected.

The Chief Electoral Officer would provide an additional allowance to parties whose list contains an equal number of men and women, at least 10% of candidates of less than 40 years of age, and members of first nations. Since we cannot force people to stand for election, there would be no obligation. That allowance would be granted by the Chief Electoral Officer to encourage gender parity, and the representation of first nations and young people.

Regarding the vote, in a mixed system, each citizen would have two votes. They would vote for a riding member, who would represent local interests and ensure the representation of the riding in Parliament. The other vote would be cast for the party that would defend national issues and best represent the government's overall program. In this way we would avoid a relatively frequent situation, which is that electors vote for a candidate but do not like his party. It can also happen that electors like a given party but consider that the riding candidate does not represent a region well enough. We would prefer to avoid that situation by allowing for the expression of two distinct votes. Electors could vote on the same ballot, but there will be two types of members of Parliament.

The lists would be closed. Consequently, the party would choose the order of the members. This would be maintained according to the election of each member. As I have already said, there would be one vote for the riding, local issues, the experience of the members and the program of the party at a more local level, and a vote for the party, basically at the national level.

We decided to adopt a one-third, two-thirds ratio to keep the compensation balanced and to avoid creating overly large ridings. If we grant too many votes through a compensation system, the current ridings of the members would be too big. Consequently it would be harder to reach people.

● (1650)

We advocate, rather, electing one-third of the MPs through electoral lists and two-thirds using the first-past-the-post system. Candidates would have the right to stand for election in both systems, but they could of course only accept one of the two positions. We would like to see a dual candidacy system for the simple reason that the electoral list legitimizes the election. However, people should not say that those who are elected through the electoral list do not have as much legitimacy to sit in the House of Commons as members who are elected in a riding.

This would also allow us to maintain the ratio of men and women, and youth and first nations people, as I mentioned earlier.

As for the representation threshold, many countries that have adopted the mixed proportional system have established a minimum threshold of representation to avoid having parties that only obtained 0.5% of the votes from being represented and having this divide the House of Commons. We looked at Germany, for example, where the representation threshold is 5%. The first member elected in a party that has been elected through the electoral list must have obtained at least 5% of the vote. We find this figure too high and think that once again it strengthens the two-party system. And so we propose a 3% threshold in order to control the division somewhat, the fracturing of the House of Commons, but also to allow new parties to take their place.

Gender parity has been achieved in the countries that have adopted this type of voting system. Male-female representation is much more equal and is maintained more easily without coercive measures. We find this very interesting. It is also good for the parties themselves. Indeed, if party members had to choose the MPs who would be on the electoral lists at provincial conventions, this would encourage people to join political parties. We know that the number of members in all parties has been on the decline for 50 years. This could increase those numbers, in addition to ensuring a higher level of citizen participation.

I use the House of Commons as an example. We are not necessarily in favour of revising the number of MPs. We would keep the current number of seats at 338. There would be 225 ridings, and 113 members would be elected through the electoral list, by compensation. Those 113 seats would be divided according to the weight of each province, in order to avoid having 113 seats come from Ontario or western Canada, and to ensure representativity even in compensatory seats.

Also, the regroupement is opposed to any measure to make voting obligatory. If this were to be debated again, we would be against any obligatory vote or any type of compensation for people who do vote. We are against imposing penalties on those who do not vote, or providing financial rewards or other compensation for those who do. We think that this undermines the whole principle of the right to vote. It must not become a duty, an obligation, but should remain a right. People must have a choice, they must be able to decide on their own. And so we are opposed to that.

Moreover, whatever the type of voting system that is recommended by the committee and chosen by the House of Commons, we are in favour of a referendum. The population needs to be consulted on the voting system. Of course, a referendum will be held only if the decision is made to change the first-past-the-post system. We would like to see a national referendum on the issue, with a double majority, that is to say that one option would have to obtain 50% plus one among citizens for the referendum to pass, but also among the provinces, to make sure that the bigger provinces do not decide on the voting system for all of Canada.

We think it is important that we be democratic in trying to reform the democratic process.

Thank you.

● (1655)

The Chair: Thank you for this very complete perspective on the matter. You have touched upon all of the points in the mandate the House of Commons referred to us.

I thank you for these two presentations which were extremely clear. You have given a new flavour to our deliberations. This is the first time we have had both a seniors' representative and a youth representative. We have had witnesses who work with young people, but this is the first time that we have before us a young person involved in governance and politics. I think this will lead to some very interesting exchanges.

In order to begin these exchanges, I now give the floor to Mr. Aldag.

[*English*]

Mr. John Aldag: Thank you to both of our panellists. As was mentioned, you have provided some very interesting insights.

Mr. Mireault, as you were going through your presentation, I kept writing down questions and you answered them, so it was very effective and very well thought out. I commend you on the quality of the submission.

One piece that I didn't catch was the piece on the referendum population. Did the 50% of provinces—50% plus one, I think it was—have to represent 50% plus one of the population as well? I know you said not to worry about having the large provinces dominate. Could you clarify that point?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fred-William Mireault: As I mentioned, there would have to be a double majority. And so the majority of the population of Canada, that is to say 13 million electors out of 25 million, and also the majority of the provinces, would have to accept that option, otherwise it would be rejected. Six of the 10 Canadian provinces would have to agree. If we include the territories, as they would no doubt be included, we would need the approval of seven provinces or territories, in addition to 50% plus one of the population.

[*English*]

Mr. John Aldag: Okay, perfect. That's clarified.

Given the quality of your submission, I'm assuming that you looked at the principles that we were given to work with as a committee. Are you familiar with the principles we were given? They are effectiveness and legitimacy, engagement, accessibility and inclusiveness, integrity, and local representation. I'm wondering if the group that you represent thinks that those are adequate principles. Were there any other principles that you felt would be important from a youth perspective to include in the rethinking of our electoral system?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fred-William Mireault: We didn't really examine that. We focused on the voting system itself. We feel local representation is clearly important. That is why we would like the first-past-the-post system to be maintained in the ridings. We certainly need a system that better represents the population's wishes, in order to avoid situations such as we have seen in the past, where the governing party is not necessarily the one that obtained the most votes. The idea is to offset that eventuality, but as far as we are concerned, local representation is very important.

[*English*]

Mr. John Aldag: Okay, perfect.

Ms. Perreault, I'm wondering, with FADOQ, if your organization has a specific electoral system that you are advocating. You covered many excellent points in your presentation as well, but are you looking at maintaining the current system or changing it to something else? Is there a preference that your organization has?

● (1700)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Danielle Perreault: At the FADOQ network, we consider that the way in which we function currently, with certain improvements, is acceptable. As I was saying earlier, certain changes need to be made, because there are discrepancies among the regions.

Access is our first preoccupation, because we know it is not always easy for seniors to get around. In the context of this reform we have consequently emphasized access and transparency, which is also very important for us. Equity is also important. We would like young people to be well represented, as well as women and the members of all of our various ethnic groups. This is important for us, because even within our network, we have members who represent all of that diversity. Those are our concerns regarding the current structure and the way in which things are done at this time.

We also need to talk about people's disaffection. We know that the senior population is beginning to show less interest in politics. We feel all of this is important regarding transparency, since these are still the people who vote in large numbers, although their interest in politics is diminishing. If we could show that there is change in this regard, this could stimulate their interest.

Then there is the issue of the ID card. I am bringing this up again because it is a source of irritation, perhaps more so than the system as such.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses. Ms. Perreault, Mr. Mireault, this is all very interesting.

Your presentation was very well done, Mr. Mireault, and I congratulate you. However, I would like a clarification.

In the system you are proposing, do you suggest that we maintain the current ridings?

Mr. Fred-William Mireault: No, in fact...

Mr. Bernard Généreux: There are 338, but you were talking about 225 riding.

Mr. Fred-William Mireault: The ridings would be larger, since there would be fewer MPs representing ridings, but we would maintain the ridings.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I would like to mention the fact that my riding covers 7,500 square kilometres and contains 58 municipalities. You are telling me that my riding would be made even bigger. I don't know if you will one day become an MP. I hope so for your sake, since you seem interested in politics. However, if you must cover 2,000 kilometres during your weekend, in addition to going to Ottawa, you will find that that is a lot.

Inevitably, in order to maintain similar representativity in each of the ridings, with a certain number of electors, some ridings are going to have to be made smaller in large cities, and rural ridings will have to be made bigger. In my opinion this may be a problem. However, what you have presented to us was very interesting.

I would also like to know if you represent only your association or if you are also speaking on behalf of the student association you are affiliated with, in Quebec.

Mr. Fred-William Mireault: The point of view we have presented today is that of the Joliette association, but we also consulted the other students in Quebec to obtain a more representative opinion.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Concerning the possibility of holding a referendum, I think you were very clear. You think it is necessary that the population be consulted before any reform takes place.

Is that correct?

Mr. Fred-William Mireault: In fact, I think that the reform can be proposed and planned. A project to reform the Canada Elections Act can be tabled, but before it is adopted, it needs to be approved by the population in order that the party in power not use the reform of the Canada Elections Act for partisan ends.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Ms. Perreault, I think that your group is also suggesting, as did Ms. Chaput earlier as an individual, that the population be consulted on the reform or the choice that could be made.

Ms. Danielle Perreault: Yes. In 2014, when we tabled our brief, one of the recommendations was that we be consulted on the reform. That is why we are very pleased with what is going on currently. You have to go further, naturally. There has to be a broader consultation of citizens, given the very different territorial realities from one end of Canada to the other. You also have to keep that in mind.

In addition to showing transparency, this will encourage greater involvement among citizens, who maybe more interested when the time comes to go and vote.

● (1705)

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Mireault, I invite you to become a candidate in 2019, for the party of your choice. We certainly need young people like you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Boulerice, you have the floor.

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

Thank you, Ms. Perreault and Mr. Mireault.

You spoke about accessibility, which is your central theme, we understand, but you also mentioned the need to reflect the diversity of opinions and voices within our Parliaments.

Now, I just want to stress that, in the current system, MPs can be elected with 30% or 35% of the vote when there are three or four candidates on the ballot. In a case like that, it is true that people may think that their vote doesn't count.

In the last election, nine million votes were cast to elect no member at all. That is also causing problems with representation. There are Conservatives on the Island of Montreal, but no Conservative MPs for the Island of Montreal represent those people. There are Conservatives and New Democrats in the Maritimes, but no MPs from those parties represent the Maritimes and Atlantic regions. We could give you scores of examples like this. For us, these distortions have an impact when people take the time to go and vote. They sometimes find that their votes don't really matter, that their voices don't reach Parliament.

How do you see it?

Ms. Danielle Perreault: You are right.

It's disappointing for anyone casting a ballot to see that the candidate they voted for wasn't elected, even though he or she got a good percentage of the vote. However, it's always fairly difficult to find a mechanism that would please everyone. I don't know how a balanced representation of Conservatives, New Democrats, Liberals and the Green Party could be achieved. The mechanics aren't easy, and I doubt the solution will be found in the next three years because the analysis needs to be much broader than what we're doing now.

Each party has the right to be duly represented in the House of Commons. That's where the issue mainly lies. Is it important to get minister positions? That may not be the issue. But it is important to resolve the representativity issue so that the number of interventions by each party in the House is no longer established based on the votes received. That might be something to look at.

I'm not saying that it isn't nice to be in power, but often the questions asked by the opposition put more pressure on the government. So perhaps it's worth thinking about the distribution of speaking rights and your presence in the House. From the moment you are elected as an MP, you are again—

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: I'm sorry to interrupt you, but I only have five minutes for two witnesses.

Still, we need to have a chance to be elected, which is why we're studying the voting system.

Ms. Danielle Perreault: Exactly.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Mireault, it seems you are a student: you are certainly studious. You have studied the effects of the voting system and the preferential technique, which creates or strengthens bipartisanism.

Australia is the only example of a democracy similar to ours that has had this voting system for a long time. In the last four elections, the country's two main parties have had between 96% and 99% of members elected. We in the NDP do not see that as an option that provides better representation or that better reflects the votes.

You spoke about a two-thirds and one-third proportion between riding MPs and list MPs. That's what the Law Commission of Canada recommended in 2004, and what Benoît Pelletier recommended during the provincial consultations. This ratio seems reasonable.

As for the size of the constituencies, is it reasonable to consider that some very large rural ridings might remain a single riding and that urban ridings might be merged into larger ones, with three, four or five MPs representing the same area? That could be done very easily in large urban centres.

● (1710)

Mr. Fred-William Mireault: That is a viable option. We never pushed our study that far.

However, I would add that, even though we keep very large constituencies, members elected from voters' lists could help to represent a territory. They could be assigned a territory that might clearly be larger than one constituency and could cover two or three constituencies. They would help members elected by their constituencies in carrying out their tasks.

Constituencies could also be merged, especially in urban areas.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Thériault and Mr. Ste-Marie, you are going to share your time, are you not?

Mr. Luc Thériault: We are.

Welcome, Ms. Perreault and Mr. Mireault. Congratulations for your presentations. They were interesting and your message was clear. I have certainly made a note of all your recommendations.

With this question, I would like us to go a little further, or maybe just in a different direction. I am taking advantage of the fact that I have representatives from two age groups before me.

In terms of the nature of politics, the way in which politicians do politics, what do seniors and young people object to the most?

Ms. Danielle Perreault: What puts seniors off the most is the lack of transparency. We get particularly frustrated when politicians do or say the opposite of the understanding they have given.

I include myself in that generation that was, to an extent, used to things being done and said in a certain way. We are not absolutely opposed to change, but we would also like things to be done with much more transparency.

Mr. Luc Thériault: What do you think, Mr. Mireault?

Mr. Fred-William Mireault: This is a good time to say what puts young people off most. It's the voting system itself, because it doesn't encourage people to participate. When young people, or anyone, live in a really safe constituency, one that belongs to one party, but they do not want to vote for that party, they will not vote at all, because they know that their votes will not matter, will not be counted.

In my opinion, that is what explains the low turnout rate in elections in Canada, particularly among young people. If my memory serves, the rate was 33% in 2011. It increased a lot in the last federal election, but the fact remains that the voting system does not encourage people to participate. In my opinion, it is not just the practices of politicians, it is the reform of the voting system that will get more young people going to the pols.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Ste-Marie, the floor is yours.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: First, I must congratulate each of you for your presentations.

I would like to talk about voting accessibility. Ms. Perreault, you talked about that earlier. You said that there have to be polling stations in seniors' residences. I'd like to have more details about that.

Mr. Mireault, I would like to know your opinion about the possibility of having polling stations in post-secondary educational institutions. Could you also tell me about the tools needed to identify voters.

Do you feel that online voting is a good idea, or is it something we should be afraid of because of the possibilities of fraud or pressure, especially the pressure put on elderly people by their loved ones?

Ms. Danielle Perreault: As for online voting, at the moment, we know very well that the generation of elderly people is not really comfortable with the Internet and technological tools.

In addition, in some regions, such as my own, Internet access is not available everywhere. So you could not take that option and offer it to everyone. Seniors are very afraid of everything done on the Internet. They are never sure whether it is legal or secure. That generation will be changing. Today, people who are 50 or 60 are more comfortable with technology. At the moment, if that method were the norm, a lot of elderly people would not vote because they would not be comfortable enough using the tools.

In response to your first question, I must say that we would indeed like people to be able to vote in places other than community centres and schools because some people with reduced mobility cannot travel as easily as others. Even if parties call and offer to come and get them, they are still reluctant because they do not know them. They do not venture out with anyone. If they could vote where they live, it would be a lot easier for them.

● (1715)

The Chair: Your turn, Ms. May.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Chair, can Mr. Mireault answer too?

The Chair: A quick answer, if you please.

Mr. Fred-William Mireault: We are in favour of voting on university and college campuses. Provincially, in the last election, Quebec's Chief Electoral Officer allowed that kind of voting for the first time. The effect was excellent; the turnout rate for young people and students went up. I did not talk about it earlier, but it certainly would be helpful to encourage polling stations on college and university campuses, even in schools providing professional diploma courses to mature students.

As for online voting, we have not taken a position on it. Clearly, it is an interesting option, but it would have to be very secure so that hackers could not crash or corrupt the elections. So we are in favour of online voting, but it has to be on a secure platform.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Ms. May.

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

I would like to congratulate the witnesses for their presentations. I would particularly like to congratulate young Mr. Mireault. He did an incredible job with the issues and challenges that members around this table are dealing with.

Really, you are highly informed and committed; you are very much in tune with the questions that affect our democracy.

Here is my question. In your opinion, what is the level of interest among the young people in your group, or people in general, for democracy and electoral reform? Which questions about electoral reform are Canada's young people asking?

Mr. Fred-William Mireault: In terms of electoral reform, I presented the basics of what we want. Of course, we came to that decision after holding a round table, a group that brought together members of our Regroupement's board of directors and other young people from the CÉGEP. Of course, we are going to continue to consult our members at a general meeting to make sure we have the most accurate point of view.

In general, young people want changes to the voting system. They feel that the first past the post system is not representative enough and that, as I said, it does not encourage participation in elections. In our opinion, proportional representation is an interesting approach.

Ms. Elizabeth May: That's great.

You did not comment about the voting age.

In your opinion, should the voting age go from 18 to 16?

Mr. Fred-William Mireault: I will give you my personal opinion as an answer because I have not consulted the members of the Regroupement about it.

I personally would support the voting age going to 16, providing, of course, that the provinces were to reform the education system in order to provide a more complete course in civics or politics.

In my opinion, it would be advantageous to allow voting at 16.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Excellent.

Ms. Perreault, when you talked about seniors and their access to the polls, you mentioned verification problems. Are we talking about problems that existed before the Fair Elections Act was passed, Bill C-24? Were there problems before that, or only afterwards?

Ms. Danielle Perreault: I can't answer that question because our organization did not really discuss the matter.

However, access is an important issue for us, certainly.

Perhaps if you phrase your question differently, I could give you a better answer.

● (1720)

Ms. Elizabeth May: I am sorry about my mistakes in French.

Ms. Danielle Perreault: You are doing very well.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Thank you. I am doing my best.

If we are to have a real democracy in Canada, it seems really important to me that there be a dialogue between the generations that your two groups are representing here.

Do you have any other creative ideas for strengthening the relationship between old and young? In my opinion, because of the workplace, our society makes a separation between places where seniors get together and places where young people are educated.

[*English*]

I'm wondering if there's a way to create more relationships in learning about democracy between our elders and our youth. Since you're both here, do you have any thoughts on that?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Danielle Perreault: For the next consultations, I will perhaps invite Mr. Mireault to invite the Réseau FADOQ, so that we can discuss the issue together. That could be really interesting.

Mr. Fred-William Mireault: At our next general meeting, we could invite the seniors' representatives, and, in turn, young people could talk to the Réseau FADOQ.

The young and the old have different interests, but they are complementary. So it could be interesting to work together, especially on electoral reform, a subject that affects us all.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Thank you.

The Chair: Your turn, Mrs. Romanado.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you very much.

My thanks again to the members of the public who are always in the room, including those who are just arriving.

My thanks also to the witnesses.

Honestly, I think all parties, even the Réseau FADOQ, are going to be trying to recruit Mr. Mireault. In three years, we certainly are going to talk.

Thank you very much, everyone. Your comments give us an idea of all the challenges that our voters and our fellow citizens are facing during elections.

Ms. Perreault, I did not know that there were problems with identification cards. During your testimony, I checked the Régie de l'assurance maladie du Québec. I did not know that the cards issued by the Régie to people when they reach the age of 75 no longer contain photos. I now understand why seniors sometimes come to polling stations without photo ID. I am grasping the problem better.

In the past, I know that we could bring a voter information card that showed our identity, but I understand that a law was passed that no longer allows us to do that. Is that so?

Ms. Danielle Perreault: People still have to bring that voter card to confirm that their name is on the list at their designated polling station. However, in terms of the identification that you now have to provide, if you have no driver's licence and if there is no longer a photo on the health insurance card — which is no longer required after the age of 75 — it becomes very complicated. That is why a voter ID card could be a workable solution.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Before I was elected, I always volunteered during the election campaigns and I worked at the polling stations. So I am familiar with the challenges facing those voting.

Furthermore, in the last election campaign, we received a lot of calls from seniors with mobility issues who were asking us whether it was possible to vote from home instead of being given rides to the polling station. Elections Canada received a lot of requests and it was not able to handle all of them.

You mentioned the idea of setting up polling stations in seniors' residences. Do we still have mobile polling stations? Could the administrators of the residences be appointed scrutineers? I'm not sure whether that request has been made.

Ms. Danielle Perreault: I'm not sure whether the request has been made to residences. These days, residences are big, like micro-societies. All sorts of people live there. So there could be people at the residences who would be certainly interested in becoming scrutineers. I am pretty sure.

Often, thousands of people live in those places. So there is a significant potential for voters. In addition, that would help with the travel of people with reduced mobility. As you know, with aging, mobility often deteriorates. Some residences use minivans to transport seniors. However, if they have 1,000 residents, the minivans cannot transport so many at the same time. So I think having polling areas in residences is an appealing solution.

● (1725)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Mr. Mireault, you mentioned one of the reasons why people don't vote. Sometimes, it's because they think their vote doesn't count.

Let me ask you another question about the non-participation of young people. In your view, what are the barriers preventing young people from running as candidates in elections? We actually want to increase not only the turnout of young people at the polls on election day, but also their engagement in active politics. Some day, we will be older and retire. We need the next generation to take our place. It is equally important to have the voices of young people heard in the House of Commons. What are the barriers preventing young people from running in elections?

Mr. Fred-William Mireault: I think young people don't run because they are not sufficiently informed about the procedure. They have a lot of information about how to vote, but the process to run for office is still quite long. They are probably not sufficiently educated on the matter. I come back to the need for a citizen participation course. That might be a useful way to solve the problem.

Another barrier is the lack of experience. Many young people don't run for office because they think they are not ready to sit in the House of Commons because of their lack of experience. That is certainly a second barrier. The lack of experience does not help.

I had a third point in mind, but I can't remember it right now.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Maguire.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thank you.

I'm very interested in both of your presentations.

Obviously, I'm within the demographic of your group, Ms. Perreault. But my nephew and his wife had a baby girl last night, so I'm also enthused about what you have to say, Mr. Mireault. I have seven grandchildren of my own, so I'm pretty interested in this whole process. One of them is old enough to vote already.

I appreciate the fact that you've both made your presentations.

Ms. Perreault, I liked your three pillars. You talked about the three pillars with regard to accessibility and well-being of voters, seniors, and that sort of thing, for voting. When you talk about taking the vote to the residences, do you mean individual residences? All of the multiple residences that have seniors living in them already do that in my riding, and as far as I know, across Canada.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Danielle Perreault: No. Not all the residences have a mobile polling station. It depends on the size and location of the residences. So that's not the case everywhere. This really prevents people from exercising their right to vote.

If it were possible to set up a mobile station in each of the residences, and I'm not talking about residences with six people, but those with hundreds of seniors, that would truly make the voting process easier. That would be especially useful since the people in those residences often have reduced mobility. Generally, those who live there are 75 or older. So when you and I reach that stage, we will probably like to have a polling station in the residence where we live. So we have to think about that right away.

[*English*]

Mr. Larry Maguire: I'll just reiterate that all of the ones in my riding do at the present time.

Mr. Mireault, my question for you is, when are you going to run?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fred-William Mireault: Yes.

[*English*]

Mr. Larry Maguire: When are you going to run? Not where, when?

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Larry Maguire: But my more serious question is, because of what you've outlined—one-third of the people would be on lists and two-thirds in direct election—if you were going to run, which list would you want to be on? Would you want to be on the two-thirds who are directly elected, or to have your name on the one-third? There's going to be a list.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fred-William Mireault: That's a good question. I think both are the same. The type of member who comes from a list is elected by all their party members. That's definitely beneficial.

However, I would say that I still prefer the MPs who run in a constituency, because they will truly represent their region's interests in the House of Commons. I prefer this type of MP, but I have to acknowledge the legitimacy of the candidate chosen by the party members.

● (1730)

[*English*]

Mr. Larry Maguire: Yes, but we haven't had a proposal that those...lists would be elected to those lists. They could be appointed by party officials as well. What would you think of that?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fred-William Mireault: In my view, the 113 MPs chosen by the parties would still be legitimate. It would be up to the Canadians who want more space in the 113 seats to obtain a membership card for the party closest to their values, to go to the provincial convention and to vote for the candidates on the lists.

[*English*]

Mr. Larry Maguire: Yes, I understand that. But there are closed and open lists, and then there are those who may not be elected to those lists.

Now, when you mentioned it—you had your one-third and two-thirds—you gave us some specific numbers. I think you said you would have 265 elected directly. Is that 225 or 65?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fred-William Mireault: There would be 225 MPs.

[*English*]

Mr. Larry Maguire: Oh, 225. You're looking at the present list that was there, okay. You're not proposing to increase the number of members in the House.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fred-William Mireault: We proposed a format of one-third and two-thirds. As I said at the outset, assigning too much proportionality would sort of drown the various populations in each province. If we don't assign enough weight to proportionality, we might not factor in the distortions that might arise between the number of votes and the number of MPs.

The Chair: We asked whether you wanted to add seats to achieve proportionality without expanding the constituencies. Do you want us to have more than 338 MPs in the House?

Mr. Fred-William Mireault: No.

The Chair: The number would be lower.

Mr. Fred-William Mireault: In terms of increasing the number of MPs, we would have to see. We chose the number of 338 MPs because the House of Commons is bursting at the seams. It is more complicated than that. We are in favour of increasing the number of MPs in a sense, but, for a purely technical reason, we are keeping the number at 338 MPs.

The Chair: Thank you.

The floor goes to Mr. DeCourcey.

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

Ms. Perreault and Mr. Mireault, thank you for your testimony.

Mr. Mireault, the committee is wondering how we can encourage a higher voter turnout. We have listened to a number of presentations and we even know that, in some Canadian groups, many people don't vote. That's the case for young people especially. There was a higher voter turnout in 2015, but we want it to continue to grow. With all that, you are proposing a referendum after a new electoral system is put forward.

What should we do to ensure that young people will participate in the referendum?

Mr. Fred-William Mireault: I think the participation of young people in this possible referendum would depend on an information campaign. The Chief Electoral Officer could join with youth groups, youth forums, and promote participation in the referendum. Perhaps he could visit CEGEPs and universities to explain the debate to those who aren't following it.

That might also mean that there would be more young people working as election officials. Before the last federal election, the Chief Electoral Officer said that he would leave more room for young people. Yet we've heard about young people who applied and didn’t get a job.

If young people are part of the electoral process, they can be more informed and might be more aware of the referendum.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: If the issue goes to a referendum, do you think that the turnout of young people would be low?

Mr. Fred-William Mireault: I think the point of a referendum is to open the door to all Canadians. We can't make young people vote against their will. Personally, I wouldn't want a referendum to be invalidated because a group of young people didn't vote. We need to make an effort to engage young people, but I don't think we can impose a youth representativeness criterion.

● (1735)

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Thank you very much.

Ms. Perreault, how do you think seniors would react if the issue of electoral reform went to a referendum? Do you think seniors would participate?

Ms. Danielle Perreault: I think seniors would participate in a referendum as long as the question was clear. It's important in Quebec that the referendum question be very clear. In any case, seniors are very committed people, and they would certainly take part in the referendum.

The Réseau FADOQ would also strongly encourage its members to exercise their right to vote. Unlike Mr. Mireault, who doesn't seem to want participation in a referendum to be mandatory, we at FADOQ think that it's a duty. We are lucky in Canada to have the right to vote to elect the people who will represent us. I think the failure to exercise this citizen right is wrong.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. DeCourcey.

Ms. Sansoucy, you have the floor.

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

Please allow me to welcome the members of the public who are with us this evening. I would also like to thank the two witnesses for their presentations.

Ms. Perreault, you mentioned that the percentage of voters who exercised their right to vote was disturbing. You also said that you represented people who felt that voting was a duty. These senior voters are upset that they can't exercise their right to vote when access problems prevent them from doing so.

You also argue that you represent people who find that the current voting system isn't a problem at all. I know that your organization doesn't have a position other than that on electoral reform. But the government announced that the status quo isn't an option. You represent people who aren't against change but who have been exercising their right to vote using the current system for 50, 60 and even 70 years or more. So it will be important to inform them about the change when Parliament recommends a new voting system to the Canadian public.

What steps do you think should be taken to properly educate the people you represent about the fact that they will no longer be able to vote the same way they always have?

Ms. Danielle Perreault: I think the first thing would be to organize meetings, like this one, to fully explain to seniors the changes to the voting system. You also need to ensure you are there for them, more than every four years, and hold meetings in every region so that they fully understand the changes.

FADOQ feels obligated to clearly explain to its members the nature of the changes that will be made so that they are not afraid of the new voting system. We know that the older we get, the harder it is to adapt to change. We will need to explain to them the reasons for the changes and the resulting benefits. Seniors aren't necessarily resistant to change, even though they sometimes seem to be because they no longer know what to do. We will need to support them as they navigate this. We will also have to be flexible with them when they come to vote so that they fully understand how to vote. Polling stations might have people designated to explain to seniors how to fill out the new ballot.

Time definitely needs to be taken to provide seniors with good explanations. People who have been voting for 50 or 60 years might feel that their routine has been disrupted.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Mr. Mireault, like my other colleagues, I won't ask you any questions about the voting system. Your presentation was very clear.

You mentioned being inspired by your membership in the Mouvement Démocratie Nouvelle, the MDN, and the Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec, the FECQ. The MDN appeared before the committee, but I don't think the FECQ has presented its position to the committee. I know that the FECQ presented its position during consultations in Quebec, and it could adapt it fairly easily to present it to us. Our committee would be interested in knowing the position of students in Quebec. I invite you to pass on our message to the FECQ.

We spoke about the issue of voter turnout in the 18 to 34 age group. Although the rate has increased slightly, there's still reason to question the low turnout of young voters. The Institut du Nouveau Monde has even described this phenomenon as generational suicide. So it's important to take interest in it.

At a previous meeting, the importance of awareness programs and ways to boost interest and participation in elections was raised. What measures do you think would be the most effective for encouraging more young voters to vote?

● (1740)

Mr. Fred-William Mireault: As I said, for voter turnout, it's clear that young people who are part of the electoral process are more informed. For example, the young people recruited by Elections Canada to check names on the voters list tell their friends that they will be working in the next election and that the job is super interesting. They are informing other young people about the electoral process. What follows is an immediate mobilization of young voters so that they become interested in the electoral process and exercise their right to vote.

As for the measures that should be put in place to increase the participation of young voters in elections, it would be worthwhile to organize activities at CEGEPs and universities because that is where the students are.

Of course, not all young voters are students. There are young people who aren't in school anymore. To reach them, it would be a good idea to work more closely with youth forums. The Chief Electoral Officer could also launch a national campaign to promote exercising the right to vote in elections among young voters. We could show the impact of the failure of youth to vote on representation in the House of Commons and on Canadian politics in general.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Sansoucy.

Ms. Sahota, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you.

Madam Perreault, you were mentioning that local representation is extremely important to you and to your association. You talked about parachuting and how that wouldn't be acceptable. To parachute a candidate into a region where they don't have local ties is not preferred by you or your association. I find that's true. I've seen that happen in my riding as well, and there was a big protest against it. Even the local riding association didn't want to help represent that candidate because they were parachuted in.

With your list system that you've created, Mr. Mireault, you said there were about 113 list members who would be divided among the different provinces. Would they be assigned to a riding of a sort, or would they set up a local constituency office? Where would that be, and how would we make sure that the local representation piece was still there so we wouldn't be parachuting people in?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fred-William Mireault: In terms of parachuting in candidates, I would say that if Canadians are against parachuting in a candidate at this point, all they have to do is vote against the candidate who was parachuted in.

The double vote makes it possible to indicate that a certain candidate was parachuted in, that the voter liked the candidate's party, but not the fact that the candidate was parachuted in the voter's riding. So the voter can vote for the party through the voters list, while for the local candidate, the voter could vote for a candidate closer to the region who has a better knowledge of the region's needs.

[*English*]

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Maybe you could clarify a bit.

It would be a closed list, you were saying. At that point, you'd be trying to have proportionality by having people vote for members of a certain party on this list. Would they be left with a lot of options?

I don't understand. Would they be assigned to a whole province? If they were of that province but not of a certain local region, you would still have a problem. Do you see what I'm saying?

● (1745)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fred-William Mireault: Yes, but we could adopt rules to avoid parachuting.

We are in favour of a closed list because, as I said, you can maintain the gender parity, alternation between men and women, and youth representation. You could adopt open lists in which voters would decide the order in which they would like their candidates, to justifiably avoid parachuting.

[*English*]

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Okay. I'm also very impressed by your responses and your in-depth knowledge on these issues, so I hope you will entertain running one day. It would be a great career for you.

My second question is more about the referendum issue. You said we would come up with a recommendation here, vote on it in the House, and then put it to a referendum. A lot of witnesses and citizens have come before us and said, "That's what we elect you to do. You need to make these complex decisions. That's what parliamentarians do on a daily basis. Consult citizens, come up with a recommendation, perhaps vote on it to give it legitimacy in the House, but then move forward because we have been spending decades and decades talking about this issue but not having action." What would your response to that be?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fred-William Mireault: Basically, we're in favour of a referendum. Electoral reform wasn't a major issue in the last federal election. It can't be said that it was a referendum election.

Of course, it's good that a committee is consulting Canadians across the country, but they won't have a direct impact on the committee's recommendations or on the electoral reform that the federal government will propose.

We still think it's important that Canadians be consulted directly on the voting system that will be proposed. Coming here and talking is extremely interesting and enriching, but you can't be certain of the voting system that Canadians will choose.

[*English*]

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I have one follow-up question to that. How would you see this referendum worded, ideally? Say we go with your recommendation and we put it to a referendum. It's quite a complex process to ask in a referendum question. How would you see that working out? What would be your ideal question?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fred-William Mireault: There might be some kind of introduction explaining the proposed reform of the Canada Elections Act, and Canadians would vote for or against the proposal.

Going into details is complicated. Perhaps you could address the issue of the voting method more generally. The government would determine the terms and conditions, but it's important that Canadians have their say on the issue. Maybe you could give the government more room for the format and the details.

[*English*]

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Do you not feel that might be quite complex for a lot of people who have never thought about electoral reform?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fred-William Mireault: Of course it's complicated. In one sense, few Canadians have thought about electoral reform. Perhaps there should be an awareness campaign to inform Canadians about what electoral reform is, what it does, the different types of voting around the world and the impact of each type. It might give Canadians a better picture.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Both of you have given us a good, stimulating discussion this late Friday afternoon. Thank you. Thank you again for coming here and sharing your views with us. I hope you will read our report. You will find quotes in there, I'm sure. Thank you again, and good night.

The committee members will take a break until 6:30 p.m. The meeting will continue at that time in an open-mike session.

● (1745)

(Pause)

● (1835)

The Chair: We are officially resuming the meeting.

We are now at the open-mike part of the meeting. Eight members of the public want to speak. We normally limit interventions to two minutes, but since we have only eight speakers—more people spoke at the start of the day—I will extend the speaking time to three minutes.

Please make your comments in three minutes, no more, to give others the chance to do so as well. If your presentations are long, I invite you to read just the number of paragraphs you can in three minutes.

We'll start with Daniel Green.

Don't be insulted if I have to interrupt you after three minutes. That's how we have to work in this context. I apologize in advance.

Go ahead, Mr. Green.

● (1840)

Mr. Daniel Green (As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Technical difficulties*] of Canada. I ran for election in October 2015. However, I'm not sitting with you because I didn't win.

Still, I took part in about eight public meetings on electoral reform. I met with dozens of Quebecers on this. The message I'd like to share with the committee tonight is that the public is ready for a change. The public understands that the current system is not democratic. People are demanding more democracy in this country.

If I have the opportunity to be invited to testify before your committee—I made a request to the clerk—I will be able to use Legos to do my presentation on reforming the electoral system. You would be able to see what a throw away vote is. After the October election, people told me that they would have voted for me, but they didn't want their Green vote to be lost. People don't vote for who they prefer anymore, but against who they don't want to see elected. That's not a democracy.

I suggest to the committee—and I think Canadians are asking for this as well—that you come to a consensus. Every division could be seen as the same as a jury that hasn't made a decision. So I recommend to Mr. Scarpaleggia, the Chair, that after hearing from all the witnesses and all the stakeholders, he closes the door and doesn't come out until a consensus has been reached.

As a voter, as a taxpayer and as a Canadian, I ask you to give us the gift of democracy. I ask you to shut yourselves in a room to reach a consensus to improve the country's democratic system.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green. I'll take note of your idea. We will discuss it together, perhaps in camera.

Yves Perron, you have the floor.

Mr. Yves Perron (As an Individual): Good evening. I'm here as a citizen.

Mr. Chair, could you please let me know when I only have 30 seconds left because I'm afraid of running out of time.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Yves Perron: I want to draw the committee's attention to principles that are important to me regarding local representatives, namely, their obligation to be accountable, their accessibility and their representativeness. It is important to have an MP you can approach and whose role is to provide services to the constituents, even if it means reducing the size of ridings and increasing the number of MPs, if necessary.

It is also important that your final plan be submitted to the public through a referendum. I think it's essential that a referendum be held and that it include a regional component. I would be very concerned to see electoral reform adopted if English Canada was in favour of it, but Quebec was against it. We've already been through that situation.

I would also like there to be no preferential voting. As we know, it favours bipartisanship. We prefer a mixed member proportional system. Everyone is talking about a two-thirds and a one-third proportion, but I suggest that the committee try to form a three-quarters and one-quarter. One-quarter might be enough to set things right. What we want from a proportional system is for it to correct the defects of the current system and represent the total percentages.

It is also essential that the banks of candidates provided by the parties are national, not regional. This kind of formula has already been proposed in Quebec. The fact that the regions would vote in a block for one party would end up distorting the percentages. That's a very important point.

I'm also suggesting an innovative idea, which is that these lists not be submitted by the parties. That way, we would keep the establishment of a party from controlling the lists and certain candidates, by running in both a riding and on the list, from being guaranteed of being elected. Instead, it could be a list of the best runners-up. Each member would have to run in an electoral campaign, meet with the public and take part in debates. If, in looking at the election results for the ridings, we saw that three Conservative candidates were missing to correct the percentages, we would determine which one received the most votes or the highest percentage in his or her riding. I think that approach would ensure that all elected officials were equally legitimate. I don't think this would be the case if we were given a list that could be put together in various ways.

I also think it's very important to recognize all the parties. A party with a single elected official should have the same budget as a party with 150. With this, we are recognizing the problem facing the Bloc Québécois, which currently has 10 MPs.

The public financing portion should be restored to ensure a plurality of voices. This is fundamental.

Perhaps we could also take the opportunity to regulate election signs and stop polluting the environment with coroplast. In fact, we are arguing the need to pay attention to these issues, to use electric cars, and so on. But there's a contradiction there.

I'm putting forward the idea of a citizen-initiated referendum. I don't know if this is the appropriate place to do it. If a government is elected after making speeches and promises, but three months later is doing the exact opposite of what it had announced, the public has to deal with that government for four years. Is that democracy? I don't think so. Perhaps the public could have a right of recall or be able to demand a vote or consultation on the matter.

Thank you very much.

● (1845)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perron.

I will now ask Eric Trottier to take the floor.

Mr. Éric Trottier (As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair, ladies and gentlemen MPs.

Good evening, everyone.

First, I would like to say that I am in favour of having some proportionality in Canada's federal election system so that serious small parties could be represented.

Second, I am in favour of members for federal electoral districts being elected on the principle of 50% plus one.

Third, should an electoral system that includes a proportional component be chosen, I would be in favour of candidates elected on the proportional principle being candidates who were not elected in the election, going from the highest percentage result to the lowest. That's what the person who spoke before me explained in one part of his comments.

Fourth, I am in favour of strengthening the criteria for a party to be officially recognized in Ottawa. For example, the requirement could be a minimum number of members in good standing, a full political agenda and 75% of candidates in the 338 electoral constituencies. The goal would be to prevent recognition of small parties that aren't serious or parties with sometimes extremist ideologies. It doesn't add anything good to the debate.

Fifth, when someone runs for election, there should be more selection criteria. This mainly has to do with buddy candidates, naturally. The person should be proficient in the language spoken in the riding in which he or she is running. We need to avoid the election of an anglophone from western Canada in a French-speaking riding in Quebec. I think we've seen this already, but I'm not sure.

That concludes my comments. Thank you for listening.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Trottier.

I'll now give the floor to Therese Desrosiers.

Ms. Thérèse Desrochers (As an Individual): I would just like to mention that my name is Desrochers, not Desrosiers.

The Chair: I'm so sorry, Ms. Desrochers. It's been a long week.

Ms. Thérèse Desrochers: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen MPs, and everyone here.

I'm going to give my personal opinion.

During the elections, I'd like there to be proportionality. Say, for example, that 10% of voters vote for the Bloc Québécois, but the party only manages to have five MPs elected. I'd like five other members from that party who weren't elected to be given a seat to better represent the proportion of the 10% of voters who voted for candidates for that party. A seat should be given to candidates from that party who received the most votes. Perhaps a Conservative member was elected with 9,000 votes, while the Bloc Québécois member wasn't elected, even though he received 8,000. I would like those people to be elected to represent their voters.

Voters' choices aren't currently being respected. People vote hoping that a certain party wins, but it doesn't. In the end, there are only five or 10 MPs who reflect their values and represent them very well. If 10% of the population wants MPs of that quality, MPs who represent their values well, those MPs need to be elected.

Canadiates also need to be verified. I don't know how members from very special parties can be allowed to stand for election. I think it's absurd.

I have nothing more to say. I absolutely want the people to be considered. They need to be respected. They're the voters who elect the MPs.

I also think the party's mission shouldn't change. The fact that elected MPs change their mind and don't respect their agenda is totally offensive.

● (1850)

The Chair: So you are in favour of proportionality in the distribution of seats.

Ms. Thérèse Desrochers: Yes.

The Chair: You also do not want floor-crossers, members who switch from one party to another.

Ms. Thérèse Desrochers: That's right. Members from one party suddenly joining another party is absolutely not acceptable.

The Chair: So you do not want there to be floor-crossers. We talked about that a little this afternoon.

Thank you, Ms. Desrochers.

Mr. Battah, do you want to talk about the electoral system?

[*English*]

Mr. Ken Battah: I'm back.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: You have three minutes.

Mr. Ken Battah: It should be the same three minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Chairman, I read off your website your remarks when you were nominated to be chairman of this assembly, and I will quote your statement:

> [We] will broadly consult Canadians on how to change the first-past-the-post voting system.
>
> [We will] examine options available for modifying Canada's electoral system so that the distribution of seats...better reflects each party's share of the popular vote... I look forward to working with [all party] colleagues...to create and execute a consultative process that gives Canadians...the opportunity to weigh in on the kind of voting system they feel best suited to Canada's democracy.

You must remember your words, I'm sure.

The Chair: I certainly do.

Mr. Ken Battah: Thank you.

As parliamentarians, you all know that words matter.

Mr. Chairman, I didn't see in your words where you suggest that the decision will come from the people, and it must come from the people.

In my earlier intervention today, I wanted to add my personal view. I told you I've become cynical in my old age. I'm now 65. If voting mattered, it would be banned. That's my view. Therefore, if the people don't make the decision through a referendum, then this exercise is rhetorical embroidery. Think of that one: rhetorical embroidery.

The Prime Minister wrote a mandate letter for electoral reform to Ms. Monsef, and he said, “As Minister of Democratic Institutions, your overarching goal will be to strengthen the openness and fairness of Canada's public institutions. You will lead on electoral and Senate reform to restore [Canada's] trust and participation in our democratic process.”

Well friends, let me tell you something. It's going to take a lot more than a way to change a vote to restore trust and participation.

[*Translation*]

I agree completely with Mr. Green, who made a comment earlier. If there is no unanimous decision, by all the parties, this exercise will be bogus. You are too honourable human beings to turn this exercise, which is so important, into something bogus. The last word goes to the public, to the people, and nothing else.

● (1855)

The Chair: That is noted, and thank you for your words of encouragement.

Francis Blais, you have the floor.

Mr. Francis Blais (As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, members of the committee.

I heard a commentary on Radio-Canada that said that demographic change in Quebec was soon going to mean that when an election is held, the baby boomer generation, generation X and generation Y will each represent one third of electors. This means that it will be one of the first times that young people will be able to have a bigger influence on electing a government.

I would first like to talk about preferential voting. Something that I like less about that option is that it eliminates small parties. The message that sends to young people is that if you vote for someone and you get shut out, you may as well stay home because there is no point in voting. In fact, small parties are as good as the big ones; democracy speaks. No one party is worse than another; it is the people who choose. If a party exists only in Quebec and nowhere else, I think it has as much right to exist as other parties in the West or that are more independent.

Now let us talk about funding political parties based on the votes they get. I think it should be restored. If the parties are short of money, the public is going to pay at the end of the day. The public will take the financial losses and I think it is important to fund these parties again.

Recognizing small parties is also important. Whether it is one or two or 150, they are all entitled to be recognized.

In the case of the mixed proportional system, I am afraid we will always end up with centrist governments, with the same old deadwood in the same place, and we will never manage to get rid of it. This means we will always end up in the same place. At the end of the day, there is always a province, the aim is to reduce its influence and it still seems to be a war between two peoples.

Essentially, I think democracy and a referendum go hand in hand. Democracy means asking the people what they want. I do not understand why some people call themselves democrats and do not want a referendum. I do not know who you are talking to, but I think it is important to see that it is the public who decide, who elect you, who give you a job. I think it is important to ask people what they want.

Essentially, I am neither for nor against. I think some work has to be done to present us with what is good, the advantages and the disadvantages. It will then be up to us to choose what we want.

Thank you.

The Chair: If I understand correctly, you are in favour of proportional voting, but not necessarily of the system.

Mr. Francis Blais: I am in favour of plain common sense.

The Chair: That is a good philosophy. Thank you.

Sylvain Chartier, it is your turn.

Mr. Sylvain Chartier (As an Individual): Hello. I have the good fortune not to be a parliamentarian, so I do not have to beat around the bush.

I get the feeling that we are all a little out of focus. There is your committee, which is sitting today, but ask around with your neighbours to see who knows what you are doing. Not many people, except those already in the know, those who are informed, who are in the loop, who know what is happening.

And yet any change in the voting system is going to affect us all. It is said that the devil is in the details, but details are what we are not being given, because no matter what voting system is chosen, there are different ways of getting there. There are hundreds.

During the election campaign, the government promised to change the voting system. It made many other promises for which we have not yet seen results. If we are going to place our trust in someone, we have to be able to determine whether the person is capable of delivering on their promises. So far, not many things have been accomplished.

Second, how is this reform to be applied? As I was just saying: there are thousands of ways of applying it. When a proposal for reform is presented to the public, we will have to be told exactly what it is, and not just have an broad proposal put to us. At present, the government is not proposing anything. It is gathering ideas, and then, someday, it will present us with its proposal.

Even the government whip, Andrew Leslie, has stressed the importance of having a discussion with the public and not with a few members of the public. He says that the Liberals' seven months in power — at the time he said it — was ultimately not very long at all for holding a complete and inclusive consultation. So this is improvising of the kind we saw with the process for medical assistance in dying. We know that subject is still being debated, even though the law has been enacted.

The bill to legalize marijuana is to be introduced in the spring, but the public is not being consulted to this extent.

So the government really has to prove itself.

Your committee is rather small. There are not many of you around the table. As well — given that I do not have to beat around the bush — there are people who are on their cell phones right now. There are others who do not understand our language well. This does not promote consultation.

I propose that each political party be able to consult its members and be subsidized by the government for doing that. Prof. Kenneth Carty of the University of British Columbia has said he is afraid that the changes made will weaken the country.

If the goal is to improve the system by making changes, you should start by changing yourselves, stopping the systematic hypocrisy and lying during debates in the House, and having regard and respect for your adversaries. The last time I attended parliamentary debates, a government member told a third party member that he was eager to see his party disappear, and that that party was worthless. I think when we have this kind of language, we are not ready to talk about proportional voting or anything else of the kind.

● (1900)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chartier.

I would like to clarify something. You spoke about consultation. While there are only 12 members here, the Committee has invited the 338 members to hold public consultations in their own ridings. I think a little more than a hundred, so far, have held consultations. So we are trying to meet as many people as possible, taking into account the time constraints we have, especially.

Thank you for your comments. You have stated some good principles, of course.

Mr. Samson, you are our last witness. You have the floor.

Mr. Daniel Samson (As an Individual): Hello everyone. I hope everyone is doing well.

I am the deputy director of an employability organization that assists young people aged 16 to 35 years. We help over 3,000 people in the region every year. We provide them with guidance in their individual and group activities. I am responsible for leading activities relating to the voting system. Explaining a voting system to young people between the ages of 18 and 35 is not easy. It takes me an hour and a half to explain the issues and objectives to them, how it works, using diagrams. Our voting system is archaic and outmoded. Young people want to be involved in and understand politics. When I ask them which of them voted in the last election, it is always one person out of five.

After my workshop, when I explain the platforms and parties to them, and members of Parliament come to meet with them, they are able to talk about politics and understand it. I am here representing these young people and an organization. I will therefore not tell you what voting system we want to see. Instead, I will tell you that young people want to be heard. When they go out to vote and get involved in the process, they want to feel that their participation counts for something.

Personally, I would adopt proportional voting. I will let young people choose for themselves. I would certainly also agree with a referendum on the voting system, to get young people to participate.

I am prepared to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you.

● (1905)

The Chair: Thank you.

In fact, the topic you have raised has been a somewhat recurring one at our hearings. We are often told that we need to meet with young people and get them involved at the secondary school level. If we are able to interest them and explain politics to them at that stage, they will vote throughout their lives. So what you are doing helps to raise young people's participation rate. We congratulate you and thank you for that.

Does someone else wish to speak?

Mr. Castro, you have the floor.

Mr. Hernestro Castro (As an Individual): Hello. My presentation comes at the last minute, but I wanted to take the time to listen to the others before I said things of little significance. I hope that my remarks will not be insignificant

There is something that concerns me. We have talked about mixed proportional voting, geographic voting, regional voting, MPs, and so on, but I have not heard anything about the realities of nations in Canada. I know that the subject of the nation is sensitive, in Canada, but it is also unavoidable. Whether or not one is a sovereignist, we have to "cross the Rubicon", as they say. I think that a reform of our institutions should include this aspect.

I will start with the First Nations. I worked for a time in Manawan, with the Atikamekw, and because they are spread over several regions, they are always in a minority. We therefore need to create a firmly rooted place for the First Nations. I know this is complex. How could we do this? In spite of the fact that the subject is taboo, we have to address it.

The other factor concerns cultural communities. Again, I know that people who favour a national approach will say that this is part and parcel of Canadian multiculturalism. However, with all due respect to the sovereignists, it exists. There are a number of cultural communities here; we are not just individuals. The sovereignists have some work to do on recognizing those communities, and people who are not sovereignists also have a way to go, to recognize that a Quebec Nation and First Nations exist.

That is what I wanted to say.

The Chair: Thank you for that broad perspective.

The testimony has been excellent. I think my colleagues would agree with that.

This is our fifth day of travel around Canada. It has been exceptional. We are very happy that we decided to come to Joliette. We are visiting only 18 Canadian cities, and Joliette was one of them. We made a good choice. Thank you very much.

Thank you for hosting us, Mr. Ste-Marie.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: There are people who wanted to speak.

The Chair: I thought we had been relatively open in terms of people who wanted to speak.

Mr. Perron, you have the floor.

Mr. Yves Perron: I went quickly earlier because I wanted to have the time to say everything.

I talked about the list of second-best candidates. Essentially, there would not be two different candidate lists. All candidates elected would have campaigned and met with the public. I think that is important in our political system. It is also important that people be able to reach their member of Parliament and that their member be accessible.

In the present system, there are 338 ridings. I think it was Mr. Boulerice who talked about twinning. That might be possible in urban areas, but maybe not in rural areas. I was a candidate in Berthier—Maskinongé, and I can tell you that it is a large riding. The election campaign was long, but it was not long enough for someone to whom it is important to meet everyone in their riding.

Mr. Généreux, you said your riding was enormous, and that argument struck a chord with me. This makes no sense. We have to reduce the size of ridings, to bring members closer to their communities and raise our level of democracy and the importance of getting out to vote. If the candidate I vote for is not elected, but their party does well at the national level, it might be appropriate to go back and try to get them in a kind of second round or second chance.

Not changing the voting system has one big advantage when it comes to seniors. We must not end up with a ballot that looks like what they have in the United States, where people vote for eight things at the same time, with the result that they get all mixed up. People should vote for the candidate of the party they have chosen, and the rest would happen afterward.

I encourage you to consider that possibility.

● (1910)

The Chair: Thank you.

Do you want to comment, Mr. Généreux?

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I would just like to add something to what you have said.

There are rural ridings. I am going to make a joke here. We should split Montreal into 18 Quebec administrative regions and spread all the electors in Montreal around the other regions in the province. That way, there would be equal numbers of electors everywhere in the province.

Seriously, the issue you have raised is an important one. That is a situation I live with. The members around this table do not represent urban ridings alone, they also represent rural ridings. We represent these people and we would like to meet them more often. However, the large distances prevent us from doing that. I have travelled 1,500 to 2,000 kilometres in a weekend in my own riding to take part in activities. It becomes virtually inhuman at a certain point. The distances are very large.

The Chair: We do still have to return to Montreal.

We could hear two or three final witnesses, and I would ask that they make fairly brief comments. Do the people in the room agree? I see they do.

Mr. Green, Mr. Battah and Mr. Massicotte, you will each have two minutes.

Daniel Green, you can start.

Mr. Daniel Green: I would like to draw something to the committee's attention.

A number of comments have been made on the lack of knowledge about the various voting systems. I have had the opportunity — perhaps the misfortune — to read the PowerPoint document prepared by the Library of Parliament, which was offered to members to help them make presentations at their community meetings. I have rarely seen a presentation as hard to understand, to the point that last Friday, in Vimy, MP Eva Nassif, accompanied by the Minister, Ms. Monsef, completely lost the thread of her presentation. People left the meeting even more confused than they were when it started. Even MPs have a hard time explaining things to their constituents.

I propose that the committee take the time to have a meeting to see whether the pedagogical material offered to members is sufficient for giving an objective explanation of the various voting systems proposed. I think that is not the case. There is some pedagogical work to be done so this can be presented to the people who are going to have to decide.

The Chair: Thank you.

This is indeed a complex subject. The analysts have really managed to make it as comprehensible as possible. I have used the slides and it worked very well. You do really have to study the document before presenting it, however.

I agree that there is some education to be done. It is a complex subject. We have to go out to people and explain to them what it is all about. That is the process we are engaged in.

Mr. Battah, you have two minutes.

Mr. Ken Battah: Thank you.

I would like some clarification about the time we have for putting this all in place. Could someone here tell me what the present government's plans are in terms of bringing this change into force?

The summer of 2016 is virtually over and it will be 2017 in a few months.

Essentiallly, I would like to know how much time will be needed for bringing this change into force. Your recommendations are going to be submitted at the end of the current year, I believe.

What is the government going to do with these comments after that?

What has to be done before a referendum is held, if there is a referendum?

● (1915)

[*English*]

What's the game?

[*Translation*]

We do not know that.

The Chair: Obviously, we are focusing on our terms of reference. We have no control over the government's decision. We are a legislative committee.

Under our terms of reference, we must submit our report by December 1. Witnesses have told us, on the question of holding a referendum, that it should be set for before the spring of 2017. The Chief Electoral Officer has said he would need some time — I have forgotten exactly how much — to prepare for a referendum. It also depends on the complexity of the system to be adopted. If it is very complicated and there has to be a redistribution of electoral districts, that cannot be done overnight.

For our part, we are limiting ourselves to our objective, which is to submit a report on or before December 1. We are working very hard and very intensively on that.

Mr. Ken Battah: To conclude, I would like to make a comment.

You all have life experience and, as you know, people are resistant to change. Proposing a major change is going to call for very thorough discussion.

Good luck to everyone.

The Chair: We shall see where it takes us.

Thank you again. Your comments were superb.

I now give the floor to Jean-François Massicotte.

Mr. Jean-François Massicote (As an Individual): Good evening.

For those who do not know, I was an intern with Mr. Scarpaleggia during the summer. I traveled back and forth between Pointe-Claire and Ottawa for the entire time, and I was happy that it was the other way around this time.

When we work on the other side, we do not have access to microphones. I will therefore take the opportunity I am offered this evening.

Like Mr. Scarpaleggia, I have been to Latin America. I spent five years there. I returned to Canada in April. Politics there works somewhat differently. There is an example there that I thought was worth considering. On the question of holding a referendum that has come up several times, the idea is to conduct a public consultation but without focusing on one question.

If a referendum were eventually considered to be a good idea, I would personally think about including more than one question. For example, "Do you want electoral reform?" "Should there be a maximum time for which an MP can be elected?" Please do not pelt me with tomatoes. There could be a dozen questions included.

As long as we are going to spend public funds on a referendum, it could deal with more than one question. That might be worthwhile. A witness said that including more than one question would confuse people. However, if there are clear questions, presented as a relatively distinct set, for which the answer was yes or no, it could be useful. I think we could explore various topics and resolve issues that are, as was said earlier, somewhat sensitive.

The Chair: That is what New Zealand did. There were two referendums before the election and two more afterward. People could choose the status quo or indicate their preference for other systems.

In November, there is going to be a kind of referendum in Prince Edward Island where the same principle will be applied. People will be asked to indicate their preference among various systems. That is a good idea.

We have to conclude there. Thank you for coming to meet with us. We will look forward to seeing you again someday, I hope.

The meeting is adjourned.