HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Special Committee on Electoral Reform

ERRE • NUMBER 042 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Wednesday, October 19, 2016

Chair

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia

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● (1915)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)): Welcome committee members and witnesses to this 42nd meeting of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform.

To the witnesses, we are sorry for the delay. We had about an hour of voting in the House.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Very briefly, I want to apologize to the witnesses. You've been waiting and we'll get right to you.

I just want to give committee members notice of a motion that we'll put on tonight, knowing that we need 48 hours' notice, I believe.

The Chair: I think so, if it pertains to the committee.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Yes, it's a very straightforward motion. I think it will likely be received well by all.

We have copies in French and English for people who would like to receive it afterwards. I move:

> That the committee invite the Minister of Democratic Institutions to table a summary of her public consultations with the committee.

We have received the consultation reports from many MPs who have conducted them. This is likely just an oversight at the minister's office. We just haven't seen the minister. We know she's been on the road a great deal. This is simply an invitation for her to present to the committee so the committee can incorporate what the minister has heard as well.

The Chair: Shall we discuss this at a later date?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Yes, as committee protocol requires, unless we have unanimous consent, of course.

The Chair: You don't need 48 hours' notice, if it's a motion that pertains to committee business.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Oh, okay.

The Chair: Do you want to—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: My only caution is taking away time, and I don't know if this requires discussion. That's all I wanted to say about it. It's very straightforward.

The Chair: Okay, why don't we deal with it after the witnesses.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Yes.

The Chair: We have with us appearing as an individual, Mr. Byron Weber Becker. Thank you for being here, Mr. Weber Becker.

We have from the Electoral Reform Society of the United Kingdom, the Honourable Darren Hughes, deputy chief executive; and Katie Ghose, chief executive.

From Dominion Voting Systems, we have John Poulos, president and chief executive officer; and John McKinstry, account executive.

The way we work means Mr. Byron Weber Becker will have 10 minutes. Mr. Hughes and Ms. Ghose will have 10 minutes to split, and Mr. Poulos and Mr. McKinstry from Dominion Voting Systems will split 10 minutes. Then, we'll have a round of questions where each member will get to ask questions. The time limit for each member of Parliament in their questioning of witnesses will be seven minutes tonight. We just have one seven-minute round of questions.

Without further ado, we'll start with Mr. Weber Becker please.

Mr. Byron Weber Becker (As an Individual): Mr. Chair, members of the committee, thank you for the time and energy you are investing in the health of our democracy. You are investigating important issues related to how Canadians express their will as we elect our leaders. I very much appreciate the work you are doing.

I also appreciate this opportunity to address you regarding my own work. I teach computer science at the University of Waterloo, where I've been a faculty member for 25 years. I've also been interested in electoral reform for the last decade.

Over the summer and into the fall, I combined my expertise in computer science with my interest in electoral reform to model many of the systems that have been proposed for Canada. “Model” is a critical word to understand in this context. This is the definition I would like to use: the application of electoral system rules to data, producing results that assist in understanding the behaviour of the system.

I want to emphasize the last phrase. I'm trying to understand the overall behaviour of electoral systems. My goal is not to predict who wins and who loses under a different system. That goal has many difficulties, including voters changing how they vote when the system changes. Instead, I'm attempting to use past elections to see if the system is well behaved. If it has been well behaved in many such elections, we could expect it to be well behaved in future elections, even if voters change how they vote.

What does it mean for a system to be well behaved? I think this committee's own mandate provides a helpful definition that I'm sure you'll recognize. A well-behaved system "reduces distortion and strengthens the link between voter intention and the election of representatives". Distortion is introduced when representation in government is significantly different from the level of popular support expressed in the election.

A well-behaved system should not be arbitrary or erratic. First past the post, for example, will award a party earning 40% of the vote anywhere from zero to 338 seats in the House of Commons. With a well-behaved electoral system, a small change in the votes cast should result in only a small change in the MPs elected. Another way to say that is that in a well-behaved system, the number of MPs awarded is proportional to the number of votes earned.

With that preamble, let's dig into the meat of my results.

Graphs like this are essential to my methodology for understanding whether a system is well behaved. It shows the proportionality of an electoral system across seven sets of data.

This graph is for first past the post and shows what a misbehaving system looks like. In contrast, here is the graph of the rural-urban system. It is well behaved. Notice how each pair of coloured lines track each other closely.

Let's take a few moments to understand these graphs. The centre, at 0%, represents the data from an actual election. In this case, it is first past the post 2015. The heavy points are the percentage of the popular vote for a particular party. The Liberals earned almost 40% of the votes, the Conservatives 32%, and so on for the other parties. The lighter points reflect how the parties were rewarded with MPs in the House. The Liberals' 39% vote share turned into 54% of the MPs at the expense of the other parties, which received fewer MPs than they deserved.

In 2015, first past the post was a misbehaving electoral system. But this is old news. We knew this on election night. What value have I added?

Remember that we want to see how each electoral system behaves in many different but realistic elections, not just in 2015. We can simulate a different election by taking the 2015 results and shifting 10% of each Conservative candidate's vote to the local Liberal candidate. That might reflect an election in which late-breaking good news for the Liberals swings voters to their camp. Applying the first-past-the-post voting rules to that set of data gives the Liberals 64% of the MPs, with only 43% of the vote.

If we swing 30% of the Conservative votes to the Liberals, they get 81% of the seats but still don't have a majority of the votes. Meanwhile, the effect on the Conservatives is devastating, with 7% of the seats in spite of earning 22% of the votes.

Of course, we can also simulate the movement of Liberal voters to the Conservatives. That is shown on the left side of the graph. Other graphs can simulate votes shifting between other combinations of parties.

First-past-the-post misbehaviour plays out in previous elections as well. These four graphs represent four real elections and 24 simulated elections. First past the post did not give a proportional result in any of them.

Let's move on to take a brief look at some of the other electoral systems.

● (1920)

The rural-urban proportional system is very well behaved. Here is the graph applying those rules to the 2015 election data and simulating related elections where votes swing between Conservatives and Liberals. Recall that the heavy lines represent the popular vote, while the lighter lines indicate the number of MPs. The important thing to note is how the two lines track each other very closely.

Here are the graphs based on earlier elections. In each case, the system is well behaved. I like the rural-urban proportional system, as proposed by Fair Vote Canada, because it addresses our huge disparity in riding sizes. It keeps our already huge ridings at about the same size by electing a single MP in those ridings. It gains proportionality by using multi-member ridings where higher population densities make that feasible.

Finally, a small layer of top-up seats, like the ones used in MMP, offsets the disproportionality of the single-member seats. That top-up layer is important. Rural-urban proportional is inspired by Kingsley's proposal, but it is not the same. Kingsley's proposal leaves off the top-up layer. When we model that, the result is surprisingly good, but not as good as rural-urban.

I've also modelled STV, single transferable vote, with both small ridings averaging 4.1 MPs and larger ridings averaging nearly 11 MPs. Both are well behaved, but predictably, the system with the larger ridings does better.

Modelling mixed member proportional, or MMP, with two sizes of top-up regions shows that it is also well behaved.

Alternative vote has the distinction of being the only system I modelled that misbehaved more than first past the post. Using data from four real elections and 72 simulated elections, alternative vote did not produce a single proportional result.

Another alternative that might seem attractive is to keep exactly the same riding boundaries we have now but enlarge the House with 10% more MPs, making them top-up seats similar to MMP. We might call this MMP-light if we elected MPs in the local ridings using first past the post, or we could call it AV-plus if we elected MPs using the alternative vote.

While both of these systems would be a step toward proportionality, my modelling shows that it would be a very small step, even with the best-case scenario of calculating top-up seats over each province, rather than smaller regions, as is common with MMP. A 10% top-up simply is not enough to overcome the disproportionalities of all those single-member ridings. But if we use exactly the same constraints with the rural-urban system, that is, 32 extra MPs assigned to top-up seats and calculated at the provincial level, we get a well-behaved system.

Thank you for your attention thus far. I've gone over some very detailed and technical material. You may feel at this point like my brother, who said, “That makes my head hurt.” Nevertheless, I believe it is important information for your decisions.

Let me summarize. First past the post frequently misbehaves. Alternative vote is worse than first past the post. STV, MMP, and rural-urban are all well behaved across many different simulations. Last, half-hearted attempts such as MMP-light and AV-plus are only slightly better than what we have now. Rural-urban, under exactly the same constraints, is excellent.

The program I've written and the input data are available for anyone to download, run, or modify. The results I've shown here are readily available on the web at election-modelling.ca.

Thank you again for your attention and for the incredible service you are performing for Canada. I look forward to your questions on my comments here, as well as my earlier submission to the committee.

● (1925)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Weber Becker.

Our heads may hurt, but it's a small price to pay for the insights that your models have brought to our discussion.

We'll go now to Mr. Hughes and Ms. Ghose.

Ms. Katie Ghose (Chief Executive, Electoral Reform Society United Kingdom): Thank you, and good evening.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for inviting us to appear before the committee to share our position and expertise on the United Kingdom's electoral systems. My colleague Mr. Hughes and I thank you for your welcome.

The Electoral Reform Society is a non-governmental association that campaigns for a better democracy in the United Kingdom. The principle underlying our work is that every voice needs to be heard and every vote must be reflected in Parliament.

I will start talking about the various systems in the U.K. My colleague will then speak to the system in New Zealand, which changed in 1996. Finally, we'll talk about our experience of referendums.

● (1930)

[*English*]

Thank you very much for inviting us to give evidence today. We're honoured to be here and thank you for your warm welcome.

The Electoral Reform Society campaigns for a better democracy in the U.K. We believe that every voice should be heard and every vote valued and that votes should be fairly translated into parliamentary seats.

I'll address the U.K. experience of proportional voting. I'm loving the well-behaved idea, which isn't one I had come across before. My colleague Darren will speak to the New Zealand experience, and finally, I'll share reflections on the U.K.'s recent experience of referendums.

First past the post, as you may know, is used to elect all members of Parliament, and in England and Wales only, municipal representatives. All our other institutions and elected offices use other systems.

The ERS's preferred system is a proportional system with a constituency link that allows voters to vote preferentially for candidates from parties or independents. This system, the single transferable vote form of PR, is used in Scottish municipal elections as well as in Northern Ireland and in Ireland. It's a candidate-centred system that puts maximum choice in the hands of the voter rather than the party.

We like it because candidates reach out to far more voters and they visit neighbourhoods they never bothered with under first past the post. They literally go to parts of the community that would otherwise go untouched. They have a different kind of conversation, often more positive. After all, they're saying, “You might not want to give me your first preference, but how about giving me your second or your third preference”. It's a different kind of conversation. It's a more positive conversation.

There's more competition. Uncontested seats are a thing of the past at the Scottish municipal level. There are no no-go areas. Competing everywhere is worthwhile, and people are far more likely to have a representative they voted for and a choice of representatives to visit.

There's some evidence of some specialization when it comes to casework. After all, when there's a team of MPs or representatives voting locally, you can begin to have some sharing of the casework load. Translated to the federal level, that approach sees a team of local MPs from a range of parties, very much like in Ireland, where it's used for the lower house and you have three to five local MPs. Interestingly, Ireland has multi-member constituencies elected by STV and an extremely local focus by candidates, which is interesting. That's something they have under a proportional constituency system.

Turning to MMP, which we also have some experience with, but we call it AMS, the additional member system, that's the system used in Scotland and Wales for their Parliaments. As you all know, it's a system where people can vote for the constituency representative and a party list.

What happens is that it produces broadly proportional parliaments where people are seeing seats reflect votes. Voters retain a clearly identifiable local representative. It has produced both power-sharing governments and majority governments, and crucially, it has also enabled parties to put forward a balanced and diverse group of representatives.

On that note, I'm going to hand it over to Darren.

Hon. Darren Hughes (Deputy Chief Executive, Electoral Reform Society United Kingdom): Thank you, Katie.

I just wanted to share some of the New Zealand perspective from experience that I had as both a constituency and a list MP in New Zealand under a proportional system.

New Zealand is an interesting case study, because it is a unique clash of unfairness, some anger amongst the voters, and a bit of luck, which always helps in politics.

Basically, I think the New Zealand context leading towards proportional representation is very hard to replicate. There had been two general elections in a row where the biggest party in vote share became the opposition rather than the government. There had been a decline in the two-party system from the voters' perspective, and there were elections regularly where third or fourth parties would receive large shares of the vote. One in particular got 20% of the vote and in return only two seats. That sense of unfairness was really building up quite strongly.

Then on the anger side, in the 1980s, there was far-reaching economic and social reform, which some of you may be familiar with, that left virtually no area of life untouched. It was delivered by parties, both the centre right and the centre left, contrary to what their manifesto commitments had been and with a real sense of a revolution taking place in the country, in a policy sense, with no direct mandate from the public for that.

That combination of unfairness in results and anger amongst voters about the state of politics, the actions of politicians, and the policies they were following really led to that unique scenario, that moment when change was able to be achieved. There was also a report that the prime minister misread his notes, which said, “Please don't promise a referendum on proportional representation,” and he said out loud, “There will be a referendum on proportional representation.” It was hard to row back from that once he had said it. That is why I say there was a bit of unfairness, a bit of anger amongst voters, and a bit of luck.

The result has been now, for over 20 years, strong, stable, respected governments that go the full term, contrary to some of the perceptions about PR. There have been seven general elections, and all but a couple of years have resulted in a minority government, parties having to work together in order to get things done. These governments have crossed the ideological spectrum. In fact, there have been more centre-right governments than centre left, although the centre left has had a good fair share of time in government as well. In terms of strong leadership, Helen Clark, the Labour prime minister, and John Key, the National prime minister, the conservative prime minister, are easily two of the most successful leaders those parties have had in 40 years, in terms of policy program, popularity, and election-winning record.

There has been a tremendous advancement on diversity of the House of Representatives in New Zealand. There are many more women members and ethnic minority members, and of course, crucially, better representation for indigenous New Zealanders, the Maori people, than first past the post could ever have achieved.

New Zealanders now like it. After six attempts, at the sixth general election under proportional representation, there was a further referendum that wasn't planned at the time, but it's something that happened. After this experience with PR, six times, New Zealanders chose again to stick with PR, which means that political parties have adapted. It wasn't easy, initially, but they have adapted, and they have made it work. There are no serious anti-proportional representation parties today in New Zealand. It has become very much a mainstream part of democracy that is good for voters and that political parties and politicians have been able to make work.

● (1935)

Ms. Katie Ghose: I'm just going to wrap up with a few reflections on referendums, which have been quite a new phenomenon for us in the U.K. and might be of interest.

The electoral reform referendum in 2011 was a classic case of proxy voting. The real issue on the ballot paper became the unpopularity of the junior coalition party, the Liberal Democrats. In contrast with New Zealand, where voters had an opportunity to consider the pros and the cons of the status quo, first past the post, in the U.K. we were just plunged into a negative discussion about the one non-proportional system that was on offer. The voting system was of low interest, and voters had no prior knowledge to come to grips with the issues. The campaign was too short. It was a low interest, low information, low turnout—41%—referendum.

In contrast, the Scottish referendum campaign, which was looking at the potential independence of Scotland as a country, lasted for two years. It gave voters the time and space to come to grips with the issues in some detail and to become knowledgeable. The stories of heated debate about technical issues around the currency arrangements at bus stops and in the pub are all true. People had enough time to get really informed and knowledgeable. It was a high information, high interest, high turnout referendum at an 86% turnout. The evidence shows that the political capacity building that took place during that referendum has sustained itself, with more Scots now taking part in formal and informal political activity.

Finally, there is the EU referendum campaign. The formal campaign just lasted for four months. It was very short. This is in our report entitled “It's Good to Talk: Doing referendums differently after the EU vote”. We did polling throughout the campaign. People said they didn't feel well-informed about the issues at the start of the campaign in February. Only 16% felt well informed or very well informed. That rose to just one-third with a week to go before polling day. Obviously, that's reporting how informed people feel. It's not scientific, but it does give us a good indication that people didn't feel informed. The issue mattered hugely to everybody in the U.K., and so the turnout was high at 72%, but it was a low interest, low information, high turnout referendum.

Done well, referendums can hope to achieve high-quality public information and debate in the run-up to polling day. Done badly, a referendum can obliterate any chance of meaningful public and political debate, as the ballot topic is completely overtaken by proxy issues. Reflecting on comparable examples, and the particular time constraints of the Canadian process, where there's a real practical deadline around implementation, we cannot see how a good referendum is achievable here.

We'll conclude our remarks there. Thank you.

● (1940)

The Chair: Thank you. That's very interesting.

We'll go now to Mr. Poulos and Mr. McKinstry.

Mr. John Poulos (President and Chief Executive Officer, Dominion Voting Systems, Corp.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and committee members. My name is John Poulos, and I am the president and CEO of Dominion Voting Systems, based in Toronto.

I have been following this committee with great interest, in particular the presentations by Mr. Marc Mayrand, Mr. Greg Essensa, and Mr. Jean-Pierre Kingsley, all renowned election administrators for whom I have the utmost respect. I am familiar with the various alternatives that have been proposed to date.

I've asked to appear before this committee to provide a first-hand perspective of how technology is currently deployed in elections around the world and how technology may address some of the issues that arise when contemplating different electoral systems.

Electoral automation has been my profession for the past 14 years. Therefore, not only am I aware of the global trends and discussions, but I have broad and diverse first-hand experience in deploying tabulation technology for administrators globally. Internationally, we have deployed tabulation technology in the Philippines, representing a voting base of 50 million eligible voters across 82,500 polls; nationwide in Mongolia, which represents perhaps the most severe environmental and physical challenges to voting; and more recently across the entire island of Puerto Rico.

In the United States we work with more than 1,000 electoral agencies across 35 states, including several statewide deployments. In November we will be tabulating the votes for just over one-third of U.S. voters. In Canada, we provide tabulation technologies to more than 100 agencies at the municipal, the provincial, and as a pilot, even the federal level.

Now, when considering a potential change to the electoral system, including any of the various voting alternatives proposed to the committee, I will first address the need for timely results.

As the complexity of the ballot increases, so does the time needed to manually hand count. In addition, as both the ballot complexity and the time needed to count go up, there is also a corresponding increase in the rate of human error. Mr. Mayrand has already identified the challenges of the hand count experience in Australia and speaks to the need for timely results. The link between timely results and voter confidence is well documented, so I won’t comment on it further. Instead I will address how technology has solved the issue elsewhere.

In the Philippines, implementing the same type of tabulating technology that is in wide use across Canada, the time to result went from weeks to hours. What makes this relevant to this committee is the fact that the ballot was perhaps among the most complex ever. The ballot featured more than 100 voter selections in a multi-column, single-spaced, double-sided, 22-inch paper ballot. In terms of sheer size, there were 82,500 polls for 50 million eligible voters.

In the case of Mongolia where there is simply no telecom in over 30% of the locations, the time to result with this technology fell to 90 minutes for half of the polls, with over 85% reporting within a few hours.

When this technology has been used in Canada with our local infrastructure, the results have been even better. In each case, the paper ballots were digitally scanned in real time, and the results from each location were modemed in, after the election, immediately following the close, populating a central database. Results from each poll were printed off as soon as polls closed, and the consolidation was able to happen centrally in an automated fashion.

In the case where an election may have successive rounds of voting, such as a ranked choice system, proportional representation system, or hybrid system, the database would already have all the selections, so each successive round would be instant and could be done with a press of the button.

The next issue that arises is voter concern regarding the displacement of hand-counted paper ballots. This is not a new concern, and it has been addressed in thousands of jurisdictions with the advent of fully transparent auditing capabilities. Any modern paper-based tabulation system that has been deployed around the world now captures the image of every ballot, and combines that image with the machine’s interpretation of all the marks made by the elector.

These resulting audit marks offer a completely objective and fact-based view to any auditor post-election of how each mark was interpreted and, more importantly, why. When used effectively, this process effectively mirrors the current practice of scrutineers standing over the shoulders of the manual ballot hand-counters.

There are many specific examples of recounts using modern tabulation technology, too many to list, where all recounts are exactly the same each time, a feat that is rare in a manual hand-count election, and virtually impossible in a manual hand-count election featuring a complex ballot.

● (1945)

The key here is that the jurisdictions that have thoughtfully preserved the role of the scrutineer/independent auditor have found that the deployment of tabulation has increased the accuracy and transparency of the count.

In addition to addressing the need for timely results, as Mr. Mayrand has brought up, and the accuracy and transparency issues that follow, tabulation technology also affords the built-in options to address other issues that exist in our current system that may be of interest to this committee. In no particular order, every jurisdiction that has implemented a modern tabulation system has concluded the following: the numbers of unintentionally rejected ballots can be reduced to zero when the administrator configures the system to warn electors of any errors done while marking the ballot; deploying the so-called second-chance voting, issues of language- and literacy-based mistakes are eliminated; in jurisdictions where a DRO, deputy returning officer, box is used, such as Canada, issues of a blank DRO box causing a ballot to be rejected fall to zero; the deployment of tabulation technology has provided options to the increasing problem of election day staffing by eliminating the need to have several large hand-count teams in larger urban polling centres; and last, the ability to leverage the technology to enable various assistive options makes voting accessible and allows voters of all physical abilities to exercise their right to vote privately and independently.

The last point has, in many cases, been the underlying driver to the move of tabulation technology around the world and, indeed, has been used across Canada in various capacities over the last 14 years.

Moving to the cost of tabulation technology, I will point out that Mr. Essensa has used the word “congruence” as an option to leverage Canadian government spending.

In many electoral centres around the world, including the United States, the same agency is tasked with running elections for various levels of government. While it is not entirely possible given current Canadian laws, I will point out that there is precedence among many jurisdictions where various separate agencies leverage the same technological investment. In this specific case, there isn't any reason that I'm aware of why current tabulation technology that is currently being used across this country can't be leveraged for federal use.

Before I conclude, I would like to point out that, while my comments have been around systems that preserve paper ballots, there are other options available. Multi-channel voting is the premise that the voters have a list of options to choose from when exercising their franchise. Various channels would include, but would not be limited to, vote by mail, vote by telephone, and vote by Internet.

Elections Canada and various provincial agencies currently use vote by mail, while various municipalities use a combination of the three, almost always in conjunction with the paper ballot. Voting by telephone and voting by Internet have been ongoing for over 13 years in Canada. I've experienced providing technology for all three methods in addition to paper-based technology, and I've have been doing so since 2003.

I note that Mr. Kingsley stated to this committee, “Online voting is coming fast. That light at the end of the tunnel is a train”, to which Mr. Essensa added, “The challenge is not the lack of technology, but the questions concerning the privacy, security, and reliability of these technologies”. Last, Mr. Mayrand added to this, “caution is needed in moving forward to ensure that Canadians continue to have the same high level of trust in the integrity of their elections”.

From my experience, and through the conversations I have on an almost daily basis with administrators across this country, I believe all three of those statements to be absolutely true. While each so-called channel of voting has its own pros and cons, I will limit my comment to what I know to be fact, which is that despite what this committee or this country decides on which channel or combination of channels of voting is appropriate for our electoral norms, the challenges introduced with any of the various voting alternatives that this committee is considering can be met through the use of technology that is already being deployed in this country.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

I look forward to a very good discussion in light of the testimony we've heard this evening.

We will start the first round with you, Mr. DeCourcey, for seven minutes.

● (1950)

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

I extend my thanks to my colleagues as well.

My thanks to the witnesses for their presentations.

[*English*]

I'll start with you, Mr. Hughes. I'll continue in English; it's my first language as well.

I wonder if you could speak to your experience watching voter turnout decline in New Zealand after the initial bump, the slight bump in voter turnout in the first MMP election. It's an issue that we've seen is taking place across western democracies. I wonder if you could provide some insight into why that is happening in New Zealand.

Hon. Darren Hughes: I think it's a central challenge for all democracies that fewer and fewer voters are showing up. You're right in that with the initial election there was a lot of excitement, a lot of information about a new system, and there were many voters casting a vote for the first time in their lives that actually counted for something. There was quite a lot of excitement about that. In two of the elections where the turnout was low, it would be twofold. One, I think it would have been lower under first past the post if we kept on seeing the same results that had been there previously, but also in both the elections where it was lower, it was a first-term government going for its re-election. Two, they were both reasonably popular governments, so there was an expectation that they were going to win the election. The second party was almost 20% behind in the polls from the first party. I guess that motivation wasn't quite as strong, whereas in closer elections, where there was only a 2% gap between the two bigger parties, there was a higher turnout.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: It would be fair to say then that voter turnout is often driven by a lot of issues of political calculations, the relevant policy matters of the day, and whatever the political culture dictates. I'm looking at voter turnout throughout the history of New Zealand, and I'm seeing back in the early to mid-1980s that it was up over 90%. Of course, we've experienced a decline here despite a relatively sizable bounce in voter turnout in this last election. I think that was driven by a desire for a new direction with the government. Is it fair to say that there are a whole range of ideas upon which voter turnout is driven?

Hon. Darren Hughes: The notion that just one thing would control voter turnout would not be correct, as there are so many factors. In some of those 1980s results there was tremendous anger, which I spoke of earlier. It's a big motivation to vote if you're angry about the way things are going. In some elections, if the result looks like a full-blown conclusion, you may not be as motivated, or you might not feel as though it's crucial that you get there, because the direction that you support is likely to get across the line.

I think the one thing that would depress voter turnout consistently would be if there was a long tradition of votes not counting for lots of people. If you were a centre-right supporter living in a very strongly centre-left constituency, then there's just no strong motivation to vote other than out of civic duty. For a lot of democracies, regardless of what electoral system, there has been this lowering as time has gone on. In my opinion, PR can be one of the factors that can assist in preventing that decline going even deeper. If all political parties are genuinely on the side of voters, then it doesn't matter who you vote for, because your vote will count. That's a fairly fundamental and decent thing to be able to promote to voters.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Thank you.

Ms. Ghose, I listened, and despite an admission that a well-run referendum can be a valuable educational experience for a population, I sensed an overall aversion to going down the road of referendum in validating a new electoral system. If I'm wrong, please correct me. I wonder if you can explain your view, or your experience, with the multitude of different electoral reforms and modernizations that have gone on within the U.K., and Scotland, in particular, over the last number of years, and the importance of properly educating and validating those reforms with citizens as they were being implemented, or before they were being implemented, or post-implementation.

● (1955)

Ms. Katie Ghose: Yes, sure.

As I suggested, I think we've ended up, in quite a British fashion, with sort of incremental and piecemeal changes, which has given us a kind of laboratory of different electoral systems. They have different origins, as well, so we've had brand new institutions. We've had a lot of devolution of power from Westminister, and we've had these brand new institutions in Scotland and Wales, and with those came new non-first-past-the-post electoral systems.

I suppose in looking at those examples, it wasn't necessarily that the citizens perhaps had some sort of a role in validating the idea of a new devolved institution. There were referendums around those, but not always particularly on the electoral system. So the origins have really been quite diverse.

I think I've spoken a little about the 2011 AV referendum. There have been quite a lot of examples where a new system has been kind of imposed, or political leaders have decided that this would be part of an institution and that's what they were going to do. That's been quite a common pattern as well.

I should say on the referendums, and we set it out thoughtfully in our report, that we didn't take a position as to whether in and of themselves they're good or bad for us. It's all about the context and the timing and how they are conducted, and how much emphasis is put on public information, public education, and the public role. We made nine recommendations about the good conduct of referendums, with a lot of emphasis on the public role, starting even when the legislation for a referendum had been put through, having a strong citizen role there.

There has been quite a variety of impetus and motivation behind that, and therefore, the public role is varied as well. The thing that really stuck out for me about the electoral reform referendum was how very low the prior knowledge of the public was, and how there were no real opportunities to become educated about the status quo, about first past the post. If people don't understand the status quo, it's quite hard to have a rich conversation about what to replace it with.

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Reid now.

Thank you, Mr. DeCourcey.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): I want to start by saying I had a delightful meeting about two or three weeks ago—maybe it was a month now—with Darren Hughes in my office. We meant to meet for half an hour and stayed for two hours. It was really informative. So, Darren, don't take this the wrong way if I address all my questions to Professor Becker instead.

Professor, I want to ask you a series of questions.

For one thing, you run a number of models, and I want to explore a bit of them. I want to start by dealing with something you raised in your written submission to this committee but which you did not raise in your presentation this evening, and that is the metric that you used to judge whether or not a system is proportional, the Gallagher index.

Could you chat with us a bit about the Gallagher index and how you apply it to your models?

Mr. Byron Weber Becker: Sure.

In the graphs we looked at earlier, there's always a gap between the percentage of votes and the percentage of MPs. The Gallagher index takes all of those gaps and it expresses them as a single number. Rather than saying, well, the Liberals are overrepresented by 15% and the Conservatives are under-represented by 7% or whatever, it takes those numbers and puts them into a single number. We can talk about how it does that if you want, but the best intent....

One of the downfalls of the Gallagher index is that over-representation, say, in Alberta, can be offset by overrepresentation in, say, the Maritimes. That does not show up in the classic Gallagher index, so I adapted it to what I call the composite Gallagher index. I calculate the Gallagher index for each region of the country and then average them together, so that disproportionalities in the Maritimes and disproportionalities in Alberta both contribute to an overall picture of how proportional the system is.

Mr. Scott Reid: First, to be clear, if we go to your written material, the material that was submitted to us, in that we would find the composite Gallagher index being used and not the original Gallagher index.

Is that correct?

● (2000)

Mr. Byron Weber Becker: I present both of them.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay, all right.

To make sure I'm crystal clear on this, when the first prime minister Trudeau was in office, you would have situations where he had zero seats in Alberta and all but two of the seats in Quebec. Those would have cancelled each other out and given the impression that the system was actually less equitable, but it appeared more equitable than it would have been if he'd merely had the disproportion, either up or down, in only one of those regions.

Is that correct?

Mr. Byron Weber Becker: That's correct. The classic Gallagher index does not account for those regional disparities, but the composite one does.

Mr. Scott Reid: That's very helpful. Thank you.

I mention this for the benefit of colleagues. I mention this in part because I think that if the committee is trying to design proportional alternatives to the status quo, the composite Gallagher index would be a good way of testing the various models that might be looked at.

I assume it's the case, Professor, to return to you, that when you're faced with multiple versions of multi-member proportional, or multiple versions of single transferable vote, one could actually set as one's goal accomplishing the lowest Gallagher index number that is compatible with the hard barriers we face, such as the fact that we have to have all our seats within single provinces. Would that be correct?

Mr. Byron Weber Becker: Yes. The composite Gallagher is an excellent measure of the disproportionality of a system, and the lower that number, the better. I think it's also fair to say that once we get into the range of 2% to 4% , at that point I have a hard time making the claim that decreasing it even further needs to be our primary goal. I think that once we have it down in the 2% to 4% range, our goal can shift to asking which one is simpler, or which one preserves the connection between the MP and the local voter better.

Mr. Scott Reid: When you get down to those very low numbers, I gather that pushing them down further may require heroic measures such as doubling the size of the House of Commons, or increasing riding sizes to make them vastly larger than they are now in order to get another couple of percentage points in improvements. Am I understanding that correctly?

Mr. Byron Weber Becker: Yes, and those heroic measures in my estimation, once we're already down to 2% or 3%, just aren't worth it. It's the law of diminishing returns. There's more important stuff to pay attention to at that point.

Mr. Scott Reid: That's very helpful.

I now want to turn to the models you've worked on. I had this conversation with you earlier. You provide numerous models that involve adding seats to the 338 we already have. For example, the most recent model you circulated to us, the AV-plus model, involves 32 list seats being added on. If time were not an issue, this wouldn't be a problem, but time is an issue as the 2019 deadline is approaching. I'm worried that if we were to do that we would run into the issue of having to confirm with the courts the constitutionality of doing this because of the fact that section 52 of the Constitution Act, 1867, says:

> The Number of Members of the House of Commons may be from Time to Time increased by the Parliament of Canada, provided the proportionate Representation of the Provinces prescribed by this Act is not thereby disturbed.

You have to disturb it to some degree, and obviously, the courts would say that some degree is permissible, but not too much. Once we go into trying to sort that out before the courts, the 2019 deadline may be lost.

Would it be possible for you to create some additional models that assume we start with the 338 MP cap we have now, but that try to be as close to the lowest possible number on the composite Gallagher index, looking at STV, MMP, and also rural-urban? Would it be possible to do that and come back to us?

The Chair: Answer very briefly, please, if you can.

Mr. Byron Weber Becker: Sure. I do have a day job, so I want to talk more with you about exactly what you're asking for, but I would be willing to make myself available to this committee for more modelling work.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Thank you to all our panellists here tonight.

This is one very rich field that I want to get into, so time is of the essence. Thank you for that most recent offer, Mr. Becker.

As I understand it in looking through your graphs, the steeper and more dramatic the curve is, the more misbehaving and the more distortion is going on within the system.

● (2005)

Mr. Byron Weber Becker: Not quite.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Not quite? What am I wrong about?

Mr. Byron Weber Becker: It's hard to tell on these monitors, but those lines come in coloured pairs. There are two red ones, two green ones, two blue ones—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Yes, the more they separate—

Mr. Byron Weber Becker: —and the more they separate, the more misbehaving the system is.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: First past the post is bad.

Mr. Byron Weber Becker: Yes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Alternative vote is worse.

Mr. Byron Weber Becker: Yes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Okay, that's helpful. If we wanted to distort the results even more, if we wanted to have votes reflected even less, we would take the system we have now and throw it into an alternative vote system.

Mr. Byron Weber Becker: That's correct.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Okay. That's good, because that's not the intention of this committee, nor its mandate.

Just for context, our mandate, which I'm sure all of you have read, is to change.... It is to offer to the government some ideas, and then a model which we recommend for change to improve our system, to make it a better behaving system, a more accurate system.

In that context of change, I want to turn to you, Mr. Hughes, for a moment.

The New Zealand experience is often held up: “New Zealand, New Zealand, New Zealand”. We hear a lot about you, and often people arguing for opposite things use New Zealand as an example to somehow try to prove their points. The context for the change that New Zealand went through was rather special. There was a high level of voter discontentment and maybe a gaff from a prime minister promising one thing that was not as written on the paper.

Up until maybe this morning, the context we were operating under was also unique in Canada. We had an elected government with a majority under first past the post also committed to making a change to the system that got them elected, understanding the false majority that was achieved, similar to that of the last government we had, which was 39%. Yet this morning, the Prime Minister was musing that maybe people are happier now ,so the mood for change is less, and so maybe the commitment is less. The unique alignment of stars to get change through is important.

I want to get to a point Ms. Ghose made about how voters see things differently under a change. She said that there are no so-called safe seats, seats that have traditionally voted one way to the extent that they kind of get ignored, not just by the party that has the seat, but also by the other parties, which think they can't get the seat.

Was there any cultural change that went on in New Zealand in the way that voters experienced the campaigning of parties? What happens on policy if those voters remain relevant because their votes affect who will form the next government?

Hon. Darren Hughes: I think that's a very interesting way of looking at it.

Because of the stage of the process here at the moment, by definition, you're looking at structures and statistics, how it would all work, and what it would all mean. That's an important thing to do, but in terms of the New Zealand experience, looking back on it now, I would argue that though we count votes differently, what's been more important is actually the political cultural change. For a political party to be successful, it needs to reach out to the entire country and not just see voters according to the determinant of geography. Geography is important, of course, but it's not the only thing. There are lots of other values and that forces parties to really shake up the way they campaign and think.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It's interesting. One of the things that was decried of the last government not just by my party but also by the now-governing party, was the notion of narrowcasting. Messages and policies increasingly became focused only on the Canadians “that mattered to them,” the ones who were likely to vote for them, knowing that they only needed somewhere around 40% or less in order to achieve a majority government. It distorted policies because they could simply ignore 60% or more of the country, and discontentment rose.

This seems to happen to governments in Canada. You hear it in every election night victory speech: “I was elected by these Canadians, but I will now govern on behalf of all Canadians.” It's a nice and important thing to say, but over time you watch this narrowing and narrowing, because the calculation is that you can't please everybody; you have to start to focus on people that matter, in places that matter.

Does the promise of proportionality upend that somewhat natural and cynical outcome of first past the post?

● (2010)

Hon. Darren Hughes: I think it does. The larger parties obviously want to try to maximize their vote so that they can form a government and have as much influence in that government as possible, which is an entirely rational thing to want to do. But they also look to make sure that their message and their appeal is broad enough so that parties that are outside of government are interested in working with them post-election.

The other thing you said that really chimed for me is that it's so easy in talking about a topic like this to be obsessed about what it would have meant for the last election and what it would mean for the coming election. With all respect to everyone here, I can understand why, because you've recently been elected and you'll be running for re-election soon enough, but I think that on a topic like this, you're having to think about what system you want to be robust for at least 100 years. Once you decide that, you would have to assume that the parties behave competently and with integrity, and with the dollops of luck that I mentioned politics requires, that you would get a fair shake at being in government over that time. But I think to have a narrow focus on "what it means for us next time" or "what would have happened last time" in the end, is a self-defeating way of looking at it.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: This is the interesting exercise of reform. Everybody involved in voting on that reform in the House of Commons has a self-interest in no reform. Whether you actually got into government or opposition doesn't matter. The system that got us here is the system that we promised to reform, so maintaining that commitment, even though it may speak against the self-interest of the elected politicians, is an interesting moment.

Ms. Ghose, I want to get into—

The Chair: Briefly, though, please, Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: —diversity. We just came from the House of Commons where a bill that was commended by many witnesses here as helping women get nominated in Canada—we rank 64th in the world—was defeated overwhelmingly by the two major parties.

You've seen different models in the U.K. You have working models on the ground, some proportional, some winner-take-all. Can you speak to any change in the notion of diversity under proportional systems in terms of the diversity of the parliaments that get elected?

Ms. Katie Ghose: Yes, definitely.

First past the post, the evidence tells us very clearly, is the world's worst system for achieving gender balance in politics. Every other system is better. The reason they're better, and we see this from the Scottish and Welsh parliaments, is that they enable parties to do the right thing, to put forward a more balanced group of representatives to the population.

The Welsh assembly was the first gender-balanced parliament in the world. As Darren was professing earlier, we should never say the electoral system is the prime cause of anything, or that it's a silver bullet. It's not, but it's an enabling factor. That was one of the factors there that enabled the parties to take the positive measures to make sure that it was a more diverse parliament.

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Thériault.

[*Translation*]

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

Welcome. Thank you very much for your testimony.

I will continue along the same lines as my colleague.

Ms. Ghose, you said that a structural change in the voting system, such as having members on a list, would be needed to achieve gender parity. I think that's more effective than a coercive measure that may well exploit women in a simple plurality system, in the sense that political parties could assign female candidates to unwinnable ridings in order to achieve the number required for so-called gender-balanced representation. That would not help advance the cause of women. That's why I voted against the idea, even though I'm not in either of the two major parties.

If I'm not mistaken, you are more in favour of a structural change than of measures that would supposedly increase the participation of women in politics in the current system.

[*English*]

Ms. Katie Ghose: What I would prefer is a society and a democracy where all of our parliaments and our political institutions aren't necessarily a carbon copy of our society, but where they are a mirror and a better reflection of all the people and the rich diversity that is out there.

If I've understood you correctly, you were saying that I was advocating for structural change as the way forward. I think what I'm saying is, frankly, if parties wanted to field equal numbers of women and men to achieve parity, they could do that in first past the post by making sure that women were in winnable seats. We see this at home in the U.K., and it's a party-based system. It's women in winnable seats that gets you to parity. In terms of structures, what I'm saying is that proportional systems are an enabler and they make it easier for parties to do what they want to do, which is to end up with a balanced parliament. That's how I would put it.

● (2015)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Thériault: We're on the same page. In a first past the post system, it is easier to manipulate the participation of women in politics.

As soon as there are several parties, the number of potentially winnable ridings decreases. However, if we shift to a mixed member proportional representation system with a list of members, it is then up to every political party to ensure gender parity on the list. Structurally, parity can be achieved.

It is very easy to say that we will keep the current voting system and that we will vote for either coercive or incentive legislation. However, there may be more female candidates in each party, but if we don't place women in winnable ridings, they will not have seats in the House, especially since the current situation favours the two-party system.

[*English*]

Ms. Katie Ghose: I'm not sure I've understood your point. Are you asking me if I'm arguing that basically a plus of proportional voting is that it helps parties get more gender diversity, or are you arguing that under first past the post that's also possible? Which part are we looking at?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Thériault: I'm not sure whether the interpretation is accurate, but it's not a big deal.

What I'm basically saying is that, if we want to achieve gender parity, it is best to change the voting system.

[*English*]

Ms. Katie Ghose: Yes, I agree one hundred per cent. There are many reasons to change the voting system, and a fantastic plus is that it will help us to get near it. It's not just gender diversity. It will help parties to do the right thing and to field a more diverse, balanced slate of candidates.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Thériault: You said that we don't have a lot of time to organize a referendum. What is your point of reference on the issue? Are you referring to the 2019 date for the next election, which is when we could also hold a referendum?

Why would we not be able to engage voters in a process that would lead to a debate and decision at the next election in 2019?

[*English*]

Ms. Katie Ghose: I have been informed. I'm making that comment on the basis of what Elections Canada has said about the two-year implementation and preparation period that would be needed to bring about a changed system. Therefore, working back from that, and looking at some of the evidence we've taken from recent referendums in the United Kingdom and elsewhere as well, it would seem impossible to do all the important preparatory work, groundwork, and public education, to provide the information that you need to be part of a good referendum, and to do that in the time available.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Thériault: The Chief Electoral Officer told us that he could not hold a referendum separate from the 2019 election, because we wouldn't have enough time.

It's 2016 now. Let's assume that the committee agrees on a mixed member proportional representation system, that it goes in the field to consult all the voters and to explain the difference between the current system and the new system so that the people can decide on the issue in the next election. In that case, would you consider the three-year timeline as adequate?

● (2020)

[*English*]

Ms. Katie Ghose: Are you talking about that being part of the platform commitment that voters would be voting on at the election, or are you suggesting that there could be a referendum around the time of the election?

The position we take is to ask how to get the best quality and most inclusive public consultation. That, for me, is the question and the goal. A referendum can be part of that if it's well prepared, well conducted, and well done, but it doesn't have to be.

There's nothing magical, if you like, about a referendum. There's nothing magical about a change to the voting system that suggests it's of such a grand constitutional order that there has to be a referendum to make that decision.

What's going to give you the richest and most inclusive public consultation? That would be the question for me. Is it going to be some of the discussions that you've been having and a citizens' assembly? Is it going to be that without a referendum or that with a referendum? That would be my response.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

Ms. May.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): My colleagues and I have just finished 19 place visits in 10 provinces and three territories, so I had thought, and you'll have to forgive me, that our theme song was *I've been everywhere, ma'am*, but I now want to change it to *Ain't misbehavin', savin' my votes for you*.

I'm going to ask you some questions Mr. Weber Becker. I'm also going to try to get to Darren Hughes and try to get some questions to Dominion Voting Systems.

Your summary says that first past the post frequently misbehaves, and if I heard your evidence correctly, in the models you ran, it always misbehaves. Is that a fair statement based on the models you ran?

Mr. Byron Weber Becker: Yes. I was trying to be generous.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Is it a misbehaving system that, in your checking of our past elections, has never reflected the way Canadians actually voted?

Mr. Byron Weber Becker: Correct.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Is the only thing worse than that the alternative vote?

Mr. Byron Weber Becker: Yes.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Okay.

I'm very grateful that you already answered Mr. Reid that you would be prepared to continue to help us with modelling. Did you look—I don't think you did—at dual-member proportional, which is another system that has been presented to us?

Mr. Byron Weber Becker: No, I have not looked at dual-member proportional yet.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Okay.

You made the point that rural-urban proportional was similar to Mr. Kingsley's model. Is there any reason you didn't do a modelling of Mr. Kingsley's proposal?

Mr. Byron Weber Becker: I have done a model of Mr. Kingsley's proposal. I didn't show a graph because the graph makes it look very good, but if you look at the composite Gallagher index, which I did not have enough time to talk about, it shows that it's not as good as it could be.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Given the terrible risk that you might not ever again have enough time to talk about the composite Gallagher index, would you give us another bit of time on that, knowing that I want to move along? Can you give us a sense of it?

Mr. Byron Weber Becker: Sure.

Once again, the composite Gallagher index takes into account disproportionality between different regions of the country, and for Mr. Kingsley's proposal, in the simulations or the modelling that I did, it appeared to be very proportional, but in fact, regionally it was disproportional.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Okay, thank you. So the composite Gallagher index reveals that—

Mr. Byron Weber Becker: Yes.

Ms. Elizabeth May: —which is something we should bear in mind when we're doing further analyses.

I'll now move to Darren Hughes, the only former member of Parliament who's lived a life similar to the rest of us around this table when he was a member of Parliament in New Zealand.

You made the comment that a change in political culture occurred when you went to mixed member proportional in New Zealand, and that it shook up the way politicians campaign.

One of our goals and one of our principals includes trying to find a system that might promote greater stability and social cohesion. How did the political culture change from first past the post to mixed member proportional in New Zealand? There is this notion that we might have greater stability. That's one of my notions, but it's rather idealistic and not grounded in experience. Could you comment on that from a New Zealand perspective?

Hon. Darren Hughes: Sure. I think there's a high level of co-operation amongst parties at the parliamentary level, and that's a very good thing. Some of the hyper-adversarial nature and also the secrecy—"We're in power; we'll hold all information"—has diminished significantly. I'm not going to say it's been eliminated. Pixie dust didn't fall from the sky or anything magical like that, but it certainly has improved the notion of parties being able to work together.

The two major parties broke up a little bit. They became slightly smaller, and people on their right and left broke into new parties, so it kind of revealed the internal coalitions that all parties have to have under first past the post. I think that improves civility because people understand their positions much better.

I think the shake-up in the campaigning sort of got rid of the idea that there were no-go zones in parts of the country, so that if you were from one party there was no point campaigning somewhere else, because even if you had no chance of winning that constituency or that riding, there would still be a significant proportion of citizens there who might give you their party vote, so it made it worthwhile.

I think it has encouraged parties to think much more broadly about how they approach campaigning, and I think that has been a good thing, though hard for the parties. I was in a big party, so I liked the idea that we would win majorities, but until we could win a majority of the vote, I never felt we should get a majority of the seats. That used to be a minority view. It's now a view that I think nearly every politician in New Zealand would hold.

● (2025)

Ms. Elizabeth May: For instance, of the larger parties in New Zealand that used to profit from first past the post with sort of big swings—you would win one time, then you would be out for a while, and then it would be your turn again—are they now comfortable? I'm not generalizing. Do you have the experience that some of the more right-wing and far-left-wing politicians are comfortable with this now?

Hon. Darren Hughes: Sure. I think what's happened is that the politicians and the parties have just made it work. As I was saying before, there's no serious party that says, "Let's upend this and go back to first past the post."

Recently, it was the 20th anniversary of the system coming in. I understand that a cabinet minister in the National Party, the conservative party, who is seen as being on the right of her party, was writing on the anniversary and saying that she's now in favour of it for two reasons: one is that every vote counts, and two, because of the diversity impact. Now there's a view in favour of every vote counting, and diversity is held right across the political spectrum, from the centre right across to the centre left.

Ms. Elizabeth May: As a segue before I go to Dominion Voting, did you find that it took longer to count ballots? I know it's longer sometimes to figure out how the government is coming together, but with the ballot, did it become more complicated? Did voters have trouble figuring it out? Did it take longer to count?

Hon. Darren Hughes: It's a transition. The first term was a little untidy, as we might say, as the transition took place. There were arguments about how the ballot paper was structured, but these teething problems all get resolved.

I think the biggest thing, from a political class point of view, is that as candidates, MPs, and campaign activists, etc., we're used to.... This has been part of our lives. We want to know the result on the night. We want to know who's up and who's down. It's part of the culture change, and it's about calming down a bit and leaving it for a few days, or maybe a couple of weeks, just to see what the people have said, and then what we can put together in order to form a stable government that can go the full term.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I don't know if I have time for a question. I think I hit my seven minutes before—

The Chair: Very briefly. If it can be brief and to the point, with a brief and to the point answer, we can do it.

Ms. Elizabeth May: It may open up a whole can of worms, but I wanted to ask something of Mr. Poulos. I hate to say it, but I think your voting systems were used in the New Brunswick election in 2014, where they—

Mr. John Poulos: Yes, that's correct.

Ms. Elizabeth May: It was a scary moment for me. I was hoping David Coon would get elected, which he was, but there was an hour of staring at pundits with nothing to say.

Quickly, how did that happen, and is it an ongoing problem?

Mr. John Poulos: There are official results and non-official results.

The ballots are marked by voters. They go through a machine. They get digitally scanned. The polls close at a certain time. One second after the polls close, the result tape is printed off and posted publicly. The results get modemed in to Elections New Brunswick.

They were added together, correctly mind you. Through months of recounts in a judicial court, it was found that it was 100% correct.

When the unofficial results were transferred—this was outside of the system, if you will, and this was an IT issue—from the official database inside of Elections New Brunswick to the news media, they used a freeware FTP, file transfer protocol. When the file was transferred, it was not doing proper checks and it was truncated. This is an example of when you treat unofficial results as official and proper care is not taken to transmit the results to the media. This was, I think, their fourth time running the same system.

You leave it to the court, which said very clearly that there wasn't one vote change. It shook voter confidence because of the way the results were transferred and handled outside of the official system to transmit unofficial results. We see this in the United States, for example, where the media does exit polls.

● (2030)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Ms. Romanado now, please.

[*Translation*]

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

My thanks to the witnesses as well.

[*English*]

Don't worry, I'm not going any place. I just wanted to thank you all for being here this evening.

Given that it is Women's History Month, and given what we've heard tonight, I just have to repeat a famous quote that well-behaved women seldom make history. You'll forgive my directness, because sometimes I'm not well-behaved.

That being said, my first question is for you, Mr. Poulos. You mentioned that in transmitting results, they are modemed in. Could you let me know what would be the impact for, I guess, polling stations in rural areas with broadband connectivity issues? Would this be an issue for the counting of the ballots?

Mr. John Poulos: No. This was the example that I mentioned with Mongolia, which is the absolute worst case in the globe, in my opinion, for connectivity.

There are three methods. There is the modeming in of the results, and these are all with unofficial results. The official results are the paper ballots. There are also redundant copies of memory in the machines. A copy of the results is modemed in to the central location, if there is a connection. It can be over satellite, broadband, or telephone.

In the cases where it doesn't work for whatever reason, and that happens, they are telephoned in, and that's the same as what we currently see in Canada. The returning officers phone in the results and they are entered into the computer, double-checked and double-called. Sometimes, and we know this happens at Elections Canada, there's a transcription error. That's why it's unofficial.

Then, of course, it's official when you reconcile the ballots with all of the audit logs from the polling location. That happens at some point after the election.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: We heard from a professor in Vancouver, Professor Simons, about Internet security in terms of online voting and so on. We've heard of multiple cases, even in the elections of our neighbours to the south, where there have been hacks and so on.

I think we've heard that there's no guarantee in terms of security, and that this would be something that would be difficult to sell to the Canadian public. What are your thoughts on Internet security? I love the idea of using technology to increase efficiencies, but in terms of security, it's one of the principles in our mandate that we cannot.... People have to feel that there's legitimacy and there's security behind the privacy and/or the security of the actual vote.

Mr. John Poulos: That's a great question. I'll keep it as objective as I can.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I'm sorry, but I'm going to ask if you could keep it very brief, because I have a question for your colleagues.

Mr. John Poulos: Sure. I'm assuming your comments are centred around online voting.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Yes.

Mr. John Poulos: In online voting, perception is obviously very important, and it's linked back to the trust of the voters. In Canada—and I'm not sure if the committee knows it or not—we are exceedingly high in terms of the trust electors place in the elections such that when there are mistakes and wrong candidates get elected and then we fix it in the recounts, no one seems to care. We just understand that was probably an honest mistake by tired people counting ballots.

Perception is obviously something that you have to take into deep consideration with online voting. The hacks that you read about in the United States are in voter registration systems. There is no online voting in the United States. In terms of concrete experience, the fact of the matter is all online elections in Canada have been fairly small. In my experience of the systems we have run, I can tell you that they have not been hacked, and there have not been any attempts on hacking. I won't be subjective, if you will. That's objective.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you.

Ms. Ghose, you mentioned that changing the electoral system would assist in getting more women elected. We've heard multiple witnesses say multiple things that it's not the electoral system that will get the women elected, it's many other things.

I'm just going to preface my question with a comment. When someone applies for a job, usually they look at the job description, maybe the location of the job, the conditions of employment, what kind of tasks they do, and see if they want to apply for that job. Very rarely do they say, “Hmm, what's the interview process going to be? What kind of tests am I going to have to take?”

I'm not quite convinced that the decision for women to pursue public office has anything to do with the electoral system. There are two things. First is seeking the nomination. I understand you yourself have run for office. There's seeking the nomination, and then there's getting elected. Those are two different things.

I firmly believe the seeking of the nomination has everything to do with the actual job. Do I want to live in Ottawa? Do I want to transfer? Do I want to work the hours? Am I going to enjoy the tone? Am I going to like the personal attacks and so on? I don't think it's the actual electoral system. Perhaps, once they get the nomination, that could be a different story.

I'd like to get your opinion on that.

● (2035)

Ms. Katie Ghose: Sure. There are actually so many different factors at play, it's kind of hard to answer this in a nutshell.

I think it is important to say that some of the research that's taken place in the United Kingdom has looked at the obstacles that might disproportionately affect women, like finances, not having as much cash to run. That actually does affect the number of women who put themselves forward for selection. It's very expensive in the U.K. Then there's the election as well. I just think we need to acknowledge that, really, that there are a number of factors there.

Taking a step back to the very big picture, it is still right to say though that first past the post, the electoral system itself, is a block on women becoming elected. Certainly when we looked at the evidence recently in the United Kingdom, there were kind of seat blockers, basically male MPs who had been in the safe seats—coming back to the safe seat culture—for a very long time, and where you just have that single winner, of course you're much less likely for that to be freed up when you have the safe seat culture.

I completely acknowledge what you're saying. It's complex, isn't it? We would never say it's just the electoral system. There are a lot of factors there, but it is still right to say that the electoral system is one factor that is making it hard for parties to put balanced groups of people in winnable seats.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: In that line, would you agree then that it will take multiple tactics or initiatives for us to address that? As you said, if we have, I don't want to say spaces, but seats that have been held by members of Parliament for many years and so on, then perhaps a term, or a maximum limit, would prevent that.

Our current electoral laws help with day care expenses for women candidates or male candidates. Perhaps a family-friendly Parliament would assist in that regard. Perhaps the idea of travelling in a plane for 12 hours just to get to work would be an issue. All of these things, I think, we have to look at. It's not just going to be one factor that will impact on whether a woman decides to seek office.

Do you agree?

The Chair: Briefly, yes or no.

Ms. Katie Ghose: Yes, I do, but the electoral system is key, as well.

The Chair: Mr. Nater.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Thank you to our witnesses for joining us today.

I want to start with my questions for the good folks from Dominion Voting Systems. I have to admit that my home municipality used your services for online voting for the last municipal election. I was on the municipal council leading up to that election. I unfortunately was probably the only one on council who actually voted against going in that direction. You were administering an election. My wife commented on how much she appreciated the online voting because she was able to vote at three in the morning while feeding our then three-month-old daughter, so she does appreciate that.

I'm not going to start with online voting. I'm going to talk a little about your experience in the New Brunswick election, and I appreciate your response to Ms. May to clarify some of those issues. There was another concern that was raised with that election and that was the concept of spoiled ballots. There was some concern, and one of the professors from UBC who presented to this committee, Professor Moscrop, suggested that there is some form of challenge with feeding the ballot into the voting machine and making it beep as a form of intimidation, I guess, for lack of a better word, with it beeping and poll clerks saying, “Did you need to spoil your ballot?”

Would you mind commenting on that and on your experience, and what suggestions you would make on that?

● (2040)

Mr. John Poulos: Sure.

When a ballot goes through a paper ballot scanner, the election administrator has the ability to configure it however they wish. The “no change”, if you will, setting would be the complete analogy to our current federal process where the ballot is scanned and drops in the box, pure and simple, and whatever happens, happens.

The concept of second chance voting is that if you wish, you can take advantage of the capability of the machine to warn the voter somehow that they are about to make a mistake. There are some common ones out there, and we see them with Elections Canada all the time. There are good stats on how many ballots are spoiled. A common one would be to mark an *x* for someone and then realize, oh no, you meant to vote for somebody else. Then you scratch that out and mark another *x*. Then we get into the whole question of voter intent. With a voting machine we can warn the voter. Another common issue is circling your name. That's not an *x* and that's not putting a mark in, so should that count or not?

How you configure the machine, what kind of message to display on the machine, what language, and does the machine make an audible noise or not is completely up to the discretion of the election administrator. There are several considerations. If there's a beep, am I going to be embarrassed that I've made a mistake on my ballot? There's a reality to this. If we wish to warn voters while still maintaining privacy and secrecy, then that is a question, and that's a compromise that you have to look at. If the machine makes a beep, and somebody sees that John Doe went from the machine, took his ballot, asked for a new one, and then put it back, and now we know that he made a mistake, then is that intimidating?

These are questions that we won't comment on. We provide the tools and say it was in the realm of possibility.

Mr. John Nater: A situation like that would have been consistent across New Brunswick. That would have been a decision made by Elections New Brunswick across the board. It wouldn't be individual polling stations.

Mr. John Poulos: Correct. When you use automated technology to tabulate ballots, one of the advantages is that every mark across every location, regardless of who happens to be counting the ballots, is counted against the same thresholds, and those thresholds are defined by the electoral agency, in this case Elections New Brunswick.

Mr. John Nater: You used the example of the Philippines, with 82,500 polls give or take with a 22-inch document for the ballot itself. I assume there was an audit process undertaken to compare the results. How extensive would that audit process have been? What percentage of ballots might have been compared? How would that be undertaken? Can you walk us through that a bit in how you would ensure the integrity of an example like that with such an extensive ballot?

Mr. John Poulos: The judicial recounts were limited to any district where there was a contention, but 100% of the ballots and their audit mark were available to anybody who wished to look at them. One party chose to look at them all, and they were able to filter results, for example, to show the ballots where one party got a valid vote and their party did not.

You can use your own subjective interpretation because you're politically motivated—you lost or you won—to compare it against the objective interpretation of the system. The system doesn't really know candidates or parties or politics; it just integrates the number of pixels against the voting marks.

Mr. John Nater: In examples where you've done online voting for a municipality, for example, over a number of elections, more than one election, have you noticed an uptick in voter turnout after the first online voting? In the second example of using online voting, was there any change in voter turnout, from your experience?

Mr. John Poulos: I'll speak specifically to my experience and the systems that we've run first-hand. There has not been an appreciable increase.

From my own anecdote, I classify voters in three categories: those who always vote no matter how bad the weather is and how boring the election is; those who will never vote, even if they got to cast a deciding ballot; and the third group are those who swing, depending on if the election matters. We look at elections all over the world where there's a galvanizing issue, and sometimes it's as simple as the local community wanting to spend $100,000 on lighting up the football field and that draws in unprecedented numbers.

So the answer is no. I know that there are studies out there that quote percentage increases. I would submit that the sample data is not very good. It's smaller municipalities. It hasn't been run very often, and certainly hasn't been run around the world very extensively. One thing that we do know from our surveys, and this is from our customer side, the administrators, is that the first group I mentioned, likely your wife who always votes, appreciated the convenience.

Another one we see very often as number one on that list is, “I get the choice to vote near my office because I have a busy day and I can't get to the local community centre or at the local hockey rink because my son is playing hockey.” The vote anywhere concept, where I can get my ballot and it goes back to my riding, is at the top of the list in terms of voter satisfaction.

● (2045)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Aldag now, please.

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Thanks to our witnesses.

Ms. Ghose, you talked about a number of systems that have ended up within the electoral systems within the U.K.

Can you give us an idea of time frames? My question is around how rapidly change can happen as opposed to thoughts on a more incremental approach. I assume that this probably evolved over time with different systems coming in. Would U.K. residents have been ready to throw it all out and bring in a new system all at once or was it kind of the evolution of new systems? Can you make any comment on that?

Ms. Katie Ghose: Sure. I think “evolution” is the word.

To take an example, there was the adoption of the single transferable vote in Scotland, with the first set of elections in 2007. I was looking at some information recently that showed there was an uptick as time went on with the second and third uses of the new electoral system. People were casting more preferences, going down and saying, “I will cast a second, third, and a fourth preference.” That's just an example from the voter's perspective of the kind of evolution of the system. There's certainly no evidence of anybody wanting to change back to first past the post from any of the proportional or preferential systems.

I think the times have been interesting. Also, as I mentioned earlier, it's been quite some years now that we've had the new institutions. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, we had these new institutions of the Scottish and Welsh parliaments, and with that a new electoral system. There's been that gradual evolution since then.

Again, to give a concrete example, there were some concerns raised about having two different kinds of members of Parliament—and I might have reflections on this from elsewhere—a constituency MP and a list MP. That's really bedded down in Scotland, and it isn't really an issue any more. You've maybe had people who've even had a go at doing each of the roles, as well.

It's really been evolutionary. As Darren sort of indicated, citizens are getting used to it; parties are getting used to it. It does take a bit of time, and I would say in all of our systems that are fairly new, maybe a decade or two decades old, it's a continual process. Parties will still talk about how they're adapting to campaigning, which is, practically, different under new systems.

There's evidence from the U.S. about the greater civility. Many are having different kinds of conversations. You're participating in different areas where perhaps your party wasn't active before. It's those cultural changes that take a while, and they carry on evolving. It's not a one-night wonder, if you like.

Mr. John Aldag: Great. Thank you.

Mr. Hughes, I'd like to get your thoughts. The comment was that nobody has decided to go back to first past the post. I'm wondering whether you can comment on the New Zealand case, and perhaps relate it to the U.K. as well. At what point do these new systems become the norm? We often hear that one of the fears with a referendum is that people will vote for the status quo. In New Zealand, has PR actually become the status quo, so the people are now comfortable with it and would be afraid to go back to first past the post?

I'll leave you with that one to start with.

● (2050)

Hon. Darren Hughes: That's a very accurate description of what has happened. If there had been a referendum at the end of the first Parliament of PR, I suspect it would have been thrown out because there was such an upheaval and so many things happened in that single first term that were counterintuitive to what people thought would happen. There were these new list MPs, elected on a party list. Some of them swapped parties. There was a lot of bedding down as the first-past-the-post culture and personnel, really, were transiting out of the system, and then new people were coming in who were part of the new political culture.

If you fast-forward 15 years from that, at the sixth attempt to have a general election under PR, by then, you're right in that it was the status quo. In the referendum that was held then, having had six goes at it, it won by a bigger margin than it had had when it first came in, so it had become the status quo.

More recently—I was alluding to the 20th anniversary taking place—there have been figures that people probably would have been quite surprised to see in favour of PR when it was first introduced. Now they are saying it's part of the landscape. There was some suspicion at the beginning that this would just favour one side of politics, but that hasn't been evidenced at all. It has been very fair in the way it has treated all sides. I don't know that the country has ever ended up with a government it didn't want.

Mr. John Aldag: Along those lines, if both of you would care to comment, would you say that the citizens of New Zealand see better policy?

I go to the U.K. example, where there are these different systems. Are the policies that are coming out of the first-past-the-post systems worse than the policies you are getting out of the more proportional ones? We keep hearing that different forms of PR can solve all of our problems. The U.K. has these mixed ones. Is there clear evidence that PR will give better policy? In New Zealand, was there a change from when you left first past the post and went into PR so that you can say clearly that yes, this is way better policy now and the country is doing better on whatever those markers are?

Hon. Darren Hughes: There are two good examples of this. On the one hand, what's gone is the surprise policies, policies coming out of nowhere and being enforced on the public with no real parliamentary scrutiny because it's one large, single-party majority government. There is much more signalling by parties before the election about what direction they are going in, and I think a lot more transparency, which has been a really good thing.

The second example is that there has been more policy stability, because you don't get the wild swings that first past the post gives you, the instability of having a result one way and then the opposite in the following election. With that winner-take-all mentality, you throw out what the last people were doing, and there are your own surprise ideas. What it means is that parties that were working with one government in one particular term might work with another government of a different political persuasion in the next term, but they have buy-in with some of the policies that were there.

When there is a change of government in New Zealand, what we haven't seen is an upending of everything and then a blank piece of paper, back to the beginning. There has been quite a strong public policy evolution. I would argue that's been a real strength for New Zealand's social and economic policy.

Mr. John Aldag: I'm going to get cut off. You have a minute to make a quick comment.

The Chair: Comment very briefly, please.

Ms. Katie Ghose: That's broadly been borne out. Whether something is a good policy or not is going to depend on your perspective, but I'd really endorse those points about systems that enable and prompt parties to work together and do that detailed negotiation around policy. They are probably going to have different policy outcomes.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Boulerice, you have the floor.

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

I promise to try to speak more quietly than in question period.

Mr. Becker, I think your demonstration of the disadvantages of the first past the post system and the benefits of more proportional systems is striking and irrefutable. We have often heard that a more proportional system or with a proportional outcome could create political instability. If we look at the facts, we see that this has not been proven. The proportional systems are not any more unstable than majority systems. Since World War II, Canada has had more elections than countries with proportional systems.

You are talking about the instability of public policies under majority systems, including the first past the post system. I find that interesting. Could you talk a little bit about what you have observed in terms of the instability of public policies in plurality systems?

● (2055)

[*English*]

Mr. Byron Weber Becker: I'm not sure that my simulations really have much to say about the instability of public policy. That's not something that I've attempted to model. I'm not sure that it's something I can model.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: You had some proposals about that in your presentation.

Mr. Hughes, for the sake of transparency, I will inform the committee that a number of the statistics and examples that I have presented in the past months have come from the wonderful little reports that you produce and that you have been kind enough to share with me in Montreal on a number of occasions for discussion purposes. You are a key witness for us also because you have experienced a change in a voting system, but you also have more first-hand experience as an elected official in New Zealand, both as an elected local official and as one elected from a list.

Could you tell me how you felt representing the citizens in those two categories of representatives of the people?

[*English*]

Hon. Darren Hughes: This was considered to be an area of huge interest when the system first started, because people were obviously used to having single-member constituency MPs only and then, suddenly, all these list MPs arrived and there was, I think in the early days, quite a strong feeling of class A and class B that did exist. And as Katie cited, in Scotland there was a similar thing at the beginning.

What I would observe is that, as time went on, voters and citizens tended to judge the politicians by performance, by achievements, rather than by what type of MP they were. Of course, not everyone does that. There are always some who will want to make the distinction.

I guess the constituency MPs continue to do the work that they've always done, and that you're all very familiar with here. List MPs fall broadly into two areas. One type are people who, in all honesty, probably want to be constituency MPs, and so their parties might assign them to a certain area to work in and they'll run services and be invited to things, and so on and so forth, in a way that gives representation of their party to voters in that particular constituency, remembering that the same voter has two votes under that in that New Zealand context.

The more interesting area, I think, about list MPs is that it enables a richer diversity of people to come to Parliament, people who represent communities that might be significant across the whole country but very, very small in status in a particular geographical mapped-off area of a constituency. That's enabled the Parliament, in what is called the House of Representatives, to look much more like a house of representatives because of that.

Also within that category are people who are policy specialists in certain areas, people who are experts at something, for whom the parties say, “Look, we really need somebody with these sorts of skills”. They might not be somebody who'd be elected at a geographic level or somebody whose great strength is in running surgeries for constituents in need, but they are people who have a lot to offer to public policy from a certain area. I think in that context, being able to get people from both walks of life was very useful.

[*Translation*]

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

Ms. Ghose, I am very pleased to welcome you. This is the first time I have had the chance to listen to you. I might also add that I love your name, particularly in French.

I want you to tell me a little bit about the process that was followed in the U.K. when the new regional parliaments in Wales and Scotland chose some type of mixed member proportional representation voting system. What was the logic behind that choice in those two regional parliaments? Let’s not talk about the Parliament of Northern Ireland, because I think it’s a somewhat exceptional political case.

● (2100)

[*English*]

Ms. Katie Ghose: I'm not sure I can give you a straight answer on this for the simple reason that there are all kinds of things written in the history books about the politics behind the different systems that people came up with. It was felt on the one hand that the government wanted a system for the Scottish Parliament that would mean that one party could never get a majority. Actually, what we've seen, which is a good thing, is that voters will ultimately decide who they want to cast their votes for. That's why sometimes under the same system you will end up with different sorts of power-sharing arrangements. It might be a minority or coalition government, or a majority government, as we've seen in Scotland with the Scottish National Party. There are a lot of politics there, just to give you the sense of it.

I think it's really interesting that when we look at countries around the world, it's no surprise, in a way, that mixed member proportional is often the system that's adopted. After all, it perhaps does bring the balance to, or a compromise between, some of the different elements that people care about: keeping, but developing, a constituency link; having a good degree of proportionality, but not obsessing over it to the nth degree, as Professor Becker has said. I think it's no coincidence that, perhaps, we were slightly reflecting a global trend in the United Kingdom by adopting the additional member system, which is basically MMP.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We’ll now turn to Mr. Rayes.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Good evening, everyone.

My first question is for Mr. Becker.

Mr. Cullen pointed out to me that you were a great witness, because you have even provided us with a list of questions. For my first question, I will use one of those you have provided to us. I hardly changed a couple of words.

Your fourth question indicates that the preferential voting system seems to be a valid option for many Canadians. I would add that it also appears valid for our Prime Minister, who seems to like it a lot.

Then you ask why this modelling produces such poor results for the preferential voting system. Could you tell me what you think?

[*English*]

Mr. Byron Weber Becker: First of all, let me say that that list of questions was not meant to be distributed. That was for me to have in my hip pocket just in case everybody gave me a blank look. Nevertheless, since you have the list of questions, let me address it.

I think that alternative vote makes a lot of sense at the individual riding level. Let me say that I can appreciate why it would be attractive at the individual riding level, but I think there are also some problems at that level.

In each individual riding, the decision is made independently of all the other ridings, the same as with first past the post. It's when you aggregate all of those individual decisions that it breaks apart and becomes a disadvantage for Canada as a whole. I have sometimes compared it to the economic theory of the tragedy of the commons, where a village has a common pasture and everybody grazes their cow on that common pasture, and it works out wonderfully, as long as everybody obeys the rules. But then some bright soul says, “Ah, I can graze two cows on that pasture.” They make a locally optimal decision just for themselves. It's like the individual riding saying that it's best for it to use alternative vote. If everybody does that, the pasture gets over-grazed and everybody fails. If all of the ridings use alternative vote, then the system as a whole becomes very disproportional and Canada as a whole suffers.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Thank you very much.

My second question is still for you, Mr. Becker.

At meetings with our fellow constituents in our ridings, the issue of local representation comes up a great deal. When we talk about proportional systems, most presentations have been indicating a decrease in the number of constituency MPs to make way for list members.

My colleague Mr. Reid started to talk about the following. If we decided to keep the 338 constituencies, how many members do you think should be added for better proportional representation, even if we don’t necessarily have the best possible outcome? Is there something in-between that would prevent adding 200 or 300 MPs, but that would keep the 338 MPs in place? I think this would help the public be more accepting of a change in the voting system.

● (2105)

[*English*]

Mr. Byron Weber Becker: I've run a number of different models, some of which maintain 338 MPs and make the ridings a little bit bigger as needed to make room for those extra list MPs, while still maintaining 338. I have also run simulations or models where we keep 338 ridings for individual MPs and add on the top-up layer as well.

From my perspective, the optimal system that meets your criteria either way would be the rural-urban system. That maintains very good proportionality while still having just a very modest layer of top-up MPs, as few as about 50, which is significantly less than MMP for the same degree of proportionality.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: I asked you that question because it’s something we have not discussed much. Every 10 years, the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada adds a number of MPs, given the population growth. It seems to me that there might be another solution: adding fewer members now, but planning from now on for all members added every time the electoral map is reconfigured to be elected based on a proportional voting system.

Do you think taking small steps to some day reach the number of MPs required for good proportional representation could be an appealing solution?

[*English*]

Mr. Byron Weber Becker: Certainly, we could take an incremental approach. The question, I think, is, can we trust those in power to actually follow through on the good intentions? Can we trust those in power to actually add the extra, the new MPs, to that top-up or to the list? If we can indeed trust that, what you have suggested is a nice incremental way to move from our current system to a proportional system.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Mr. Hughes, you mentioned the list members, which gave some food for thought. Since the list members are not connected to a constituency, what will happen to them at the next election? I guess their political party must submit their names on the list, if they still want to remain members.

[*English*]

Hon. Darren Hughes: That's correct. Many stand for re-election, just as any other member of Parliament would, and the law requires parties to conduct democratic processes for the assembling of the list.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: If they were re-elected as list members, could they represent another region of Canada or would they rather be firmly assigned to one region of the country?

[*English*]

Hon. Darren Hughes: It would be possible. It would be a matter for that member of Parliament and for their party and the size of the party in terms of where they were trying to use their resources around the country. I think that would be a matter for what the party thought was the best way to use its resources.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go now to Mr. Fraser. Welcome to our committee.

Mr. Colin Fraser (West Nova, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to be substituting in this evening.

Witnesses, I want to start by thanking you for your excellent testimony and for answering our questions.

I also want to thank you, Chair, and all the members and staff, for the great work you've been doing. I know members who aren't on the committee have been following it closely, and we really appreciate the good work you're doing. It's a privilege to be here this evening and to ask a few questions on this important discussion.

I want to start with you, Mr. Becker.

This is with regard to rural-urban proportional, which I understand you're saying is the best of all the systems that you looked at. I'm wondering if you could explain the legitimacy of a member directly accountable to his own constituency and riding, such as in the rural area as you're proposing, versus one who is elected among other members who doesn't necessarily have one single constituency, where a constituent can say, "That's my MP and I want to hold him accountable if he doesn't do what I think he should do."

Can you explain how the different levels perhaps of accountability or legitimacy would be reconciled in Parliament?

● (2110)

Mr. Byron Weber Becker: It's important at this point to draw analogies from what Mr. Hughes talked about with mixed member proportional, because it's very much the same. There are MPs—the top-up MPs, as I often refer to them—who have broader responsibilities than do MPs in the local ridings. I think it wold be very much like mixed member proportional. They can address broader issues, not just issues specific to their local place.

For MPs who are in multi-member ridings and come from densely populated areas, there we can look to the analogy of single transferable vote and other places where there are multiple members. They would be, in a sense, each of them responsible to their whole larger riding in terms of policy. However, for constituency work, they might very well carve it up and say, "This part of the riding is your job, and this part of the riding is your job."

Mr. Colin Fraser: Very similar to the first question, I would imagine that in an urban riding where you have multi-member, there could be hard-working MPs who are taking on the vast majority of the work, and the one who is not working very hard or is not necessarily representing the people or doing a good job kind of gets lumped in and isn't held accountable.

Could you comment on the problem that may create with some MPs perhaps being better MPs and dragging along those who aren't performing very well?

Mr. Byron Weber Becker: I think the voters are smart enough to tell the difference. I think those freeloading freeloaders, if we can use that term, would pay the price in the next election. It could be that they can attract enough votes to still squeak by, but it also might be the case that they're turfed out in favour of somebody else.

Mr. Colin Fraser: Thanks.

I want to move now to Mr. Hughes.

I'm wondering, in the New Zealand model, when you brought in the mixed member proportional system, how that change affected political engagement, memberships in political parties, for example, fundraising. Did it have any impact or noticeable effect on the political parties themselves?

Hon. Darren Hughes: I'm afraid I don't have any information about the actual party membership of the existing parties. I suspect that they continue to decrease, as they have been. Although other factors came in when one of the major parties decided to have an election for the leadership of the membership. That did increase.

I think probably, where there were increases in membership, it would have been for smaller parties that up until then didn't have much of a realistic opportunity of being in Parliament. Suddenly, people who supported those parties thought it was worthwhile getting involved and joining up. I suspect that smaller parties saw an increase in their membership as a result.

On the fundraising, I guess equally, the amount of money that people were making as donations was going to more parties because there was a more realistic chance of them being in the House.

Mr. Colin Fraser: Also, in New Zealand, it's quite geographically different from Canada. Obviously, there is a larger geography here, more regions. There are 10 provinces and three territories.

Could you comment on the differences you would see in the Canadian system that would have to address regional issues, linguistic issues, versus what you experienced in New Zealand?

Hon. Darren Hughes: I think it's a summary of what the issues are. New Zealand is a single chamber. It's a unicameral Parliament. There is no upper house. There are no states or provinces. There are three official languages, and Parliament must engage in those languages.

I can understand that the vastness does present some challenges about how you put it together. I'm sure that given that the government has made this commitment about it being the last first-past-the-post election, I guess the thought has been given to how you can honour that, but also replace it with a system that will be a vast improvement on what you have at the moment.

● (2115)

Mr. Colin Fraser: Do you think there would be an incentive for political parties to focus on more targeted issues in certain areas of the country versus having a broad national vision that would answer to all regional concerns at the same time?

Hon. Darren Hughes: I think it's a fair question. I think it depends on the party size. What tends to happen with PR, whether it's single transferable vote or MMP, rather than trying to squeeze everybody into two parties and then hoping that the result reflects what people are looking for, you do have many more political players and many more political parties that are in the system.

Some of them will be very much more narrow and focused than a larger party. It may be that they have particular concerns that they wanted to address, and they stick to those issues, whereas you would expect the larger parties that are seeking to lead a government to have that broader vision that you talk about. There's much more choice in the system, and so consumer choice becomes citizen choice, and that's reflected across the political landscape.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fraser. Those were excellent questions.

Thank you to our panel. It was another great discussion, and we deepened our knowledge of the issue of electoral reform. We appreciate, Mr. Hughes and Ms. Ghose, that you came from so far away. Mr. Becker, we appreciate that even though you have a day job, you devoted so much time to these models to illustrate how systems behave. Mr. Poulos and Mr. McKinstry, thank you for your real-life concrete knowledge of how electronic voting or online voting works. It informed our discussion a great deal.

Thank you to the witnesses. You're free to go.

To the members of the committee, tomorrow we meet here at 8:45 a.m.

Mr. Cullen, are we going to do that tomorrow?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Tomorrow.

The Chair: That's it for the meeting tonight.

Thank you very much to everyone.

The meeting is adjourned.