

WSSR WORKSHOPS ON SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

The Politics of Electoral Reform: Canada in Comparative Perspective

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May 28-29, 2018

9:00am – 4:30pm

Summary

For nearly a century, there has been an active debate in Canada on the issue of electoral reform at both the federal and provincial levels. Following the 2015 federal election, the Trudeau government began a new initiative and an all-party House of Commons committee was appointed to study the issue and to make recommendations.

In this workshop, we will consider the questions of representation and democratic accountability that have driven the debate in Canada as well as the structure of past reform attempts in several provinces and the related issue of Senate reform. We will also examine the characteristics of alternative electoral systems and the merits of various unicameral and bicameral institutional models. Particular attention will be given to countries such as Japan and New Zealand that have accomplished fundamental reform of their electoral systems, and the processes employed in those cases that have led to these outcomes.

Outline

Day 1 (morning)

Canadian Democracy at 150

- The “Democratic Deficit”
- What’s wrong with first-past-the-post?
- Our Scandalous Senate

Day 1 (afternoon)

Elections around the World

- Electoral systems: an overview
- Proportional Representation
- Hybrid and Mixed Systems; Bicameralism

Day 2 (morning)

The Electoral Reform Process

- New Zealand and Japan
- Electoral Reform in the Provinces
- The Special Committee

Day 2 (afternoon)

The Future of Electoral Reform in Canada

- The battle for (and against) reform today
- After the Special Committee
- Focus on BC and PEI



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Suggested readings for the Workshop*

- Dennis Pilon, *The Politics of Voting: Reforming Canada's Electoral System* (Toronto, Edmond Montgomery, 2007), chapters 3-5, 9 [Webster Course Reserve Room \(3 hour loan\)](#)
- Lawrence LeDuc, Richard G. Niemi and Pippa Norris (eds.), *Comparing Democracies 4: Elections and Voting in a Changing World* (London, Sage, 2014), chapters 2, 6, 11 [Webster Course Reserve Room \(3 hour loan\)](#)
- Brian Tanguay, "Electoral Reform in Canada: Addressing the Democratic Deficit." *Underneath the Golden Boy* (Manitoba Law Journal) vol. 4 (2005), pp. 1-5 <http://reserves.concordia.ca/ares/ares.dll?plink?u-http%3A%2F%2Fmlj.robsonhall.com%2Fmlj%2Fcontent%2Felectoral-reform-canada-addressing-democratic-deficit>
- Nicholas Erskine-Smith, "I'm deeply sorry my party broke its promise on Electoral Reform." *Huffington Post*. February 2, 2017 https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/nathaniel-erskinesmith/liberals-abandon-electoral-reform_b_14574512.html
- Konrad Yakabuski, "If Senators can't be elected, why do we have a Senate?" *Globe and Mail*. April 28, 2018 <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-if-senators-cant-be-elected-why-do-we-have-a-senate/>
- R. Kenneth Carty, "Doing Democracy Differently" (The J. K. Galbraith lecture, Memorial University, 2006) <https://www.mun.ca/harriscentre/policy/galbraith/2006/Booklet.pdf>

Other sources and references

- Don Desserud and Jeffrey F. Collins "The Ongoing Saga of Electoral Reform in PEI". *Policy Options* (April 11, 2017), <http://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/april-2017/the-ongoing-saga-of-electoral-reform-in-pei/>
- Gary Mason "B.C.'s NDP are Sabotaging Electoral Reform". *Globe and Mail* (May 15, 2018), <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-bcs-ndp-are-sabotaging-electoral-reform/>
- Strengthening Democracy in Canada: Principles, Process and Public Engagement for Electoral Reform*. Report of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform (House of Commons, Ottawa, 2016).
- See also other documents, reports, briefs, etc. available on the Parliamentary web site: <http://www.ourcommons.ca/Committees/en/ERRE/StudyActivity?studyActivityId=9013025>
- Voting Counts: Electoral Reform for Canada*. Report of the Law Commission (Ottawa, 2004), pp. xiii-xx, 171-173 (executive summary and conclusion), chapters 2, 4
- Alan Cairns, "The Electoral System and the Party System in Canada: 1921-1965." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* vol. 1 (1968), pp. 55-80
- J. Patrick Boyer, *Our Scandalous Senate* (Toronto, Dundurn, 2014)
- Jack Vowles, "The Politics of Electoral Reform in New Zealand." *International Political Science Review* vol. 16 (1995), pp. 95-115
- Lawrence LeDuc, "The Failure of Electoral Reform Proposals in Canada." *Political Science* vol. 61 (2009), pp.21-40
- David Farrell, *Electoral Systems: a Comparative Introduction*, 2nd edition (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011)
- International IDEA, *Electoral System Design: The New International IDEA Handbook* (Stockholm, International IDEA, 2008)
- Supreme Court of Canada, *Reference re Senate Reform*, 2014 SCC 32
- Fair Vote Canada <http://www.fairvotecanada.org>
- International IDEA <http://www.idea.int>
- International Foundation for Electoral Systems <http://www.ifes.org>
- Inter-Parliamentary Union <http://www.ipu.org>

*If you are registered for non-credit and are unable to locate the readings, please contact us at wssr@concordia.ca

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