



The Senate and the People of Canada

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9:00am – 4:30pm

Summary

Reform of the Senate of Canada has been one of the most contentious issues in Canadian politics. While the motivations for reform proposals often have been directed at specific political goals (such as the enhanced political representation of regions of the country that have been perceived as being generally underrepresented or marginalized), the subject has a wider significance. The legislative upper house has a special and, frequently, ambiguous role within parliamentary systems, especially as it relates to the Westminster model that Canada has adopted. It also is subject to conflicting and, often, confused understandings of parliamentary democracy in general, as well as other political themes that are strongly relevant to Canada, such as intrastate federalism, pluralism, multicultural inclusion, and institutional analysis.

This workshop will address the subject of Senate reform, not simply in terms of specific policy and constitutional options but, also, in terms of these broader themes. Critical discussions will take place concerning the political theory of parliamentary upper houses in general, the nature and proper expression of parliamentary democracy and other liberal democratic traditions, the historical context of the upper house within the evolution of the Westminster model, and the broad political and social aspirations of Canada in terms of national identity, bilingualism, multiculturalism, executive and legislative government, and federalism. Those discussions will be followed by applied exercises in public policy options concerning practical proposals for both constitutional and non-constitutional reform of this often-criticized and even more frequently under-appreciated institution of the Canadian political system and Canadian society.



WSSR WORKSHOPS ON SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

●●● DELIBERATING A PUBLIC AGENDA ●●●
●●● FOR FEDERAL ELECTION 2019 ●●●



Outline

9:00-9:50

Purposes of the parliamentary upper house in theory and practice

- Representation of distinctive constituencies
- Legislative activity with reduced partisanship
- Specialization of function and expertise
- Counterweight to governmental dominance

Institutionalism as a method for upper house reform

- Rational choice approach
- Historical institutionalism
- Cultural-cognitive analysis
- Unentrenched constitutionalism
 - Westminster model
 - Appointment and self-constraint
 - Party discipline and responsible government

9:50-10:00 Break

10:00-10:50

Ideological basis for the second chamber

- Ancient antecedents
- Classic conservative
- Liberal and liberal democratic
- Modern republican
- Utilitarian
- Communitarian

10:50-11:00 Break

11:00-12:00

Constitutional conception for the Canadian upper house

- Canadian version of the House of Lords
- Facilitator of intrastate federalism
- Ancillary functions of parliamentary democracy
- Chamber of pluralism and multiculturalism
- Committees and technical improvement

Prominent Senate reform proposals

- House of Federation
- Triple-E
- Bundesrat Model

12:00-1:30 Lunch

1:30-2:20 Group exercise I

- Constitutional and political obstacles to Senate reform
- Drafting a constitutional amendment for Senate reform

2:20-2:30 Break

2:30-3:20 Group exercise II

- The Salisbury convention and its relevance to parliamentary reform
- Drafting non-constitutional proposals for Senate reform

3:20-3:30 Break

3:30-4:30 Presentation of proposals





Required Readings*

- Forsey, Helen. 2015. *A People's Senate for Canada*, Halifax: Fernwood
Chapter 1: "'Sober Second Thought' Why Have A Senate At All?", pp. 3-23.
<http://reserves.concordia.ca/ares/ares.dll/plink?14EF3A5F>
- Gibbins, Roger and Robert Roach. 2010. "A New Senate for a More Democratic Canada," *The West in Canada Research Series*. Canada West Foundation, March. http://cwf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/CWF_NewSenate_Report_MAR2010.pdf
- McHugh, James T. 2017. *The Senate and the People of Canada*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books
Chapter 2: "A Counterintuitive Approach to Senate Reform in Canada", pp. 19-44.
<http://reserves.concordia.ca/ares/ares.dll/plink?14EF3A61>
- Russell, Meg. 2013. *The Contemporary House of Lords: Westminster Bicameralism Revived*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
Chapter 9: "Is the House of Lords 'Legitimate'? Attitudes Towards the Chamber", pp. 228-257.
<http://reserves.concordia.ca/ares/ares.dll/plink?14EF3A6D>
- Smith, David E. 2009. *The Canadian Senate in Bicameral Perspective*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
Part I, pp. 3-66. <https://0-www-deslibris-ca.mercury.concordia.ca/ID/418415>

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

