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Chair

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia

Special Committee on Electoral Reform

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• (1735)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)): We are beginning our 43rd meeting of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform. If I'm not mistaken, this is the last meeting in which we will hear from witnesses. So we are reaching the end of this stage, which has been extremely interesting and during which we have learned a great deal about electoral systems. We have had an opportunity to hear from many Canadians in our tour of the country.

Today, we are hearing from five groups of witnesses who will have 10 minutes each for their presentations.

From the Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick, we are welcoming R. Bruce Fitch, the interim leader of the Progressive Conservative Party of New Brunswick.

Welcome, Mr. Fitch.

We also have Jerome Dias, the national president of Unifor.

[English]

A voice: “Jerome” Dias?

Mr. Jerome Dias (National President, Unifor): If I ever hear you calling me Jerome....

A voice: I'm calling you Jerome from now on.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Have we started an incident here? Did I err?

Mr. Jerome Dias: You can call me “Jerry”.

The Chair: Jerry: okay, got it. Well, I'll call you “Mr.” Dias—

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: —being as we're in committee and so on.

As an individual, we have Professor Arthur Lupia of the department of political science at the University of Michigan. He is joining us tonight by video conference from Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Thank you for being before the committee and sharing your views and knowledge on the issue with us. We appreciate it very much.

From CARP, the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, we have Wanda Morris, chief operating officer and vice-president of advocacy, and we have Wade Poziomka, director of policy and general counsel of advocacy.

Then, from the Canadian Armed Forces, we have Gordon Dave Corbould, commanding officer of the Joint Personnel Support Unit, and we have Deputy Judge Advocate General Vihar Joshi, administrative law.

We have a great lineup this evening. It should be very interesting. There should be a great deal to learn from all of you. Of course, we'll be interacting through questions and answers. The way it works is that after all the witnesses have done their presentations, we'll have one round of questions and each member will have seven minutes to engage with the witnesses. At the seven-minute mark, unfortunately, we'll have to move on to the next questioner. That doesn't prevent you from addressing an issue that has been asked about later on when you have the floor if you didn't get a chance to respond because of the time limits.

Without any further ado, we'll start with Mr. Bruce Fitch for 10 minutes, please.

[Translation]

Mr. R. Bruce Fitch (Interim leader of the Progressive Conservative Party of New Brunswick): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My name is Bruce Fitch and I'm the interim leader of the Progressive Conservative Party of New Brunswick. I am very pleased to be here this evening and to take part in this meeting.

[English]

I appreciate this opportunity to make some remarks before the Special Committee on Electoral Reform.

Just like when you have a good book, sometimes you like to turn to the last page to see what the outcome will be. I'll take the suspense away, just so there are no surprises, and declare up front that I will be speaking in favour of the status quo. But if in fact the committee and Parliament decide to make significant changes to the way Canadians elect their members, I believe a referendum is required, because it's the people who own democracy. The politicians don't own democracy.

My position on these matters comes from a long history of working with and for the people of New Brunswick, especially in my little riding, *ma circonscription*, of Riverview. I've been elected four times as a member of the Legislative Assembly. Previous to that, I was mayor for two terms and a councillor for three terms before that.

In New Brunswick, our voting system is very similar to the national model of first past the post. There have been variations in my lifetime, including multi-member ridings, but other than the occasional boundary change or shift in the number of MLAs, the current system has been stable for the past 40 years, and for the most part the people seem to be happy with that system.

This is a important point to make, because in New Brunswick over the past 40 years there have been some very interesting results where the democratic expression, in terms of the percentage of votes for parties, has been wildly and disproportionately translated into very different seat allocations.

Just to name a few examples, in 1987 the McKenna Liberals took 60% of the vote but 100% of the seats in the legislature; in 2006 the Graham Liberals received fewer votes overall than premier Bernard Lord, but they still formed a majority government; and recently, in 2014, the Green Party elected its first member to the New Brunswick legislature with 25,000 votes provincially, while the NDP elected no members with 50,000 votes province-wide.

Despite all these variants, basically there has been no one complaining about the voting system in New Brunswick, no mass protests in front of the legislature, and no one has challenged the legitimacy of the government. On a personal level, I know from going door to door over the last number of elections and over the last 27 years of being an elected official that no one has raised this as a concern, outside of the occasional discussion on the doorstep. The concerns are the economy, jobs, health care, education, and seniors care.

You asked the presenters to the committee to consider seven questions before appearing, and I would like to boil that down to this: why do you think you need change, or not?

While I see areas that could be improved, the fact of the matter is that the people I represent are satisfied with the current system, warts and all. They like it because it's simple to understand, it's accessible, and they even have an option not to vote because all the choices are competent and decent—although, of course, as politicians we always encourage people to vote. But for that reason I would not be in favour of forcing people to vote under a mandatory voting system. It's a freedom of choice that people exercise.

They feel that way because they know their local MP or MLA in our area and they are represented by that person. They notice that over time the results of the elections have become more inclusive, more representative of women, minority communities, and diversity. People like that.

• (1740)

Overall they see the results of the current system as fair because all parties, all candidates, have an equal chance to succeed. Very similar to life in general, the results are not always perfect and are sometimes a little different from what was expected, but there is a foundation built on equality of opportunity.

At the end of the day, I work for these same people who are relatively satisfied with the current system. It would seem more than just a little disingenuous to try to imagine a number of different reasons we should change the way that I and my colleagues get hired every four years and to change that system without the approval of

the people who are doing the hiring—basically, the bosses of the elected officials.

Specific to this committee and for your deliberations, please keep the first-past-the-post system. The people in New Brunswick like it. If the government chooses to move ahead with significant changes because it's popular, it's an ill-conceived election promise, it's something to do to distract from other issues, then whatever the new system that is proposed must be ratified by the people in a clear and concise referendum.

We commissioned a poll in New Brunswick a short while ago when I was leader of the opposition because the provincial government in New Brunswick was also considering some of the changes in the voting system. It was interesting to see that 77% of respondents said that New Brunswickers should be consulted first and a referendum should be held before any changes were made in the system. Again, that's a question through a pollster, but we had 77%, which is a very clear majority. That majority I don't think should be ignored. These results align clearly with other national polls, which have been conducted over the last six months. Again, I'm not the only New Brunswicker here; one of your members, my friend Matt who's here today, is from Fredericton.

Finally, you also may want to know what we think about online voting. I think in general in every election cycle there are always some administrative improvements in improving accessibility to the voting stations, but accessibility and ease of voting can't trump the faith in the system itself. During the last provincial election a new administrative system, involving electronic vote tabulation machines, was rolled out across the province of New Brunswick. This was, of course, intended to allow the results to be known instantaneously, right away, right at the close of the polls. We were told that within 15 minutes we'd have our results. Well, as luck would have it, on election night there was a glitch and the results weren't known until the next day.

Subsequent recounts proved that the machines were accurate. The perception left with the voters was that this new technology cannot be trusted to deliver immediate results. Before people rush into online voting, especially on a big scale, there should be a cautionary note to make sure that it works, and works better than some of the ways it has been done in the past.

Overall, Mr. Chairman, I do think it's always a good thing to look at our voting system every so often, continue to modernize it to take advantage of technology, or improve service levels and accessibility, but when major changes are proposed, such as the fundamental way in which ballots are structured and counted, that requires the approval of the people.

I think you'll find that several referendums and plebiscites have proven in the past that despite the flaws of the first-past-the-post system, the people see it as legitimate, simple to understand, and accountable. They will want us to stick up for what has served their country very well over the past 150 years. As I mentioned, it's the people who own democracy, not the politicians. That's why the people should be asked if the way they hire their politicians should be changed.

Thank you very much.

● (1745)

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

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

Mr. Jerome Dias: Thank you very much.

If you listen to our members, if you're listening to Canadians, the reason we've had such poor voter turnouts over the last several elections, which is starting to finally turn around, is that people believe their vote doesn't count, doesn't mean anything. What I love is that when you take a look at the last two federal elections, we have had majority governments with 39.5% and 39.6%. More than 60% of Canadians didn't vote for either governing party.

So I'm fascinated when I listen to remarks about democracy and referendums. We know that in the last 10 years there was not a referendum. There was Bill C-4, Bill C-51, Bill C-377, Bill C-525, but not one referendum. I would argue, for those who are screaming for a referendum today, that we need to take a look at their history.

Now, I will argue that on October 19 there was a referendum, and it was a referendum of change. One issue was clearly the elimination of the first-past-the-post electoral system. On behalf of Unifor's 310,000 members, I am here to emphasize the importance of implementing electoral reform in time for the next election. I want to get straight to the point of the discussion, because it seems to us at Unifor that this process is quickly coming to a moment of truth.

According to remarks from the Prime Minister and also from Minister Monsef, broad-based support for change is a prerequisite for changing the system. The Chief Electoral Officer has said we need the broadest possible consensus. So let me be very direct with all of you: there is a broad base of support for electoral reform. You have the most recent Ekos survey from only a week ago: 60% want the government to fulfill its election pledge that we have had the last first-past-the-post election.

It's true that support for specific options is less decisive, but still, there is a clear broad base of support: support for PR, 46%; support for the current system, 29%; support for preferential ballots, 26%. In other words, there is one clear alternative to the present system: proportional representation.

Our members and most Canadians believe they have voted for change. They have voted for the principle of change, expecting that you will implement that decision with specific reforms that are understandable and explainable to our members in our communities.

This committee has the capacity, the mandate, and the information on voting systems needed to bring forward a majority position on electoral reform, and when you do so, the vast majority of Canadians

will support you. In August our national convention affirmed that electoral reform must be addressed. Our members unanimously endorsed the proportional representation system for Canada. We did not get into the weeds of the particular kind of PR system; we say that is your job. We support the principle of proportionality to make sure that every vote counts and to make false majorities impossible. We want fewer reasons to vote strategically and more opportunity to vote for a hopeful, progressive future.

There's no question that our organization and one of my previous organizations, the CAW, talked a lot about strategic voting, but what was strategic voting really all about? We voted strategically because we didn't want a particular party. It thus wasn't about voting for the party you wanted; it was making sure that one party didn't get elected or have a majority with less than 40%.

We want fewer reasons to vote strategically. We want more reasons for young people and all those who have been alienated from politics to engage and participate in the democratic process. In our view, when Canadians think about electoral reform, they want the system to change so that all votes directly impact the composition of Parliament, instead of the situation in 2015, in which an estimated nine million votes are without real reflection in Parliament.

I want to comment also on the idea that has been floated that smaller reforms could be implemented with a smaller consensus. I don't think this makes a lot of sense.

● (1750)

First, support for the present system is pretty much limited to the core base of the previous government. Support for preferential ballots, which we assume is what is meant by "smaller reforms", is even less. There is not more support for smaller reform. Frankly, there is not a single person in Unifor who has spoken out in favour of ranked ballots as the preferred option for reform, so I urge you not to go down that road. The way to get this done is for the majority of you to agree on the principles that represent Canadian opinions and values and then propose an electoral system that best implements those principles.

In our opinion, the core issue is that Canadians want a different system that eliminates false majorities. We have too much experience that these false majorities produce extremist, ideological governments that do more harm than good—I can argue the last 10 years any time. Canadians want less partisanship in politics and more co-operation that produces good public policy. It means that we all have to look forward to a different kind of government, with the knowledge that it is far less likely that any one party will dominate in the way we have become accustomed to, but we still have stable government. In our opinion, we'll have more stable government, and the incoming government will not spend the first year repealing the extremist agenda of the previous government. We will still have parties with distinct alternative policies. We will need more political leadership, not less, and it is that political leadership we need and expect now.

If the majority for electoral reform fails to take this opportunity, it will be a long time before these conditions come around again. Unifor members are ready for change now, and we are expecting you to lead that change to ensure that a new proportional voting system is in place for the next federal election.

Thank you very much.

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

We'll go now to Professor Lupia in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The floor is yours.

Dr. Arthur Lupia (Hal R. Varian Collegiate Professor of Political Science, University of Michigan, As an Individual): Hello. Thank you for having me. I regret that I can't be with you in person today. I'm in Washington at the moment.

I've been asked to speak with you about what voters know about referenda and some of the implications for strategies and outcomes. Democracies around the world use referenda to offer legitimacy and elevated legal status to a range of statutory and constitutional proposals. This is similar to what the gentleman from New Brunswick was saying with regard to looking for legitimacy.

That's the starting principle. For people like us, who know a lot about referenda, and for people like you, who have been involved in drafting referenda and thinking about all the possible things that could be in it or might not be in it, and about what language to use to describe it, from that perspective many referenda are very complicated instruments. Yet when the same question is brought to voters, they necessarily see it differently, because we don't ask them to rewrite the proposal. By the time we bring it to them, the question is simply "yes" or "no". Not surprisingly, they're going to think about referenda differently from us.

What I'd like to do is review a couple of basic facts about what people know about referenda. There's a question about whether citizens are competent to make this type of decision, so I'll give you an argument for and against.

The argument against it is that referenda typically deal with complex topics to which many voters pay little or no attention. Moreover, when you run surveys about referenda, and you ask people what seem to be basic questions about the content, it's often the case that voters answer the questions incorrectly. From that perspective it looks like they're not qualified to vote in a referendum.

However, there's also evidence in favour of them voting competently. Let me first say what I might mean by "competence". What I'm talking about is a voter who casts a vote that's consistent with a set of facts and values that they care about. The values may pertain to the life they want for their family, their community, or their nation; and people in different situations might vote differently. By competence I mean the vote that someone would cast if they knew a lot about the referendum in question. Typically they don't, so the question is whether they can still vote competently. In many cases the answer is that they can. The reason they can do this is, again, they only have two choices, "yes" or "no". If there was a correct vote for, let's say, a particular voter, and they used a coin to cast a vote, they would get the correct answer 50% of the time.

There are a number of situations where voters can do better than that. The way they do is to look for simple environmental cues, which in referenda often come in the form of interest group or party endorsements. Suppose you have a well-known entity or person who has a political history. You know their stance, and they come out and say that they're in favour of a change or they're against it. People use those. They calibrate to try to figure out what they would do if they knew as much as that person. If there are well-informed people who share the values of voters, they can use various endorsements to figure out how they would vote if they knew more.

This is controversial, because you might think that voters should still know a lot. However, in the report I sent, there are actually many cases where all of us make what seem like very complicated decisions using a very simple environmental cue. The example used in my report is driving. If you think about a busy intersection in a city at rush hour, there may be four lanes of traffic each way on each road. There can be 150 or 200 cars at the intersection at a time, and the engineering problem is how to get everyone safely through a relatively small space in 90 seconds.

To try to solve that problem from an engineering perspective is very complicated, because you have to think about the speed and acceleration potential of each of the cars. You have to know something about the intention of every driver, and you have to know something about what every driver believes about every other driver. It's a very complicated problem, and yet all of us solve that problem every day with a nearly 100% success rate, because we have a simple environmental cue we can use to make the right decision. We look at the traffic light to determine whether it's red, yellow, or green, and we look at the car in front of us. That's the simple rule we use to make a decision about when to press the accelerator.

•(1755)

In politics, things like political parties and interest group endorsements serve the role of traffic lights. If you know that your interest is aligned with a particular group or individual, and they say, for instance, "I've looked at the proposition, I've looked at the referendum, and for people with our values, this is a good thing", we've shown that what happens over and over again is that people cast the same votes they would have cast if they had known more.

Of course, there's a downside to this, too, because if you're a voter, and your values don't match the values of people speaking out and giving their point of view, you can get lost. You can also be subject to manipulation. Someone could represent themselves as sharing your values when in fact they don't. This often happens in the form of mailers. A person such as the leader of an interest group wouldn't get up in public and lie about their position, but maybe someone would send out a mailer saying that the Liberals in the country have a particular point of view, when in fact they don't.

To summarize, most people do not obtain detailed information about referenda. Instead they look for interest group or simple cues to tell them how people who have values like theirs are likely to vote.

An additional point I'll make is that if you want to know whether people will take the time to read the fine print of a referendum, most people won't. That's because if you put the referendum online, you're competing with hockey games, Pokémon GO, and cat videos, which many people find very appealing. Very few people in any country will put those things aside to read a piece of legislation. The Internet allows some people to gain more information than has ever been possible about these things, but most citizens have their daily lives. While some are watching hockey games, for others it takes all of their energy through the day to feed their families, take care of elderly parents, or do things for their community. They don't have the time to invest in legislation, so most people in referenda look for these simpler cues to try to figure out what they would do.

A related point is about how people think once they gain this information. In the case of Brexit, there was a sense that there was this intellectual argument about trade liberalization that wasn't part of the campaign. The question is why was that. One of the answers is that for voters, a referendum isn't an intellectual argument. The question for them is quite simple: Is yes better for me or is no better for me? Those are the only two choices they have. You could say there are all these complicated aspects of Brexit that they should have thought about, but they weren't in the legislature. Their choice was very simple, and the only thing they could do in that situation was figure out which would be better for them, yes or no. That was what they could act on. For other reasons, they might have wanted to know more, but for the act of voting competently, that was sufficient.

The last point I'll make is with regard to campaigns. In referendum campaigns, the "no" side has a huge advantage, regardless of the legislation. This is true throughout the world, and you might ask why. It's because with a no campaign, you're running against change, and people don't know what life is going to be like under that change. A typical no campaign is when you think about a worst-case scenario, and you make your whole campaign about that.

With a "yes" campaign, you have to describe this new world and convince people that even though there are scary possibilities, their life is going to be better. I have a statistic that I use just to tell you how skewed this is. In California, where there's a professional referendum industry, and people care about their win-loss records, most people will not touch a yes campaign unless it's polling 70% or more a year in advance of election day. The reason is that people recognize that no campaigns are easier to run. Everybody believes that the yes support will fall over time, the mystery being whether it will be above or below 50% on election day. There are very few cases where support for yes actually goes up during a campaign. It happens, but it's quite rare.

In sum, in many cases, if voters have clear interest group endorsements, they can make the same choices they would have made had they known more. As a general matter, though, many times they learn that change is scary, so if they're confused, you see more support for the status quo than you might expect.

•(1800)

The Chair: Thank you so much for that extremely interesting perspective on referenda, including the California perspective. I'm sure there will be many interesting questions.

We'll go now to CARP with Wanda Morris, please.

Will you be splitting your time?

Ms. Wanda Morris (Chief Operating Officer, Vice-President of Advocacy, Canadian Association of Retired Persons): We will. I'll start, and Wade will continue.

CARP is the organization that advocates for health, financial security, and freedom from age discrimination for older Canadians. We have 300,000 members across the country, and on average our members have an above average education, income, and net worth, and approximately 87% of them are retired. Our advocacy position here today is guided by our membership, and while there is strong interest in this issue, there is no consensus. We're here today to share their divergent views.

I'll turn it over to Wade.

Mr. Wade Poziomka (Director of Policy, General Counsel of Advocacy, Canadian Association of Retired Persons): Thank you.

Prior to coming today, we surveyed our members. We received 6,209 responses. What we learned from that survey is that 98.7% of our members polled voted in the last federal election, 81% of our members who responded believe that electoral reform is an important issue for them, and 90% of our members have some knowledge of electoral reform, with 36% feeling that they're extremely knowledgeable or very knowledgeable.

Of the CARP members who believe that electoral reform is an important issue, over 58% believe it's time to change the first-past-the-post system. I want to share with you some of the comments from our members, and I'll start with a few of the negative comments: "Don't play around with a system that has worked for 149 years, better the devil you know"; "The end result of systems in Italy and Israel are frightening, with fringe parties holding an exorbitant amount of power"; and "With proportional representation, nothing can get done because a minority is allowed to stall all initiatives."

Of course, we also had positive feedback from some of our members: "Canada needs to reform the electoral process to be more democratic and representative of the people"; "The present system needs to change. A party can get less than 40% of the vote, still get a majority government, and make very important changes when the majority of Canadians oppose those changes. It's a joke. I'm not proud to be a Canadian"; and "We've suffered too long with inadequate representation from a system that was devised 149 years ago. This is 2016, and it's time to refresh the system and make every vote count."

Of those members who opted for reform, the choice of alternative system is nearly evenly split, with a small majority preferring proportional representation over the ranked ballot system.

The material we reviewed from this committee prior to coming today indicates there are four characteristics that we look at: the ballot, the number of candidates per constituency, the procedure to determine winners, and the threshold for determining winners.

From a process perspective, CARP also encourages this committee to consider whether there should be any barriers to access, thresholds for political parties, and if so how significant should those be. For example, some members suggested there should be minimum thresholds for parties to obtain seats under a proportional system, whether that be 5% or 10%. Others noted that eliminating the first past the-post-system would allow parties to build support over their current levels. The majority of our members, approximately 65%, support a three- or four-party system as opposed to a system with more parties than that.

On the idea of a referendum, our members were almost evenly split, with about 53% in favour of a referendum. Several members told us that education is required if a referendum will be held, and I'm going to share a couple of comments from our members that summed up that sentiment with you now: "The idea of reform is scary. It needs a lot of discussion and information", and "I feel too many citizens will not understand the complexities of this issue, and will feel comfortable with the status quo as a result."

Several of our members suggested a trial period as opposed to a referendum. Here are a couple of comments: "Any change to our

electoral system should be on a trial basis. One or two elections will give a good reading on the effect of change. This means that our Parliament can review the results eight and 10 years down the road, and modify our change back, or establish a more acceptable form of selecting who can govern our country", and "Government must make every effort to ensure that the electorate understands exactly what is being voted on. If we go with a referendum, then I would propose a binding trial period of two or three elections, followed by a vote to keep or reject that system." I think what this reflects is a fear among some of our members of what an alternative to the status quo might be. Several of our members would like the opportunity to remove an elected politician from office.

With issues that affect seniors and those with disabilities, the diversity of health is greatest amongst our membership of seniors, and disability-related needs must be considered in electoral reform. In that respect, CARP has three specific asks as it relates to our members. Online or telephone options should be explored, as well as other options to physically bring seniors with mobility issues to polling stations, but we are aware of elder abuse and the potential for vote manipulation by caregivers and family members that may not reflect an individual's choice. Campaign offices, debates, and public meetings should be physically accessible, and campaign material should be drafted in large font and plain language.

Those are my introductory remarks. I thank you for the opportunity to be here today.

● (1805)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go now to commanding officer Dave Corbould, please, and Deputy Judge Advocate General Vihar Joshi. I don't know who will be going first.

● (1810)

Brigadier-General Gordon Dave Corbould (Commanding Officer, Joint Personnel Support Unit, Canadian Forces): I will be, sir.

The Chair: Go ahead.

BGen Gordon Dave Corbould: I'll speak alone for the opening comments, and we're both here for questions.

The Chair: That's great. Thank you.

BGen Gordon Dave Corbould: Mr. Chair, members of the committee, thank you very much for the opportunity to address you today regarding the experience of Canadian Forces electors in federal elections. I'm joined by a representative from the Office of the Judge Advocate General, Colonel Vihar Joshi.

Part of the mission of the military personnel command, in which I currently serve, is to support Canadian Armed Forces personnel in many areas. Commanding this command, Lieutenant-General Whitecross recently asked me to lend my support to the study of the proposals for amending the Canada Elections Act. In this context I come before you today.

In addition to his work as Deputy Judge Advocate General, Colonel Joshi was also appointed the coordinating officer by the Minister of National Defence for the purpose of subsection 199(1) of the Canada Elections Act. His role in this capacity is to work with the Chief Electoral Officer, during and between elections, on carrying out the special voting rules that apply to Canadian Forces electors. We will later tag-team to answer your questions, when appropriate, if this is acceptable.

First, I would like to make a few comments on voting by Canadian Forces electors. The Canada Elections Act gives special status to members of the regular force and members of the reserve force who are serving full time on training, service, or active service. This status is not new. Indeed, in 1917 Parliament provided for special rules to allow members mobilized during the First World War to exercise their right to vote. Provisions to a similar effect have been maintained in electoral legislation to this day. They are now listed in division 2 of part 11 of the Canada Elections Act.

If not for these provisions, Canadian Armed Forces members serving within Canada or throughout the world in various types of operations and exercises could find it very difficult to exercise their right to vote in the same way traditionally experienced by other Canadians.

[Translation]

In a democratic society such as our own, the Armed Forces—like the public service—must maintain political neutrality not only at the level of institutions but also at the level of the people in them. For example, the Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces Code of Values and Ethics requires that members and public servants “uphold Canada’s parliamentary democracy and its institutions” by notably “carrying out their duty and their duties in accordance with legislation, policies and directives in a non-partisan and objective manner.”

More specifically, the Queen’s Regulations and Orders prohibit regular force members from taking an active part in the affairs of a political organization or party, making a political speech to electors, or becoming a candidate for election to the Parliament of Canada or a provincial legislature.

Given these limits imposed on Canadian Armed Forces members with respect to the exercise of their democratic rights, exercising their right to vote is one of the main vehicles for expressing their political opinions. Restricting their opportunities to exercise their right to vote would be tantamount to depriving them of their voice.

[English]

At the time of the 42nd general election, 64,049 Canadian Armed Forces members were registered on voters lists. Of this number, a total of 29,247 Canadian Forces electors exercised their right to vote using the special voting rules provided by the Canada Elections Act. These votes were collected by military deputy returning officers, either at one of the 186 polling stations set up in various defence establishments across Canada, or abroad in nearly 80 countries, and at sea on board Her Majesty’s Canadian ships.

These votes represented a participation rate of approximately 45%, but this percentage excludes members residing at the address indicated in their statement of ordinary residence and who chose to

exercise their right to vote at their civilian polling station on polling day.

[Translation]

Administering the vote of military electors is based on collaboration between the Chief Electoral Officer and his staff on the one hand and the members appointed by the Minister of National Defence to the positions of coordinating officer and liaison officer on the other, as well as with the commanding officers of Canadian Armed Forces units and the deputy returning officers they appoint. The Special Voting Rules dictating this type of collaboration have not been overhauled since 1993.

• (1815)

The Speaker of the House of Commons recently received the report entitled *An Electoral Framework for the 21st Century: Recommendations from the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada Following the 42nd General Election*.

Certain recommendations in this document specifically address voting by Canadian Armed Forces electors. We understand that this report has been referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs for review. Upon invitation, we will naturally support Parliament and the government with regard to the review of the recommendations it contains that address voting by Canadian Armed Forces electors.

[English]

Mr. Chair, we understand that your committee’s mandate includes, among other things, the study of various voting systems, mandatory voting, and online and Internet voting, and that you will also assess the extent to which these options are compatible with certain principles for electoral reform—namely, effectiveness and legitimacy, engagement, accessibility and inclusiveness, integrity, and local representation.

We are pleased to answer questions from the members of this committee on such topics as the way Canadian Armed Forces members are called to vote, the way in which the electoral process is administered by the Canadian Armed Forces, and the challenges we experienced in the last general election.

We hope this information will be of assistance to this committee in carrying out its mandate.

Thank you again for offering us the opportunity to talk with you on this matter. We would be happy to answer your questions as appropriate.

The Chair: Thank you, Brigadier-General Corbould.

We’ll go to our round of questioning.

We’ll start with Ms. Romanado, please, for seven minutes.

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

I’d like to thank our panellists for being here this evening.

And thank you to the folks in the audience for hanging out for the hottest ticket in town: electoral reform.

[Translation]

Thank you very much for being with us this evening.

[English]

First, General Corbould, we're delighted to have you here. It's the first time we have had members of the Canadian Armed Forces in front of us. We thought it was incredibly important that we make sure that the voices of our serving members are heard. I'd like to thank you and your colleagues, first, for their service to Canada, and also for being here this evening, as a key stakeholder group, to provide us with this information that is incredibly important for us.

As I mentioned to you, I have two sons currently serving, and I had the pleasure of trying to figure out what the statement of residence was during the last election. You touched on that a bit. If you could elaborate to this committee on the steps that serving members would need to take in terms of setting up their address to correspond with their electoral riding, and explain that a little for the benefit of the committee, that would be helpful.

Thank you.

BGen Gordon Dave Corbould: Yes, ma'am. I'll speak in broad terms and then allow Colonel Joshi to go into any specifics that I may have skipped over.

In terms of the statement of ordinary residence, primarily, as you get enrolled into the military during your recruitment phase you declare your statement of ordinary residence, which for most of us, as we join, will not be the place where we go to a recruiting centre; rather, it will be the place primarily where our family is from. When I joined I was from Bella Coola, British Columbia. That's where my parents lived. I associated that with my statement of ordinary residence.

Every year we have an opportunity to change our statement of ordinary residence. I believe it's two months of the year in which—my colleague will correct me, I'm sure—you can change your statement of ordinary residence. That is generally as a result of a posting, so if I were posted from St. Albert to Ottawa, I might decide, myself, to change my statement of ordinary residence, or I might, as an individual, choose to maintain it at St. Albert, Alberta, depending on my personal circumstances and ties to my location.

In addition to that, I know that during an election, once a writ is dropped, then we are limited in changing our statement of residence during that time frame, obviously to not affect the election campaign.

I'll hand it over to Colonel Joshi to clarify some things.

Colonel Vihar Joshi (Deputy Judge Advocate General, Administrative Law, Canadian Forces): I have just a bit of clarification. On the subject of changing the statement of ordinary residence, it can be changed any time during the year, but it is not effective until 60 days after it's been received by the commanding officer.

During an election period, as General Corbould mentioned, after the writ is dropped, if you move to change your statement of ordinary residence, it is not effective until 14 days after the election period. So during an election period you cannot change a statement of ordinary residence, but during the course of the year, your

statement of ordinary residence can be changed to the place where you would live but for your military service, or the location where you are currently serving, or the location that you held immediately prior to enrolment.

So there is some flexibility in aligning your statement of ordinary residence with your connection to the community.

● (1820)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you.

In your brief, you mentioned some of the challenges we face. I'm quite happy to see all of the efforts that are made to make sure that our service members, especially those serving abroad, are able to participate in the democratic process.

It was very helpful for you to mention that when we have to advance the voting date for them, it sometimes may prevent members from understanding or learning some things in the last minutes of the campaign and so on. It was very helpful for you to provide us with that information, because that's something we'll need to be mindful of, no matter what we decide to do. In that regard, I want to thank you both very much for filling us in.

My next question is for you, Mr. Dias. I just want to get some clarity on some of the statements you made. We have heard from your members throughout the tour. They seem to follow us because, as I said, we're the hottest ticket in town, I think, in terms of electoral reform.

You said that over 60% of the Canadians didn't vote for the governing party, and that on October 19 there was a referendum of change. Then, of course, you talked about making false majorities impossible. I'm a little confused, because on the one hand you're saying that we're a false majority in that 60% of Canadians didn't vote for us—which, I agree, that's in fact correct—but then you're saying that we have the mandate to then change the system. I'm not sure which one it is. Is it the first one or is it the second one?

As well, you said that people voted strategically because they didn't want a party. So if they voted strategically because they didn't want a party—i.e., I'm assuming the last government—that in itself is not then saying that they voted overwhelmingly because the three parties wanted reform. I'm not sure which one it is. Could you clarify, please?

Mr. Jerome Dias: Gladly. If you take a look at the last federal election, it's clear: the debate across the country was change, no question about it. If you take a look at one of the issues that was debated, it was electoral reform.

You're right that we suggested to our members to vote strategically. I think if you take a look at the numbers, Canadians, 70% of Canadians, voted strategically. If you take a look at the numbers, 70% went to the ballot box...first of all, went to the box to vote strategically, and then 70% said, "Who am I going to vote for that's best positioned to defeat a Conservative?" That's my opinion, and that is, frankly, what the numbers seem to show.

Now, the mandate is clear, in my opinion. Regardless of the system, the government should do what they ran on. If part of your platform was eliminating first past the post, then you should do that. One of the frustrations with politics today is that people will frequently run from the left and govern from the right, or in fact when they get elected their platform seems to disappear. Even if you take a look at the polling afterwards, it's clear that people are looking to get rid of the first-past-the-post system.

So I'm not giving an inconsistent message. What I'm saying is that the government should do what they said. Too, that's what Canadians are expecting.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have to go to Mr. Reid now.

Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My questions will be for you, Professor Lupia.

I have to tell you, first off, that you hit a raw nerve with your Pokémon GO comments. I am a level 26 Pokémon GO player with a 2200 Combat Power Snorlax in my Pokédex.

Voices: Oh, oh!

An hon. member: You shouldn't admit to that, Scott.

Mr. Scott Reid: I'm just saying.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Scott Reid: However, in other regards you seem to be a well-reasoned individual.

I could see you listening with interest to the previous exchange. There has been a narrative presented, and Mr. Dias has articulated it, that there is no reason to have a referendum on a new electoral system for Canada because the 2015 federal election was a de facto referendum on electoral reform due to the fact that the Liberals, the New Democrats, and the Green Party collectively had positions in favour of changing the electoral system. These, of course, were not their entire platforms; they were part of what they articulated.

Is it reasonable to treat elections as de facto referenda on any particular issue?

• (1825)

Dr. Arthur Lupia: It's difficult to treat a candidate-based election or a Parliament-based election as a referendum on a specific issue. Typically, in one of those elections, you're talking about a basket of issues. Some people when they go to the polls are really worried about the economy. Some may be really worried about whether a particular factory in their town will stay open or closed. Others might be worried about children, or the elderly, or things of that nature. It's very difficult to take an election result and narrow it down to a single topic.

Does that answer your question?

Mr. Scott Reid: Yes, it does. Thank you.

You've written a number of papers that are germane to what we're discussing today. One that you co-authored with John Matsusaka twelve years ago, in 2004, described how voters can be grouped into roughly three categories. I'll quote from it and then ask you for a comment on a concern that occurs to me.

You wrote:

The data showed respondents sorting themselves into three categories. The first category contained voters who knew neither the answers to detailed questions about the propositions nor the insurance industry's preferences.

This is in reference, parenthetically, to a referendum on changes to the insurance industry.

The second category contained "model citizens"—voters who consistently gave correct answers to detailed questions about the initiatives and who knew the insurance industry's preferences. The third category contained respondents who could not answer questions about the propositions' details but, like the model citizens, knew the insurance industry's preferences.

This study's central finding is that voters in the second and third categories voted in very similar ways, whereas voters in the first category voted quite differently.

I think the evidence is convincing that well-informed voters vote in accordance with what could be regarded as their true interests, and that those who know to turn to authority figures they know and trust are likely to do likewise. Those are categories two and three.

As for category one, are these people sufficiently subject to being swayed by propaganda, or in some other way manipulated so that they ruin everything for everybody else in a typical referendum?

Dr. Arthur Lupia: You know, I'll answer the question, but one of the reasons I'm hesitating right now is that it depends on the relative numbers of these three groups, and that's not constant. In a situation where you have a clearly stated question and you have leaders of political parties or interest groups who are well known, who are arraying themselves for and against in some way that voters see as coherent, you're not going to have as many people in group one. You're not going to have as many people who are confused.

Where group one can cause trouble is when things get hard for them to comprehend. This can be a situation where the question is so complicated that the interest groups, the traffic lights that they're looking for, are not working or are sending inconsistent messages. Group one can't really take these information shortcuts and make the same decisions. That's when things get problematic.

I will say, though, that as a general rule, when voters get concerned or confused, they generally vote "no". If you want to think about how they're most likely to cause trouble, it would be just by voting no.

Mr. Scott Reid: There have been some referenda in Canada on this very issue of electoral reform—for example, one that took place in the province of Ontario in 2007—with quite low voter turnout. In the case of that referendum, it's quite striking that the election, which took place on the same day, with people voting in the same location, had a substantially higher voter turnout.

Two things occurred. One is that the electoral reform model that was proposed only got about 35% of the vote. The second is that voter turnout on that question was only about 35%, despite the fact that the overall voter turnout in the actual election was substantially higher.

How are we to treat that kind of evidence? What does that tell us?

• (1830)

Dr. Arthur Lupia: There's a lot of variance worldwide in turnout in referenda. If a referendum is phrased in a way that people see it as vital to their day-to-day life, they can easily imagine what a "yes" vote means to them and their families and what a "no" vote means. They can feel it, right? That's the time when they turn out.

If it seems like an arcane and abstract thing that really isn't connected to their life, perhaps something that just the elites are arguing about, that's when they stay away. Even if they go to the polls to vote for another candidate, there's this idea of drop-off, where if a referendum is just too confusing or too abstract, people just wash their hands of it. That's the main variation.

The other thing that I'll say is that, when that happens, the people who are more likely not to turn out tend to be people who are lower on the socio-economic scale. If you're worried about people who have less education or less income being part of this process, then if you have a situation where the referendum is confusing and the interest groups aren't telling people what's going on, the folks who are most likely not to participate would be those lower on the SES and of lower education.

Mr. Scott Reid: That is one of our concerns.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thanks.

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

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Thank you very much.

I'll also stay with our professor for a moment.

You enlightened me on a couple of things. One is that it sounds like politicians are traffic lights to voters on these things. I hesitate to explore what signal Donald Trump is sending to you and other folks right now, because it confuses me. But you also suggested something regarding a fear of change.

Can you remind me again about the California example and whether this is empirical or anecdotal, the notion that people are reluctant to sign up to campaigns unless they express a 70% or greater favourability of change a year out? I think that's what you told us.

Dr. Arthur Lupia: Yes. Here's what's empirical. If you look at referenda around the world, particularly national referenda, and a year out or on the initial date that you announce you're going to put this on the ballot you look at what percentage is voting "yes", in almost all cases what happens is that support for yes goes down.

When you first launch a referendum, it's always like mom and apple pie, or let's reform elections and make everything great. People say, okay, yes, let's do that. But then the conversation comes and maybe the "no" ads come out and say, oh, but this will ruin your life, and it's very scary. In almost all referendum campaigns around the world, support goes down. That's the empirical fact.

The anecdotal fact is that there are these relatively small professional communities that run campaigns. In California there's a very active one around referenda, and this is a rule of thumb. There

are a bunch of people whose reputations and compensation depends on win-loss, so when you're in a room with those guys, when you're at conferences with those guys, if you're 55% or 60% "yes" a year in advance, that's a danger sign. They're pretty sure that one will not win.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Thank you. That's...sobering, I suppose is the term I'm looking for.

I'll turn to you, Brigadier-General Corbould. Sorry I had to step out, but I was on the phone with Bella Bella, which I think is a place you perhaps have some familiarity with.

I want to ask a specific question. The military, in our history, has been a place that in a sense by necessity we've innovated. We had women voting, mothers of those serving in the First World War. I believe we had testimony that way. We had the age of voting lowered for servicemen and servicewomen the very first time.

One of the innovations we're contemplating is online voting. I may have missed it in your testimony because I was in and out a bit, but what contemplations would you give to enable a higher participation rate of our men and women serving overseas in particular? Their vote would seem to be as important, if not in some ways a lot more important, to be counted in a general election.

BGen Gordon Dave Corbould: Indeed, our common theme and our default is always to make sure that pretty much as many of our soldiers as possible have access to voting within the special voting rules. We go through great effort working with the government to make sure that those votes and that capability to vote is there. Any developments that Canada Elections decides to move forward on, we would assist and take a look at it and see how we could apply it to military.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: The big downside with online voting, of course, is security, the ability to keep our networks secure. We had testimony at an open-mike session in which somebody who had spent time working for the federal government, including the defence department, said that keeping an Internet-based system secure is near to impossible right now. Would the military offer us any advantages perhaps in testing on a small scale the ability to keep something like that secure and the vote sacred?

• (1835)

BGen Gordon Dave Corbould: I'm not in a position to be able to answer specifically. I'm certainly not a computer expert by any means, so I'm not sure how we would approach that.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Okay.

Mr. Dias—I won't call you Jerome, ever—I think one of the things you suggested in your initial testimony was the idea of perhaps the stars lining up, or that the occasion for reform is rare. It is, in fact, rare when you have a government come into office with the commitment to change the system that got them into office.

Mr. Jerome Dias: That's right.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Despite the Prime Minister's musings last week that maybe the heat has gone off this issue, that it's not important anymore because people are happy—and I don't know why one would lead to the other—but with the membership that you represent, is there now an appearance that they're saying, well, as Madam Ambrose said, the bad man is gone so everything's fine, and our interest in changing the way we vote, and the way our votes are counted, is also gone?

Mr. Jerome Dias: We had over 2,000 members at a convention in August, so that was after the change of government, and what did we talk about? We talked about proportional representation. It passed unanimously, because the stars are aligned, candidly. Three of the four parties that are sitting here today are in favour of eliminating first past the post, and you can't detract from that.

I'm just going to repeat myself, but the reality is that when parties get elected, whether I agree or disagree with their platform is irrelevant. But if they run on a platform, they should implement it. That's my point. Our members haven't changed our position as a result of that.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: One thing we're looking for, and what we put out to Canadians, is the perspective of a voter, what experience they have going to the polls, what satisfaction they leave with that their vote, as you say, counted for something—nine million didn't count last time—but also what policies come out the other end.

One thing about first past the post is that we get these big policy lurches. I'm wondering, just on the impact of labour law, which you deal with, or economic policy, manufacturing policy, is there any benefit to be seen in having a form of system that doesn't policy-lurch every five to 10 years, going the opposite direction that we were just running in?

Mr. Jerome Dias: Well, there's no question, there's been a more dramatic shift in the last year than in the previous 10, one can argue. I will argue that minority governments act differently from majority governments.

The fact is that Canadians deserve to have their voices heard, whether people agree or disagree with the position that was taken on strategic voting. There's inherently something wrong with strategic voting when people go to a ballot box and vote against something, because you have to vote against something in order to have the type of change you want.

People are expecting that when they go to the ballot box, their vote means something. At the end of the day, if one party gets 10%, they get 10% of the seats. Another party gets 20%, they get 20% of the seats. A party that gets less than 40% of the seats, regardless of their political stripe, or regardless if I've supported them or not, should not have a majority government.

I would suggest that if every vote counts, then you end up with a type of government that will speak on behalf of the majority of Canadians, and I think they'll be more satisfied with that.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now turn to Mr. Thériault.

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

Everyone knows that my party is in favour of changes, but not any changes and not at any cost. My party tends to be in favour of self-determination, both for a people and for voters.

We are here talking about the principle of whether or not to consult the public, allowing them to give their free and informed consent to change the democratic rules. If we discuss the principle from that angle, I think we should be careful not to make assumptions about the voters and their intelligence. Of course, if we do the work within the established timeframe, we see that it's quite absurd. We have held consultations everywhere and it will not happen. However, if we invest the time and resources to get it right by 2019 and if we think of a formula with an additional question on the ballot for the election, I have faith in the people's intelligence to settle the debate.

Mr. Fitch, I imagine you will agree with me. Why make the people settle the debate? Because all the experts who have come to meet with us, be they for or against the change, have told us that each voting system has its advantages and disadvantages. This is not a debate among politicians or among experts. This should not be just for the initiated. This must be a debate that belongs to the people, and it is up to the people to decide and to weigh the disadvantages and advantages that they are willing to accept.

Mr. Fitch, if the people want to keep the current system, I guess you will not be against a referendum in which they can express their opinion. You said that the public should be consulted only if the intent is to make a change. Given that the people's representatives mandated a committee to finally address the issue, we argue that the people must decide on the issue in either case. Realistically, we will not reach a consensus by December 1. As for the voters, they need to be better informed. So let's take the time to do things properly. That was my first point.

Second, the committee has discussed the principle of a change. The majority of people we have met have told us that a proportional system is needed. Being in favour of the principle of proportional representation is one thing, but defining that model is a completely different thing. It's when the model is being developed that the partisan bias may appear. Just think of the new electoral maps that are prepared each year. By the way, if we applied the electoral map of 2012 to the 2011 results, no candidates from my party would have been elected. So the devil is in the details.

If we are able to talk about the principle, I don't understand why we are not able to build on the principle that this debate should belong to the people and be settled by the people through a referendum. I don't understand why, in principle, we are saying that the committee has a duty to decide for the people. That's not my idea of democracy.

Ladies and gentlemen, what do you think about that?

• (1840)

The Chair: Who wants to respond to Mr. Thériault's comment first?

[English]

Mr. R. Bruce Fitch: Perhaps I could just jump in, because my name was referenced there.

I wish I had met the professor before the last election, because we had to have a ballot question. Our ballot question was yes or no on the development of shale gas in the province of New Brunswick. In my opinion, the people voted no because we were kicked out and the Gallant administration went in. People, after the fact, once they had more information, said things like, "I didn't have enough information at the time. I was uncertain. I had heard things on social media that I wasn't happy about and it made me uncertain, so I voted no".

Some people said, "It didn't have anything to do with the referendum. I just hated your guy." If you asked them what they hated about him, you'd hear, "I don't know. I just didn't like him." They voted against the person.

Going into that election, we knew that only about 50% of the population was in favour of extracting natural gas in non-conventional ways. If I had known it had to be 70% before we started, then maybe we would have tried to run something a little bit different. At least it made a ballot question, and it made people make those decisions.

People vote for different reasons, and sometimes they vote contra to a position or a person. A lot of times they vote against as much as they vote for. That's where a platform has things like, "Let's do certain reforms and review it". Some people who voted for you may not have voted for that particular piece in the platform. That's why you need to go back and get the reaffirmation, especially if you're doing something as grandiose as going away from first past the post. You have to go back and check, because that's how you elect your governments. If a government makes a decision that disadvantages other parties, maybe that's when you look at why certain parties are pushing for this, because it will be an advantage to them. That can be misconstrued as rigging the voting system.

That's where you need to have clear and concise information to go back to the people and say, "We're going to change it in this manner. Do you agree with that way to form your next government?"

• (1845)

The Chair: We're going to have to go to Ms. May now.

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

Thank you to our witnesses.

I'll start with you, Brigadier-General Corbould. Do you have any statistics on what the participation rate was for members of the armed forces in the election, given the difficulties you describe that are certainly well known?

By the way, you should know that Sherry Romanado sticks up for the armed forces every chance she gets. I'm just putting that in; she wants to have more kids in the armed forces because it's more votes for her.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Elizabeth May: No, no, that's not why.

How many members of our armed forces did manage to vote in the election? Is that a figure we know?

BGen Gordon Dave Corbould: Yes, ma'am. Using the special voting stations, it was 29,247. What we don't know is how many individuals used their local polling station based on their statement of ordinary residence. That's an individual choice made by the member.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Thank you.

I want to turn to Wanda and Wade from CARP. By the way, you do have a very impressive organization on so many issues. You do provide real service to parliamentarians in giving us good data.

In looking at the high proportion of your membership that's familiar with issues of electoral reform, did you have any way of double-checking that in the questions you asked them? Were they self-identified as well informed? Did you test that in any way by asking them specific questions? I think it was Forum Research that told us that of the general population across Canada, only 40% of Canadians know that we currently use first past the post.

Mr. Wade Poziomka: In this particular survey, we gave lots of opportunities for comments. We were looking for qualitative response, as well as just ticking off boxes, because we wanted to test that. We also wanted to get something that we may have missed when we brought their views here to you today. What we also did at the outset of our survey was to give a brief description of the different options available. Some of our members said they were informed because of what we gave to them. It was minimal, but there was some information there on the various systems. I think when our members say they're informed, generally they are somewhat informed the way they tell us.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I also represent the riding of Saanich—Gulf Islands, which I think has the fifth-highest proportion of seniors within the riding. I have a lot of CARP members, and they're always extremely well informed.

Did you have any other specific sense of why the majority of those who understood the choices for electoral reform trended towards supporting proportional representation? Was there any way to figure out what their reasons were, what values they were attaching to that choice, when they gave you the answers they gave you?

Mr. Wade Poziomka: I think it was just to have their vote count. We found in the survey that our members were split on a lot of the key issues. It wasn't very close, but there were some views far to one side and some far to the other, so we had a lot of divergent views. Having their vote matter, I think, was one of the key views that we heard repeatedly on the pro-proportional representation side—and, of course, that the government had campaigned on that, so they were questioning why this was at issue now. We saw that as well.

Ms. Elizabeth May: With the time I have, I'll turn to Mr. Fitch.

I hope you won't mind, because I don't think you intended, by your turn of phrase that people own democracy, politicians don't own democracy.... I've searched in my mind as to whether I've ever heard anyone refer to democracy as a commodity before. I don't think you intended to offend me, but I was offended.

Aristotle said, "If liberty and equality, as is thought by some are chiefly to be found in democracy, they will be best attained when all persons alike share in the government to the utmost." I think we could distill this in what Abraham Lincoln said, that government should be "of the people, by the people, for the people". He didn't say "owned by the people". I see democracy in a much more relational aspect, much more participatory, much more active. Really, the point of democracy is to ensure that the will of the people is effected by those whom they elect.

If you became premier of New Brunswick, would you make every decision by referendum? Which ones would you think you needed a referendum on, and when would you trust that the will of legislature was okay?

• (1850)

Mr. R. Bruce Fitch: If I offended you, I didn't mean to. The point I was trying to make was that if politicians think they can make a unilateral decision that could determine the outcome of the next election to their favour forever and ever, that's where the people need to have a say. That again is the point at which, if you're leaving a method of voting, a method of creating governments, that has been fundamental and used for many years, you should have affirmation from the people, saying, yes, this is what we wanted, when we understood what that plank in the platform was.

Personally, I'll never be the premier of the Province of New Brunswick, so I won't get it past that, but it is when we come to things as important as how we elect our government that you need to have the people's reaffirmation on it. This is why I would have a referendum.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I think I'm out of time, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: No, you have about a minute.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Oh, good. My clock was too fast.

I would then ask whether, for instance, when the previous government under Stephen Harper decided to change the Elections Canada rules such that the longer the election campaign took, the more money accrued to all parties.... That was a specific benefit to one party, but it was applied equally to all parties. The timing of that election period, being 11 weeks, was part of the Fair Elections Act changes. Those changes weren't taken to the people. When Manitoba, or in the past New Brunswick, had multi-member ridings, those provisions were never taken to a referendum.

We've changed a lot of things about elections acts. We've changed our voting before; we've had the extension of the vote to women, to ethnic minorities, to first nations. We've never held referenda on those. I know the argument can be made, and Mr. Reid makes it well, but there's no constitutional requirement for a referendum, and we have changed our voting system in Canada in the past without resorting to referenda.

Is that the only category of decisions that you think have to go to the people before a legislator makes a decision: when it's a clear parliamentary decision to be made?

The Chair: Be brief, please.

Mr. R. Bruce Fitch: I can speak to what goes on in New Brunswick, where we've used referendums in different parts. We've gone to the people on amalgamations of communities, which indirectly determine how people will vote to be represented by the people who spend their tax dollars. Some have said yes. Some have said no, they wanted to stay where they were.

Again, it is one of those points of debate. There are some people who say that there needs to be that ask and others who say that there shouldn't be. That's where I make that point.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. DeCoursey.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Fredericton, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

First of all, to our Brigadier-General and Colonel, thanks very much for being here. I have the pleasure of serving the riding where Base Gagetown is located, so I'm certainly aware of the issues of exercising franchise for women and men who serve in uniform. I appreciate your concerns that were brought here today. This committee and other committees of the House will have the opportunity to discuss in depth how we can better assure that military members are able to vote.

To Mr. Fitch, thanks very much, and let me congratulate you on the two years you served as interim leader for the Progressive Conservatives in the province. I wish you and your new leader, Blaine Higgs, all the best of luck as the House returns into session next week. However, I would be a bit loath to compare this process here to the one in New Brunswick. Here we had a government that committed to engaging with Canadians and to working with all the parties. You see all the parties assembled around here coming to some form of agreement on what we can offer to Parliament. In the situation in New Brunswick, unfortunately, both opposition parties ran away from a process proposed by the government. All the same, I know there will be robust debate going on at home, and I certainly look forward to seeing how that turns out.

Mr. Dias, perhaps I can return to some of your testimony, particularly around the polls that were commissioned recently and how we read those. I've heard testimony from certain people in front of this committee to the effect that clearly there's a consensus and absolutely people want this. The testimony indicates that there's an interest in electoral reform, and we would be naive and ignorant to suggest otherwise. At the same time, I go to the Ekos poll, and I read the statement that respondents were asked to respond on a sliding scale of one to seven. The first statement was: "Electoral reform is something the Liberal Party campaigned on, so they should deliver on this promise." On that, 59% agreed, with either five, six, or seven out of seven. Now, that hardly surprises me, hardly at all, that people think the government should fulfill its promises.

The second statement was: "Electoral reform is too important to be rushed; the process should be slowed down and subjected to more public consultations." There were 57% of respondents, either five, six, or seven out of seven, who agreed.

The third question was: "Electoral reform is crucially important and should not be delayed for another election cycle." There were 47%, five, six, or seven out of seven, who agreed.

It tells us that there is a variety of opinions on how this issue should be addressed. Then, when we go to the preferred form of electoral reform, we have 43% of respondents suggesting that proportional representation is the best option for Canada; 29% for first past the post; and 26% for preferential ballot, which leads me to think, again, that there's a diffuse and diverse view of exactly how this issue should be addressed.

Is it not more fair to say that we need to address this with some level of modesty, work together across partisan lines, understanding that there's no clear consensus on how we should move forward on this issue, and do our best, in a smart, possibly incremental way, to find a solution and bring Canadians on board?

• (1855)

Mr. Jerome Dias: Which of the nine statements would you like me to deal with first?

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: I can address the Forum poll that said only 48% of Canadians think we should move forward with electoral reform. There is a variety of opinion out here. I think it's dangerous for us to move forward thinking that clearly there's a consensus in any one direction. We need to understand that there's a diversity of views, and address that with some level of modesty.

Mr. Jerome Dias: There's a difference between clear consensus and unanimous consent. First of all, you're never going to find unanimous agreement on this issue. If we found unanimous agreement on this issue, then I would suggest we'd be starring in the next version of *Mission: Impossible*.

This is an important subject, and I agree, nobody should rush it. I believe there has to be broad-based consultation. I would suggest that the government has done that. But I would suggest that it takes real guts and ownership for a government that benefited by first past the post to have the courage to change it because they said that was part of their platform. To me, that is something Canadians will understand and would respect.

Do we need to have broad-based consultation? Yes, I think there's a check mark. Do we need to have—what's your terminology—clear consensus? I think you do. I think four of the five parties are expecting some type of a change, so if you take a look at the elected parliamentarians, I would suggest that you have a clear consensus.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: A clear consensus to go exactly where and do exactly what?

Mr. Jerome Dias: The consensus is to eliminate first past the post. We would trust those on the committee to make the recommendation on the best way to proceed.

The Chair: Mr. Lupia seems to want to jump in, Mr. DeCourcey.

Do you want to jump in, Professor Lupia?

Dr. Arthur Lupia: No.

The Chair: Oh, okay.

I'm sorry, Mr. DeCourcey, to interrupt you. We'll give you a bit more time there.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: I appreciate the comments. I think it's dangerous for us to think that there is any one view guiding us in one particular direction on this issue. Our friends from CARP reminded us that there perhaps is no consensus on how we should move forward, so we need to take care to deliberate intelligently as a committee, put the sloganeering aside, and come to a recommendation or a set of recommendations that will be palatable to the largest possible number of Canadians.

• (1900)

Mr. R. Bruce Fitch: Can I just jump in for a minute?

The Chair: You can have maybe 25 seconds.

Mr. R. Bruce Fitch: When we talked about electoral reform in New Brunswick, I said to the premier at the time that we shouldn't put closure on the legislature that Friday but come back and debate electoral reform on the Tuesday. However, they let the motion die on the order paper. They went and did something else and brought closure for the summer.

Thanks.

The Chair: Mr. Reid, do you want to split with Mr. Richards?

Mr. Scott Reid: Please, if possible.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to return to Professor Lupia for a moment, if I could. One of the features of referendum campaigns in the United States, and I would suggest also of election campaigns, is that there is much more substantial spending on the part of the various participants than is the case here in Canada.

I noticed in one of your papers you make reference to the signature-gathering component of an initiative in California typically amounting to around \$1 million just for that part of the campaign. By the way, this is the paper I referred to earlier, the one you co-authored with Matsusaka. You pointed out that when they are very substantially funded, a “no” campaign can develop. You don't use the term unfair advantage, but they can develop an advantage that is pretty substantial.

On page 471 of your paper you state:

Voters prefer to stick with policies whose consequences they have experienced, namely the policies that continue when initiatives lose, rather than risk voting for a new initiative whose consequences might be very bad. Thus, spending vast sums of money to defeat an initiative may make voters sufficiently confused and uncertain that they vote against it.

You then go on to point out that there's no similar advantage to spending vast amounts of money in favour of an initiative, which would be relevant, I guess, if you're talking about initiatives on things like changes to the insurance industry, etc.

Can you give me an idea of the kinds of dollars you're talking about? Let's use California because it is a jurisdiction the size of Canada with the same population as we have, more or less. What kinds of dollars would we be talking about on the “no” side when they've been successful in stopping an initiative?

Dr. Arthur Lupia: As a general matter, you can have referenda where there's nothing spent, then you can have huge amounts spent. In the insurance case that you referenced earlier, that was amazing, because there were five different referenda to reform the insurance industry on the ballot in one state, in California, and the amount of money spent for and against those five referenda was more money than was spent in the presidential election nationally that was happening at the same time, the hard money. There were some soft-money expenditures, but it was comparable, so you had a debate in one. This was the late 1980s, so you had maybe \$85 million spent by both sides in the presidential campaigns in the hard money, and \$88 million spent on these five initiatives. You can, on certain initiatives have, let's say, \$100 million spent.

You know, there has been innovation in the U.S. about presidential campaigns, so now they're spending \$1 billion. Obama spent over \$1 billion on both of his. There are no referendum campaigns getting anywhere close to that, but you can get in the \$150-million to \$200-million range at the top end.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

I raise that because I think people, like my colleague Mr. Cullen, referring to the impact that money can have on campaigns, may not be aware of the vast difference in the dollars that are likely to be spent here in Canada, should we have a referendum on electoral reform, on the pro or con side.

This is why I'm asking this question. We also, unlike the United States, have the capacity to amend our referendum law to reflect the rules we have in our election law, which places very strict limits. You can't go over, for example, a \$1,500 Canadian donation to any party in an election. One could put similar restrictions. Indeed, they exist in some provincial legislation. We would be talking about numbers that are, I would think.... Well, I shouldn't put an exact number. They would be a small fraction of what they are in the States.

In that kind of environment, is the ground, pro and con, levelled? It must be to some degree, but how much does that level the playing field?

● (1905)

Dr. Arthur Lupia: In terms of campaigning, the “no” campaign always has the advantage if they can make their case well, because if you vote no, you continue with something known. At the time of the campaign, “yes” is an imaginary thing. Yes is this virtual world, this thing that has to be described to you. No one has lived it before. So the *modus operandi* for a no campaign is to find a worst-case scenario and run with it. It's very easy to do that if you know what scares voters.

The yes campaign has to find a simple, urgent, and direct message to try to relate it to people's lives. It can be done, but it's harder. I would say that, if two sides are given equal amounts of money, the no side still has the advantage because it's just built in. It is advocating for something that people have lived through, while the yes side is advocating for something that, at least at the moment, people can only imagine.

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

I'll let Mr. Richards have the remaining time.

The Chair: He has a minute and a half.

Mr. Scott Reid: Oh.

Sorry about that, Blake.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): That's okay: not a problem. I'm a generous guy, what can I say?

You'll all have to be brief with your responses, I suppose, but I want to ask this of each of you. Some of you've alluded to it and/or mentioned it. I just want to see the positions that any of the organizations would have with regard to online voting and mandatory voting. I know I heard some allusion to it from some, but we haven't really got positions from anyone specifically.

I don't know if you want to start, Mr. Fitch, and then we'll work our way across.

Mr. R. Bruce Fitch: The online voting is, I can imagine, something that will eventually come. I made note of the computer glitches we had when we used modern technology in the last election. We didn't have the results until the next day on some of these. What was supposed to be an advancement turned out to be a real concern, because people were concerned that there was a rigging or that there was a problem with the machinery. Again, security's always an issue when you talk about online.

As to mandatory voting, people have rights and freedoms to choose to vote or not to vote. That's why, again, if we force them to vote, it starts moving into being heavy-handed and takes away that freedom of choice that we all find so important.

The Chair: Be very brief, please. We've gone way over time here.

Ms. Wanda Morris: With respect to online voting, if we look at our members' behaviour in other areas, surprising numbers of seniors, and particularly elderly seniors, are not online, do not have access to computers, and are not comfortable with an electronic environment. Even those who are online are reluctant to make important transactions online. For example, many of them refuse to pay their CARP membership electronically—and it's such good value.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Wanda Morris: With respect to mandatory voting, we had a few comments on that, but nothing that I feel I could share.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll have to now move to Mr. Aldag, please.

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): It will be Ruby first.

The Chair: Okay.

Go ahead, Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Thank you to all the witnesses who are here today.

I've never actually, in all the months we've been doing this, asked a lot of questions about referendums, but you brought up some interesting points, Professor Lupia, so I want to get your opinion on this. You have quite a lot of states using an instant run-off method in the United States currently. In any of these states, have there been any local referendums held before the change to the system? We haven't heard all that much about the United States, since we've been comparing ourselves to other parliamentary countries.

If you could shed some light on that for me, that would be great.

Dr. Arthur Lupia: The true answer to your question is that I don't know, just because of the thousands of local jurisdictions we have. I don't know about all of them. I know that at the state level, there is a tendency, in half of the states, if you want to amend the state constitution, to go through a referendum. These types of questions would often be constitutional rather than statutory. It would be normal in half of the states to go through this process. They tend to be the western states. The older states do not have the referendum process for this purpose and they could make these types of decisions just through legislative action.

I'm sorry; there's variance at the state level. It's very decentralized. The Constitution of the U.S. gives very few instructions. It leaves it to the states to decide the manner in which they decide these things.

• (1910)

Ms. Ruby Sahota: A whole bunch of states, from what I can see currently, are using this alternative voting system now, but you haven't heard of any referendums at the state level regarding this. Is that correct?

Dr. Arthur Lupia: At the local level this is happening; at the state level—

Ms. Ruby Sahota: At the municipal level: okay.

Dr. Arthur Lupia: We have tens of thousands of municipal governments. I'm just not familiar with all of them.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Okay.

We've been discussing referendums quite a lot on this committee and whether or not a referendum is necessary to give this scale of reform legitimacy. We are also considering the timing of a referendum. There has been some discussion about whether you have the referendum up front or whether you have it one or two election cycles after; even three has been suggested. You give the voters an opportunity to not prejudice the system but to have been through the system and then decide on whether it produces better results or not.

Have you looked into that aspect of referendum at all? What are your opinions on it?

Dr. Arthur Lupia: Worldwide, most referenda are one-off affairs. You announce a certain date, you have a vote, and then that's the end of it. In some cases, people will revisit it later on, but it's not a planned revisitation.

In some U.S. states, however, including Massachusetts and some of the older states, for some types of referenda you have two votes and you need a majority over successive elections. In Massachusetts, for a constitutional amendment, let's say you and I wrote a referendum and it got on the ballot. We'd have to get a majority in 2018 and then a majority again in 2020. That's I think for a small set of constitutional....

That's the type of thing where it's prolonged, but worldwide typically you announce a single date and then you have the vote at that time.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I'm not saying you would need to have it up front and then revisit it once again later, although you could do that as an option, but how about just changing the system and then having the referendum after the fact?

Dr. Arthur Lupia: I'm not sure I understand the question, sorry.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Let's say the government were to put this to the legislature, it was voted on, we found legitimacy in that, we went ahead and made the reforms needed, and then, in order to really legitimize the process, we put it to the people after an election process cycle had taken place, whether one election cycle or two, and then the referendum were to occur.

Dr. Arthur Lupia: There's no precedent for that in the United States, but worldwide there are different types of referenda. The situation you've described is quite rare, that you enact the change and then ask for a vote later. What's more common is that you would have an advisory referendum. First you say that you're going to put this out to a vote, but we're not going to implement it yet and it's not going to count; we just want to get a sense of the people. That's a little more common as an alternative to the normal referenda where you vote on it and they implement it.

The case that you've described happens, but it's pretty rare. Once governments invest in a change like this, typically there's a reticence to put it out there and change it. It has happened, but it's really rare.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you.

Do I have a little bit more time, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have about a minute and a half.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Perfect.

My next question is for you, Brigadier-General Corbould. I know you had suggested in your introduction some of the challenges that the armed forces will face when it comes to voting. You mentioned some of them, but I think you ran out of time and you said that in the question period you would revisit the other challenges that you think we can accommodate or look to change.

• (1915)

BGen Gordon Dave Corbould: I'll hand it over to Colonel Joshi, who monitored the last election.

Col Vihar Joshi: One set of challenges we have is time periods. Our military vote period is from day 14 before the election to day nine. We have to get the material out in time. On deployed operations we have operations going on all around the world, and it's a challenge to ensure that Elections Canada and we can get the elections material to the members in time, and to get the materials back. That's a time period challenge.

On exercises, members are not always near the military polling stations. We have to make sure that we can get the polling station near our members during the time period. Sometimes we have to ask for variances from the time period to allow the vote to happen a little bit before, or a little bit after, the military period. Or on the hours of the polling stations, people work on shifts and different routines, so we have to make sure that the polling stations are open long enough for people to vote.

Other challenges we might have include ships at sea. We almost had this time a submarine under water during the election period. It's hard to get the information to a submarine when it's under water. So to try to plan that, that the exercises or the deployments happen around that election period, is another challenge we have to deal with.

Also, in our SOR process, statement of ordinary residence process, it changes. People might only realize that they wish to change their statement of ordinary residence once the writ is dropped, but of course it can't be effective until 14 days after the election is completed.

Those are very briefly some of the challenges we face.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Sansoucy, you have the floor.

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

My thanks to all the witnesses and to Ms. Morris in particular. This is the second time today that I have had the opportunity to hear from her as a witness before a House of Commons committee.

My first question is for you Ms. Morris and your colleague.

In addition to the fact that you are representing 300,000 members in 50 sections, you are also representing the citizens with the highest rate of participation in elections and who have been voting for the

longest time. So we might expect them to want to keep the status quo. However, the majority of your members want the system to be reformed. They are very engaged in the electoral reform process.

You said that the first thing that motivates them is the fact that every vote should count. Beyond that, what compels them to support the electoral reform?

[English]

Ms. Wanda Morris: We'll review some more of the comments we received.

[Translation]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: I can ask another question while you are looking for the answer.

I will turn to Dr. Lupia.

You said that, in the event of a referendum, the option of the status quo has an advantage given that it is easier to campaign against change. Campaigning for change means convincing people that the future will be brighter.

In the case before us, we are talking about electoral reform. We could actually conclude that the status quo is not an option in a reform. Does that mean that we can avoid the trap you have identified by giving people the choice between two new electoral systems?

[English]

Dr. Arthur Lupia: That's a non-traditional referendum. Usually there's one proposal put forward and people vote yes or no. If that wasn't on the table, then the status quo...that dynamic would not be present. Then it would be more like a candidate campaign, where you have ostensibly two new people.

[Translation]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Thank you.

Ms. Morris, have you found an answer to my question?

[English]

Ms. Wanda Morris: We've already shared a couple of the comments. I think the other one that's come through is just a concern that a relatively small percentage of electors would be able to vote for and elect a majority government.

[Translation]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Thank you.

My last questions are for Mr. Dias.

It is very interesting that you are sharing the report on the consultations you have held for the study of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform. Since those consultations were held with members of your union, it is interesting that you are able to identify the answers that I myself was not able to identify in our own consultation. For instance, you can specify that such and such a comment was made by a young person and that a lot of people who said they felt their vote doesn't matter or count were young workers.

As you pointed out, electoral reforms are not very common in the history of democracies, and it may be a while before the next opportunity to have a reform.

In your report on the consultations, you are saying that the groups that feel excluded from the electoral system are indigenous people, working class people, people of colour, immigrants, young people, homeless people, women, people with disabilities and seniors or folks receiving care. Could you elaborate on the importance of electoral reform for working class people? Why is it important to talk about those excluded from the current electoral system, not just the workers?

• (1920)

[English]

Mr. Jerome Dias: It's because I think working-class people understand that politics affects everything—the economy, decisions made by governments. I think we're at a time when people want more say, or they want to be listened to. I think you will find that in our consultation with our members, we did more than just meet with a national executive board, of whom 19 out of 25 are rank-and-file, shop-floor workplace, and then also have the debate at our convention. We also had numerous public forums internally. In Port Elgin we have an education centre, where we had more than 400 members talking about electoral reform. We have youth committees, we have workers with disabilities committees, we have aboriginal and workers of colour committees.

So we have had broad-based consultations with our members. The dialogue questions were actually drawn from “Your guide to hosting a successful dialogue on Canadian federal electoral reform”, which of course was put out by the government. It really is about a broad-based understanding that politics affects everything, such as the issue of the environment. We could start to walk through a whole host of initiatives. Politics is important, and I think people want to participate in it.

[Translation]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Okay.

So you are saying that the people in those groups themselves reported that they felt excluded from the system. It's not the workers who said that those groups of people felt excluded. The groups themselves confirmed that they felt excluded from the current system. Have I understood correctly?

[English]

Mr. Jerome Dias: Yes.

[Translation]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Okay.

The feeling of not being represented by the current system came up a lot in the comments that you have shared with us. What changes should be made first to ensure that your union members are well represented?

[English]

Mr. Jerome Dias: You know, it's interesting. Our members represent the communities. If I take a look at a breakdown of our membership for the purpose of discussions, I will have many who will come to a monthly union meeting, and many won't participate

because of family obligations or whatever; however, we also have other members who will participate on environment committees or who will participate in social events. People have different interests, but we come together as a collective. That's what the labour movement is about, a coming together of collectives.

So people will have different ideas, but people just want to be heard. People want to participate. They might not want to participate by coming to a membership meeting, but boy, they're going to come to a ratification meeting, or they're going to go to a proposal meeting. People want to make sure they're heard.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Rayes, the floor is yours.

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

My first question is for you, Professor Lupia.

Today, a journalist said that the Liberal government had 350 election platform promises. That number in addition to hundreds of electoral promises made by the two other parties that were also in favour of changing the voting system.

Mr. Dias said that 70% of people voted for a change because the previous government had been in power for almost 10 years. He was not entirely wrong, although I wouldn't say 70% myself.

Based on your experience, would you say that the government has a clear mandate to change the voting system without necessarily having to consult the people?

• (1925)

[English]

Dr. Arthur Lupia: I'll give a blunt answer. The first answer is that I don't know, because to answer that question I would want to get high-quality survey data to try to find out why different people voted for things.

As a technical matter, when we vote for candidates in an election, it's not like going inside the grocery store. It's like going to the front of the grocery store and someone hands you a basketful of fruit, vegetables, cereal, and whatnot and somebody else has a different basket. If you and I were going into the store, we might just pick our favourite types of food. But this would be like going to the supermarket and two people have already prepared a basket and we have to pick one.

In an election, it's very difficult to say that the reason the electorate chose a particular candidate is that they had a strong feeling about a particular issue. Some people may have felt very strongly about change, but other people may have felt strongly about the economy or inequality or social issues or things of that nature. As a general matter, it's hard to find one issue that is the reason a majority cast a vote. For me, it's impossible to do that without data.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes: I think you answered my question indirectly. Thank you.

Mr. Dias, Ms. Morris, Mr. Poziomka, I have not participated in all the meetings, but I think I participated in more than two-thirds of the meetings that witnesses attended. But all the groups that were clearly in favour of changing the voting system and, in almost all cases, of establishing a proportional voting system, were clearly opposed to a referendum. They argued that their members were clearly in favour of a change and that, as a result, a referendum was not necessary. They cited polls to justify their position.

Over the past few months, almost all the polls in which Canadians were asked whether or not they were in favour of a referendum on this issue have shown that many of them were in favour. It was more than 50% in all cases.

Why would all the surveys of the organizations you have cited provide a valid justification, but not those conducted with the general public?

[English]

Ms. Wanda Morris: Our surveys are not statistically significant, and we don't pretend to say that they reflect the views of the entire population. We simply poll all our members and invite them all to poll, and depending on the topic and their level of interest, we'll see somewhere between 2,000 and 10,000 respondents. I'm sharing with you what our members said, not something reflective of the larger electorate.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Surveys based on scientific statistics show us that the majority of Canadians are in favour of a referendum.

Under those circumstances, would you be in favour of the idea of polling the public once the government submits a voting system proposal to determine whether or not they want to see that voting system adopted?

As elected officials, why should we not consider those surveys, which are scientific, not solely based on the opinion of a group of people?

• (1930)

[English]

Ms. Wanda Morris: Just to be clear, our poll actually did support a referendum, but it was 53% in favour of a referendum.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes: So, as an organization, would you be in favour of that?

[English]

Ms. Wanda Morris: As an organization, I don't think that's a strong enough consensus to strike a position. We're here really to share the views of our members, not to advocate for a particular position.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Thank you very much.

Mr. Dias, I'm sure you will be pleased to answer that question.

[English]

Mr. Jerome Dias: It would be my pleasure.

If we started to do everything by referendum, my guess is that Bill C-51 probably would not have been accepted by Canadians. If we had a referendum on omnibus Bill C-4—about this thick—I can only guess that it probably would have gone down.

The bottom line is that those who talk about referendums today usually are those who never held them when they were in power, so I find it somewhat hypocritical.

Here's how Canadians are looking at it. It depends on the question and how you ask the question. If you asked a Canadian—excuse me, let me finish—

The Chair: Mr. Dias, typically I give the member the discretion to manage the flow of the exchange, if that's all right. But I think we got your point.

Mr. Jerome Dias: It sounded like a referendum question.

The Chair: We got your point on the issue.

[Translation]

Mr. Rayes, you may continue.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Mr. Dias, let me ask you my question again in the hope of receiving an answer.

Surveys have been conducted. In all the surveys conducted in the past year asking citizens whether they are in favour of a referendum, the answer is clearly “yes” for more than 50%. The number is not close to 50% in the polls for your members and organization, but it is for the entire Canadian population.

Do you recognize that those surveys are valid, yes or no? That's the question I'm asking you.

[English]

Mr. Jerome Dias: I recognize that there are valid surveys and polls, too, that say that people want electoral reform. They want to get rid of first past the post. Which poll do you want to use for your benefit? I guess that is part of the discussion.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Thank you.

The Chair: We will wrap up this period of questions with Mr. Aldag.

[English]

Mr. John Aldag: Thank you.

I'll start my questions with the witnesses from the Canadian Armed Forces.

Looking through your brief, a line that caught my eye talks about the deadline for returning special ballots to Ottawa for counting. Counting must be taken into account. Do I read that you actually transfer the physical ballots to Ottawa for distribution, either if people vote at their home location or home base, as opposed to counting at whatever location? I am imagining a ship in the middle of the Atlantic or Pacific, or a base in Germany or elsewhere. How does that actually work? Are you actually having to allow that physical transfer of ballots and then get them distributed, or are they actually being counted and then phoned in?

BGen Gordon Dave Corbould: No, they're mailed in and counted by Elections Canada.

Mr. John Aldag: When you're talking about issues of timeliness and allowing members to maintain their knowledge as things evolve during the writ period, you would think that would be a real challenge.

BGen Gordon Dave Corbould: The more in advance, the larger the potential of missing out on key debates or issues, although there is a physical dimension to making sure that the ballots do get back to you.

Mr. John Aldag: Can you give us an idea what kind of time frame? What would be the furthest out you would need for some of the more extreme situations that your members would find themselves in?

Col Vihar Joshi: Currently it's up to nine days before. It depends on where the members are deployed. In Canada it's a little easier. It should be easier from the United States. It really depends on where the members are deployed.

Mr. John Aldag: Okay. That's really a dimension I hadn't even considered.

Second, I can't remember if this was in the brief or if you said this was under the Elections Act that gives this kind of flexibility to our military members—I can't remember if it was under the armed forces act or somewhere else—but does any of that apply to family members? What kinds of issues do family members who are deployed, perhaps internationally, face in trying to cast a ballot?

• (1935)

BGen Gordon Dave Corbould: They would fall under the same category as any Canadian citizen who is outside the country, depending on their time.

Mr. John Aldag: So it doesn't extend to—

BGen Gordon Dave Corbould: They are not associated with the division 2 under the Canada Elections Act.

Mr. John Aldag: Okay. Interesting.

Are there ever any identification issues for the address, or do the rules in place right now allow the members to be able to cast the ballot where they want? Do you have any identification issues that have posed barriers?

BGen Gordon Dave Corbould: I don't believe so....

Col Vihar Joshi: Most of the time it works in terms of members casting their vote where they wish to. As I mentioned earlier, if you change your statement of ordinary residence after the drop of the writ, then it's not effective. In that case, there is a difficulty in maybe voting in the riding where you feel a connection and where you're serving. Members are asked when joining the regular force to put down, on their statement of ordinary residence, their usual place of residence before enrolment, so that should be the accurate address.

Mr. John Aldag: Thank you. That was very enlightening information. Those are aspects of the challenges for our members who serve that I hadn't considered, so I appreciate that insight.

To the representatives from CARP, I'd like to get your thoughts on this. I think you said, or at least I wrote it down, that when you talked to your members, they had spoken about online and telephone

voting. Did that come up? I don't think we've talked about telephone voting. It's been about online. Did I hear that correctly?

Mr. Wade Poziomka: You did. In some of the qualitative feedback sections of our survey, telephone voting and online voting were both raised. I think it's especially important for our members who have mobility issues. Those were raised as potentials.

Mr. John Aldag: I imagine that would be like a phone tree system? Maybe you would have some sort of secure access, enter a pin, and then for the Liberal candidate, push 1, Conservative candidate, push 2. Is that what you're talking about?

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: What about rotary dialling?

Mr. John Aldag: Right: rotary or flip phone; but I'm sure your members are more advanced than that.

Mr. Wade Poziomka: We don't have information beyond them saying telephone and online. It's something we're not able to comment on, unfortunately.

Mr. John Aldag: Okay.

Mr. Fitch, in your opening comments, I heard you say you really are a supporter of a referendum for major changes. It's always that line, about what's major and what's minor. We've heard from some witnesses that it might be too much to be going to a wholesale change, so there is the idea of incrementalism.

I'm sitting here thinking, well, what if, for 2019, we introduced an element of proportionality. We've heard from many Canadians that they want to see some sort of PR system. What if we came up with x number of seats—it could be 10 seats, or 30—to introduce Canadians to what this might look like and gain the support and the comfort with it? In your opinion, would that kind of incremental change require a referendum?

Mr. R. Bruce Fitch: It does cause a bit of problem in that now you're not electing everyone on an equal footing. You're going to now elect a certain portion of the MPs one way and then the others another way. So if you're staying with first past the post for 80% of the MPs, but then we're going to have this particular, if I understand you correctly, region or geographic region in the province or in the federation to do it another way—

Mr. John Aldag: I don't know what it would exactly look like, but yes, it could be at a provincial level. We heard that often there are disproportionate results. We heard when we were in the Atlantic provinces that, although we like to think that everyone there is a Liberal, as we saw in the results of the vote, there are probably a couple of supporters for another party. How would we allocate some sort of proportionality in that situation to deal with some of the skewed results we do get from our current first-past-the-post system?

Mr. R. Bruce Fitch: I could comment on the division of votes, and maybe you could have a convert here, and that means we'd have probably four seats now in New Brunswick on a federal level.

Again, the people spoke with authority to say, "We're not pleased with the present government, and we want the seats to go a certain way". They won it fair and square with first past the post. I wouldn't come off my position that if you delineate away from first past the post, then you should get the authority from the people through a referendum.

● (1940)

The Chair: Thank you.

That concludes our last meeting with witnesses.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Where's the champagne, Chair?

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: We've been in a listening mode, and now we have some heavy lifting ahead, but that will be informed and inspired by

the testimony we've heard this evening and over the course of the last few weeks.

I thank the witnesses for coming here in the evening to talk about electoral reform. I thank Professor Lupia for piping in through the use of modern technology. It was very interesting. We heard interesting insights from everyone.

We hope you'll read our report when it's published, and maybe even buy it for Christmas for somebody.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Are we going to sell it?

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I will just mention to the members that tomorrow we have an open-mike session here on the Hill. It was supposed to start at 6:30, but because of votes it will be delayed until about 7 o'clock, if we're lucky. We'll see everybody tomorrow night for some citizen input.

Thank you. The meeting is adjourned.

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