



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

45th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 012

Tuesday, November 18, 2025

Chair: Chris Bittle



Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

Tuesday, November 18, 2025

• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 12 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3), the committee is meeting for its study of challenges regarding special ballot voting.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application. I would ask all in-person participants to consult the guidelines written on the back of the cards on the table. These measures are in place to help audio and feedback incidents and to protect the health and safety of all participants, including our interpreters. There's a QR code. Check it out. There's a video for awareness on the subject.

I will make a few comments for the benefit of members. All comments should be addressed through the chair. Members on Zoom—there aren't any today—can raise their hand if they wish to speak.

A voice: One witness is on Zoom.

The Chair: Yes, but they're not a member. They don't get to raise their hand to speak. If we'd like to deal with some Standing Order changes or some committee business changes, I'd be happy to deal with those.

I would like to now welcome our witnesses for today's meeting. We have Lucia Kovacicova, assistant professor of political science, and Professor Lori Turnbull, faculty of management at—I am so sorry, but it just seems so weird to say—Dalhousie University.

Welcome. You each have five minutes to make your opening statement.

Since you're in the room, Professor Turnbull, we'll start with you.

Lori Turnbull (Professor, Faculty of Management, Dalhousie University, As an Individual): Thank you very much.

When I moved to Ottawa and had to say “Dalhousie”, I couldn't. I really had to adjust to that, because if I didn't, people didn't know what I was talking about.

Thank you very much for having me today. I really appreciate that. I'll keep my comments very brief.

We know what special ballots are, of course. They require the voter to write in the name of the candidate they wish to vote for. The final list of candidates is posted on the Elections Canada website three weeks before election day, so voters can refer to that list when they're figuring out who to vote for.

Those who wish to use special ballots to vote by mail must apply to do so by the Tuesday before the election. Eligible voters will be sent a kit in the mail and must have ballots returned by election day. Canadians living abroad who wish to vote this way must register with the international register of electors. Once this is done, these voters do not need to apply to vote via special ballot with each election. They will receive the kit automatically, as soon as the campaign commences.

Elections Canada has already spoken about the issues that arose in the 2025 election with respect to some special ballots not being counted properly and not being in the right place at the right time. They have indicated that they will take measures to address this to ensure that it doesn't happen in the future. Beyond that, I would say there are at least two main challenges that could arise with special ballots, one being about tight timing and the other around judgment with respect to vote counting.

On the issue of timing, it's important that those who wish to vote via special ballot apply to do so as soon as possible, regardless of where they live. It strikes me that waiting until the Tuesday before voting day is not very much time at all. You're throwing in a risk that you're not going to get your ballot back in time. We need to make sure that voters are aware of these timelines and that they leave enough days to get the whole process over with so that their ballot gets in on time. These days, as we know, mail service faces disruptions and interruptions. We don't necessarily count on that. It can have unintended consequences.

On the issue of vote counting, special ballots perhaps require more interpretation than normal ballots, particularly if there's any judgment regarding how to decipher the voter's handwriting and therefore who they really intend to vote for. That said, it didn't seem to be a problem in the by-election in Battle River—Crowfoot, where a special ballot was used to avoid a long ballot with over 200 candidates, so it might not be an issue at all.

I'll leave it there. I look forward to the discussion.

• (1105)

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Professor Kovacicova, you have five minutes, please.

Lucia Kovacicova (Assistant Professor of Political Science, As an Individual): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, everyone.

My name is Lucia Kovacicova. I am an assistant professor of political science at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I'm also a very recent addition to the growing Canadian diaspora, which includes more than four million Canadians at this point, or just over 11% of the population.

In 2024, as part of the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada, I compiled a report for the office of the honourable Senator Yuen Pau Woo entitled "Canadians Abroad: Overview of Recent Research and Implications for Public Policy". This report outlines a number of policy areas that affect Canadians abroad, including external voting—or special ballot voting, as it's sometimes known.

We know that citizens of advanced industrialized countries are very internationally minded. They often study, volunteer, work and live abroad. Canadians are no exception. As a result, countries have started to alter their policies to reflect these changes.

In 2019, the Supreme Court of Canada lifted the five-year residency limit on external voting, allowing all Canadians living abroad, no matter for how long, to cast a vote in federal elections. Other countries have done the same, including Great Britain, which passed its "votes for life" legislation in 2023.

There's also an appetite from the Canadian diaspora to participate in politics. According to Elections Canada, 57,440 Canadians abroad voted in the 45th general election in April. This is significantly more than the approximately 34,000 Canadians abroad who voted in 2019, or the approximately 11,000 who voted in 2015.

However, these statistics are consistently lower than the external voting numbers from other countries, including the United States. The real question is why. I believe one reason may be logistical. According to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, there are four types of external voting mechanisms: in-person voting, postal voting, voting by proxy and electronic voting. Of these, Canada employs only postal voting, which can lead to unreasonable timing constraints in cases of sudden elections and can be susceptible to postal disruptions.

I would like to echo the statements from the two witnesses who came to this committee on October 30. I also cast my vote in the latest federal election. The ballot came quite late in the process, and I decided to use a private carrier to try to return my ballot on time, paying \$120 in the process. That is a significant price tag that not many others would be willing to pay. I also have no way of knowing if my ballot arrived on time or if it was counted.

Yet another reason may be informational. Citizens always have a personal responsibility for knowing the details of elections and voting options. However, I would argue that Canadians living abroad face the additional challenge of not being part of informational

campaigns. For example, there is no centralized website dedicated to the Canadian diaspora and their questions. Unless individuals follow the Canadian government's social media accounts or visit special websites, they may not receive timely information about elections.

This informational disconnect only amplifies the responsibility of those living abroad to seek relevant and timely information about elections and also to familiarize themselves with the processes of voting, including adding their information to the international register of electors. We cannot discount the amount of time and energy it takes for a Canadian citizen living abroad to research their options and complete all required steps on time.

Another issue could be political. The diaspora is largely forgotten during political campaigns, and their concerns are not part of parties' agendas. To an extent this is completely understandable, but it creates a system where a segment of the voting population is not acknowledged. This can be contrasted with other systems where the overseas diaspora votes for their own member of parliament to represent their unique interests.

Lastly, I just want to highlight that this topic of the Canadian diaspora is relatively understudied, and existing data is often outdated. We would really benefit from having more research analyzing the diaspora, their views on external voting and their electoral preferences.

In conclusion, I believe there are parts of this debate that have relatively easy solutions. For example, consider alternative methods for external voting and create a centralized diaspora-focused website that could be a one-stop shop for all information the community might need.

• (1110)

Of course, the more difficult questions are structural. How can the democratic process be improved so that all Canadians who want to vote can do so, and how can Canada better shape its relationship with the diaspora?

Thank you so much.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll now turn to questions. We'll go first to the Conservatives with Mr. Cooper for six minutes, please.

Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Sturgeon River, CPC): Thank you to the witnesses.

Welcome back, Professor Turnbull. I'll turn to you.

You cited some logistical challenges with regard to special ballot voting for Canadians living abroad. I would submit that there may be another issue, which is a gap, and I'd be interested in your thoughts on that as it pertains to the application process.

The riding in which a Canadian living abroad votes is determined based on their last address before leaving Canada. The application for registration for Canadians living abroad requires proof of identity to establish Canadian citizenship, but nowhere in the application does it require a prospective elector to provide proof of their last place of residence in Canada.

Would you agree that the application process should be amended to require some form of proof of the last place of residence?

Lori Turnbull: I don't know why it wouldn't. I don't see how that would make it any more difficult, because the value is that you want to make sure Canadian citizens can vote. You don't want to do anything that would make it more difficult for someone who's eligible to have access to the ballot. If someone had recently moved outside the country, they might have readily available proof of where they last lived in Canada, but if they had moved a while ago, it might be harder for them to find that.

In the case of a student living with their parents, they wouldn't have a deed with their name on the house, so they might need to have proof. What would they provide as proof to show that they lived in Canada if there were no bills in their name?

We'd have to think through the logistics to make sure that nobody was denied the right, but apart from that, I don't see why we wouldn't require proof.

Michael Cooper: I certainly take your point that there could be some challenges for Canadians who may not have lived in Canada for some time, but every elector who lives and votes in Canada has to provide either one piece of ID with their address or two pieces of ID with at least one that shows their address, or they must have someone vouch for them who must establish their address.

There seems to be a bit of inconsistency. I guess if you can't establish proof of your last place of residence, what is there to say there aren't electors who are, for example, randomly selecting ridings, strategically selecting ridings or selecting ridings for any number of reasons? That would seem to me to be a gap. There needs to be some sort of verification, because by law, it's not as if a Canadian living abroad can vote in any riding. By law, they can only vote in the riding they last had residence in.

Lori Turnbull: I agree with you. It seems like it's matching the requirements that would apply to someone who lives in Canada, making them basically the same for someone who lives outside Canada.

I remember it being part of the public discussion 10 years ago when this was going through the court system, and maybe fewer years ago than that. People were talking about where expats would vote, and it wasn't necessarily obvious. I remember this coming up: What if everybody wanted to vote in former prime minister Trudeau's riding because they knew his name and wanted to cast a ballot for him? There were policy discussions about the appropriate

place to cast a ballot, especially if you haven't lived here for a long time.

I think you're right. I would agree with you.

Michael Cooper: Thank you for that.

Professor Kovacicova, is it correct that over the past 20 years, there has been a significant increase in voter participation by Canadians living abroad?

• (1115)

Lucia Kovacicova: Yes. In terms of actual numbers, more Canadians abroad vote in federal elections. I'm sure the 2019 Supreme Court ruling has quite a bit to do with that as well.

In terms of the percentage of people who request a ballot and actually cast it, the percentage has slowly gone down. I believe that in 2015, the percentage of people who requested a ballot and then cast a vote from abroad was 69%. That percentage has slowly gone down to I believe 52% as of 2025.

Michael Cooper: Yes, but it has significantly gone up since 2004, when I thought there was something in the order of 7,000 or 9,000 ballots cast. It was in the order of tens of thousands before the Supreme Court decision.

Lucia Kovacicova: Yes, I believe that in 2004 the number was around 10,000—it was 9,000 plus. Of course, we have to account for the fact that the number of Canadians living abroad is growing.

Over time, we have seen more and more Canadians vote, but if you look at the final number from the last election, which is 57,000 Canadians, it really depends on how you look at that. That number could be quite small when you look at the fact that over four million Canadians live abroad. It really depends on what you compare it to. Certainly, in terms of external votes cast by other nationals, Canadians abroad vote less than those in the United States, for example.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Mr. Cooper.

We'll now turn to Madam Kayabaga for the Liberal Party for six minutes, please.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Welcome, Lori Turnbull and Dr. Kovacicova—I hope I said your name correctly.

Dr. Kovacicova, I want to go to you. You talked about how in this election, you mailed in your ballot. You got it a bit late and then used a private courier to make sure your ballot arrived on time.

Can you, if you are able to, share the associated costs of doing that?

Lucia Kovacikova: Yes. I really wanted to make sure it would get back to Canada overnight. That was, of course, my personal choice. Time was running out, and the deadline was fast approaching. I spent \$120 to send my ballot.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: Do you think there's an appetite from Canadians abroad to go extra lengths to make sure their ballot arrives on time? What reforms do you think need to be in place to ensure that ballots actually return on time without an extra associated cost to that?

I'll start with you, Ms. Kovacikova, and then we'll go to Ms. Turnbull after.

Lucia Kovacikova: My name is very long. I'm sorry about that, everyone.

I believe there is a relatively easy fix. Dr. Turnbull mentioned that there are certain time constraints in place at the moment. For example, if there was a way—as is the case for U.S. citizens who vote from abroad—to print out a ballot and send it, that would significantly reduce the amount of time it would need to spend going through the postal service, both there and back.

Do I think there is an appetite from Canadians living abroad to pay an additional cost to cast their ballot? I would say it really depends on the individual. I cannot imagine that a lot of people would be willing to pay \$120 to cast a ballot. I am a political science professor, so I feel like I'm a very special case. I think it's very important for me to cast a ballot.

I want to very quickly mention the issue that, because we have a first-past-the-post system, it is pretty easy to determine how some ridings will go. I, myself, happen to be voting in a riding that is pretty much decided, so there is a question of whether my vote even matters. If I know how the riding is going to go, perhaps I didn't have to spend \$120, but it was my personal choice to do so.

In the case of other Canadians who are seeing this—they see the polling and know that their riding is going to go one way or the other—they might not feel the need to even cast a ballot. It might be prohibitive for them when they know they might have to pay additional costs to get it in on time.

• (1120)

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: Thank you.

Dr. Turnbull, are there reforms that you think would aid in this situation? Obviously, the voter turnout for Canadians abroad is low. How can we encourage them to vote more?

Lori Turnbull: I think one thing we could think about doing, instead of having the requirement that we have the vote received by election day, is making sure that it is sent, posted and stamped by election day.

There's a Supreme Court case going on in the U.S. right now to that effect, because states, of course, make their own laws about this, and some states will allow a ballot that comes in late and some states won't. We're not the only one with this issue.

The same type of thing would apply to someone who lives in Canada and didn't get their vote in on time. We could think about having a bit of a grace period after election day just to make sure

that the costs, for example, could be defrayed and you don't have to take extra steps and pay extra costs to make sure your vote gets in on time.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: Can you explain why only 100,000 of the estimated three million Canadian voters who requested a ballot in the 2025 general election returned one? Only 100,000 were returned out of the three million that were requested. What do you think is the reason for that?

Lori Turnbull: There are probably a number of things. It's hard sometimes for people who are not right in the middle of it. They're not absorbing and receiving communications about the election all the time. For instance, for me anyway, when we're in Canada and we're in election time, there's coverage every day, and we're really focused on it. If you're living elsewhere, you won't get the same exposure to it, and you won't get the same reminders. You're certainly not going to get the same exposure to the candidates in your riding and the specific ways it's playing out in the riding where you'd vote, because you're not living in that community.

You can look at the writing on the wall and think that your vote is probably not going to make a difference in the riding. The same type of thing that could deter a Canadian living in Canada from voting could also apply in the international context in the sense that you might not feel that you're going to make a difference.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Welcome to the committee, Monsieur Deschênes.

[*Translation*]

You have the floor for six minutes.

Alexis Deschênes (Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Lis-tuguj, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, everyone. Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

I'm pleased to be with you to discuss this topic, which I find quite fascinating. From what I understand, we need to adapt to this Supreme Court ruling. Therefore, 3 million to 4 million expatriate Canadians may be voting in elections. I understand the imperative to foster voting rights.

Ms. Kovacikova, do you see any risks in opening this up?

[*English*]

Lucia Kovacikova: It is a really good question, because risks exist in any type of voting. Just like in Canada with voters who reside in Canada, some will vote and some will decide not to vote, especially people living abroad, as there are very different circumstances.

For example, if you are a student or are residing abroad temporarily, you might be much more connected to the political process and be much more willing to cast a ballot. Obviously, some Canadians have decided to permanently leave Canada, and they are perhaps not thinking of coming back and have started to live somewhere else. For them, voting might not be top of mind because they might be more engaged in their new country.

I think a portion of the population living abroad will always simply decide not to vote. I would say there is a very good chance that a big chunk of the population living abroad will simply decide not to vote, and that is their right.

In terms of risks, this is something that all modern democracies have to deal with. Is there a risk, for example, if we include being able to print a ballot instead of having it mailed? Are there some electronic risks? I am sure these kinds of things can be mediated through the process.

I don't necessarily see any sort of risk in trying to switch the location of where to vote, because it is tied to your last riding. Things like that are already prevented by the system itself, so I don't foresee any major risks, but we need to acknowledge that not every Canadian abroad will choose to vote.

• (1125)

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: Therefore, what you're saying is that people living abroad usually vote in the riding their last place of residence was in. However, isn't it a bit vague to do things that way? Does anything get verified? At the end of the day, isn't that an opportunity to shop around and choose whatever riding one wants?

[*English*]

Lucia Kovacikova: I'm sure Dr. Turnbull also has some statistics on this, but I believe your vote is determined based on your last residency, so you have to prove to Elections Canada where you last resided.

The real question and the problem here is with Canadians who have been away from Canada for a very long time. Obviously, there are those like me who have been abroad for a short amount of time. I know exactly what my riding is and I know exactly where I'm supposed to put my address. It's really about the portion of external voters who have been abroad for 20 or so years and are no longer really connected to their riding.

Again, overall, what is the actual percentage of outside voters who fall into that category? The truth is that we don't really have data on that. We don't know how many of those voters are the voters who have been abroad for too long.

To properly answer that question, first we should have a bit more data. Certainly, I wouldn't think it applies to everyone. I think it applies to a very specific subsection of those voters.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: Ms. Turnbull, are you convinced that the last place of residence should determine the riding allocated to voters voting abroad? Shouldn't other solutions be found? For example, could we instead use the place of birth of voters who have been living abroad for a very long time? What mechanisms could be put in

place to stop a diaspora organization, for example, from targeting a too-close-to-call riding and concentrating votes there for partisan purposes?

[*English*]

Lori Turnbull: Of course it's possible that someone will put an address that may have been the second-last or third-last place they lived, or their parents' house. Maybe they feel more of an affinity for a riding than they do for the last place they lived. We could do something like have people swear an oath to say this is the proof of the last place they lived. They would be legally responsible for the information they've given you, and if they're found to have violated that, they'd be in a whole lot of trouble. We could do something like that.

I don't think you can completely eliminate the possibility. I don't think you can completely eliminate the risk that some people could possibly have a reason to put down something that isn't their last place of residence. All we can do is encourage honesty, as we do every other time we ask Canadians to be honest about things, whether on their tax forms or on their passport application—things like that.

The reality of it is we're not going to put every person who lives abroad through top secret level clearance where we make sure we know exactly where they lived last. There has to be some trust in this or else we're not going to be able to do it.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you so much.

I'm generally pretty generous with the time. I'm adding another minute to each questioner in this round just to get us closer to one hour, rather than trying to mess around with the third round.

Mr. Jackson, you have six minutes, please.

Michael Cooper: Can we have one more round?

The Chair: You'll have two slots in this round.

Grant Jackson (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Thanks, Chair.

Thank you to both professionals for being here with us today.

I want to thank you, Dr. Turnbull, for being here again.

It's nice to meet you, Professor Kovacikova.

I have a question that I'll address to both of you. It builds on the topic raised by my colleague from the Bloc. As you probably know, the House of Commons recently passed an immigration bill to deal with the Supreme Court ruling that says the first-generation limit is not in effect for Canadians born abroad or the children of Canadians born abroad.

If the Canada Elections Act requires voters voting abroad to vote at their last place of residence, where does the grandchild or great-grandchild of a Canadian born abroad vote? They have likely never been at the residence listed by their grandparent or great-grandparent, who's the last person in their family to have lived in this country. How do we determine where those folks vote? They're Canadian citizens now by act of Parliament. It's going to pass the Senate, I'm sure, and will be in effect, so how do we determine in what constituency multi-generational, foreign-born Canadians vote?

That's for Dr. Turnbull first, and then Professor Kovacicova.

Lori Turnbull: Going back to an earlier exchange, I can remember this question coming up when the court case was going on and the government was considering this. There was a back-and-forth about where Canadians abroad would cast their ballots. I believe that when the decision was made that they would cast the ballot in the last riding they lived in, it had the advantage of being clear. You're not making a judgment. You're not asking people to say what their favourite riding is and where they feel the closest affinity. You're not doing that. You're asking what the fact-based...to eliminate any possibility of people trying to make judgments about where they ought to be voting and there being inconsistencies in the application of the accessibility to the ballot.

If we've made the choice to decide where people will vote, it puts us in a difficult spot for a Canadian citizen who has never lived in a riding in Canada.

I would love to give you a clear answer to this, but I think we're seeing a limitation in the value we chose to emphasize, which is clarity in the attachment to the last riding. You might have lived there for two weeks and spent your whole life somewhere else. I am a Cape Bretoner at heart. I will be forever, but if I moved away, I'd have to vote in Ottawa. I'd have to vote in this riding.

I think there is a policy gap. Maybe that is the right word. It's not easy to take that principle and apply it to someone who is a Canadian citizen but who has never lived here.

Grant Jackson: Go ahead, Dr. Kovacicova.

Lucia Kovacicova: This is a great question, and I agree with Dr. Turnbull that there isn't an easy explanation.

Starting to think creatively about it, this is where a potential conversation might come in about MPs who are designated for overseas voters, for example. I know that was part of the debate during the last committee meeting with the previous two witnesses.

I think it will require outside-the-box thinking, because I don't think it makes much sense to tie people to the riding in which their family used to reside a generation ago. I think there will need to be a different approach.

Grant Jackson: I'm glad you mentioned the committee testimony from the last meeting, because I'm also curious about our dear

friends down the street. By that I mean that the conversation here is about equal representation for Canadians living abroad. We're talking a lot about the House of Commons and elections, but nobody has mentioned the Senate. I'm fascinated to know what equal representation in the upper chamber may look like as part of this conversation.

Are we asking the government to appoint senators to represent Canadians who live abroad, or are we worried only about equal representation in the House of Commons for Canadians who live abroad?

Anybody can take that.

• (1135)

Lori Turnbull: I'll jump in.

This is a fascinating angle and a fascinating lens to the discussion because it's about how we apply the values and principles that we believe and know are important and operationalize them. It's much harder in a lot of ways to think about how you're going to put this into practice.

Even for representation in the House of Commons, if we started to think along the lines of what if Canadians living abroad had their own representative, how would that work in terms of the constitutional formula around representation by population and ensuring that there is a balance in a riding? We protect communities of interest. We have a geographical sense of how big we want a riding to be and how many people we want to have in that riding.

An MP for Canadians living abroad would be a totally different kettle of fish. I'm not sure how we would make that work constitutionally anyway. I'm not saying we shouldn't. I'm just saying that we don't have a formula for that right now at all. I find that sometimes in these conversations there is a tendency to say that we'll have a senator for that because it might be easier, but it wouldn't be because the allocation of senators is by province and by region.

This would be an extremely complex thing to do, and it would definitely have constitutional implications.

Grant Jackson: That was my next question, so thank you—

The Chair: Mr. Jackson, I'm sorry, but we're over time.

Grant Jackson: Yeah, that's okay.

The Chair: We can continue that conversation later.

Next is Mr. Louis for six minutes, please.

Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Through you, I want to thank both of the witnesses for being here.

We heard today and in the past that over four million Canadians are living outside of Canada, which is about 11% of our population. Many of these citizens remain deeply connected to Canada. That's what we're hearing. They represent our values internationally, and now they have the right to vote in federal elections, yet what we're hearing is that voter turnout among Canadians abroad remains low. It's a fraction of the potential electorate, which is why I'm happy to have this study to address that gap.

I appreciate the opportunity to talk about these practical solutions, whether we're talking about modernizing voting methods, improving outreach or reducing the administrative barriers. Those are all things that we've heard ensure that every Canadian, no matter where they live, can fully participate in democracy.

I'll start with you, Dr. Turnbull.

We're hearing about low voter turnout. I'm trying to think if this is by, let's say, choice or lack of information. I feel like I have it down to three categories: people who choose to not vote, people who don't have the proper information, and then people not being able to vote. Is that a fair assessment?

Would you be able to, in your best estimate, say what percentage of people just don't want to vote, what percentage don't have information on how to vote, and what percentage are trying and can't vote? What would your best idea of the breakdown be?

Lori Turnbull: Honestly, you could probably apply the same categories to Canadians living in Canada. We don't have great voter turnout, and there have been years when we've been really worried about it.

I was trying to memorize your categories as you said them, so that I would be able to come up with some kind of intelligent answer to your question.

When we started studying this stuff really in depth back in 2000, when voter turnout was something like 62% in a federal election, those sorts of categories emerged. There are people who could not vote for administrative or whatever reasons operationally; it didn't happen, even though they wanted to. There were some people who didn't like any of the choices and didn't want to vote for anyone, and then there were people who were totally turned off the process and were just not interested in it at all. You had this kind of divide between those who purposely didn't vote, the ones who engaged but didn't like the choices, and then some who just didn't engage at all. The worry, I think, was more the ones who just self-selected out of the whole process.

There are lots of debates to be had about how big a problem the decline of voter turnout is. How bad is it? Should we really be worried about this? When we see provincial elections with fewer than 50% of eligible voters voting, to me, that's a major problem.

What do we expect in terms of a voter turnout for Canadians living abroad? I would anticipate that it would be less than the overall turnout for people living here, because you don't have the parties reaching out to you as much—I don't think, anyway. Do political parties have lists of Canadians living abroad? Are those lists as up to date as the ones you have for Canadians living here?

I'd be interested in the data on how many Canadians living abroad give donations to political parties. Do they show other ways of getting engaged in the process? I think it probably has a lot to do with how much you're staying informed about this sort of thing. It would be a very individual kind of calculation.

The answer to your question—a long one, I'm sorry—is that I don't know. I think it's really hard to know. For people living anywhere in the world who are Canadian citizens, they could have all kinds of reasons for not voting, but if we want to identify low voter turnout among Canadians living abroad as a problem and something we want to do something about, I think political parties would have to take a leadership role in getting really engaged in that.

• (1140)

Tim Louis: Thank you.

Dr. Kovacikova, I'll ask you the same question, and maybe we could focus on whether there are ways of reaching out. I think in your report you talked about centralized information affecting the voter engagement, or a dedicated government website. What kinds of solutions do you think we can find to reach out to more of those voters?

Lucia Kovacikova: I fully agree with Dr. Turnbull's statement there. I think that for Canadians living abroad, one of the bigger issues among the three you've listed is the lack of information, and, frankly, even the idea of not being able to vote. Those are, I genuinely believe, relatively easy fixes.

Of course, every citizen is responsible for knowing information about the election. There is only so much, at one point, that the parties and the government can do. Ultimately, it is a citizen's responsibility. However, the access to information, I think, is something we can easily address. I believe that a website dedicated to the Canadian diaspora, which could link to information about elections, would simply streamline that information access.

Of course, you may argue that there is the Elections Canada website. That is absolutely true, and their website is great. However, I think the problem is that if you are a Canadian living abroad, you have to access so many different websites. There is nothing that is centralized, and I have actually heard from some people asking about provincial elections. Obviously, there are completely different rules for provincial and federal elections, but people might not know that.

It's up to individuals to research all of this. I can tell you that I was almost shocked. I do research for a living, and I spent a significant amount of time just poring through websites trying to figure out what the rules were.

Therefore, I think centralizing that information is a relatively easy step for the government to do and that it actually might have serious implications for information sharing for anybody abroad, and that added benefit—

The Chair: I'm going to have to cut you off there. We're over time, but you can continue that answer through other questions.

Monsieur Deschênes, you have three and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd first like to comment on the notion of an MP representing the diaspora. I know it's being done elsewhere, in other countries. That might be an idea to consider, because, ultimately, Canadians living abroad have more in common with each other than they do with other ridings in Canada.

Ms. Turnbull, as you were saying, I understand that this idea would raise constitutional issues, but a Constitution can sometimes be amended. That's something to think about.

That said, I was a bit traumatized by the election results in Terrebonne. Therefore, when people talk about special ballots, mail-in ballots, I shudder. We've talked a lot about mail-in ballots, but where are we with electronic voting? Do you know if this is being done in other countries, and if it's being done successfully? It seems to me that this could make everything easier and also resolve the issue of deadlines.

[*English*]

Lori Turnbull: Do you mean, what if we opened up electronic voting just across the board and made it possible to vote in general elections digitally?

• (1145)

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: My question is about expatriates, but if you want to expand on that, go ahead.

[*English*]

Lori Turnbull: I think that if we were to open to the possibility of voting electronically, it would be very difficult to make an argument that this would apply only to some voters and that it would apply only to voters living abroad, because lots of people would love to be able to vote electronically.

Personally, I would love to see a movement in that direction. I think it would do a whole lot of good to break down barriers for people with physical disabilities, people who are living in remote communities, and people who actually do have to go through quite significant expenditures to be able to get to their polling station and vote, even though they live in Canada.

Therefore, I'm in favour of giving more thought to electronic voting. I don't think we would be able to restrict it to people living abroad, and I don't think we should, either.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: Ms. Kovacicova, what do you think?

[*English*]

Lucia Kovacicova: Thank you.

I fully agree. I don't think it's possible to simply say that overseas voters get this wonderfully easy and streamlined option that is going to be denied to the Canadians actually living in Canada.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: Do you think that would be an avenue to consider for all Canadian elections?

[*English*]

Lucia Kovacicova: Yes, I agree. It would be lovely to be able to vote electronically, and I would echo yet another idea mentioned in the previous meeting. I know there was a very brief conversation about the fact that we already have so many accounts electronically. I can submit my taxes electronically through the CRA portal. There are all these different portals. Different agencies have figured out a way to securely store and access people's information, so I am sure there is a way to create electronic voting for all Canadians.

I'm not saying that would be easy, and it wouldn't be instantaneous, but I do think that, in looking at the world around us today, so many things are already happening electronically. I think, slowly but surely, all countries will start to move in that direction, because that is just the easiest way to access citizens. This is all theoretical, of course, but that may be one way to increase voter turnout, because, obviously, physical voting might have some limitations, so you might be able to actually see an increase in those numbers.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

I turn to Mr. Ruff for six minutes, please.

Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

This is a fascinating discussion. I can't speak for all the committee members here, but I am somebody who has voted by special ballot because, in the Canadian Armed Forces, it is actually set up fairly well. I've had the privilege of voting, I think, in Bosnia and in Afghanistan, and our votes got back here—at least I assume they got back. To speak to that process, I know that every member of the CAF is registered for their home riding. They can change that if they get posted, but there's a deliberate process, so there's a record.

Where I'm going with this—and I want to go back and build on some of the other questions—is it all comes down to trust in the voters and in our democracy. Interestingly enough, I just pulled up the latest results from the last election in my own riding, and, according to the Elections Canada list that was provided, to their own results, there were only 224 voters listed as “special ballot” or “outside of Canada”; however, 536 voted. There were only 224 on the list, but when I look at the latest data that we all get as members of Parliament—we can pull from Elections Canada—there are only 164 still on that list. When you have this vast number, it raises some fascinating conversations and, I think, analysis or research that should be dug into. If you're saying that Canadian voters abroad aren't voting in mass numbers, yet, in my own riding, twice as many people are voting than are actually on the list, it gets to this question of, what are candidates...? Part of our whole democratic process here in Canada is our ability to make our case as to why we, the candidates who are running for the respective ridings, should be the best representative.

Any commentary—from either you, Dr. Turnbull, or you, Professor—would be just great...about the interesting challenges here about maintaining trust but, at the same time, ensuring that information flows both ways so that voters can make informed decisions on how they vote and so that political parties and candidates know how they can actually engage in the process.

• (1150)

Lori Turnbull: Yes, it doesn't help public trust when a discrepancy like that happens. If I'm understanding you correctly, there were 200-some people on the list who were eligible to vote abroad, and then there were twice as many people who voted by special ballot. Is it that some of those people who voted by special ballot live in Canada?

Alex Ruff: That's a great question. I don't have.... Elections Canada doesn't provide us that...the fidelity. They maybe do on election night, or whatever, if we dug into the actual list, but I can't tell you right now.

Lori Turnbull: One of the things that have come from the 2025 example, in which we have this information that—I think it was—822 special ballots were in the wrong place, weren't counted at the right time, is that that sort of thing can create real concern on the part of voters, to the extent that they become aware of it. What if votes aren't counted? What if this process isn't unfolding as it should?

We really pride ourselves in Canada, and I think we should, on having a very strong electoral democracy, that the administration is non-partisan, independent and run extremely well. I'm interested in the reaction that Elections Canada has, because when they say, "We're going to make sure this was human error; this is not going to happen again," I wonder what the process is going to be.

Alex Ruff: Go ahead, Professor.

Lucia Kovacicova: Thank you.

It's a great question, and I fully agree.

I was looking up some numbers prior to our meeting, and I wanted to find out the number of special ballot votes in the last election. The interesting thing is that—this is perhaps a very boring thing to mention—the methodology of how you count these things matters.

Sometimes there's some data out there to actually measure voters from overseas and exclude the military. Sometimes you find data that includes the overseas military as well as other overseas voters. Obviously, it makes a big difference to be able to separate those two groups or to count them together.

This is just one example from when I myself was trying to find certain data, and I realized that, oh, I can't use this particular statistic because this includes both the military and other voters, but this other one includes only one of the two groups. My larger point here is that it would be really great if that kind of data, the more specialized data, was actually made public, so that we would actually know what the differences in the groups were, because, obviously, once you include the military and diplomats, that changes how you can actually use that data and what you are actually counting.

Alex Ruff: In the 30 seconds that I have left, I have just a quick question for both of you.

Is there another country out there that's really kind of cracked this problem and does it better than Canada does? Just provide the name of the country that maybe has done a better job.

Lori Turnbull: Estonia—they're great at everything. They're much smaller, though, so how do we take that and scale what they do? In terms of using electronic voting and being tighter with those sorts of things, Estonia is always the example I hear.

Lucia Kovacicova: I'm going to have to agree, because I don't have any other examples.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Next is Mr. Wilkinson for six minutes, please.

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (North Vancouver—Capilano, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

I'm going to go a bit along the lines of Mr. Louis but also of Mr. Ruff.

The turnout in the 2025 election federally was around 69% overall. For those who actually vote from overseas, of those who requested the ballots, the turnout was 2.5%. Of those who actually voted, it was about 2%. That's a pretty enormous difference. Certainly, one would think that some of that is a lack of interest from folks who have been outside the country for a long period of time. Clearly, there must be more than that, and that would relate either to a lack of information on the part of folks who could vote or to obstacles.

Look at some of the other countries. The Americans vote eight times as much as we do in terms of folks outside the country. The French vote 35 times as much as we do in terms of folks outside the country.

I guess I'll say a couple of things. First, is there academic literature that actually looks at best practices and why there are such differences between western democratic countries in terms of the mechanisms they use to encourage people to vote? If the answer to that is no, what are the things that we could do to try to make it easier for folks to vote?

I mean, we used an example, I think, in one of the earlier sessions. It takes a week to get to Hong Kong. It takes a week to get back. There are all the processes of registering. If you think about Canadians who are living in Nepal, that's much worse than Hong Kong. It just seems to me that having only one mechanism that clearly is pretty clunky is not a way to encourage participation.

Maybe I just throw all of that to both of you.

• (1155)

Lori Turnbull: I'll try to take a little piece of it and not take too much time.

I don't think anybody would put their hand up and say that mail is the best, most efficient, quickest way to do anything. At this point, we're used to being able to do everything online. I think that there's an argument to be made that we should think about that. The question is the security of it. How do you ensure that this is going to be a safe transaction?

I'm not a digital tech person. There are people out there who can answer that question, but I think, in terms of trying to verify the identity of the person and the security of the vote, those sorts of things would make it a lot easier. Beyond that, I think we can make some changes to the system we have now.

One thing is that we don't have fixed elections here. In the U.S., they know when their elections are coming. They're in a whole different situation. Sometimes I feel as though we're having elections all the time, but we're not. It's much harder, I think, for us in a parliamentary system to fully engage that process when we have to wait until the writ drops in order to be able to take any real action.

Lucia Kovacikova: Yes, I would fully agree with that. I do think that in terms of the academic literature, I honestly cannot really point to anything I know that specifically deals with comparing Canada to other systems and trying to compare the statistics on voter turnout from abroad. Certainly, there's a big space there to be filled, and it would be wonderful to have some new data.

In terms of why the turnout was so low, I would say that exactly the parliamentary system is part of it. It is in many ways the beauty of the system that elections can be called relatively quickly, but what that essentially means, especially with voting by post, is that you may not receive the ballot in time to then mail it back. Mine was an example of that. I tried very hard to get it there overnight, but whether it arrived or not is another story.

I think that quick turnaround also increases the incidence of not getting timely information about elections. I am in a different position, because I pay attention. If I am a Canadian who isn't in the political space, and I know that there is a talk about election but I'm not really sure when it's happening, and then all of a sudden it's called, by the time I look up from my day-to-day life, I realize it's over.

If you have these quick turnarounds, then, that's great in many other respects, but in terms of actually having the administrative ability to tell everybody, especially those abroad, and to then mail the ballots back and forth, that really creates a huge challenge.

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson: There's the issue of reducing obstacles. It seems to me that perhaps one thing Elections Canada could do is make it clear that people actually can use consulates and embassies to vote. It doesn't solve anything for people who live in far rural areas of particular countries, but it certainly would make it a bit more accessible for a lot of people who live in the larger centres.

The other piece is this. What could Elections Canada be doing differently to engage Canadian voters in advance of the election to try to ensure that people have the appropriate information such that once there's a writ drop and there are 36 days, they're not just scrambling?

Lori Turnbull: I think that's a key part of it, because it's true that it's not enough time. If they have an international register of electors, presumably they have contact information and email addresses for people. They don't want to flood their inboxes and build anticipation of an election that we're not sure is coming, but I think there could probably be a decision made to engage well in advance, to put it on people's radar, to make sure electors know to look for the package we'll be mailing to them.

It gets tricky. I'm not making an argument for a presidential system here, but it's easier when they know that the election's going to be on the first Tuesday of November, so they're going to mail your kit well in advance. We can't do that. It really does put us at a disadvantage, but the best way is information. The best way is to build an expectation of communications from Elections Canada.

● (1200)

The Chair: Thank you so much. We are over time.

I would like to thank our witnesses.

We're going to do a bit of committee business. You're welcome to stay, or you can go. I do appreciate both of you for giving us your time.

I believe we have a quick matter, and there have been discussions among the parties and consent for Mr. Cooper to move his motion on foreign interference.

We'll turn the floor over to him on that particular point.

It's being circulated, unless there's any opposition to that happening.

Seeing none, Mr. Cooper, the motion's being circulated.

Michael Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The motion has been on notice since November 14. I'll read it into the record:

That, further to the motion adopted by the committee on June 12, 2025, the committee undertake a study respecting foreign interference, provided that:

(a) the evidence and documentation received by the committee during the first session of the 44th Parliament on the subject, in relation to the following studies, be taken into consideration by the committee in the present session: (i) foreign election interference, (ii) the question of privilege related to the member for Wellington—Halton Hills and other members, and (iii) the question of privilege related to cyber-attacks targeting members of Parliament;

(b) the committee readopt the report entitled "Question of Privilege Related to the Member for Wellington—Halton Hills and Other Members", adopted during the first session of the 44th Parliament, and instruct the chair to present it to the House, provided that dissenting or supplementary opinions be filed with the Clerk in both official languages within one week of the adoption of this motion;

(c) the committee hold at least four meetings on the matter of reported instances of foreign interference in relation to the recent general election, and, for that purpose, invite the following to appear: (i) a panel of representatives of the SITE task force, for two hours, (ii) a panel of members of the critical election incident public protocol panel, for two hours, (iii) the Chief Electoral Officer, for one hour, and (iv) such other witnesses as may be proposed; and

(d) the committee hold at least two meetings on the matter of the implementation of the foreign influence transparency registry and, for that purpose, invite the Minister of Public Safety to appear before the committee, for two hours, in addition to other witnesses as may be proposed and that these meetings be held by no later than December 12, 2025.

That, Mr. Chair, is the motion. I will very succinctly outline the rationale for it.

During the last election, there were reports of foreign interference. That was identified and uncovered by the SITE task force. The critical election incident public protocol panel invoked the critical election incident public protocol to alert Canadians of such foreign interference. In light of that, I think it's important that we hear from members of the respective panels to get a better understanding of what interference was identified and how that was dealt with.

In addition to that, I think it's important that we hear from the minister with respect to steps that are being taken to get the foreign influence registry up and running. Also, with respect to the question of privilege related to Michael Chong, the purpose for having it brought back or for the committee to readopt the report is so that the House can concur in the report, because the House did not have the opportunity to concur in that report and therefore has not pronounced on Zhao Wei's being in contempt of Parliament.

With respect to the evidence and documentation received by the committee in the last Parliament, the purpose of that is that significant work was undertaken in the last Parliament around foreign interference, so it would just provide that the evidence would be available for the committee's study in this Parliament. We would not have to reinvent the wheel.

• (1205)

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

Ms. Kayabaga.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: Thank you, Chair.

I had proposed a friendly amendment to the French version of the motion.

[*Translation*]

It's to remove the words "at least" from paragraph (c)(iii) so that the amended text of the paragraph reads as follows:

(iii) the Chief Electoral Officer, for one hour,

[*English*]

The Chair: The amendment is in order.

There is no opposition to that friendly amendment, so we'll go back to the main motion.

Is there any further discussion on the main motion?

The only other point is that it's not a tight timetable, but in order to get it done, can we have witness lists or initial witness lists by Friday, November 21, by the end of business? We will take witnesses after, as we always do, but it will be a good opportunity to get the ball rolling, especially since there will likely be a meeting on December 12. There may not be a meeting on December 12, but whether or not that happens is well above all our pay grades. I will just put that out there.

Is this something that can be agreed to on division?

(Motion agreed to on division)

The Chair: Thank you.

Before we go, I'll turn this over to the researchers.

Andre Barnes (Committee Researcher): It's up to the committee, but on the readoption of the report, Laurence and I were wondering whether the committee would like to see a paragraph saying that this was decided by PROC in this Parliament or whether it could just be left as last Parliament's report. It's just for the reader who would see it in the 44th Parliament and the 45th Parliament and go, "Oh, what happened?" That's up to the committee.

The Chair: My take is that, based on the written report, does the committee want an addition to say that we, the future 2025 PROC, have—

Andre Barnes: It would be as part of an intro.

The Chair: It's as part of an intro. I think that seems reasonable.

I don't see any serious shaking of heads, so we'll go with that.

The motion as amended is adopted.

Thank you so much.

Seeing no further business, we stand adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>