

Summerhill Residents Association

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VIA EMAIL: chrystia.freeland@parl.gc.ca
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The Honourable Chrystia Freeland
Deputy Prime Minister
Member of Parliament, University-Rosedale
344 Bloor Street West, Suite 510
Toronto, Ontario M5S 3A7

Federal Election Districts Redistribution 2022

Dear Ms. Freeland:

The *Summerhill Residents Association* ("SRA") represents a residential community of your constituency in public policy debates. It has followed with interest the work of the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission and, quite frankly, is appalled by the proposed federal election districts redistribution, particularly as it affects Ontario.

The proposal currently out for public consultation distorts the fundamental principle of representation by population to an extent that should simply be unacceptable in a parliamentary democracy. The two attached Globe and Mail editorials not only summarize the issues eloquently but also outline a reasonable solution to have them redressed by Parliament without unnecessarily inflating the number of seats.

The SRA, respectfully, urges you and your government to initiate the necessary steps to correct a situation that has become untenable.

Yours sincerely,
Summerhill Residents Association



Deborah Briggs
President

Attachments:

Globe and Mail editorials of 27 and 30 August 2022

Copies:

Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission for Ontario
Hon. Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario
John Tory, Mayor of Toronto

In Canada, rep by pop is just a myth

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Since 2011, the City of Toronto has grown by more than 179,000 residents. That's more people than live in Prince Edward Island. The people of PEI are represented by four seats in the House of Commons, and after the once-a-decade redistribution of seats that is to be completed before the next fixed election date, they will still have four members of Parliament.

And Toronto? Despite adding more people than the population of PEI, Toronto is slated to lose a seat.

How's that? Welcome to the strange, undemocratic formula that decides how many MPs each province is entitled to.

“Gerrymandering” is something Canadians think of as an American problem. Across the United States, majority parties in state houses draw electoral maps to entrench their majorities. That used to happen in Canada; in the early 1950s, the then-governing Liberals gerrymandered John Diefenbaker out of his seat. But since the 1960s, independent commissions have drawn

up Canada's federal electoral boundaries. It's a great, unsung Canadian democratic achievement.

But before those independent commissions do their nonpartisan work within each province, there's the question of how many ridings each province should get. And that's a process light on principle and heavy on politics. It's a great, unsung, Canadian anti-democratic shame.

Over the past decade, Ontario added almost two million people, or more than the combined populations of New Brunswick and Saskatchewan. For its nearly 1.2 million residents, Saskatchewan gets 14 seats — around 84,000 residents per riding. New Brunswick's 789,225 people get 10 seats, or roughly 79,000 people per riding.

In 2011, Ontario's 12.9 million people entitled it to 121 seats, or roughly 106,000 people per riding. So, after growing by almost two million people, how many new seats is Ontario getting? Just one. Its average riding will now have nearly 122,000 residents.

To understand how the venerable principles of rep by pop and one person, one vote become so distorted, you'd need advanced course work in statistics, plus an MA in Canadian political economy. But here's the short explanation: the formula Parliament created to allocate Commons seats is designed to give a bonus to provinces with a history of low population growth.

The formula is also designed to ensure that this bonus, and the shortchanging of everyone else, increases over time. That's how two million new Ontarians translates into just one new seat, and why a growing Toronto is losing a seat to even faster-growing parts of the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

Overrepresented in the House of Commons are Atlantic Canada, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. The other two underrepresented provinces are British Columbia and Alberta. The former is to get one new seat in Parliament, giving it an average of more than 121,000 people per seat. Alberta is to get three new seats (despite Ontario adding more

than twice as many people since 2011), and will end up with more than 120,000 residents per riding.

The newest distortion, which Parliament quietly passed this summer, gives Quebec a bonus seat, this after the Bloc Québécois and the premier of Quebec made a stink about the fact that using the you-need-a-graduate-degree-to-understand-it formula to map the results of the 2021 census threatened to reduce the province from 78 seats to 77.

That triggered a few people in the rest of Canada. They have a small point, but they're missing the big picture. The real distortions are happening elsewhere, in the provinces named above. In fact, if you take the national population, divide it by the proposed 343 seats, allocate them based on population (and as is always done) round up to the next whole number, Quebec is entitled to ... 78 seats.

But of course, that's not how the current formula works. Instead, we have a complete perversion of rep by pop that, in a bizarre twist on equity, ensures that places where most immigrants are moving to are greatly underrepresented, and guarantees that this inequality will only grow, forever.

What's the democratic principle behind all that? There isn't one. Like a lot of things in Canada, it sort of just happened.

Fixing this is possible – without need for unattainable constitutional amendments, without reducing Quebec's number of seats and without ballooning the House of Commons. More on that, next week.

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Returning rep by pop to Parliament

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Seats in the House of Commons were originally supposed to be divided up according to representation by population. It's right there in the original British North America Act – you know, that thing from 1867 that we celebrate every July 1st.

The new country's new constitution gave Quebec 65 seats, and said that after each census, "there shall be assigned to each of the other

Provinces such a Number of Members as will bear the same Proportion to the Number of its Population (ascertained at such Census) as the Number Sixty-five bears to the Number of the Population of Quebec."

In plain English, a province's seat count would rise or fall along with its share of the population. To ensure fair representation for faster-growing provinces, Parliament was given the power to add new seats, "provided the proportionate Representation of the

Provinces prescribed by this Act is not thereby disturbed."

It was a plan for rep by pop – the venerable democratic principle of equality of votes and voters. A century and a half later, how are Commons' seats divided up? Rep by pop has been watered down by a precept unknown in other advanced democracies. Call it the Dingwall Principle.

Remember when former Royal Canadian Mint CEO David Dingwall said that he was "entitled to my entitlements"? Commons seats are now allocated, in part, on the principle that provinces are entitled to their entitlements.

Under current law, provinces don't lose seats, even when their share of the population falls. At the same time, growth in the size of the House is severely restricted, so fast-growing provinces barely gain seats. That's why Ontario, after adding

nearly two million people since 2011, will get only one additional MP in the next parliament, whereas the 1.9 million people of the Maritimes are represented by 25 MPs.

Manitoba, Saskatchewan and the Atlantic Provinces are overrepresented; increasingly under-represented are Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia. Quebec was historically under-represented but is now on the dividing line.

All of this is the result of a politicized electoral formula – as Parliament aims to satisfy not rep by pop, but the entitlements of the Dingwall Principle.

There are two possible fixes.

One is to significantly grow the House of Commons. Giving every province the same representation as the most overrepresented province, Prince Edward Island – four MPs for just 164,000 people – would mean a

House of more than 900 MPs. That's not ideal.

But even giving voters in each province a voice at least equal to those in Saskatchewan – with 14 seats for fewer than 1.2 million people – would mean a House of 461 seats, or 123 more than now. That's also not ideal, but it gives a sense of the current unfairness. If Saskatchewan is entitled 14 MPs then Ontario should have 55 more MPs, on top of the current 121. Alberta should get 19 new MPs, B.C. should add 20 and Quebec's delegation should grow to 103, from 78.

But if we got rid of one of the Dingwall entitlements, we could get much closer to rep by pop, without adding nearly as many MPs.

Saskatchewan, per the current formula, should only have 10 seats. It gets four more because several decades ago Parliament created a grandfather clause that prevents provinces losing seats. But it can be rewritten by simple vote of Parliament – as was done this summer to give Quebec an extra seat.

Parliament should scrap the grandfather clause, and return to a system that starts with a fixed number of seats for Quebec and allocates seats

to the other provinces in direct proportion to their populations.

If we fix Quebec at its current 78 seats – 110,000 people per riding – and apply that quotient to the other provinces, we'd get a House of Commons with 359 seats. That's 21 more than today. Manitoba, New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Labrador would each lose a seat and Saskatchewan would lose three. Ontario would gain 14, Alberta would add seven and B.C. six.

The Atlantic Provinces would still get slightly more seats than under rep by pop, thanks to a Dingwall entitlement known as the Senate floor rule, whose removal requires an (impossible) constitutional amendment. Leaving that aside, a couple of small changes can bring Canada a lot closer to equality of votes, and fairness, without adding more than a handful of MPs.

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