

Liberal MPs: Excuses you may hear about the ERRE failure

Preface

While the Liberals will usually say “there was no consensus” in their public defence of the broken promise, you may hear some of the following additional excuses below in 1-1 exchanges.

It is clear that many Liberals have not read the ERRE’s final report, including the supplemental reports by Liberals and by the NDP and Greens.

They are invested in the talking point that the ERRE failure was the NDP’s fault because the NDP sided with the Conservatives on a referendum. Most of the experts recommended against a referendum. As Justin Trudeau himself said, a referendum is a pretty good way of ensuring you get no reform.

Regardless of the merits/flaws of NDP’s eventual decision to side with Conservatives, the only reason they got that no-win point was because of the complete lack of willingness by the Liberals to negotiate anything.

If a Liberal MP starts arguing one of these points 1-1, the most productive response is not to argue with them but to talk about supporting our call for a [National Citizens’ Assembly](#) on Electoral Reform - a non-partisan process to build a consensus we can trust.

Things you may hear, and what actually happened

This document was written by a long time Liberal active member and PR supporter who followed the ERRE process closely. It is in his language, but backed up by other close observers of the ERRE.

No 1. It's the NDP's fault for siding with the Conservatives on a referendum.

Response: [The Liberal supplemental report opposes any and all reforms with or without a referendum.](#) What was it specifically that the NDP was supposed to side with? What reforms? Where are they found? Why did the Liberals vote to oppose reform at the committee?

The NDP+Green [Supplementary Opinion](#) in the ERRE report spelled out their terms: “We believe the government should consider adopting one of the following models, both of which would result in a Gallagher score of less than four.

Mixed Member Proportional

Rural-Urban Proportional

(**Details on both systems at the bottom of this document. Note: either can include a ranked ballot)

Note the shocker in the NDP/Green section on MMP: “The government could decide to take an incremental approach by adding regional compensatory MPs in groups of 30-45 over the next three or four elections.”

This was a **massive concession**, meaning elections would not be proportional for another 12-16 years, and depending on the will of successive government to keep implementing the changes at each election. This was a huge retreat from the NDP and Green positions. **Why is it cited? To show that the NDP+Greens had been willing to go to extreme lengths to get a deal with the Liberals. But the Liberal MPs just would not deal.** They wanted a report saying “there is no consensus” with no recommendations, or in effect, a null Report. The only people who would deal were the Conservatives (who demanded a referendum) and the Bloc.

No 2. The committee didn't recommend any specific reform.

The committee wasn't asked to recommend any specific reform. Why is the Liberals failing to include that in the terms of reference of the committee an excuse for breaking a campaign promise? How was that decision not to include recommending specific reforms in the committee's mandate not deliberate?

No 3. Something something Gallagher Index.

The Gallagher Index is not an electoral system nor was it recommended to be. It is a measurement of distance between seat share and vote share with the caveat that directions like north and east (or x and y) are replaced with parties like Liberal and Conservative. All the committee recommended was using this index to measure how closely seats track to votes. Do you object to the very idea of measuring how closely seats reflect votes?

The Gallagher Index is also just Pythagorus' Theorem. [Using Pythagorus' Theorem to calculate distance](#) as done in the Gallagher Index is taught in 8th grade in British Columbia. Do you think a government that has a math teacher as Prime Minister and an astronaut in cabinet is flummoxed by 8th grade math?

No 4. I voted no (to the motion to accept the ERRE committee's recommendations) because the motion included a referendum.

Where is your private members bill without a referendum? Would you be willing to move one?
And if not, why not?

No 5. Trudeau wanted ranked ballot not proportional representation

Trudeau promised to make every vote count. In that same speech, he promised to listen to the experts. A ranked ballot *in single member districts* is a majoritarian system that doesn't even *aim* to make every vote count - in fact only 10% of voters would even have their second preferences physically counted. Are you saying Trudeau was lying when he made that promise?

And if the promise didn't mean anything at all, isn't making a promise you don't mean also called a lie?

And the promise had the words proportional representation right in it. If Trudeau wasn't open to adopt PR, why did the platform explicitly suggest he was?

No 6. There was no consensus.

The promise didn't say "we will keep our promise subject to consensus from all opposition parties." If it had it wouldn't have been taken seriously during the election. The Greens and NDP were in favour of PR - as were 88% of the experts. A consensus could have been found between parties representing 63% of voters if the Liberals had been willing to negotiate.

No 7. Nobody cares about this but a small special interest group.

You don't make promises to win the support of no one.

Are the promises only genuine based on how many voters you think voted based on that issue? How many voters does it take for a promise to be genuine? Is the 2019 platform going to say "Pharmacare but only if voters stick a gun to our heads?"

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- Mixed-member proportional representation (MMP), with 2/3 of the House of Commons elected to represent direct constituencies, and 1/3 elected as regional compensatory members. Regional compensatory MPs may be elected from an open list, flexible list, as recommended by the Law Reform Commission, or they may be elected as "best runners-up", as per the Baden-Württemberg system. Open and flexible lists have the benefit of letting voters choose. The Baden-Württemberg option has the benefit of forcing all candidates to be scrutinized and supported by voters every election in order to win their seat. Compensatory seats would be drawn from territories, provinces, or sub-regions within provinces. As such, since it would not affect current riding

boundaries, a full riding redistribution would be unnecessary. The government could decide to take an incremental approach by adding regional compensatory MPs in groups of 30-45 over the next three or four elections.

- Rural-urban proportional representation (RUP), as first elaborated by former Chief Electoral Officer Jean-Pierre Kingsley, in which current riding boundaries are maintained, but current urban ridings are clustered into multi-member ridings of three to five MPs. To minimize the level of distortion between the popular will of the electorate and the resultant seat allocations in Parliament, in 2019, the government should add an additional 50 seats for regional compensatory MPs. Again, regional compensatory MPs may be elected from an open list, flexible list, or elected as “best runners-up”, as per the Baden-Württemberg system. Like our proposed MMP model, compensatory seats would be drawn from territories, provinces, or sub-regions within provinces. As such, a full riding redistribution would be unnecessary.