

**GLOBE EDITORIAL**

## Fair Elections Act: Slow it down, Mr. Poilievre

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The Harper government's continued focus on the threat of voter fraud in federal elections is approaching absurdity. Everyone with any expertise who has examined the question in detail has arrived at the same conclusion: There is no threat. And yet the government insists that controversial provisions in its proposed Fair Elections Act are needed to eliminate this non-existent terror – even at the risk of disenfranchising thousands of legitimate voters. It makes no sense.

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The government's bill would eliminate vouching, where one voter can vouch for the identity of another at a polling station on election day under certain conditions. It would also prevent voters from using the information card that Elections Canada mails to households as part of the identification process. Combined, the two changes could result in thousands of Canadians walking away from their polling station without voting, say critics. Critics include Marc Mayrand, the Chief Electoral Officer.

As for the people who say that voter fraud is not an issue, well, that would be the Supreme Court of Canada. In 2012, it found that alleged voting irregularities in a Toronto riding involved mistakes and oversights on the part of election officials. The court urged Elections Canada to do better. The voters, even those few who had been vouched for, were legitimate and had voted in good faith. An Elections Canada compliance review came to the same conclusion, although you wouldn't know that listening to Pierre Poilievre, the Minister of Democratic Reform. He has so consistently inverted the conclusion of the review to suit the government's narrative that last week the author of the review spoke up to complain.

Most people know what the problems are – inconsistent training for the more than 200,000

election officials who need to be recruited for each vote; overly complex rules; and low voter turnout. The Fair Elections Act seems to be bypassing these issues. As for fraud, Canadians are more likely to think about political insiders misdirecting voters with robocalls than about voters trying to cast ineligible ballots. The bottom line is that the more one looks at this legislation, the more one finds questionable elements. The vouching provision is hardly the only one.

Late last week, Mr. Poilievre said he would be open to making a small change to another section of the bill. He said he would rewrite language that appears to limit the freedom of speech of the Chief Electoral Officer. It's a tiny concession (he's still proposing to limit the Chief Electoral Officer's powers) but it's a start. The opposition is right: the government needs to slow down, open the bill to constructive criticism, and stop trying to ram it through.

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