

Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform Public Consultation Reports

February 2007

overview

what we heard

what we read

*special outreach
focus groups*

Ontario



Citizens' Assembly
on Electoral Reform

L'Assemblée des citoyens
sur la réforme électorale

ONTARIO CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON ELECTORAL REFORM

CONSULTATION REPORTS *overview*



From October 2006 through January 2007, the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform undertook consultations with Ontario citizens to learn what they value in an electoral system. The Assembly began the process with the release of its public consultation guide, "Citizens Talking to Citizens." The guide asked the public four questions:

1. Which electoral system principles are most important to you? Why?
 - Are there other principles you think are important? Why?
2. Does Ontario's current electoral system reflect the principles that are important to you? If yes, why? If no, why not?
3. Do you think Ontario should keep its current electoral system or change to a different one?
 - If you think Ontario should change to a different system, which one do you prefer? Why?
 - How does the system you prefer reflect the principles that are important to you?
4. Do you have any other comments or recommendations related to the Assembly's mandate?

The consultation process included three main opportunities for input: public meetings across the province, written submissions, and special outreach focus groups organized by the Social Planning Network of Ontario on behalf of the Citizens' Assembly Secretariat. This volume contains three reports—one on each of these components. The reports reflect the range of thoughts expressed by the people who participated.

In addition, many Assembly members undertook outreach in their own communities to get the word out about the Assembly and to find out what people in their ridings thought about electoral reform.

While people participated in the consultation in different ways, they had at least one thing in common: a concern for the future of Ontario and the shape of one of its most important political institutions.

Altogether, about 3,000 people shared their views with the Assembly. They were people who had studied electoral systems and people who had not; people who were young and not so young; individual citizens and representatives of organizations; and people diverse in occupation, political stripe, culture, experience, and point of view. The participants were as diverse as the Assembly itself.

The Consultation Phase was the second of three phases of the Assembly's work. It was preceded by an intensive Learning Phase (fall 2006), during which the Assembly learned about Ontario's current electoral system and other systems. Following consultation, the Assembly will embark on its Deliberation Phase (February to April 2007). Everything the Assembly heard in the consultation—from all sources—will help the Assembly as it deliberates and makes a recommendation to the people and government of Ontario whether to keep our current electoral system or adopt a new one.

Please visit the Citizens' Assembly website www.citizensassembly.gov.on.ca to view the consultation guide and these reports, and to find out more about electoral systems and the work of the Assembly.

February 2007

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What We Heard

A Report on the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform
Public Consultation Meetings

February 2007

Ontario



Citizens' Assembly
on Electoral Reform

L'Assemblée des citoyens
sur la réforme électorale

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose of this Report

From November 2006 to January 2007, over 2,000 people from all parts of the province came to meetings to share their thoughts on electoral systems with members of the Ontario Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform.

They were people who had studied electoral systems and people who had not, but they all knew what mattered to them in electing their Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs). They included former candidates; current municipal, provincial, and federal representatives; and a leader of a political party. But mostly they were interested citizens who had important things to say about the way we vote and what our votes should mean. Participants were young (the youngest presenter was 14) and not so young; individuals and representatives of organizations, such as Fair Vote Ontario and Equal Voice; and diverse in occupation, political stripe, culture, experience, and point of view.

This report attempts to reflect the great diversity of opinion which made the consultation meetings so valuable to the Assembly's work. The meetings were one component of the consultation process which also included special outreach meetings and written submissions from members of the public. What Assembly members heard in the consultation will help them in their deliberations. All members have access to the summaries of the public meetings and will receive a copy of this report.

The report is an overview of the key themes from the consultation meeting summaries, which are posted on the Citizens' Assembly's website www.citizensassembly.gov.on.ca. The report (like the meeting summaries) provides an idea of the range of thoughts expressed by people who attended the meetings; it doesn't claim to speak for all Ontarians. Please visit the website to read the consultation guide ("Citizens Talking to Citizens"), view this report and the other consultation reports, and find out more about electoral systems and the work of the Assembly.

About the Assembly

The Assembly is made up of 104 Ontarians: 103 randomly selected citizens—one from each of the province's electoral districts—plus the Chair, George Thomson who was appointed by the government. The Assembly was established by a regulation under Ontario's Election Act and is independent of government. Its mandate is to assess Ontario's electoral system and other systems, and to recommend whether the province should keep its current system or adopt a new one. If the Assembly recommends a new system, it must describe it in detail. If there is a recommendation for change, the government will hold a referendum on the Assembly's proposal at the next provincial election on October 10, 2007.

The Consultation Phase was the second of three phases of the Assembly's work. It was preceded by an intensive Learning Phase (fall 2006) in which the Assembly learned about Ontario's electoral system and other systems. Following consultation is the Deliberation Phase (February to April 2007) when the Assembly will discuss what it has learned and heard, and decide what to recommend to the people and government of Ontario.

The Consultation Meetings

Forty-one consultation meetings were held in 35 towns and cities across Ontario (five meetings were added in response to demand). See page 1-15 for a list of the meetings. Simultaneous English-French translation was provided at eight meetings, and sign language at two. Consultation guides were available at meetings in English and French, and on request, in Braille. Meetings were held in libraries, colleges and universities, Legion halls, YMCAs, community centres, Indian Friendship Centres, and conference halls. Assembly members and members of the public showed commitment and fortitude by braving the winter weather to attend meetings. No meeting was cancelled despite bad weather, especially in the North.

Each consultation meeting was hosted by a different panel of Assembly members. The

members usually lived in the community, or close by, but many members attended meetings outside their local area to support their colleagues and hear more points of view. Some members from the south went north, and vice versa, to hear firsthand the issues raised in other parts of the province. Members were assisted by staff of the Citizens' Assembly Secretariat who looked after logistics, facilitated the meetings, and answered technical questions.

Most meetings followed the same general format: a welcome and introductions by Assembly members, a short video about the Assembly, presentations from the people who had registered in advance, and then an open forum. But no two meetings were alike. Some had 10 or more presentations scheduled; others had fewer formal presentations and were more like town hall meetings. Some were bursting at the seams with participants; others, especially in smaller communities, had about a dozen attendees. The size of meetings didn't matter though. All generated dialogue and ideas that have given the Assembly greater insight into what is important to the people who participated in the meetings.

The Students' Assembly

Also important to the consultation was the input of the Students' Assembly on Electoral Reform, a process similar to the Citizens' Assembly to engage high school students from across Ontario. Members of the Students' Assembly made a spirited presentation to the Citizens' Assembly. (For more information on the Students' Assembly, visit: www.studentsassembly.ca)

THOUGHTS ABOUT PRINCIPLES

The regulation that created the Citizens' Assembly directs the Assembly to consider eight principles and characteristics of electoral systems. The principles (in alphabetical order) are: accountability, effective parliament, effective parties, fairness of representation, legitimacy, stable and effective government, stronger voter participation, and voter choice. The Assembly identified a ninth principle to consider: simplicity and practicality.

The consultation guide asked Ontarians what principles are most important to them and why. This section provides a summary of key themes expressed by participants on the principles.

Accountability

You need a local representative to hold accountable. I don't see any way to hold a party accountable. (North Bay)¹

Accountability means that government officials have to justify their actions to the voters and listen to the views of others. (Owen Sound)

Citizens should know who's in charge so they can hold government accountable. (Toronto)

Many participants emphasized the need to be able to identify decision-makers and hold them accountable. Most often, people associated accountability with having an MPP who is accessible and responsive. Many said they want their local representative to be accountable to them, the voters, not to their parties. Some felt that party loyalty and party discipline compromise the accountability of MPPs to voters.

Often, participants talked about accountability

¹ The quotations throughout the report are taken from the meeting summaries posted on the Citizens' Assembly website. The summaries are based on the notes taken at the meetings. In some cases, the note-takers were able to record participants' comments word-for-word; in others, the notes approximate participants' original words.

in relation to different kinds of government. For some people, single-party majority governments better ensure accountability because it is easy to identify who is responsible for decisions. Others felt that coalitions increase accountability because decisions represent more viewpoints and are often negotiated in the open.

Some participants pointed out that we can hold governments accountable by voting them out in the next election. Others said this is difficult because sometimes they may want to vote a party out, but still prefer its local candidate.

Many participants said they want more accountability and identified broken election promises as an issue. Some suggested mechanisms to hold representatives accountable that are outside the mandate of the Citizens' Assembly. These include: the right to recall politicians between elections, preventing members from "crossing the floor," and direct election of the Premier.

Effective Parliament

We need more voices in parliament. Parliament is too polarized right now. (Owen Sound)

The legislature should be about debate, including controversy. (Niagara Falls)

The opposition should have more power. (Burlington)

Most people focused on three areas related to effective parliament: the role of the opposition, the number of parties in the legislature, and the general functioning of the legislature. Among participants who highlighted the importance of an effective opposition, some argued that it has no real power under a single-party majority government, while others said the opposition can still play an important role in debate and on all-party committees.

Participants were divided in how well they thought the legislature would function if more political parties were represented. Thoughts included the following: more parties would weaken the opposition; too many more parties

would reduce the effectiveness of the legislature (e.g. small parties might exert undue influence); more parties would bring more points of view to the legislature and encourage compromise and consensus. People often said they feel the legislature is too adversarial and want to see instead a more cooperative style of parliament.

Some people were unhappy with parliamentary issues that are outside the Assembly's mandate. In general, they want to see less party discipline and more independence (e.g. free votes) to allow MPPs to represent their constituents.

Effective Parties

We can design a system to encourage larger or smaller parties, but in any system parties will adapt. (Toronto)

We have many parties now because on social issues we are not as much of like mind as we were perhaps 100 years ago. (Sarnia)

Smaller parties have their place, but if they are worthwhile they will grow. (Dryden)

Most people talked about political parties in one way or another. Some criticized parties for having unclear agendas or narrow interests, acting unpredictably when they form a government, or having too much power (especially the party leadership). Several participants called for the abolition of parties and some advocated for direct democracy where citizens would act on their own behalf. On balance, though, most people felt that parties have an important role to play in our political system: "Parties are useful. They work out ideas and policies before elections and make it easier for people to decide who to vote for." (Cornwall)

Many people wanted it to be easier for small parties to win seats in the legislature. The Green Party was a frequent example. These participants associated more parties with innovation, policy alternatives, and inclusive representation. Even among people who advocated for systems that support small parties, many said there should

be a threshold or limit on the number of parties. As one participant put it, “too many parties can create havoc.” (Timmins) A few participants felt that thresholds were artificial barriers and unfair to so-called fringe parties: “One person’s fringe is another person’s passion.” (Toronto) Some felt that we should discourage small parties because they reduce the likelihood of majority governments and decrease stability. These participants favour having a few, large parties that develop platforms to win broad support. One presenter described large parties as essentially coalitions of many different interests that have compromised on a single platform.

Fairness of Representation

The right to fair representation is as important as the right to vote. (Cornwall)

Meeting participants advocated for this principle more than any other. They tended to focus on three aspects of fair representation: demographic representation, proportionality, and geographic representation.

Demographic Representation

Aboriginals need to have a voice in the legislature. (Kenora)

Low-income people are not fairly represented. Their votes don’t count. (Kingston)

Anything we can do to increase the representation of women and minorities is healthy, but anything that mandates it is a dangerous precedent. (Windsor)

I don’t need to be represented by someone exactly like me. (Orangeville)

Many participants wanted better demographic representation and associated it with the legitimacy of our political institutions and the quality of decision-making. They would like candidates, the government, and the legislature to reflect the makeup of the province. Participants highlighted the following groups as under-represented: women, young voters, members of

visible minorities, Aboriginal peoples, Francophones, immigrants, people with disabilities, and people who are poor. Participants were divided on whether there should be direct methods to increase representation (e.g. quotas, reserved seats for Aboriginal peoples), or whether a new electoral system would bring about change indirectly.

Several presenters argued against demographic representation as an electoral system principle. Some said they want to be represented by someone who shares their values, not their background. One participant felt that reflecting all differences meant reinforcing them. Others don’t believe that the electoral system can be blamed for the under-representation of certain groups and suggest that societal values are at play and slow to change.

Proportionality

Proportionality is paramount. Seat share should equal vote share. That’s all that matters. (Belleville)

We need proportionality but we should ease into it; we shouldn’t have too many proportional seats to start with. (Oshawa)

Proportionality is a fad; it dominates all discussions. (Mississauga)

A majority of participants advocated for some degree of proportionality. Most said that proportionality would make every (or almost every) vote count toward the outcome of an election, and would make the distribution of seats in the legislature a true reflection of voters’ intentions. Many participants equated proportionality with legitimacy, and argued that other principles, in particular demographic representation, voter choice, and stronger voter participation, would flow from more proportional election results.

Not everyone agreed, however. Some felt that strict proportionality is not necessary; that proportionality has unreasonably taken over the debate on electoral systems; or that proportionality as a guiding principle leads to undesirable

system choices. Those who opposed proportionality often cautioned against coalition governments and instability.

Geographic Representation

Northern Ontario needs effective representation, even though its population is small. We are a lone, distant voice in Ontario politics. (Timmins)

The riding system is not fair. Up North the ridings are huge. (Toronto)

Districts should not have unfair variations in population. (Brampton)

The idea that ridings give us a local face that understands local issues is a romanticized idea of geographic representation. (Toronto)

Many participants thought some form of geographic representation is important. They like having an MPP from their area who is locally accessible and understands local issues. Participants argued that geographic representation is necessary to reflect regional differences and interests in the legislature. Several presenters disagreed. They think geographic representation is no longer important because of decreasing regional differences and electronic communication.

At many meetings, riding sizes and boundaries were discussed. Some participants thought boundaries are artificial: “Constituencies do not mean the same thing as communities.” (Markham) A few people thought representation by population, which requires that each vote carry equal weight in electing representatives, isn’t working. People in urban areas tended to think that their members represent far too many people, while people in rural areas generally thought their members represent far too large areas. Often, participants in the North said that the size of their ridings is unmanageable and that it is almost impossible for them to have access to their MPPs.

Fair representation for rural areas and the North was a recurring theme. Many partici-

pants (mostly, but not always in these areas) thought that rural and Northern interests are not adequately represented in the legislature. Some advocated for increasing the number of ridings in the North; others argued against this on the grounds that it would violate the principle of representation by population.

Legitimacy

Legitimacy involves having confidence in the system, and believing that we are being represented and listened to. (Kitchener-Waterloo)

The source of legitimacy is hard to identify. It has something to do with traditions and values. (Ottawa)

I accept the decisions of the government, even if I didn’t elect it. (Oshawa)

Participants often discussed legitimacy in light of other principles or outcomes they support. They saw legitimacy as the end result of other things. Some linked legitimacy to aspects of fair representation. Others identified legitimacy as voter confidence in the electoral system and the results it produces.

Ideas about legitimacy included the following: it’s about reflecting the views of the population; it’s voting sincerely (as opposed to strategically); it comes from stronger voter participation; it can’t be achieved without proportionality; in a representative democracy, it comes from majorities; it’s about inclusion, involvement, and cooperation.

Simplicity and Practicality

Simplicity is not by itself a virtue. The electoral system should be as simple as possible, but as complex as necessary. (Toronto)

The Assembly should suggest a system that people will understand, even if it’s flawed, rather than a complex system which tries to solve all problems. (Guelph)

A new system has to be simple enough for people to have confidence in the integrity of the results. (Sarnia)

Many participants who addressed simplicity and practicality said they want a system that people can understand, and cautioned the Assembly against complicated proposals. People argued that too complex a system would discourage more people from voting, and often associated simplicity with legitimacy. “The electoral system must be simple enough that people understand it, and transparent so that people trust it.” (Kitchener-Waterloo)

A number of people felt that simplicity and practicality shouldn’t stand in the way of change and achieving other objectives. As one participant put it, “simplicity can be traded off for other principles.” (Windsor)

Some people distinguished between simplicity of voting (the ballot) and simplicity of the results (how ballots are counted). Both were seen as important considerations. “Every voter should be able to understand the vote and the count.” (Toronto)

Stable and Effective Government

Strong majorities allow governments to carry out their agendas. (Perth)

Coalitions are forced to work together and reach consensus; this takes longer but the decisions that are made are the right ones. (Oshawa)

Coalitions are nothing more than minorities with more compromise, and result in added cost due to different demands of each party. The tail wagging the dog is very expensive. (Sarnia)

Many different views were expressed on stable and effective government, but there seemed to be three main threads: no one type of government is by definition more stable and effective than another; single-party majority governments are more stable and effective; coalition governments are more stable and effective.

Participants who argued the first point of view illustrated how single-party majorities, coalitions, and minority governments can be stable.

They argued that stability is more a result of political culture (and other factors) than the type of electoral system.

People who support single-party majority governments said they normally serve a full-term in office before an election is called; can make policies and pass laws without having to “play politics” with smaller parties; and can take action quickly. In contrast, they felt coalition governments are unstable; give too much power to small parties (often with narrow interests); make it hard to get things done; and act on the lowest level of consensus. Some people equated stability with the frequency of elections and thought we would go to the polls more often if we had coalition governments.

Participants who favour coalitions gave examples of major democracies, in Europe and elsewhere, with a history of stable and effective coalition government. They argued that policies in these countries tend to be more stable, because the make-up of a governing coalition is unlikely to change entirely after an election. They thought that some consistency in governance encourages long-range planning and produces better policy. In contrast, they felt that one single-party majority after another often results in drastic policy swings after an election.

Supporters of coalitions thought they would include more points of view; give women and other under-represented groups more opportunity to participate; and help to bring a more consensual style of decision-making to Ontario politics. They believe some citizens might be wary of coalitions because they have no experience with them, but would get used to a new system where coalitions are the norm.

One presenter had a unique point of view: “Coalition governments where there are never radical changes might be too stable.” (Toronto)

Finally, some participants said they like minority governments because they are forced to compromise with other parties, which improves policy and decision-making.

Stronger Voter Participation

Low turnout means the will of the people is not expressed. How meaningful is a 60% result out of only 40% participation? (Windsor)

People with disabilities should have the opportunity to vote with dignity. (Toronto)

More people would vote if they thought their voices would be heard. (Bracebridge)

At almost every meeting participants emphasized the importance of voter participation. Some expressed disappointment over low voter turnout, especially among young voters. The meetings attracted many young people, including members of the Students' Assembly (a process similar to the Citizens' Assembly to engage high school students), who provided living proof that some youth are actively engaged in political life.

The most often identified reason for people not voting was that they don't feel their vote counts or will make a difference. Other reasons included: lack of accountability of governments and representatives; lack of meaningful choice; and apathy and cynicism. Participants also highlighted specific barriers to participation faced by people who are poor or homeless, people without literacy skills, people who are elderly, and people with disabilities. Some people suggested that the Assembly should consider accessibility as another guiding principle.

Participants were divided on whether the electoral system could increase voter participation. Some saw no link between voter turnout and the electoral system and thought voting is declining under all systems. Others thought changing to a preferential ballot where voters could rank their preferences, or changing to a more proportional system where small parties could win seats would give people more confidence that their vote mattered.

Some people suggested ideas for increasing voter turnout that are outside the mandate of the Citizens' Assembly, including: mandatory voting laws; incentives to vote (e.g. tax breaks);

electronic, online or mail-in voting; and more civics education in schools.

Voter Choice

Everyone should be able to vote for something they believe in, as opposed to against something they are afraid of. (London)

People vote for many different reasons: for a party, for a candidate, or against a party or candidate. An electoral system should allow people to express these preferences simply. (Barrie)

We need more choice. (Markham)

More choice might confuse voters. (Dryden)

Many participants objected to strategic voting: voting deliberately for a candidate who is not their first choice to keep someone else from winning. They said strategic voting is not a true exercise of choice. Several participants said that they had never voted for a party that had won a seat. Some people felt that there are not enough viable parties to make their choice meaningful; others disagreed and said independent candidates could also play an important role in representing constituents.

Many people wanted ballots that would give them more choice than marking a single X. Some expressed frustration that they couldn't separate a vote for a candidate from a vote for a party. Others wanted a preferential ballot so they could rank their choices; if they didn't get their first choice, they could still get their second or third. A few participants were against preferential ballots: "Under them, most people are represented by their second choice and this would be a problem, not a solution." (Peterborough)

Finally, some people, even among those who wanted more voter choice, warned against making the ballot too complicated.

THOUGHTS ABOUT ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

The consultation guide asked Ontarians how well they feel the current electoral system (First Past the Post) meets the principles that are important to them, and whether they think Ontario should keep its system or change to a new one. People who want change were asked to identify which system they prefer and why.

Most people wanted change, but as several participants pointed out, these were the people who were more likely to attend consultation meetings. Some (but not all) of the people who advocated for change explained what system or type of system they prefer.

Some people opposed change because they are happy with the current system. Others saw flaws in the current system but think they should be addressed through reform in other areas (e.g. rules of the legislature, election financing), not the system itself. “I think we have to be careful not to use the electoral system to fix things that it cannot solve.” (North Bay) Some had problems with the current system but are not convinced that any other system would do a better job.

This section provides a summary of the key themes expressed by participants about the current system and other systems.

First Past the Post (Single Member Plurality)

In our system we vote directly for our local representative, who is someone who lives among us. (Kitchener-Waterloo)

It is simple, practical, easy to understand, and cheap. (Hamilton)

It may have flaws but it's the best system in the world. (Oshawa)

Participants who recommended that the province keep its First Past the Post (FPTP) system believe that it has worked well for Ontario. As several participants said: “It’s not broken, so

don’t fix it.” Some said the current system isn’t perfect but no system is and FPTP has generally provided Ontario with good governance.

People who favour keeping FPTP associate it most often with stable, single-party majority government; transparency and accountability (“you know who is making decisions”); and strong geographic representation. Many said that one of the greatest strengths of the current system is that it allows voters to hold individual representatives accountable. The clear link between voters and their MPPs makes members more sensitive to local needs. Supporters of FPTP said they like voting for an individual candidate and don’t understand how you could vote for a party under some systems.

Participants who spoke in favour of the current system are satisfied with candidates winning with a plurality (more votes than any other candidate). They don’t feel that a candidate needs a majority (50% + 1) or that election results need to be proportional to achieve legitimacy. They also felt that the system gives them enough choice (e.g. independents can run) and that new parties can succeed if they gain public support.

Almost everyone who spoke in favour of FPTP praised its simplicity compared to other systems. They said it is simple to use and easy to understand: the winner is the candidate with the most votes and the government is the party with the most seats.

Some people were concerned with the cost of change and indicated, for example, that they wouldn’t support increasing the size of the legislature if that were required under other systems.

Our system produces manufactured majorities, which have 40% of the votes, 60% of the seats, 100% of the power.. The last time we had a true majority government was in 1937. (Toronto)

It forces voters to make complicated choices, for example, to vote strategically or against someone and it is difficult to vote against someone. (Barrie)

In contrast, many people who spoke against FPTP said it is a complicated system in two

main ways. First, voting is “tricky” because the ballot allows voters to mark only a single X. One participant explained: “Our system is complex. We have to reconcile our different preferences for our local MPP, political party, and Premier into a single vote.” (Cornwall) Second, people said the results of elections are difficult to understand because they don’t reflect the way people actually voted.

Most people who called for change said that election results under FPTP are unfair because they are not proportional: seat share does not equal vote share. They criticized the adversarial, “winner-take-all” tendency of FPTP to produce manufactured majorities (parties that win a majority of seats with less than a majority of votes), and to exaggerate small fluctuations in popular support with large shifts in seat shares. People questioned the legitimacy of a system that produces these results.

As ridings have only one member each and there can be only one winner, supporters of other candidates said they feel they are denied representation. Many said they feel their votes are “wasted” if they don’t count toward electing anyone and that the nature of the system requires them to vote strategically—against someone, as opposed to for someone. These factors were often connected to low voter turnout.

Many who called for change gave the current system low marks for representation of women, Aboriginal peoples, minorities, and other groups. They said the system’s lack of proportionality makes it difficult for small parties to win seats and prevents a diversity of candidates and viewpoints from making it into the legislature. Some suggested single-member districts are to blame because parties choose the candidate who they think will appeal to the broadest number of voters in the riding.

Some people suggested the current system reinforces regional differences because parties that have strong regional support are more likely to win seats than parties that appeal broadly to all voters.

Alternative Vote

AV increases voter satisfaction: ‘He wasn’t my first choice, but at least he wasn’t my last choice.’ (Dryden)

AV is simple and similar enough to our current system to be accepted. It would be a modest, pragmatic change. (Kitchener-Waterloo)

AV ends up with a majority unhappy and without representation. (Peterborough)

Participants who recommended Alternative Vote (AV) like that it produces a winner with majority support. Many equated majority support with legitimacy, fair representation, and accountability.

Some people thought AV is the best system. Others saw it as a first step toward further electoral reform—an improvement over our current system without drastic change. They thought it was more likely to gain popular support than other new systems.

AV was praised for retaining local representation; often producing single-party majorities; and using a ballot similar to the current one. Instead of marking a single X, though, voters could rank their preferences. Many saw a preferential ballot as critical to voter choice and making more votes count, as voters’ alternative choices would be considered. They also thought a preferential ballot would encourage parties to seek broader support to earn voters’ second choices.

People who spoke against AV don’t see it as a big enough improvement over the current system. Comments included: it doesn’t produce proportional results; small parties would still have trouble winning seats; voters should be able to get their first choice, not their second or third choice; and preferential ballots are too complicated.

Two-Round System

We could vote genuinely in the first round, knowing that we'd have the opportunity to vote again. The gap between the two rounds would be very exciting. It would increase voter participation. (Chatham)

It might be helpful to emphasize more of a majority, but I can't imagine having two elections. (Windsor)

I would support run-off elections ahead of a preferential system. (Guelph)

The few people who recommended a Two-Round System (TRS) like that a candidate must get a majority of votes to win. This was seen as fundamental to legitimacy. Their thinking was often similar to those who advocated for Alternative Vote: TRS would retain local representation; would be simple (despite two elections); and would not be a radical departure from the current system.

One supporter of TRS suggested that we don't need immediate election results and that taking time for a second round was fine. A few participants questioned the practicality and cost of having two elections, but one noted that "poorer countries use TRS, so we can afford them." (Barrie)

Proportional Representation Systems (General) & List PR

A straight List PR system is the simplest and best form of PR. It's the 'real thing.' (Toronto)

I sympathize with Proportional Representation, but nobody has explained to me exactly how it would work. (Belleville)

If we vote for a party and not for an individual, we will not have accountability. In a list system, the members are accountable to the party, not to the voters. (North Bay)

Many participants advocated for Proportional Representation (PR), somewhere along a continuum from absolute proportionality to at least some proportionality ("more than we have now"). Some people identified which system they prefer; others did not. Some knew what they wanted to achieve, but weren't sure the best way to get there. Many people referred to PR systems in general; a few spoke specifically about List PR. Single Transferable Vote (STV), Mixed Member Proportional (MMP), and Parallel Systems were also recommended as proportional systems. (Separate sections on STV, MMP, and Parallel Systems follow.)

Many people who talked about PR systems generally or List PR focused on the principles and objectives they want to achieve: proportional results and an end to "wasted votes"; demographic representation; more voter choice; coalition governments and a more consensual style of politics; more representation of small parties and alternative viewpoints in the legislature; and an end to the "winner-take-all" feature of First Past the Post.

Comments on PR systems often fell into three main areas: party lists, thresholds, and the trade-off between proportionality and geographic representation.

Many people talked about party lists in the context of List PR, MMP, or Parallel Systems. Supporters of party lists see them as a useful tool for promoting the election of women and other under-represented groups. Generally, those who saw demographic representation as the top priority wanted closed lists; and those who emphasized voter choice wanted open lists. Some people suggested laws or incentives for parties to make their lists representative, while others thought that public pressure would be enough. Some argued that the fear of lists was "overblown," and that lists could be developed democratically by party members.

Critics of party lists included proponents of the current system, supporters of STV, and a number of people who advocated for an MMP system without lists. They said they want to vote for an individual, not a party. As one person put it: "How can you be represented by someone

from a party list?” (Orangeville) People argued lists give parties too much power, shut out independent candidates, and are a blunt tool for increasing demographic representation.

Many people talked about thresholds in relation to PR systems in general, List PR, and MMP. (Thresholds require parties to obtain a minimum level of support to qualify for proportional seats.) A few people said there should be no thresholds if voters are to be truly represented. Many people were willing to consider some kind of threshold to prevent too many single-issue or “extremist” parties from gaining representation. Common suggestions for a threshold were between 2% and 5% of the vote.

People had various views on the balance between proportionality and geographic representation (an issue also dealt with under MMP). Some supporters of PR advocated for province-wide lists (no regions) and thought geographic representation is divisive, outdated, or less important than achieving proportionality. Some said that province-wide List PR is the only way to represent geographically distributed groups who are under-represented, such as young voters and people who are poor. However, many people wanted to retain some level of geographic representation because of the size of the province and regional differences.

As all proportional systems require districts with more than one representative, many people talked about district magnitude (the number of members elected in a district). Some identified the tension between wanting a larger district magnitude to achieve greater proportionality, but not wanting to make ridings too big or add too many seats to the legislature. (The size of the legislature is discussed further under “Other Thoughts.”) Supporters of PR systems said multi-member ridings would provide more diverse representation and give voters a choice of MPPs to contact. By contrast, some people felt that multi-member ridings wouldn’t work. “Who do you go to when you have a problem with the government?” (Toronto)

Critics of PR systems felt they give too much power to parties and sacrifice the important connection between voters and their individual

representatives. They also oppose systems that fail to produce single-party majority governments. Generally, they associate PR systems with unstable and ineffective coalitions, frequent elections, a lack of accountability, and the proliferation of small parties.

Single Transferable Vote

STV possesses a conceptual elegance that comes with preferential voting. I think it would be very saleable. (Toronto)

Each vote is for a candidate, which improves individual accountability and creates a direct link between the electorate and their representatives. (Oakville)

STV sounds interesting but I don’t understand the mechanics of it. (Markham)

Supporters of Single Transferable Vote (STV) like that it is a proportional system, but candidate-centred: voters vote for individual candidates and there are no party lists. Some people thought STV would keep parties on their toes because they would have to appeal to more voters to win their second choice (and subsequent) votes. Some thought that the quality of candidates would improve because parties could run multiple candidates in a riding and they would have to compete against one another. Participants often praised STV for maximizing voter choice. Its ballot allows voters to rank their preferences, regardless of party. They said this would eliminate strategic voting and make every vote count, as surplus votes would be transferred to other candidates. They also thought STV’s multi-member districts would help improve the representation of women and other groups: more candidates, greater diversity. People were split on how big districts would have to be under STV. Some thought they would have to be too large and rural and northern areas would lose representation. Others thought that STV could be designed to have meaningful geographic representation, and that district magnitudes could be adjusted to reflect regional concerns.

Most participants who objected to STV said that the counting of votes is too complicated. They worried that people wouldn't understand it and would reject an STV proposal. Some questioned whether STV results are legitimate or "manufactured" by the counting process. A few people said STV was their first choice but they were recommending other systems because they thought STV would be a "tough sell." Not everyone agreed: "It's simpler than doing our taxes or dealing with Windows. If Malta, Ireland, and Australia can make STV work, so can we." (Toronto)

Mixed Member Proportional

MMP provides proportionality while preserving our direct local connection to government. It retains the best features of our system and remedies its deficiencies. It is the best compromise. (Kingston)

A change to MMP would be less shocking than a change to pure List PR and would bring many of the same benefits. (Toronto)

Adjustment seats give parties too much control over candidates. Everyone should have to run in a riding. (Thunder Bay)

Most people who recommended Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) like that it combines geographic representation with proportionality. Many people (supporters and detractors) said that the system involves a trade-off between local representation and proportionality. Many said they could live with some balance of the two: "I don't want to lose local representation, but I will give up some of it for a more representative government." (Orangeville) Critics of MMP felt that ridings would have to be too large, especially in the North, and local representation would suffer. A few participants suggested keeping northern ridings the same size but enlarging urban ridings to address this issue. Thoughts varied on specific design features of MMP. In terms of the ratio of local seats to list seats, there were several suggestions, including: 75% (local) to 25% (list), 60% (local) to 40% (list), or an even 50%/50% split. People were

divided on whether proportionality should be calculated regionally to provide better local representation and accountability, or province-wide to produce more proportional results. Some proposed that party lists be regional but that proportionality be calculated province-wide. Most people thought local candidates should be elected using a plurality system like we have now. A few people supported using a majority system like Alternative Vote which would allow voters to rank their preferences. Most participants recommended giving voters two separate votes—one for a candidate and one for a party. A few people suggested it would be simpler to give voters only one vote for a local candidate and use candidates' party affiliations to calculate proportionality.

Opinions on how to fill the proportional seats also varied. Some supported using party lists (open or closed). Several people said closed lists would keep things simple and allow lists to be used to improve demographic representation. Others recommended avoiding lists altogether and filling the proportional seats with candidates who had failed to win local seats ("best losers" or "runners up").

People often talked about the two "classes" of politicians—local members and list members—under MMP. Supporters thought it would be workable: "List members can focus on regional or province-wide issues. There could be a useful division of responsibilities." (Niagara Falls) Some suggested that list members could be more policy-oriented and riding members more locally active. Critics of MMP disagreed: "Having two people represent one area is faulty. Who do you go to?" (Toronto)

Finally, some supporters of MMP said that it would build on what Ontario citizens are already used to (i.e. local representation) and therefore be more easily understood and accepted than other systems.

Parallel System

A Parallel System would give small parties some representation but not overwhelm the ability of the government to govern. (Toronto)

Parallel Systems allow for a useful difference in the status of MPPs. Local members could represent constituencies, while a proportional tier could represent larger areas and focus on province-wide issues. (Hamilton)

Participants who talked about Parallel Systems generally like the features they have in common with MMP. Some prefer a Parallel System because it would be more likely to produce single-party majority governments.

Supporters of a Parallel System felt it would give voters more choice and allow small parties to gain some representation in the legislature, without the loss of stability they fear from a fully proportional system, or the added complexity of adjustment seats (in MMP). A Parallel System, they argue, would be a smaller change from the current system than MMP, and would have a better chance of meeting with public approval.

OTHER SYSTEMS AND METHODS

At many meetings, participants suggested other electoral systems and methods. Some are modified versions of the major systems described above. Others are voting methods used by institutions and organizations. Many are original models developed by presenters on their own.

This brief report can't do justice to these proposals. Visit the Citizens' Assembly website www.citizensassembly.gov.on.ca to read more about these recommendations in the meeting summaries. The summaries also note where presenters made written submissions explaining their proposals in greater detail.

Other systems and methods recommended at the consultation meetings are: Approval Voting

(Guelph, Ottawa), Centred Election System (Toronto), Condorcet Method (Mississauga, Kenora, Perth), CTESS (Christopher Twardawa Electoral System Solution) (Toronto), Fixed Members Single Member Proportionate (Ottawa), Kemeny-Young and VoteFair ranking (Kenora), Mixed Association Electoral Model (Hamilton), Modified MMP (Kingston), Open Transferable Representation (Toronto West), "other system" (Hamilton), People-Land Democracy (Toronto), Personally Accountable Representation (Scarborough), PR-DER (Proportional Representation with Decisive Election Results) (Toronto), Sudbury/Kaufman Model (Sudbury), Two-Election System (Toronto West), Weighted Vote System (Mississauga, Oshawa), and Weighting (Belleville).

OTHER THOUGHTS

Many participants raised other issues they feel are relevant to our electoral system or to the political wellbeing of the province in general. Some issues are related to the Assembly's mandate; others are clearly outside its mandate. A few examples of each category are provided here. The meeting summaries on the website provide more details on the wide range of issues people had on their minds.

Possible Referendum

A referendum with a low turnout or threshold should not lead to change. (Mississauga)

The threshold for the referendum is too high. A simple majority would be better. (Burlington)

There should be a properly funded province-wide education campaign so voters can make an informed decision. (Peterborough)

Many people reflected on what would happen if the Assembly recommends change. Many who support change said they think the 60% threshold for a referendum to pass is too high. They also advocated for a vigorous public education cam-

paigned leading up to the referendum so voters would understand any new proposal. Some participants worried whether the period of time between the Assembly's recommendation (May 15, 2007) and a possible referendum at the next provincial election (October 10, 2007) would be long enough for voters to learn about a new system.

Size of the Legislature

The public thinks that there are enough politicians already; recommending more seats would be unpopular, even if a new system requires them. (North Bay)

Increasing the number of MPPs is not a problem. We had 130 MPPs before. (Sault Ste. Marie)

Another issue raised by participants, often in the context of proportional systems, is the size of the legislature. There were two main camps: those who said they would support an increase if it were justified; and those who said they would oppose an increase under any circumstances. Some people felt that an increase would be acceptable if it strengthens the principles, in particular components of fair representation (proportionality, demographic representation, and geographic representation). Among those who thought an increase could be justified, there were various ideas on how big it could go. Most suggestions fell within the range of 130 to 150 seats.

Other Issues

We should educate young people about politics from an early age. The only way to have a good electorate is to have an educated citizenry. (Toronto)

People addressed many other issues they think the Assembly should consider in the broader context of electoral reform. Some of these have already been noted in this report. Other common ones include: how parties nominate candidates; campaign financing; voter eligibility and problems with voters' lists; and ideas on the role of media

in elections. At many meetings, people emphasized the importance of civics education in schools and of the electorate.

Citizens' Assembly Process

I hope that the Citizens' Assembly process will be used for other issues, such as climate change. (Sudbury)

The fact that the Assembly is independent gives it a lot of credibility. (Belleville)

We should be sure that the Assembly is not being steered toward any decision. (St. Catharines)

Finally, participants often commented on the Citizens' Assembly process itself. Many who came to meetings thought it is innovative and praised the involvement of "ordinary" citizens in policy-making. Many thanked the Assembly members present for their commitment and hard work, and said they would trust their decision. Others were more wary of the process: "The new system should be studied by experts before it goes to a referendum." (Belleville)

CONCLUSION

In debriefs after the consultation meetings, many Assembly members talked about how much they had learned from the public who had participated. They commented on the depth and breadth of what they had heard: a wide variety of opinions expressed with conviction and eloquence. They committed to sharing what they had heard with other Assembly members who weren't there because they were attending other meetings. They said they felt honoured to be addressed by so many citizens who care about our electoral system and civic life in Ontario. And they expressed profound appreciation for the people who came out to consultation meetings and shared their best ideas with great generosity.

Everything they heard—only a small part of which could be included in this brief report—will help the Citizens' Assembly as it deliberates and makes a recommendation for Ontario.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION MEETINGS

Barrie	December 7, 2006
Belleville	January 15, 2007
Bracebridge	January 18, 2007
Brampton	November 20, 2006
Burlington	January 18, 2007
Chatham	January 24, 2007
Cornwall (bilingual)	January 15, 2007
Dryden	November 27, 2006
Etobicoke	January 23, 2007
Guelph	January 20, 2007
Hamilton	December 6, 2006
Kenora	January 23, 2007
Kingston	January 16, 2007
Kitchener-Waterloo	January 10, 2007
London	January 9, 2007
Markham	December 4, 2006
Mississauga	November 21, 2006
Niagara Falls (bilingual)	January 22, 2007
North Bay	November 28, 2006
Oakville	November 22, 2006
Orangeville	December 6, 2006
Oshawa	November 21, 2006
Ottawa (bilingual)	January 11, 2007
Ottawa (bilingual)	January 16, 2007
Owen Sound	December 4, 2006
Perth	January 17, 2007
Peterborough	December 5, 2006
Sarnia	January 10, 2007
Sault Ste. Marie	November 29, 2006
Scarborough	December 7, 2006
St. Catharines	November 30, 2006
Sudbury (bilingual)	November 29, 2006
Thunder Bay	November 28, 2006
Timmins (bilingual)	November 27, 2006
Toronto Central	January 21, 2007
Toronto Central (ASL)	January 22, 2007
Toronto Central	January 25, 2007
Toronto Central (bilingual)	January 17, 2007
Toronto North	January 8, 2007
Toronto West (ASL)	January 8, 2007
Windsor (bilingual)	January 9, 2007

What We Read

A Report on Written Submissions to the
Ontario Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform

February 2007



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INTRODUCTION

Purpose of this Report

From October 25, 2006 to January 31, 2007, the Ontario Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform invited members of the public to make written submissions. The consultation guide, "Citizens Talking to Citizens," asked Ontarians four questions:

1. Which electoral system principles are most important to you? Why?¹
 - Are there other principles you think are important? Why?
2. Does Ontario's current electoral system reflect the principles that are important to you? If yes, why? If no, why not?
3. Do you think Ontario should keep its current electoral system or change to a different one?
 - If you think Ontario should change to a different system, which one do you prefer? Why?
 - How does the system you prefer reflect the principles that are important to you?
4. Do you have any other comments or recommendations related to the Assembly's mandate?

This report provides an overview of the key themes from the written submissions which are summarized and posted on the Citizens' Assembly's website www.citizensassembly.gov.on.ca. The submissions have allowed Assembly members to learn what is important to the hundreds of Ontario citizens and others who wrote to say what they believe an electoral system should achieve. This report reflects the thoughts expressed by the people who made submissions, and doesn't claim to speak for all Ontarians.

The submissions were one component of the consultation process which also included pub-

lic consultation and special outreach meetings. What Assembly members learn from the submissions will help them in their deliberations. All members have access to the entire collection of written submissions and summaries, and will receive a copy of this report.

Please visit the website to read the consultation guide, view this report and the other consultation reports, and find out more about electoral systems and the work of the Assembly.

About the Assembly

The Assembly is made up of 104 Ontarians: 103 randomly selected citizens—one from each of the province's electoral districts—plus the Chair, George Thomson who was appointed by the government. The Assembly was established by a regulation under Ontario's Election Act and is independent of government. Its mandate is to assess Ontario's electoral system and other systems, and to recommend whether the province should keep its current system or adopt a new one. If the Assembly recommends a new system, it must describe it in detail. If there is a recommendation for change, the government will hold a referendum on the Assembly's proposal at the next provincial election on October 10, 2007.

The Consultation Phase was the second of three phases of the Assembly's work. It was preceded by an intensive Learning Phase (September to November 2006), in which the Assembly learned about electoral systems. Consultation will be followed by the Deliberation Phase (February to April 2007) when the Assembly will discuss what it has learned and heard, and decide what to recommend to the people and government of Ontario.

¹The Citizens' Assembly regulation directs the Assembly to consider eight principles and characteristics to assess our current electoral system and others. The principles are: legitimacy, fairness of representation (which includes demographic representation, proportionality, and representation by population, among other factors), voter choice, effective parties, stable and effective government, effective parliament, stronger voter participation, and accountability. The Assembly added a ninth principle: simplicity and practicality.

A FEW STATISTICS

The Assembly received 986 written submissions by January 31—a total of 3,547 pages.² About 52% of submissions are one page or less; 42% are between 2 and 10 pages; and 6% are 10 pages or more. The longest submission is 142 pages and the shortest is just 5 words.

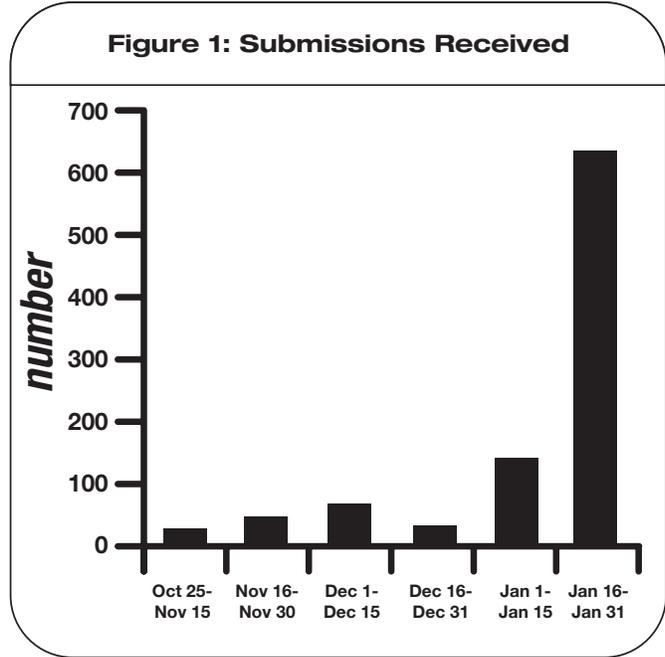


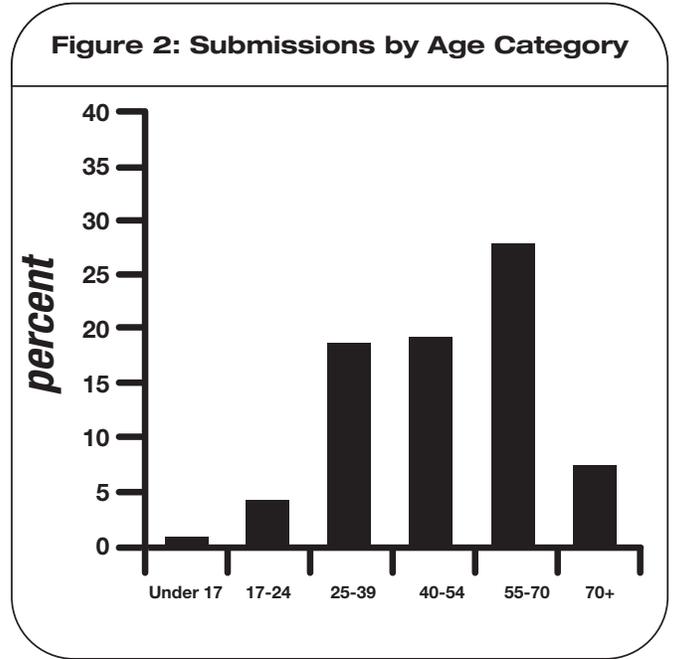
Figure 1 shows when submissions were received; 657 came in during the last two weeks of January.

Profile of Submissions

Submissions came from 889 individuals and organizations. Fifty-eight people made more than one submission. Note that the numbers in this report are based on the total number of submissions, not the number of people who made them.

Submissions were received from 54 organizations or representatives of organizations. These include: advocacy organizations, businesses, labour unions, political parties, religious organi-

zations, students' groups, women's groups, and more. The Students' Assembly on Electoral Reform, a process similar to the Citizens' Assembly to engage high school students from across Ontario, also made a written submission. (For more information on the Students' Assembly, visit www.studentsassembly.ca)



As Figure 2 shows, people of all ages made submissions.

About 79% of submissions are from men and 21% from women.

Approximately 95% of submissions are from Ontario—from 99 of the current 103 electoral districts. (No submissions were received from Scarborough-Agincourt, Simcoe-Grey, York Centre, or York West.) Fifty-four submissions, or approximately 6% of the total number from Ontario, are from the 12 electoral districts in the northern part of the province.³

Submissions were also received from Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Nunavut, and Quebec, and from other parts of the world,

² The Assembly continued to accept submissions until February 28 in response to requests from the public. An additional 53 submissions were received. These will be summarized and posted on the website, but could not be analyzed in time for this report.

³ The northern districts are: Algoma-Manitoulin; Kenora-Rainy River; Nickel Belt; Nipissing; Parry Sound-Muskoka; Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke; Sault Ste. Marie; Sudbury; Thunder Bay-Atikokan; Thunder Bay Superior North; Timiskaming-Cochrane; Timmins-James Bay.

including Australia, Germany, New Zealand, United Kingdom, and United States.

Opinions about Electoral Reform

As Table 1 shows, most submissions (763 or 77%) express opinions about electoral system reform. Of these, almost 90% favour change and just over 10% want to keep the current electoral system.

<i>Category</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Change	685	89.78
No change	78	10.22
Total	763	100

As Table 2 shows, those who favour change recommend various electoral systems. Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) is the most frequently recommended system at 33%. Single Transferable Vote and Alternative Vote are next, each with about 7% support. These are followed by List Proportional Representation, Parallel, and Two-Round System.

About 23% of people recommend a proportional system but don't specify which one they prefer. About 13% of those who recommend change favour one of a number of other methods or systems, such as Condorcet, Approval Voting, and Weighted Vote. A small group of people recommend change but don't indicate what alternative systems they support.

Note that the total number of submissions recommending alternative systems in Table 2 (721) is greater than the total number of people recommending change in Table 1 (685) because some submissions recommend more than one system.

Table 2: Most Frequently Recommended Electoral Systems

<i>Electoral System</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Mixed Member Proportional	234	32.45
Single Transferable Vote	54	7.49
Alternative Vote	51	7.07
List Proportional Representation	44	6.10
Parallel	23	3.19
Two-Round System	19	2.64
Proportional unspecified	166	23.02
Various others	94	13.04
Unspecified change	36	4.99
Total	721	100

**KEEP THE
CURRENT SYSTEM**

"It's Not Broken so Don't Fix It"

Most people who recommend keeping First Past the Post (also called "Single Member Plurality") believe it has worked well for Ontario: "It's not broken so don't fix it." Some submissions argue that the current system isn't perfect but no system is and on balance, First Past the Post (FPTP) has provided Ontario with good governance. Supporters of the system identify it most with the principles of stable and effective government, accountability, and simplicity and practicality.

Many people who wrote in favour of FPTP like that it provides stable, single-party majority governments. Under FPTP, governments normally serve a full-term in office before an election is called, and can pass legislation without having to secure the support of other political parties. Most advocates of the current system believe that an election can be fair and legitimate, even if the results aren't proportional (seat share doesn't reflect vote share).

I wish to state my support for maintaining the FPTP system. Its greatest strength is that it leads to majority governments rather than the minority coalitions that most other systems foster. The duty of government is to lead, not to be forced into compromising its platform to obtain the support of parties that garner single digit percentage support from the electorate. (Herschell Sax, submission 1583)⁴

Clear Lines of Accountability

Advocates of the current system give it high marks for providing a clear line of accountability between the voter and the government. They believe single-party majority governments are more transparent than coalitions. With single-party majorities, voters know who is responsible for making decisions, and whom to hold accountable at the next election.

In addition to providing government accountability, supporters of FPTP believe the system allows voters to hold individual representatives accountable. In our system, they argue, there is a strong link between voters and local Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs). This helps ensure that members are sensitive to the concerns of their constituents.

A Simple System

Those who favour FPTP say it is the easiest system for voters to understand. The ballot is simple and the election results are clear: The winning candidate is the one with the most votes in the district and the government is the party with the most seats across the province.

It is my firm belief that the simplicity of the existing plurality system [makes it] the most effective and most democratic method of electing our parliamentary representatives. (Joseph Zanyk, submission 1474)

The Cost of Change

A number of FPTP supporters are also concerned about the cost of adopting a new electoral system. Some believe reform would require increasing the number of seats in the legislature which they would not support.

I strongly believe that government should be small. Today, we could govern Ontario with 50% fewer elected members of the legislature and fewer bureaucrats. Any reform that would increase the number of elected members should be resisted. (Joe Mundy, submission 1436)

Representation by Population

A number of submissions support retaining the current system but think it would be fairer if representation by population was more consistent across the province. They believe every electoral district should have roughly the same number of voters, so that every vote would influence the results of elections equally.

Every attempt should be made to draw the electoral boundaries such that a vote is equal across Ontario. Right now the boundaries favour the rural voter... This is not right and should be addressed on a periodic basis. (Rod Williamson, submission 1554)

Voter Participation

Many people who wrote in favour of FPTP are concerned about declining voter turnout but don't believe it is related to the electoral system, or that a different system would encourage more people to vote. Some suggest that the problem be addressed through other initiatives, such as government education campaigns encouraging voters to go to the polls.

⁴The submission numbers start at 1,000 so every one would have a four-digit number. Some numbers are missing because duplicate or spam submissions were deleted.

CHANGE THE SYSTEM

Many people who wrote in favour of change said they believe the current system is outdated and no longer meets the needs of a modern, diverse society. Those who recommend change focus most often on the principles of fairness of representation, legitimacy, stronger voter participation, and voter choice.

An archaic voting system has no place in 21st century Ontario. (Fair Vote Ontario, submission 1383)

Proportionality

Almost every submission recommending change highlights fairness of representation and, in particular, proportionality. Most advocates of change believe that disproportional results are unfair: Some parties (often larger ones) receive more than their share of seats, while other parties (often smaller ones) receive less than their share of seats. Many believe that this—more than any other factor—compromises the legitimacy of the current system. They argue that a more proportional system would increase voter confidence in the political process.

The legitimacy of a democratically elected assembly or government requires that the voter participation is high and that the way representatives are elected is fair. Another requirement of legitimacy is that the representation of parties in an assembly should be proportional to the voters' choices. (Abel Ferreira, submission 1357)

Many submissions wanting change suggest that votes cast for candidates that don't win are "wasted" because they have no direct impact on the make-up of the legislature. The greater the proportionality of results, they point out, the fewer number of wasted votes.

When a map of Ontario is coloured according to party affiliation of members of the legislature, one often sees blocks of the same party. This is often not reflective of the percentage of the popular vote, just the unfairness of our present system.

(Elaine Kennedy, submission 1338)

Voter Participation

Unlike those who support FPTP, many people who want change think that voter participation is directly affected by the electoral system. They feel the current system discourages citizens from participating because many believe their votes don't count. They believe changing to a proportional system would increase voter turnout.

When you talk to voters you often hear them say 'why should I bother voting, my vote won't count anyway?' And if they don't vote for the most popular candidate in their riding they're probably right.

Under our current system all the votes cast for parties other than the ultimate riding winner are in effect wasted—they have no influence on the outcome of the election.

The flipside of that is that many people vote strategically rather than sincerely.

(Jeannie Page, submission 1397)

A Representative Legislature

Concerns about the lack of proportionality also relate to demographic representation. Many who favour change don't believe Ontario's legislature is an accurate reflection of the diversity of the province. Submissions identify women, members of visible minorities, Francophones, young people, Aboriginal peoples, people with disabilities, and other groups as being under-represented in our legislature.

Many argue that the "winner-take-all" nature of single-member districts under FPTP disadvantages those who come from underrepresented groups. In contrast, they believe proportional systems provide greater opportunities for parties to run, and voters to elect, a more diverse slate of candidates. Party lists, for example, can

be balanced to reflect the diversity of the population. Advocates of change often refer to the more diverse parliaments in other parts of the world as evidence that proportionality can enhance representation.

Europeans generally use some form of proportional representation instead of our First Past the Post system. This results in more women getting elected. (Doris Anderson, submission 1718)

Many supporters of change believe proportionality would allow more views to be heard in the legislature. They suggest that supporters of smaller parties often feel obliged to vote for established parties whose candidates have a better chance of winning in single-member districts. If votes for smaller parties had a direct impact on parties' standings in the legislature, people may be more inclined to vote for their first choice. This would make it easier for smaller parties to grow and, in turn, become better established.

People believe voting for an alternative party is a wasted vote... I believe all parties should have an equal voice or at least more opportunity for their voice to be heard. (Shane Mussche, submission 1173)

Coalition Government

Advocates of change are also concerned about having stable and effective government and an effective legislature. Supporters of proportional representation recognize that single-party majority governments are often stable but argue that they are only desirable if a majority of the population voted them in. Otherwise, it is more democratic to have governments that better represent the range of choices expressed by the electorate.

Many of those in favour of change believe coalitions (whether they form minority or majority governments) are more effective and responsive to the concerns of voters. In a coalition, they point out, no one party has all the power and coalition partners must negotiate

and work together to represent diverse viewpoints. Those who like the idea of coalition governments believe they would help make the legislature more co-operative and conciliatory. This would help address the concerns many citizens have about the adversarial nature of politics in the province.

The following sections provide a more detailed look at the themes expressed by the people who recommended specific electoral systems.

Mixed Member Proportional

Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) is the system most frequently recommended in submissions advocating for change. Many MMP supporters believe the system best reflects the principles of fairness of representation (proportionality and geographic representation, among other factors), and voter choice.

Local Representation and Proportionality

Advocates for MMP like that it can provide proportionality while maintaining local representation. Many people said they feel it is important to Ontarians to have an identifiable representative who is accountable to the voters in an electoral district. They believe MMP would represent significant change toward proportionality but would not be too unfamiliar to Ontario voters. MMP adds a tier of compensatory (or adjustment) seats to a structure that is similar to our current system.

While I would personally support a move toward a List PR system, I recognize that it would be a rather bold change that would alter some commonly accepted and perhaps cherished elements of our current system. With MMP, we can maintain local representatives responsible for specific ridings, but also ensure a more accurate reflection of the overall provincial vote. (Murray Cooke, submission 1814)

Many of those who recommend MMP recognize that the number of local districts must be reduced or the number of seats in the legislature increased to create a compensatory tier. Some MMP supporters don't want to see the size of the legislature increased. Others feel Ontarians are currently underrepresented, given the population of the province, and having a larger, more diverse legislature would increase the quality of political representation.

Voter Choice

Those who recommend MMP believe the system would give voters more choice. They like the idea of giving voters two votes: one for the candidate of their choice and one for the party of their choice.

I think that a mixed model in particular, similar to those found in Germany and New Zealand, would allow voters the opportunity to select the party they support, while still allowing them to vote for a specific MPP in their riding. (Jennifer MacFarlane, submission 1729)

Many said a double ballot would reduce the pressure voters sometimes feel to vote strategically for their second choice candidate, in order to prevent another candidate from winning. On an MMP ballot, the party vote determines the number of seats each party is awarded. This makes it possible for voters to choose their first choice on the candidate side of the ballot without affecting the overall standings of parties in the legislature. Supporters of MMP argue that election results would be fairer and more legitimate if voters felt free to vote according to their true preferences.

Party Lists

Some MMP supporters like party lists because they can be used to reflect the diversity of the province. Supporters argue that balanced lists would produce a more representative legislature by allowing more women, visible minorities, and members of other historically under-represented groups to be elected.

Some supporters of MMP don't like the idea of political parties drawing up lists of candidates to be awarded compensatory seats. They feel this gives parties too much control over who is and who is not elected. A proposed alternative among submissions is the "near-winners" or "best losers" method, which allocates compensatory seats to the runners-up in the local districts. Advocates believe it would help ensure that all members of the legislature are directly accountable to the voters. Some people recommend using a single-vote ballot (very much like Ontario's current one), and calculating proportionality based on candidates' party affiliations.

Those appearing high on the 'best losers' list are there, not because they are friends or favourites of the party elite (and therefore unaccountable to the voters), but rather because a sufficient number of people voted for them! This also introduces legitimacy, because these candidates can make a legitimate claim to be representing at least citizens that voted for them locally in that particular riding. (Glen MacDonald, submission 1921)

Flexibility and Simplicity

Many MMP supporters said they like the flexibility of the system. For example, those who don't think it is fair to elect local members by a plurality vote, suggest using a majority system like Alternative Vote to decide winners in local districts. Others who believe simplicity is a more important principle favour plurality elections at the local level because the overall results of the election will closely reflect the popular vote.

Some critics of MMP worry about the complexity of a system that elects MPPs in two different ways and has a list tier added to local district seats. In contrast, supporters point to the fact that MMP is used successfully in other countries and feel confident that Ontarians will adjust to the new system.

Single Transferable Vote

The second most favoured system among submissions is Single Transferable Vote (STV). Supporters of STV like that it provides a degree of proportionality and geographic representation. Similar to MMP, STV is seen as a system that preserves some of the features of Ontario's current system but also provides the benefits of more proportional results. Submissions favouring STV associate the system with the principles of voter choice, stronger voter participation, and accountability.

Geographic Representation

Many supporters describe STV as a proportional system that is regional by nature. They see this as an advantage in a province like Ontario that is both geographically and demographically diverse. Each area of the province would be represented by members from local districts much the same as now. The difference is that the districts would be larger and have more than one representative. Those who favour STV support the idea of having districts that are large enough to accommodate the diversity of a district, but small enough to represent local issues effectively.

Voter Choice

Advocates of STV believe the preferential ballot gives voters more choice than a categorical ballot because it allows them to rank their preferences. In the multi-member districts used in STV, parties often run more than one candidate in a district. Voters can choose to support more than one candidate from a party, or can support the candidate they like most, without feeling obliged to vote for the party's entire slate of candidates.

STV provides a special opportunity to mitigate geographic disparities, by varying the district magnitudes from region to region... But the real advantage of STV over other forms of proportional representation is the degree of voter choice; indeed STV can best be thought of as proportional representation together with voter choice, the ability to prefer not merely a party, but a candidate or candidates within that party. (Eileen Wenekers, submission 1018)

STV supporters also believe that the preferential ballot and vote transfers help eliminate strategic voting. Voters know that their second, third, or subsequent preferences will be taken into account even if their first choice candidate isn't elected.

STV gives citizens more say in who makes up their government by allowing them to use their second and third choice if required. In this way no vote is ever wasted and MPPs continue to be accountable to a local riding. (Brendan Simons, submission 1066)

Some people favour STV because it allows independent candidates to be elected. Independent candidates are rarely elected in party-based proportional systems because seats are allocated according to the percentage of the popular vote each party receives. And under First Past the Post, independent candidates must get more votes than each of the candidates representing established parties to be elected. With STV, candidates need only obtain enough support to reach the quota. Supporters believe this gives voters more choice because they can support candidates running for their preferred party, as well as independent candidates who have a real chance of being elected.

Absence of Party Lists

STV, unlike other proportional systems, does not require political parties to draw up lists of candidates to be elected. The parties nominate candidates to run in each district but the voters decide which candidates are awarded seats in the legislature. Supporters of the system believe this makes representatives more accountable to the voters and less accountable to their parties. Some critics of STV believe that the absence of party lists makes it more difficult for parties to promote the election of women and other groups. Others disagree. They argue that if parties nominated more representative candidates they would have a better chance of being elected under STV because each electoral district sends several members to the legislature.

Complexity in the Eye of the Beholder

Critics of STV often suggest that the system is complicated and one of the most difficult to understand. Some supporters agree but believe its benefits outweigh these concerns. Some point out that the counting and transferring of votes may be more laborious than in other systems, but from the voters' perspective, STV is simple: Voters rank a list of candidates in order of preference.

I am in favour of Single Transferable Vote because it is quite simple, straight-forward, elegant, and easily generalizable.
(Dave Robinson, submission 2044)

Finally, a number of people argue that complexity is in the eye of the beholder and people tend to be most comfortable with the system they're used to.

Alternative Vote

The third recommended electoral system is Alternative Vote (AV). Submissions in favour of AV tend to identify it most often with the principles of legitimacy, accountability, voter choice, and stable and effective government.

Supporters favour AV because it is designed to declare a majority winner in every electoral district. They believe this makes the system more legitimate and representatives more accountable than those elected with less than a majority. With AV, no candidate can be elected without a clear mandate from constituents.

Alternative Vote... brings a great gain in voter choice and therefore in legitimacy, because it will ensure the election of the candidates who can attract the broadest possible support from their constituents.
(David Mayerovitch, submission 1684)

In general, those in favour of AV like that it tends to produce single-party majority governments. Many AV supporters, like those who prefer First Past the Post, believe that governments are more likely to be stable and effective if they don't have to make deals with other parties to

pass legislation or move forward with other government business.

Voter Choice

Like supporters of STV, those who recommend AV see preferential voting as an attractive option that reduces strategic voting and gives voters more choice. If voters felt free to cast ballots for their first choice candidates (as well as their second, third, and subsequent choices), they argue, election results would be a more accurate reflection of voters' true preferences.

Unlike First Past the Post, the 'rank system' more accurately represents the will of the people, allowing citizens to vote with their hearts without fears of vote-splitting or strategic voting. (Jay Fitzsimmons, submission 1706)

Some critics of the system believe that AV results are not legitimate because voters' first preferences rarely produce a majority winner. Some argue that the majority is "forced" by the counting process, which eliminates the last-place finishers and redistributes their votes to the remaining candidates. AV supporters disagree. They believe voters can meaningfully rank candidates because they rarely support one candidate to the exclusion of all others.

Critics of AV most often point out that it is not a proportional system. Returning a majority winner at the constituency level does not guarantee that the share of seats a party wins will be proportional to its share of the vote. AV supporters recognize this but believe that fairness, legitimacy, and accountability depend more on a system's capacity to declare a majority winner.

A Saleable Alternative

Supporters suggest it would be relatively easy to move from our current system to AV. Electoral districts would remain unchanged, voters in each district would continue to have a single representative, and the ballot would be essentially the same, except that voters would rank their preferences. This, they argue, makes AV a more saleable alternative to the Ontario public than other systems.

List Proportional Representation

The next most favoured system is List Proportional Representation (List PR). In addition to proportionality, submissions supporting List PR also highlight the importance of demographic representation, voter choice, and simplicity and practicality.

Communities of Interest

Some List PR supporters feel that representation should be understood in terms of “communities of interest,” rather than geographic communities. They argue that the best way to ensure that a broad range of interests is represented in the legislature is to ensure a high degree of proportionality.

The adoption of a List PR system in Ontario would likely increase the number of political parties represented in our legislature. Rather than a negative, new parties can enhance the quality and inclusiveness of political representation by effectively articulating the interests of new social actors in the political arena.
(Roberta Rice, submission 1014)

Many supporters of List PR believe a system with a relatively low threshold would make it easier for smaller parties to elect members to the legislature and provide voters with more choice. They suggest that under the current system small parties with broad appeal fare poorly in elections because their support is not concentrated enough in any one district to win a seat. This makes it difficult for new parties to gain representation. As a result, the choices that appear on the ballot and the members who are elected are not representative of the viewpoints in society.

Party Lists

Some people support PR systems with closed lists because they can be a useful tool for promoting the election of women and other groups. They see List PR as particularly advanta-

geous because large multi-member districts make it possible to balance lists according to different demographic considerations.

Others support the use of open or free lists to reduce party control over lists and to provide voters with more choice. Voters can choose any candidate they want and are not limited to the candidates running in their immediate area.

Generally, critics of list systems believe parties should not have control over which candidates are awarded seats in the legislature.

Flexibility and Simplicity

Advocates believe List PR is a comparatively simple and flexible proportional system. A single province-wide List PR system would, for example, remove concerns about variations in representation by population. It would also eliminate the need to redraw electoral boundaries.

Many of those who recommend List PR recognize the regional nature of Ontario. To address this issue, some suggest using a system with a small number of regional districts. This design would be more complicated than a single-district (province-wide) List PR system but supporters believe it would be simpler than many other options, including our current system which has more than 100 single-seat districts.

Supporters of List PR believe that the results produced by a highly proportional electoral system are intuitive and easy to understand: A party's share of the seats is roughly equal to its share of the vote.

Nothing could be more plain and fair than the closed list system. (Tim Rourke, submission 1067)

Parallel System

Some submissions recommend that Ontario adopt a Parallel system, which they associate with the principles of fairness of representation, stable and effective government, and simplicity. They recognize some of the benefits of First Past the Post but feel it's important for election results to be more proportional.

Proportionality

Supporters of Parallel systems also have much in common with those who prefer a Mixed Member Proportional system. Both groups like the idea of having a single, local representative and a measure of proportionality. The difference is that supporters of Parallel systems are willing to give up more proportionality to achieve other objectives. In particular, many like that single-party majority governments may be more likely under a Parallel system than under MMP.

I want a system that retains political parties, allows voting for a local representative, and makes the parliament proportional. I would prefer a system that did not always produce coalition governments. It appears that the system that best achieves these goals is the Parallel System. (David Sills, submission 1694)

Some criticize Parallel systems because they don't produce results that are proportional enough. They believe that a tier of compensatory seats (as in MMP) should be used to correct disproportional local election results.

Simplicity and Saleability

On the other hand, those who defend Parallel suggest that it is easier to understand than a mixed system. Changing to a Parallel system would not, they argue, require much change. We would have elections as we do now, but we would elect additional members to achieve a measure of proportionality. Supporters see a Parallel system as an attractive compromise that would appeal to both those who want significant change and those who are happy with the current system.

Two-Round System

Several submissions recommend a Two-Round System (TRS) or holding a runoff election between the top two finishers in district races where there is no majority winner on the first vote.

Advocates of the system believe that holding a second election is an easy and straightforward way to produce a majority winner. The ballots

would essentially be the same as now, voters would not have to rank their preferences, and there would be no need to transfer votes from one candidate to another.

[The Two-Round system] is so very simple and will eliminate the vote splitting that results so often in the winner being someone that the majority of voters don't want. (Don Crosby, submission 1648)

Supporters of TRS believe allowing voters to cast their own votes in a second round is more transparent and legitimate than the counting process under Alternative Vote which may "force" a majority. They also suggest that the time between the first and second elections would give voters an opportunity to reconsider their preferences.

Critics of TRS think it would cost too much. They believe it would be easier to adopt a system like Alternative Vote that can produce a majority winner with only one round of voting.

OTHER IDEAS

Some of the most comprehensive submissions recommend less common electoral systems or methods, or entirely new models designed to meet the specific needs of Ontario. More than 90 submissions recommend alternative systems other than those discussed above. Only a few could be mentioned in this brief paper. Please visit the Citizens' Assembly website www.citizensassembly.gov.on.ca to read these submissions.

Condorcet Method

Several submissions recommend the Condorcet method to determine a winner in a single-member district. In this kind of election, voters rank candidates in order of preference. The count is conducted by pitting every candidate against every other candidate in a series of notional one-on-one contests. The Condorcet winner is the candidate who wins the most of these contests. Advocates of Condorcet believe

it is the most accurate way to select one candidate that best reflects the preferences of a majority of voters.

[In a Condorcet system] the preferred candidate is the candidate who is preferred to all other candidates, in every sub-election... This candidate deserves to be declared elected.

(Lucien Saumur, submission 1001)

Approval Voting

Some submissions recommend Approval Voting. This method allows voters to select as many or as few of the candidates listed on the ballot. The candidate with the most votes is declared the winner. Supporters suggest that this candidate is, by definition, the one that voters approve of the most.

I urge the Assembly to opt for my proposal that includes approval voting; allowing voters to mark each choice that they are satisfied with seems more practical than forcing them to arrive at 'the best'...

(Chris Bradshaw, submission 1831)

Weighted Vote

Another suggested approach is Weighted Vote. The basic idea is that the voting power of individual members of the legislature would be weighted based on their party's share of the popular vote. This would give each party influence in the legislature that is proportional to the support it received from the electorate, even if it didn't win a proportional share of seats. Weighted Vote is designed to address disproportionality without creating multi-member districts, party lists, or other design features common among PR systems.

Under the proposed system [weighted vote], although different members may have different voting power, in aggregate, each party's voting strength is exactly proportional to the number of people who voted for that party. (Cam Farnell, submission 1947)

"None of the Above"

A few submissions recommend including a "None of the Above" option on the ballot so voters would not be forced to choose a candidate if they don't support one.

Other Systems

Other submissions recommend new electoral systems or mechanisms to address regionalism, urban and rural representation, environmental stewardship, the representation of women, the nomination of candidates, and many other important issues.

DEMOGRAPHICS AND REPRESENTATION

Many submissions express concerns about demographic representation: Is the Ontario legislature an accurate reflection of the diversity of the province? Many people—both those who recommend change and those who do not—think it is important to have more women, members of visible minorities, people with disabilities, young people, Francophones, other linguistic minorities, Aboriginal peoples, and other groups better represented in the legislature. But there is no consensus on the best way to accomplish this.

Some people don't believe demographic representation is directly related to the electoral system. They think that parties should be encouraged to nominate more candidates from under-represented groups and make sure these candidates have the resources they need to get elected. Most of those who recommend change believe some form of proportional representation would help increase the diversity of the legislature. One of the most frequently mentioned options is the balanced party list—balanced to reflect Ontario's population as much as possible.

Since all-white-male candidate lists would reflect badly on a party, and hurt its electoral chances, lists are typically balanced to include women and minority candidates. (Equal Voice, submission 1505)

Some submissions favour “zippered” lists, which alternate male and female candidates. A few recommend a system of dual-member districts where each one would elect a male and female representative.

Generally, those who made submissions are not in favour of quotas or reserved seats for under-represented groups, with the possible exception of seats for Aboriginal peoples. Some suggest reserved seats would be unfair, undemocratic, or unpopular with the Ontario electorate.

I reject quotas not because I believe there is a level playing field and that they are not needed... But [because] I accept that quotas are not saleable at this time and they are not a fix. (June MacDonald, submission 2007)

Aboriginal People

Some submissions recognize the unique political position of Aboriginal peoples in Ontario and believe something should be done to ensure they are better represented in the legislature. Among those who provide specific proposals, solutions vary. They include reserving a number of seats for Aboriginal peoples in proportion to their population, and establishing a parallel Ontario Aboriginal legislature.

Another suggested idea is to establish “Aboriginal districts.” This would involve drawing electoral boundaries to ensure a small number of districts have populations that are predominantly Aboriginal. Supporters argue that while this would not guarantee Aboriginal representation, it would give parties an incentive to run Aboriginal candidates in these districts.

Others argue that the government should engage in a separate process of dialogue with Aboriginal communities.

The Citizens’ Assembly [should] recommend to the Government of Ontario that, during the next five years, it engage in an authentic, adequately financed public education, consultation and negotiation process with Aboriginal organizations and communities to determine what kind of institutional reform would encourage and facilitate the meaningful participation of Aboriginal voters in Ontario’s decision-making processes. (Stan Jolly, submission 1942)

Northern Ontario

Many submissions said the North has too little influence in the legislature. Among these, many feel that the interests of Northern Ontario are best served by maintaining a system of single-member districts. Because the geographic size of the electoral districts in the North can make effective representation difficult, many don’t think larger, multi-member districts associated with proportional representation would be a viable option.

Some northern ridings are already far too large geographically... Any system that enlarges the size of northern ridings will make this situation even more difficult. (Brian Williams, submission 1875)

Others point out that northern districts can’t be made smaller without compromising the principle of representation by population. They don’t think it is fair or legitimate that members in urban districts represent many more voters than those in rural or northern areas.

Currently rural ridings generally have fewer voters than urban ridings, meaning that a rural vote is worth more than an urban vote. I believe this is a significant problem, since I see voter equality as one of the fundamentals of democracy. (Willem Bruce Krayenhoff, submission 1368)

CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY PROCESS

Many submissions express appreciation for the Assembly and the opportunity to participate in a discussion about the future of Ontario's electoral system. Many thanked Assembly members for their commitment, time, and effort.

I applaud the work of the Assembly and look forward to bearing more about its deliberations and recommendations.

(Marianne Brender à Brandis, submission 1250)

Let me thank you for your work and the detailed attention you are paying to this very vital exercise. (Paul Wilson, submission 1721)

Some submissions express concerns about the cost and objectives of the exercise. A few question the wisdom of convening a group of citizens with little or no expertise in electoral system design and giving it the task of recommending what is best for the province. The quality of the recommendation, they argue, depends too much on the quality of the education Assembly members receive and the resources dedicated to the project.

Possible Referendum

The most frequently mentioned issue related to the Citizens' Assembly process is the government's referendum legislation that establishes a "60/60" threshold. If the Assembly recommends change, its proposal will require 60% support overall and a majority of support in 60% of the province's electoral districts to succeed.

The majority of people who mention the referendum legislation feel that the legitimacy of the process has been compromised by the 60% threshold. They believe that such a high threshold will make it difficult for any recommendation for change to succeed. Some see it as the government trying to control the outcome of

the process even though the Assembly was established as an independent body. Others feel the threshold undermines the time and effort Assembly members have dedicated to the process.

It [is] outrageous of the provincial government to impose a requirement of 60% to pass any referendum question [while] at the same time allowing MPPs to be elected with less than 50% of the vote. (Tony McGran, submission 1064)

On the other hand, several submissions support a high referendum threshold because changing the electoral system would have a significant impact on the future of the province. They argue that a new system should not be adopted without considerable support from the people of Ontario.

Many submissions express concern that the general public does not fully understand the issues related to electoral reform or the advantages and disadvantages of alternative electoral systems. Many fear that there won't be enough time for public education in advance of a referendum vote if the Assembly recommends a new system.

I am concerned that it will take a lot of education and awareness-raising to get over 60% of Ontarians to agree upon anything! (Katherine Kitching, submission 1815)

RELATED ISSUES

Many submissions raise concerns related to the broader political process—some more closely connected to the Assembly's mandate than others. Many proponents of change believe that although electoral system reform is important, other issues must also be addressed to make the system, political parties, and representatives more responsive and accessible to all Ontario citizens.

Public Education

A number of submissions identify a general lack of political interest as a problem that needs to be addressed. Many think changing the electoral system might help improve voter participation but most do not see reform as a cure-all. Many advocate for comprehensive public education campaigns to encourage citizens, especially young Ontarians, to become more involved in the electoral process and civic life more generally.

Voter Participation

Many submissions discuss declining voter turnout and suggest various approaches to address the problem. Some argue that voting is an obligation, not a right, and recommend mandatory voting with penalties for not voting. They believe mandatory voting has worked well in other countries. Others believe incentives would be more appropriate than sanctions and would also have a positive effect on voter turnout.

Some people recommend lowering the voting age. They feel this would help increase interest and participation among young people.

Others recommend electronic voting because they feel additional voting options would encourage more citizens, especially young people, to cast their ballots. Some argue that electronic voting would also make voting and counting ballots more efficient. By contrast, other submissions argue against electronic voting because they are concerned about vote tampering and a potential loss of transparency and accountability.

Accessibility for People with Disabilities

Some submissions highlight the issue of accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities. They believe it is important to ensure all Ontarians have an equal opportunity to cast votes, participate in campaigns, and run for political office.

If casting one's vote is indeed the most important act a citizen performs in any democracy, then it is time for the process to become more inclusive for all citizens. Everyone must be able to vote in secret and with confidence if we are to truly prepare our province for the future. The members of the Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians look forward to the day when we can exercise our democratic rights freely, with confidence and dignity. (Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians, submission 1132)

Nomination of Candidates

Many submissions express concerns about the way candidates are nominated. Some believe current nomination processes place too much power in the hands of party officials. They want to see candidates nominated in an open democratic way, for example, by allowing party members to cast votes for the candidates of their choice.

Other Issues

Submissions make recommendations on many other issues, including:

- Reform to campaign financing laws to ensure that no party has an unfair, monetary advantage over another during election campaigns
- Reform to the rules that govern parliamentary procedure
- New ways to select the Premier, including allowing elected members of the legislature to choose the Premier by consensus following an election; or allowing the electorate to vote directly for the Premier
- Allowing voters to recall a representative between elections and other “direct democracy” proposals, such as holding more frequent referendums on significant government policies.

If we expect to see real democratic change, then we must look to reforms beyond electoral systems, such as citizens' initiatives, referendums, and deliberative forums, such as the Citizens' Assembly. (Joseph Angolano, submission 1730)

CONCLUSION

The broad range of ideas expressed through the written submissions illustrates the diversity of opinion among those who are concerned about the electoral system. Many people are passionate about change, while others defend the current system with equal vigour. Whatever their viewpoints, the hundreds of people who made submissions have at least one thing in common: a concern for the future of the province and the shape of one of its most important political institutions.

The Citizens' Assembly is grateful for the generosity of citizens who took the time to put their thoughts about electoral systems in writing. The collection of submissions will help Assembly members in their deliberations when they make a recommendation for Ontario. It will also be a valuable resource for researchers and others who are interested in electoral systems and this unique process of citizen engagement.

Summary Report on Special Outreach Focus Groups

Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform

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Social Planning Network of Ontario



Citizens' Assembly
on Electoral Reform

L'Assemblée des citoyens
sur la réforme électorale

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INTRODUCTION

The Social Planning Network of Ontario (SPNO) was commissioned by the the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform to plan, organize and conduct four special outreach sessions as part of the Assembly's public consultation process. Although the public consultations were open to the entire community, the Citizens' Assembly wished to make sure that a special effort was made to get input from parts of the community that often have more difficulty participating in such initiatives.

The SPNO is a province-wide network of 20 locally-based social planning and community development councils that do research, policy analysis, community development and public education using participatory methods.

Four communities from different parts of the province were selected for the special outreach sessions. The sessions were conducted in:

- Mississauga with outreach to Peel Region on Tuesday, November 21, 2006, organized by the Social Planning Council of Peel.
- Sudbury on Wednesday, November 29, 2006, organized by the Social Planning Council of Sudbury.
- Ottawa on Wednesday, January 17, 2007, organized by the Social Planning Council of Ottawa/Conseil de planification sociale d'Ottawa.
- St. Catharines with outreach to Niagara Region on Monday, January 22, 2007, organized by the Niagara Social Assistance Reform Network on behalf of the SPNO

The special outreach sessions were invitational events designed to reach people from a variety of communities whose voices are often not heard on major public policy issues and proposals: low income people, single parents, immigrants, people with disabilities and people with personal and/or community work experience on issues such as literacy, housing and homelessness, hunger, supports to seniors, youth and families.

Through the community networks of the local host social planning councils and the Niagara Social Assistance Reform Network, local individ-

uals were invited to participate in a three hour facilitated session on electoral reform. Some special supports were provided to assist participation such as transportation assistance, language interpreters and material aids (e.g. the Ottawa SPC had the presentation materials converted into Braille for a participant without sight). All sessions were conducted in accessible local facilities familiar as meeting places to community participants.

Altogether, 115 people from diverse communities attended and participated in the four special outreach sessions, breaking down by community as follows:

<i>Community</i>	<i>Participants</i>
Peel	35
Sudbury	22
Ottawa	30
Niagara	28

Participation reflected well the diversity identified previously. Notably, participation in the Sudbury session included ten young Aboriginal community members. In Ottawa, French language facilitation and materials were provided to accommodate the participation of members who wished to discuss the material in their own language. As well, audio-visual presentations were shown in both official languages in the Ottawa session.

The format for the special outreach sessions varied from the consultation meetings of the Assembly open to the general public. Since only four sessions were to be held, and since it was expected that not many participants would be very familiar with the electoral systems and principles, a structured process of presentation, discussion and participation was planned. The four sessions employed an intensive three-hour agenda with the following components:

(a) Introductions of Citizens' Assembly officials and participants and overview of the purpose and agenda for the session.

(b) Screening of a DVD introducing the mandate and work of the Citizens' Assembly followed by questions of clarification to Secretariat officials.

- (c) Power Point presentation on the mandate of the Citizens' Assembly and the focus of the session with questions for clarification.
- (d) Opening questions and facilitated discussion on why participants vote and how well the current provincial voting system works.
- (e) Overview presentation by Power Point of the principles and their main elements that the Citizens' Assembly is using to assess possible options for electoral reform (principles/sub-elements are appended).
- (f) Facilitated discussion on the principles and their sub-elements individually.
- (g) "Dotmocracy" exercise in which participants individually indicate the degree of importance that they give to the principles and sub-elements.¹ (See attached list on the principles as presented for consideration in this exercise.)
- (h) Review and discussion of dotmocracy results.
- (i) Screening of Billy Ballot, a short video prepared by the Secretariat that briefly reviews the main features of the four families of electoral systems (available along with other resource material at www.citizensassembly.gov.on.ca).
- (j) Reflection on how the four families of voting systems in Billy Ballot reflect the principles that participants highly value and discussion of preferred options for electoral reform.
- (k) Conclusion and thanks to participants with information on how they can follow the work of the Citizens' Assembly.

With the exception of Sudbury, each session was facilitated by Peter Clutterbuck, Community Planning Consultant with the SPNO and attended by Susan Pigott, Executive Lead of Citizen Engagement with the Secretariat. In the case of Sudbury, inclement weather prevented the attendance of Peter Clutterbuck and Susan Pigott. Janet Gasparini, Executive Director, of the Social Planning Council of Sudbury, was briefed by telephone and used prepared session materials to facilitate

the Sudbury group. Janet was aided by other Secretariat officials who were present, including the Executive Director of the Secretariat, Karen Cohl and Mark Lyons, Policy Analyst/Researcher with the Secretariat.

Three Citizens' Assembly members, David Viitala, Stephanie Jones and Ron Green, and the Chair of the Citizens' Assembly, George Thomson, were able to attend and participate in the Niagara session. Another Citizens' Assembly member, Richard Bowdidge, attended the Sudbury session. In both cases, the Assembly members were warmly welcomed and their attendance was much appreciated by session participants.

All sessions were stimulating and animated. Those attending participated enthusiastically and took strong interest in the work of the Citizens' Assembly and the discussion of the principles and electoral systems. Many participants held strong views on the electoral system and on other parts of the democratic process. Most were not familiar with the complexities of electoral systems and found the presentations and the discussion educational. Participants were very pleased that the Citizens' Assembly had made provision for these special outreach events. Some indicated that it would have been good to conduct more of them.

THOUGHTS ABOUT VOTING

Participants were invited to express why they voted and why it is important to vote. This general opening line of inquiry led into comments and observations about the current provincial voting system.

Participants from all four communities indicated that reasons for voting include:

- To be a responsible member of society.
- To fulfill a civic duty and contribute to the working of democracy (some thought that

¹Each participant was given three strips of four dots (four red for "high importance," four blue for "medium importance" and four yellow for "low importance") and was asked to give one vote to each of the twelve principles/sub-elements (five stand-alone principles and seven sub-elements), which were listed on wall charts in the meeting room.

it was a “privilege” not to be neglected, abused or taken lightly).

- To exercise a right.
- To make a difference in the community.
- To select someone who will represent their interests and views on issues and be accountable to the people who elected them.
- To have a say, influence and participate in creating good government.
- To make change and stand up for people’s needs.
- To have legitimacy if critical of the elected government.

There were some strong feelings in all four communities about why people did not vote, which were beyond the scope of the Citizens’ Assembly mandate. Participants still requested that their views on other barriers to participation in the democratic political process be reported. Barriers include:

- Poor and homeless people with no fixed address are not recognized to vote.
- Language barriers, income barriers, literacy barriers for many people who may otherwise vote.
- Lack of good, accessible information and education about how the electoral system works (especially for newcomers and people without English or French) and about the various candidates and parties running for election.
- Physical access barriers for people with disabilities (e.g. printed ballots for people without sight; difficulty for some elderly and frail citizens to get to polling booths distant from their place of residence).

It is fair to say that participants in all four communities held a fairly cynical view of the current political system. Much of this feeling had to do with the behaviour of individuals and political parties in the democratic process. Participants were critical of politicians in general (not just at the provincial level) for serving their own interests and just seeking votes to achieve or maintain political power and not to represent the interests of everyday people.

“I want my vote to count, but I don’t think it does anymore”

“We don’t have much choice anymore. It’s important to me to have a good selection of choices.”

“Unless you are aligned with one of the three major parties, you are shut out of the system.”

“I vote strategically. I used to vote on issues, but not anymore. Now, I vote based on negative options, and I don’t like it.”

Focussing participants on issues related to the current provincial electoral system, which the Citizens’ Assembly is charged with assessing, elicited the following observations:

- Limitations of the current party system in terms of choice.
- Concern that one’s vote doesn’t count when belonging to a minority group and not feeling strongly represented in political decision-making.
- Frustration about the lack of accountability once governments are elected.
- Elected politicians are too compelled to toe the party line rather than represent their constituents more independently.
- Concern about low participation rate and low interest of youth in voting.
- General sense of political apathy among the public, which reduces participation in voting.

In terms of improvements, participants focussed more on increasing communications between the community and elected representatives, providing more accessible information to the people, making political representatives more accountable to the electorate and helping people who feel disenfranchised to get a sense that they are being represented in government.

THOUGHTS ABOUT PRINCIPLES

The facilitator reviewed the principles that the Citizens' Assembly is considering in assessing electoral systems, explaining that Legitimacy is an over-arching principle that the Assembly believes will be achieved if an electoral system adequately satisfies the other principles.

The discussion of principles in the four community special outreach sessions follows and concludes with a report of the results of a dotmocracy exercise used in each session. The discussion is reported by principle in alphabetical order and not necessarily in the order of discussion in each community session.

Accountability

Participants in all four communities felt very strongly about the need for improved accountability in the overall political process. Asked to think about how the principle of accountability might be reflected in the electoral system, there was a lot of support for the idea of ensuring the accountability of the individual elected Member of Provincial Parliament from the local area. The general preference was for voting for candidates who would represent the local area or riding rather than just voting for a political party.

Participants felt that parties should be more accountable but were less clear about how to ensure that could happen through the electoral system. Generally, they were more hopeful about holding their individual MPP accountable than about getting accountability from political parties.

"I would like to have the chance to vote for a local candidate and a party."

"I want to vote for someone I know and who knows me - not for a political party."

"There is little accountability in our current system. MPPs have to toe the party line."

Effective Parliament & Effective Parties

Participants in the four special outreach sessions did not spend a lot of time on these two principles. Some participants did not see how the electoral system might improve the effectiveness of parties and the provincial legislature. In three communities participants noted that parties could be more effective if they adopted more collaborative approaches to work on issues and solve problems. Participants also recognized that having more parties might both ensure more people were represented and also compel elected members to work more effectively together.

"[Without parties], how do we organize 103 individual egos. It would take months to elect a leader and take a long time to make decisions. This is why we need parties."

"Maybe we need more than 103 MPPs. I would like to see more of a policy role based on expertise ... not just be given assignments because of their position in the party."

As to the effectiveness of Parliament, participants would like some assurance that the opposition in the legislature has the capacity to criticize and debate government policy and legislation. The possibility of electing a Parliament with a very weak or even no opposition was seen as a weakness of the current First Past the Post electoral system.

Fairness of Representation

This principle was one of the most strongly supported among participants in all four special outreach sessions, especially with respect to demographic representation. There was unanimity among participants that they did not see themselves reflected in the current composition of the provincial government or provincial legislature, or any level of government or legislature. They felt that the voices of marginalized people are not represented in the legislature and it is very hard for people from these

parts of the population to run for elected office.

“True democracy is about everyone’s voices being heard.”

“Representation by population is important, but politicians should represent people, not geography.”

“I have no option to vote for someone like me because they are not on the ballot.”

“You can’t talk it unless you’ve walked it.”

“We need more people elected who understand what it means to be poor.”

“Society has changed a lot since 1792, but the people in our legislature have not.”

Low income people in Niagara and Ottawa; people with physical and intellectual disabilities and with mental health problems in Peel, Ottawa and Sudbury; Aboriginal people in Sudbury; immigrants and people of colour in Peel and Ottawa; all expressed similar concerns about not feeling fairly represented in the provincial legislature and government. They linked this lack of representation with low voter turnout rates among these parts of the population.

Representation in the legislature in proportion to votes received in the election also made sense to some participants in the special outreach sessions.

“I don’t like it when people win with a small percentage of the vote.”

“I don’t like proportionality because I like stable governments.”

“I like proportionality because it allows for more voices at the table.”

“I believe that votes should be equal to seats.”

“The problem with the parties having extra seats proportionately is that those individuals don’t represent anyone and don’t have anyone they are responsible to except the party itself.”

Participants in Ottawa and Peel felt more strongly about the importance of the principle of proportionality. Ottawa participants thought it would increase voter choice. There was no clear consensus in Niagara, with some participants expressing concerns about proportionality’s effect on stable government.

In Sudbury proportionality did not get as much attention as the issue of representation by population. Sudbury participants felt that larger population centres, mostly in the south, have more influence in the provincial government.

Simplicity and Practicality

There was not a lot of discussion in the four special outreach groups on this principle. Sudbury participants felt this principle would best be ensured with better education for young people about the electoral system. In Peel and Ottawa, literacy was raised as an issue for some people in dealing with the ballot. People with intellectual disabilities, people without sight, and some newcomers also pointed out the limitations to their participation by an electoral system dependent on written materials such as the ballot. There were two views about systems that have candidates’ pictures on the ballot: some feeling it would be helpful in their choice to see people running with whom they could identify; others feeling that pictures might favour certain candidates.

Stable and Effective Government

“There is too much centralized control in our legislature.”

“If we only voted for a party as in a system of proportional representation, there wouldn’t be any stability in the resulting government. It would cause too much conflict.”

“Minority and coalition governments: sometimes they are stable, sometimes they are not.”

“Stability is important because you have to get work done. But, there is no reason to think that a coalition government would not be stable.”

Participant views varied on the importance of this principle. Mostly it was discussed in relation to the consequences of introducing an electoral system with proportional representation. Many participants felt the trade-off to get better representation was worth the loss of consistent majority governments. In Peel and Ottawa participants felt elected representatives would have to adapt and work more cooperatively in order to ensure effective stable government. Some other participants expressed more concern about instability in governments with the introduction of proportionality.

Stronger Voter Participation

Participants in Ottawa, Niagara and Peel expressed strong support for this principle. In Sudbury, there was not much confidence about the political system gaining the people’s trust, and there was concern about the lack of engagement of youth and Aboriginal people in the electoral process.

Most participants felt that improved performance by elected politicians would increase voter turnout. They also indicated that information on candidates and party policies needs to be more available and accessible to voters, so that they could make informed choices at the ballot box. There were mixed feelings about the wisdom of

making voting mandatory with penalties. Some felt this was justified because voting is a democratic privilege that citizens should be compelled to honour; others worried that compulsory voting infringed on democratic freedoms.

“The most important thing is to increase voter participation. Maybe through incentives. Make voting day a statutory holiday—give a tax break for people who vote.”

“Politicians need to see that there are consequences if they are not accountable. We need to have higher voter turnout to accomplish this. If a lot of people vote, politicians have to listen up.”

Participants in Niagara and Peel thought that incentives rather than penalties should be used to encourage stronger voter participation, although this proposal is beyond the mandate of the Citizens’ Assembly. Some groups, such as low income people, could use supports to vote, such as bus fare to get to the polling stations. Ottawa participants thought that community organizations could provide voter education, if they had the resources.

Voter Choice: Quantity and Quality

“The system should increase opportunities for diversity in choices.”

“I want to see multiple candidates for the same party.”

“When I vote I look at the individual candidate and the party. I may like the individual but the party they belong to might influence my final decision.”

“It’s important to have meaningful differences between candidates. There has to be quality information before the vote and follow up after the vote—that’s how quality is expressed.”

“We need more voter choice but sometimes people can be overwhelmed by choice.”

“It’s getting more and more confusing as all parties sound and act the same.”

Participants in the four communities expressed more support in general for the principle of quality in voter choice than in quantity. When different voting options were discussed, there was recognition that some options, which allowed for rank ordering candidate preferences or voting both for an individual and a party, would provide more choice than the current provincial system and may improve the quality of candidate or program offerings.

Some participants expressed concern about the complexity or confusion that might result from too much choice. There was general agreement across the four communities that more clear and accessible information about candidates and parties would greatly assist voters in making choices however they would be presented on the ballot.

VOTING FOR IMPORTANCE OF THE PRINCIPLES: DOTMOCRACY

The process for the special outreach sessions provided an opportunity for individual participants to “vote” for their own preferences from among the electoral design principles and their sub-elements. Following the discussion of the principles, each participant was given three strips of four dots (four red for “high importance,” four blue for “medium importance” and four yellow for “low importance”) and was asked to give one vote to each of the twelve principles/sub-elements, which were listed on wall charts in the meeting room. As Legitimacy was considered an over-arching principle, it was not included in the voter choices.

The results provide a sense of which principles participants judged were more and which less important in designing an electoral system. While not a formal poll or survey, the results do provide at least an approximation of the participants’ preferred weightings of the principles in terms of importance.

The following figures show the overall dotmocracy results for the participants in all four communities and the dotmocracy results for each community. The numbers in the bar graphs indicate the percent of all participants indicating the degree of importance (dark grey bar = “high importance,” black bar = “medium importance,” and light grey bar = “low importance”) plus the percent of missing or no votes for the principles (white bar).

The principles in each figure are presented in descending order from the highest to the lowest preferences by combining percentages for the dark grey (high importance) and black (medium importance) bars. The results are also shown in three tiers of four principles each. The top tier in each figure indicates the most important principles; the middle tier indicates mid-level importance; and the bottom tier indicates the less important principles in the judgment of the participants.

The combined votes of participants from all four communities show a strong preference for Demographic Representation (75% combined vote for “high” and “medium” importance), Stronger Voter Participation (65%), Local/Regional Accountability (59%) and Quality in Voter Choice (59%). Demographic Representation also had the highest overall vote for “most important” principle (48%). Party Accountability and Simplicity and Practicality are at the top of the middle tier, but, notably, participants gave both Party Accountability and Simplicity and Practicality the second highest proportion of “high importance” votes of all the principles (37%).

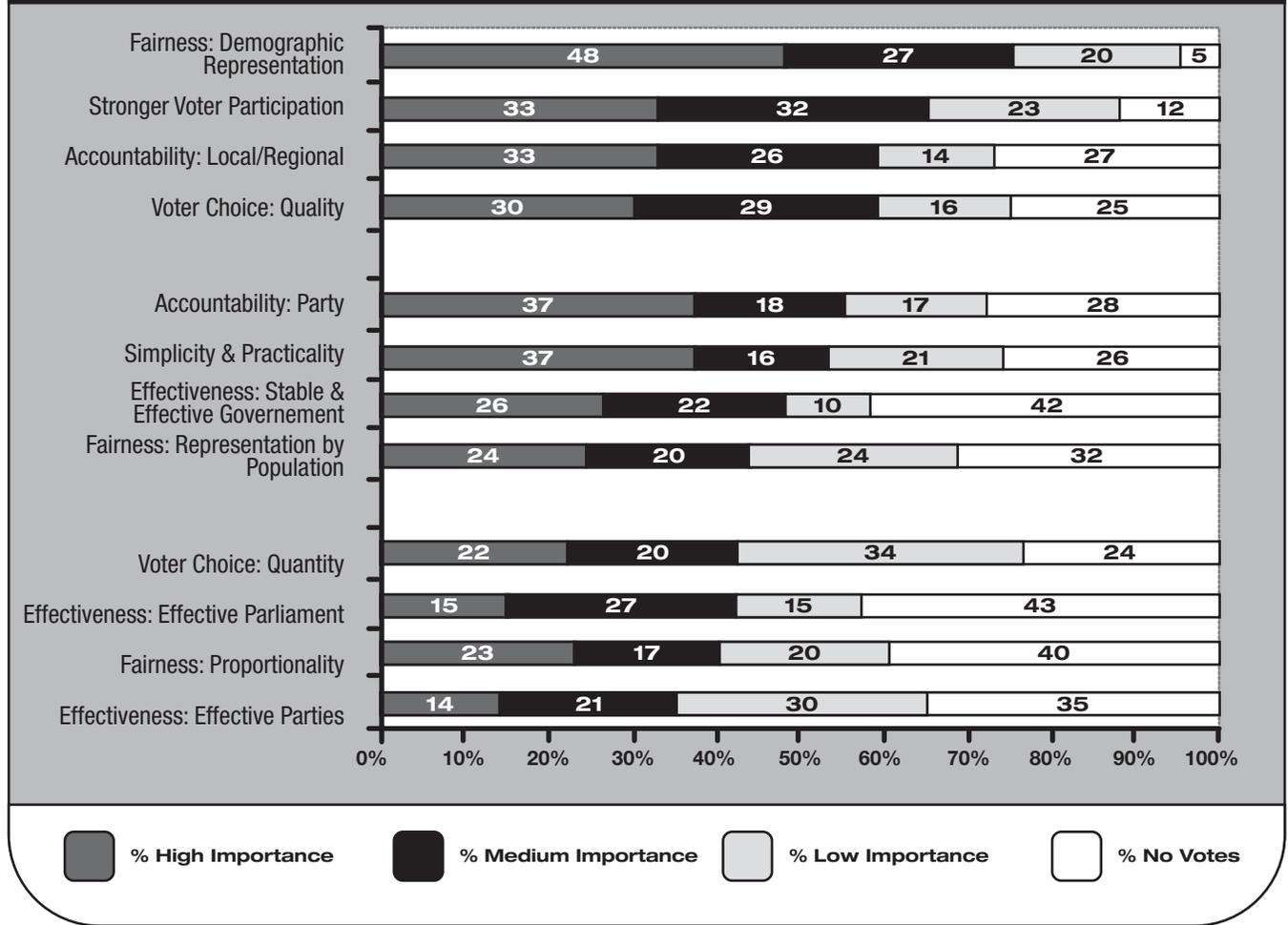
In the combined results, Proportionality is low in the third tier at 40% for high and medium importance. This low ranking is attributable primarily to the Sudbury group where only 9% of participants indicated medium importance, 50% voted low importance and 41% did not vote at all on Proportionality. The combined vote for Proportionality among the other three communities is 50% for high and medium importance, which would place Proportionality

in the second tier of importance among participants in Peel, Niagara and Ottawa combined.

In terms of the third tier of principles for the combined community vote, there is a notably high percentage of votes for “low importance” for Quantity of Voter Choice (34%) and

Results by community follow on the next two pages. Ottawa, Niagara and Peel show relatively similar results, while Sudbury’s preferences show the greatest difference among the four communities. No principle is in the top tier in all communities. Among all four special outreach groups, however, Demographic

Dotmocracy Results for All Special Outreach Groups Combined
(Number Voting = 100)

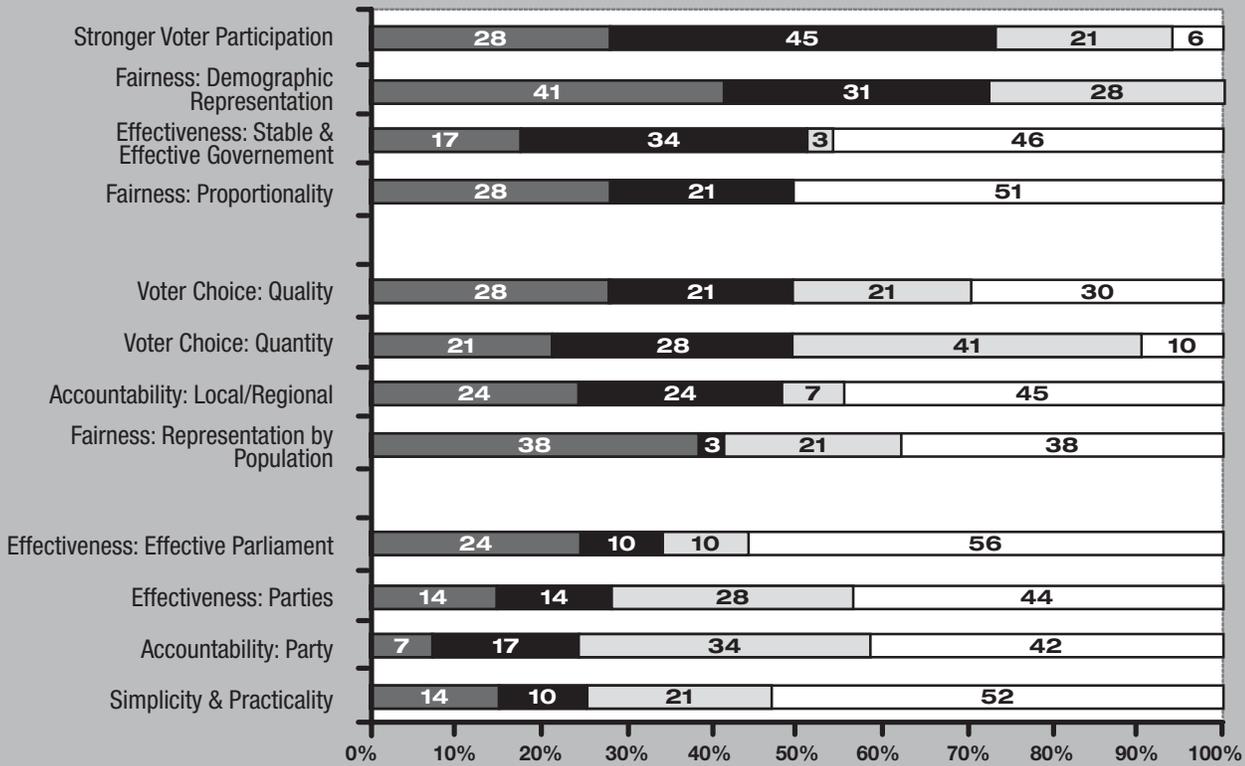


Effective Parties (30%). Among all the principles, these two received the highest percentage of “low importance” votes among special outreach group participants.

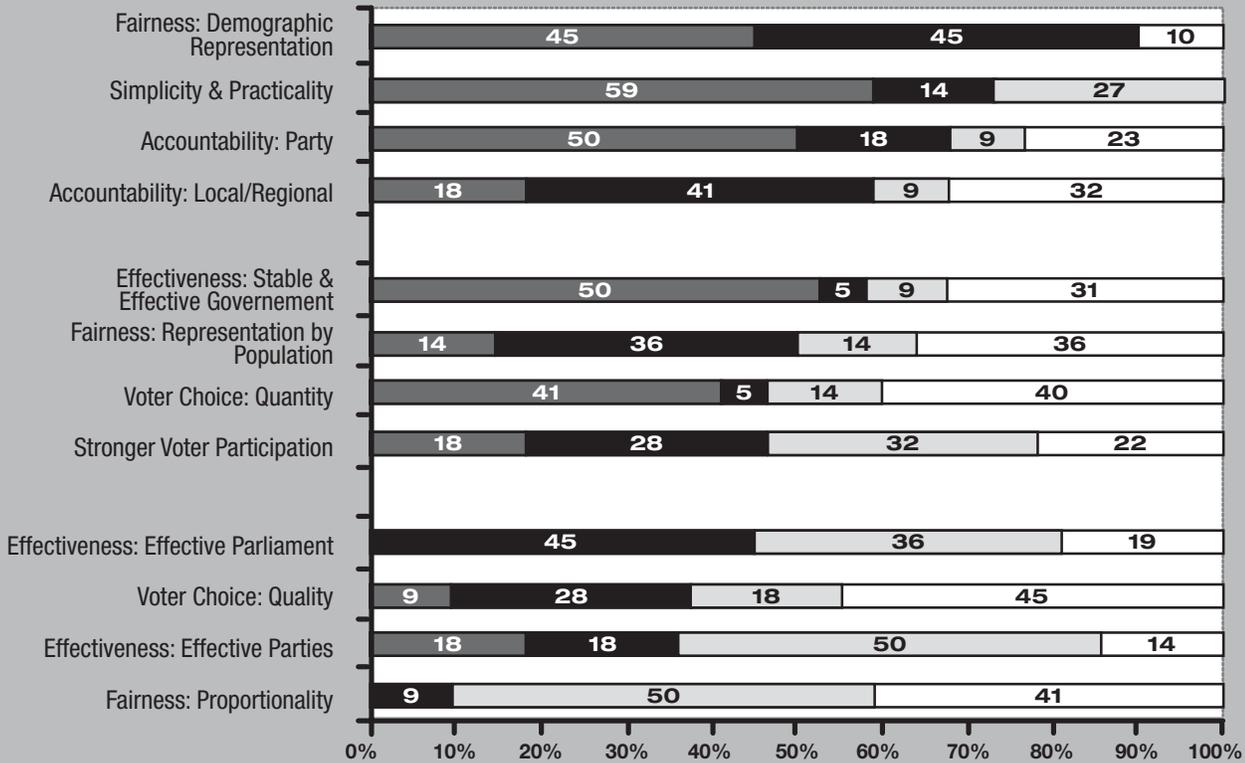
Representation, Stronger Voter Participation and Local/Regional Accountability are in the top two tiers of importance in each community.

Special Outreach Sessions: Dotmocracy Results by Community

Ottawa -- No. Voting = 29

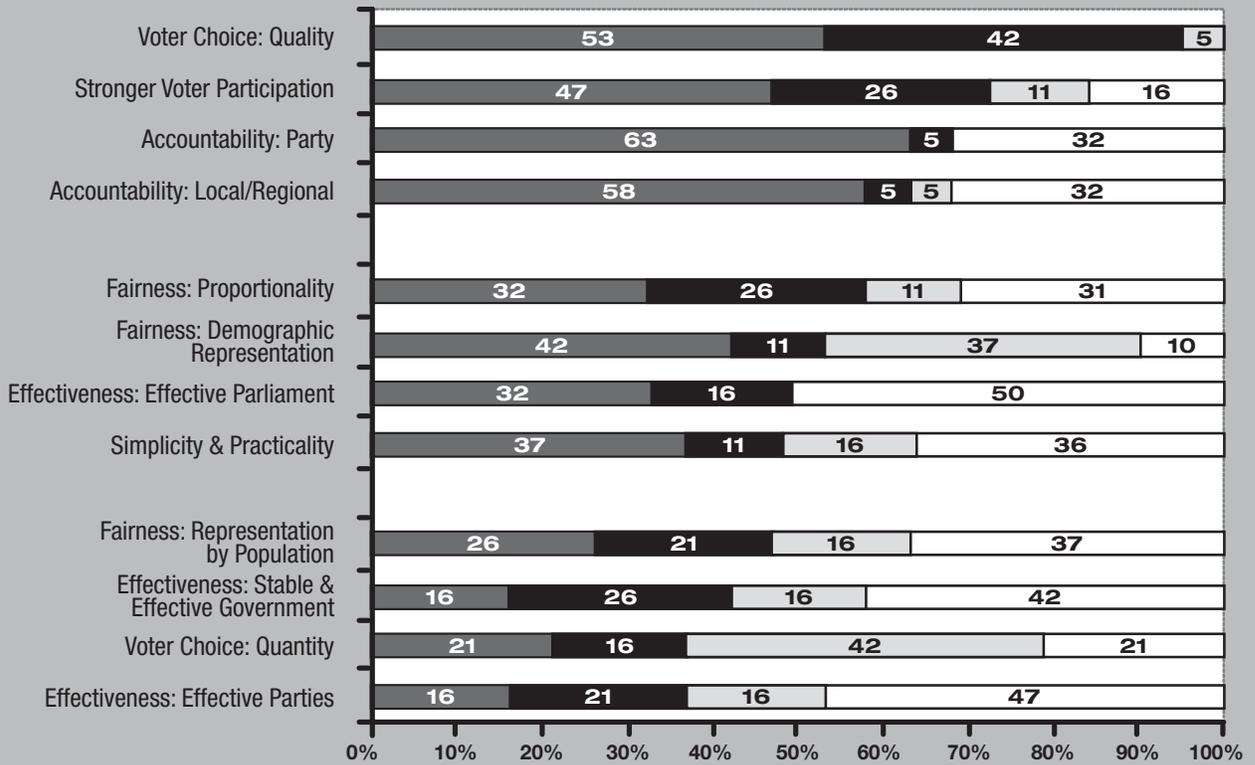


Sudbury – No. Voting = 22

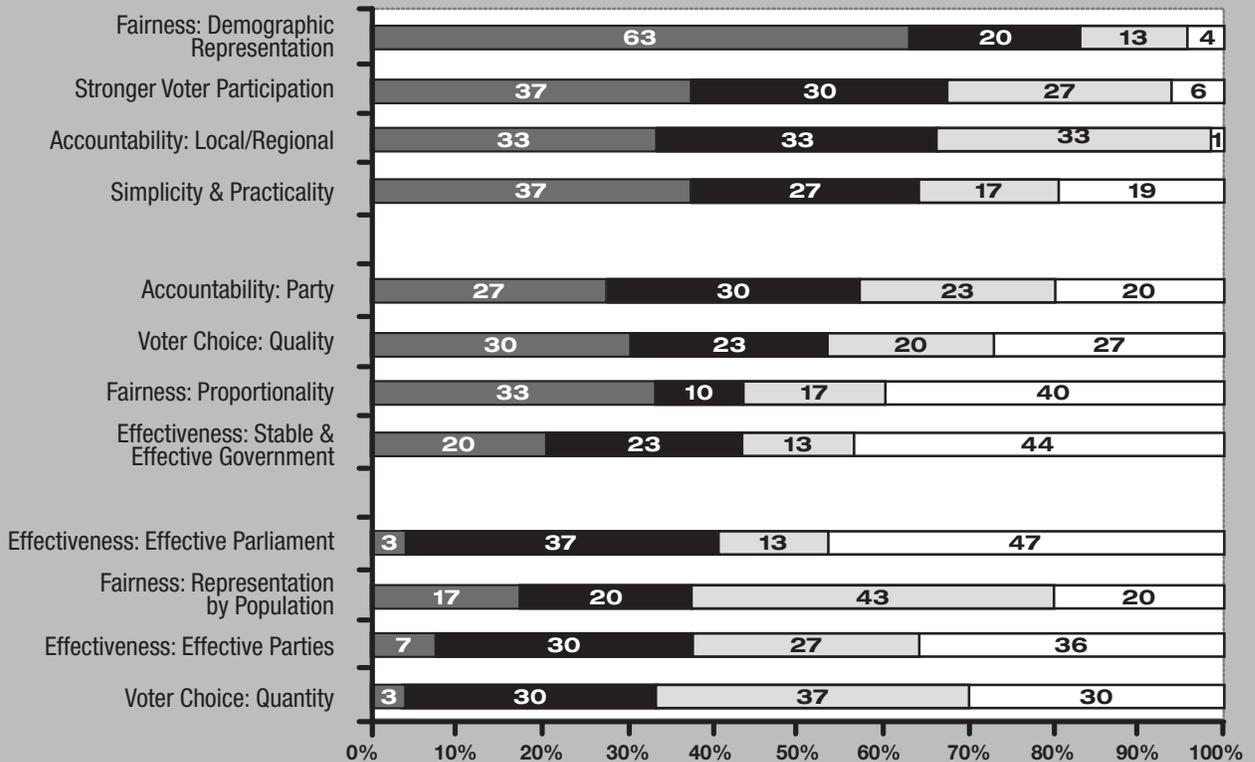


% High Importance
 % Medium Importance
 % Low Importance
 % No Votes

Niagara – No. Voting = 19



Peel – No. Voting = 30



THOUGHTS ABOUT ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

Following a screening of Billy Ballot, participants were asked to comment on the four families of electoral systems presented and how they reflect the principles that participants feel are important. There was not a lot of time for this part of the process and this was the first time that most participants had been presented with this much information about different electoral systems.

Participants in the Peel group had strong consensus that the current First Past the Post system did not reflect most of the principles that they valued more highly, although it was the simplest (fourth in importance in Peel's voting). They expressed a preference for a system that would promote voter participation, fairness in representation and improved political accountability. A few indicated support for a straight proportional system, which would demand more of parties to work effectively in coalition governments. The Mixed Member Proportional system, however, was most popular among Peel participants in that it provided a good balance between proportionality and local accountability.

Participants in the Ottawa special outreach group had similar opinions to Peel participants, especially on the benefits of proportional systems. Most Ottawa participants wanted assurance that any proportional system would keep a component of electing candidates to represent ridings. Many felt proportional systems would improve voter choice including allowing more diverse representation in the legislature. They did express, however, a concern that the Mixed Member Proportional system might be hard for voters to understand without good voter education programs. Quality and Quantity of Voter Choice were ranked high in the mid-tier level of participant preferences in the Ottawa group's dotmocracy exercise.

Sudbury participants were less positive about the prospects of a different electoral system

changing the democratic political process significantly. They concluded that it did not matter which system would be used. They did, however, express an inclination for the Mixed Member Proportional system after seeing it explained in the Billy Ballot video, to which they responded very enthusiastically. In general, Sudbury participants felt that people would need to see change in political behaviour before they would regain trust in the electoral process. There needs to be greater effort put into open and honest communications between the public and local politicians.

Participants in Niagara were also impressed with the information provided in the Billy Ballot video. There was a general sense that change in the electoral system would be beneficial and a recognition that other electoral systems reflected principles that the participants felt were important and better than the current system. Improving both local and party accountability was highly valued among Niagara participants. Although there was no consensus on the preferred voting system, participants clearly stated that the session had been very educational and had given them a lot of information for thinking about an improved or alternative electoral system.

OTHER THOUGHTS

Participants in all four communities felt strongly that there were major barriers to the participation of many people in the general democratic political process at all levels of government, which went beyond the electoral system itself. Even though these issues may be outside the mandate of the Citizens' Assembly, the participants urged the Citizens' Assembly to report these concerns and suggest government action to eliminate these barriers. These concerns include:

- Politicians need to interact more with their constituents between elections and to communicate more honestly and directly in order to encourage stronger voter participation and promote accountability.

- Politics is still primarily about who has the most money to advertise themselves. Equity should be built into the process—information should be disseminated in an accessible format—TV, radio, Internet, etc.
- There are no supports for people on low incomes, new citizens, people with disabilities and others to have the chance to run for elected office and this should be remedied.
- People need more information and political education in order to be more engaged in the democratic process, even between elections. Many participants indicated that they don't know enough about the candidates when they go to the polls.
- There should be particular attention paid to educating young people on the democratic process and electoral system and to get them engaged from an informed basis early in life.
- There is a need for more financial transparency in government and more control of party financing. There is also a concern that organized lobby groups have too much access to and influence on elected representatives.
- There should be more free votes in the legislature and greater use of public referenda.

Participants in all four communities clearly and consistently expressed frustration with their lack of access to and influence on public affairs. They had strong feelings about the failure of the current electoral system in terms of adequately representing their interests and reflecting their views. They did see merit in other electoral systems in terms of alleviating these concerns about lack of representation. They also, however, identified many other barriers to their participation in the democratic political process beyond the electoral system. Clearly, the thoughtfulness and energy that the participants brought to this opportunity to give input to the deliberations of the Citizens' Assembly belie any notion of political apathy among many Ontarians who struggle to have their voices heard.

CONCLUSION

The special outreach sessions conducted in Ottawa, Niagara, Peel and Sudbury successfully engaged people from parts of the population that are often left out of debate on important public policy issues. It is clear from both the level of participation and the enthusiasm displayed by the participants that they have a strong interest in public policy issues and much to contribute.

APPENDIX

Which principles are most important to you?

Principles	Importance		
	High	Medium	Low
FAIRNESS OF REPRESENTATION			
<p>> Demographic The Legislature reflects the make-up of the Ontario population (men/women, age, ethno-cultural diversity, income levels).</p>			
<p>> Proportionality The share of seats a party wins is about equal to share of votes it got in election.</p>			
<p>> Representation by population Each MPP represents about the same number of people.</p>			
EFFECTIVENESS			
<p>> Effective Parties The electoral system supports parties that can formulate policy alternatives for public debate and mobilize voters.</p>			
<p>> Stable & effective government The electoral system produces governments that can make policy decisions and implement their programs.</p>			
<p>> Effective Parliament The legislature works well with a government and effective opposition.</p>			
VOTER CHOICE			
<p>> Quantity Voters have a number of choices on the ballot.</p>			
<p>> Quality There are genuinely different parties and programs to choose from.</p>			
ACCOUNTABILITY			
<p>> Local/regional accountability Local reps are held responsible for government actions.</p>			
<p>> Party accountability Parties are held responsible for government actions.</p>			
STRONGER VOTER PARTICIPATION			
<p>The electoral system helps motivate more people to vote.</p>			
SIMPLICITY AND PRACTICALITY			
<p>The system works and voters understand it.</p>			

Chair	George Thomson	Nickel Belt	Richard Bowdidge
Algoma-Manitoulin	Donald Brickett	Nipissing	Roland Gibeau
Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot	Jeff Witt	Northumberland	Wendy Lawrence
Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford	Karl Cadera	Oak Ridges	Pat Miller
Beaches-East York	Catherine Baquero	Oakville	Laura Wells
Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale	Theresa Vella	Oshawa	Nancy Collins
Brampton Centre	Joyce Hughes	Ottawa Centre	Tara Currie
Brampton West-Mississauga	Mappanar Sundrelingam	Ottawa South	John Townesend
Brant	Leana Swanson	Ottawa West-Nepean	Carl Berger
Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound	Arita Droog	Ottawa-Orléans	Thomas Taylor
Burlington	Sandra Richter	Ottawa-Vanier	Chris Doody
Cambridge	Jerrold Labrecque	Oxford	Margaret Messenger
Chatham-Kent Essex	Jean Thompson	Parkdale-High Park	Andrea Kirkham
Davenport	Jon Bridgman	Parry Sound-Muskoka	Jordan Elliott
Don Valley East	Olivera Bakic	Perth-Middlesex	Lynda Dill
Don Valley West	Taylor Gilbert	Peterborough	Ann Thomas
Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey	Matthew L.O. Certosimo	Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge	Raj Roopansingh
Durham	Margo Bath	Prince Edward-Hastings	Cornelio Reyes
Eglinton-Lawrence	Laura Antonio	Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke	Maureen Grace
Elgin-Middlesex-London	Darcie Beckley	Sarnia-Lambton	Jim Passingham
Erie-Lincoln	John Toll	Sault Ste. Marie	David Viitala
Essex	Tamara Fick	Scarborough Centre	Donna Tichonchuk
Etobicoke Centre	Melinda Selmys	Scarborough East	Monica Wappel
Etobicoke North	Zaya Yonan	Scarborough Southwest	Elton Pinto
Etobicoke-Lakeshore	Tom Engelhart	Scarborough-Agincourt	Catherine Shum
Glengarry-Prescott-Russell	Roxanne Taillon	Scarborough-Rouge River	Al Joseph
Guelph-Wellington	Elsayed Abdelaal	Simcoe North	Georgette Amadio
Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant	Jon Kristman	Simcoe-Grey	Elaine Pommer
Haliburton-Victoria-Brock	Marie McLaren	St. Catharines	Ron Green
Halton	John Daley	St. Paul's	Rick Smith
Hamilton East	Rose Arsenault	Stoney Creek	Sue Tiley
Hamilton Mountain	Jennie Stakich	Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh	David Proulx
Hamilton West	Frank O'Grady	Sudbury	Christine Robert
Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington	Dianne Carey	Thornhill	Paul Litowitz
Huron-Bruce	Scott Allen	Thunder Bay-Atikokan	Nuala Wieckowski
Kenora-Rainy River	Julia Craner	Thunder Bay-Superior North	Pam Patterson
Kingston and the Islands	Buddhadeb Chakrabarty	Timiskaming-Cochrane	Hal Willis
Kitchener Centre	Marcia Soeda	Timmins-James Bay	Lise Breton
Kitchener-Waterloo	Ron VanKoughnett	Toronto Centre-Rosedale	Mayte Darraidou
Lambton-Kent-Middlesex	Peter Soroka	Toronto-Danforth	Ekaterini Traikos
Lanark-Carleton	Bruno Steinke	Trinity-Spadina	Garth Nichols
Leeds-Grenville	Fran Byers	Vaughan-King-Aurora	John Reston
London North Centre	Catarina Fernandes	Waterloo-Wellington	Bill Ritz
London West	George Dennis	Whitby-Ajax	Ted Savelle
London-Fanshawe	Linda Barnum	Willowdale	Bryan Byong-Kuon Kim
Markham	Andreo Cornacchia	Windsor West	Marisa Squizzato
Mississauga Centre	Salma Aziz	Windsor-St.Clair	Mary Jane McMullen
Mississauga East	Carolyn Agasild	York Centre	Tom Ricci
Mississauga South	Ellen Chan	York North	Edmund James
Mississauga West	Patrick Heenan	York South-Weston	William Kwegyir-Aggrey
Nepean-Carleton	Peter Warren	York West	Nathan Duru-Obisi
Niagara Centre	Stephanie Jones		
Niagara Falls	Salvación Villamil		