

**Request to the  
Ontario Citizens Assembly on Electoral Reform**

The following is respectfully submitted for consideration as an alternative electoral system model for Ontario.

**Type of Electoral System: Proportional Representation**

**System Name: Weighted Vote (WV)**

**How the Weighted Vote Electoral System works:**

- Each voter selects one person to represent his/her district in the Ontario Legislature. Candidates can either represent a political party or have no political affiliation. All parties are listed on the ballot, even if they have no candidate in the district. The winner is determined by a simple plurality, and becomes the only member of the Legislature for the district.
- Once all of the votes cast for candidates of political parties are tabulated for the election, an adjustment is made to bring the voting power of political parties in line with the percentage of the popular vote which each party received in the election, by awarding additional votes— not sitting members – to each member of the Legislature whose parties were ‘short-changed’ in the election, based on their party’s share of the popular vote.
- If during an election a party elects no members to the Legislature, but should have voting power according to voting entitlements as determined above, that party’s leader is awarded a single seat in the Legislature, and its voting entitlement.
- Candidates elected as Independents are entitled to one vote.
- The party with the highest vote entitlement in the Legislature forms the government until the next election.

**What this Means:**

- The tradition of exactly one vote for each sitting member of parliament is no longer applicable, except for members sitting as Independents. (The Canadian constitution does not prohibit members of parliament from having more than one vote each, nor is it specifically permitted.)

- The number of seats in the Legislature remains relatively unchanged.
- Proportional representation is achieved without multi-member districts, party lists or using a Single Transferable Vote method.
- The WV electoral method will normally produce minority governments that may or may not necessitate building coalitions among parties. However, with fixed election dates only four years apart, there may be an increased ability for the largest, yet not majority, party to form the government without forming a coalition, if it is willing to work cooperatively with other parties on legislative agendas. It is recommended here that electoral reform efforts include pursuing the possibility of abolishing unscheduled elections, in order to maximize stability of government.
- Legislative Bills will require a broader consensus of sitting members in order to pass into law.
- Every vote counts towards each voter's desired choice. As a result, strategic voting becomes obsolete, and minor parties will receive more support from voters. The number of political parties will increase to reflect policy directions perceived by some as not to be adequately addressed by existing parties. For example, there may be a Farmers' Party, or a Women's Party, and so on. The Legislature will more inclusive, and more accurately reflect the diversity of Ontario's citizens.
- Minor parties, including new parties, will be given a voice in the Legislature in proportion to their popularity among voters.
- Control of government and of political parties shifts somewhat from the party leaders to the membership of the party caucus.

## **Conformity to the Basic Principles** (as set out by the Assembly):

**Legitimacy** – WV, by ensuring that every ballot cast counts towards voting power in the Legislature, promotes general acceptance of election results.

**Fairness of Representation** – WV is a pure proportional representation system. Because every vote counts towards legislative voting power, it is fair on the basis of population (and equality of district populations becomes less important). Demographic representation is accommodated by enabling ethno-cultural groups, gender groups, and others to form political parties with voting power in the Legislature. Importantly, representation here is not solely defined by human membership in the Legislature or parliament, but more so by the weight of the votes carried by each political party. This is a reflection of the fact that voters primarily vote for party affiliation, regardless of the personality of the candidate him/herself.

**Voter Choice** -- The WV method maintains the current system whereby any party or individual can be represented as a candidate in a district. In addition, every registered political party is listed on the ballot, even if it is not fielding a candidate in the district. Achieving PR through encourages a wider variety of political parties and views, thereby increasing voter choice; demographic representation becomes less important. It is assumed here that having a voter's first choice count is better than having to settle for second or third choices.

**Effective parties** -- All registered political parties are given legislative voting power in direct proportion to their share of the overall popular vote, as long as their fair share is at least one full vote. (Effectiveness of district work and policy development is also enhanced if funding from the legislative budget is allocated in proportion to the popular vote to each political party).

**Stable and effective government** -- The Weighted Vote method will normally produce minority governments that may or may not necessitate building coalitions among parties. However, with fixed election dates only four years apart, there may be an increased ability for the largest, yet not majority, party to form the government without forming a coalition, if it is willing to work cooperatively with other parties on legislative agendas. The experience of European countries with PR systems indicates that minority governments are relatively stable.

**Effective parliament** – The WV method promotes full and open debate of a wider variety of views. Without absolute majority rule, legislation is passed based on a broader consensus of all members of the Legislature. Legislation is not forcibly enacted by false majorities, as is often the case under the current plurality system.

**Stronger voter participation** -- By ensuring that every vote counts directly towards each voter's preferred choice on the ballot, the Weighted Vote system offers a positive rationale for voter participation.

**Accountability** -- Every sitting member is directly accountable to the electorate on Election Day in the district which he represents. The candidate and his/her party affiliation are not separated. Accountability of a representative and his/her party affiliation is linked.

**Simplicity and practicality** of voting – The Weighted Vote method maintains the current categorical system of voting for one representative. Because over 95% of votes cast are for candidates representing political parties, the WV method suggests that listing the candidates separately from their party affiliation is not productive.

## **How the Weighted Vote method works (the details):**

The following steps present details of the calculations for the Weighted Vote electoral system that would determine the final results of an election. Using basic computer software, the calculations can be instantaneously completed to show election results as returns from polling stations become available on Election Day.

1. Existing district boundaries are maintained, and voters select a single candidate to represent them in the legislature. The ballot will list all registered political parties, and each party's candidate in the district, if any. If the party is not fielding a candidate in the district, the party's name remains on the ballot to enable voters to choose that party. All independent candidates in the district are also listed.
2. Winners are determined by a simple plurality: the candidate who receives more votes than any other candidate in the district becomes the sitting member of parliament. To illustrate, the overall election results of an election might be as follows:

	Votes	Seats
Social Democrats	1,200,500	34
Urban League	325,000	12
Taxpayer's Party	1,300,000	26
Women's Coalition	350,000	4
Independents	69,000	2
<b>Total Seats in Legislature</b>	<b>3,244,500</b>	<b>78</b>

3. Once all votes for political parties in the election are counted, the percentage of the total popular vote for parties that each party received is determined. Following the above example,

	Votes	% of Popular Vote
Social Democrats	1,200,500	37.81%
Urban League	325,000	10.23%
Taxpayer's Party	1,300,000	40.94%
Women's Coalition	350,000	11.02%
Total for all Parties	3,175,500	100.0%

4. The most advantaged political party is determined by dividing the percentage of seats won by each party by the percentage of the popular vote which that party received.

	Seats	% of Seats Won	% of Votes	Differential
Social Democrats	34	44.74%	37.81%	1.18
Urban League	12	15.79%	10.23%	<b>1.54</b>
Taxpayer's Party	26	34.21%	40.94%	0.84
Women's Coalition	4	5.26%	11.02%	0.48
Total for all Parties	76	100.0%	100.0%	1.00

In this example, the Urban League is the most advantaged party, with a positive differential of 1.54.

5. The total number of votes in the Legislative for political parties is then determined by dividing the number of seats won by the most advantaged party by the percentage of the popular vote it received in the election.

$$\text{Urban League's 12 seats divided by its 10.23\% of the popular vote} \\ = \mathbf{117.3 \text{ Total Votes in the Legislature}}$$

6. The number of legislative votes is then multiplied by the percentage of the overall popular vote received by each party to determine the number of votes for each party. Results may or may not include fractions of a vote:

	% of Popular Vote	Total Votes in Legislature
Social Democrats	37.81%	44.35
Urban League	10.23%	12.00
Taxpayer's Party	40.94%	48.02
Women's Coalition	11.02%	12.92
Total for all Parties	100.0%	117.3

As you can see, the legislative voting power of the Urban League, having had the best outcome in the election based on popular vote, is unchanged, and all other parties' votes are 'grossed up' to reflect their fair share of the popular vote.

7. The voting power of each sitting member is then determined by dividing the parties voting entitlement by the number of sitting members of that party. Final voting power for each sitting member may or may not be fractions of a vote, as seen here:

	Total Votes in Legislature	Seats	Legislative Votes Per Member
Social Democrats	44.35	34	1.30
Urban League	12.00	12	1.00
Taxpayer's Party	48.02	26	1.25
Women's Coalition	12.92	4	3.23
Total for all Parties	117.3	76	

8. Independents are entitled to one vote in the Legislature.
9. If a party is entitled to at least one vote in the Legislature as determined by the above calculations but is not represented by membership in the Legislature, its leader is awarded one seat, together with its voting power entitlement.

The Weighted Vote Method can be tested by accessing [www.weightedvote.com](http://www.weightedvote.com). Results of recent elections, or 'What if...?' scenarios, can be inputted; Weighted Vote results are immediately calculated and displayed.

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## Comparing Two Electoral Systems

This sheet compares some characteristics of the Weighted Vote electoral method with the Single Transferable Vote (STV) method.

**N.B. This is a work in progress, i.e. it's a draft!**

### Single Transferable Vote

### Weighted Vote

Multi-member districts	Single representative per district
Fewer, larger districts	No change in district sizes or number of districts
Parties not fielding local candidates are not listed on ballots	All registered parties listed on ballots, whether fielding local candidates or not
Voter must rank numerous candidates	Voter chooses one candidate only
Encourages voter participation	Encourages voter participation
Maintains geographic accountability to voters	Maintains geographic accountability to voters
Favors larger political parties; shuts out minor parties	All parties represented in Legislature in proportion to votes received
Strategic voting based on system bias against minor parties	Strategic voting not necessary; every vote counts towards legislative voting power of the voter's first choice.
Enables independents to be elected	Enables independents to be elected
Multiple constituency offices per district representing several parties	Single constituency office per district, but funding for parties can enable regional or district offices
Fails to produce proportional representation	Produces proportional representation
One vote per member of Parliament	More than one vote for members of 'disadvantaged' parties
Could result in significant increases in the number of members of Parliament	Number of members of Parliament remains relatively unchanged
Tends to produce false majorities, based on second and third choices at the ballot box	Tends to produce minority governments
Greater choice of constituency offices per district, i.e. more parties available to help residents	Single constituency office per district; assumes non-political objectivity when assisting residents. Funding can be allocated for parties to enable regional or district offices
Voters may be able to select representatives in a district based on gender or culture	Voters select candidates based on policy platforms; ballot enables gender- or culture-based parties to be represented