



## What We Heard

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### **A Report on the Ontario Citizens' Assembly Public Consultation Meetings**

**February 2007**

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# Introduction

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## 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](http://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 19 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 on the first weekend of its deliberations. (For more information on the Students' Assembly, visit: [www.studentsassembly.ca](http://www.studentsassembly.ca))

## Thoughts about Principles

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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) ♦

*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 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.

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♦ 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.

Others said this is difficult because sometimes they 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 didn't believe that the electoral system could be blamed for the under-representation of certain groups and suggested 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 participants (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 (if not 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 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

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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**

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

*PR favours the representation of parties over citizens. It is the antithesis of representative democracy.* (Toronto)

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

*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 want 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, most 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.

*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.

## **Parallel System**

## Other Systems and Methods

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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](http://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

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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 campaign 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

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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 cared 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

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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