



## What We Read

---

### **A Report on Written Submissions to the Ontario Citizens' Assembly**

**February 2007**

# Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Purpose of this Report.....	1
About the Assembly.....	2
A Few Statistics.....	2
Profile of Submissions.....	3
Opinions about Electoral Reform.....	4
Keep the Current System.....	6
“It’s Not Broken so Don’t Fix It”.....	6
Clear Lines of Accountability.....	7
A Simple System.....	7
The Cost of Change.....	7
Representation by Population.....	7
Voter Participation.....	8
Change the System.....	8
Proportionality.....	8
Voter Participation.....	9
A Representative Legislature.....	9
Coalition Government.....	9
Mixed Member Proportional.....	10
Local Representation and Proportionality.....	10
Voter Choice.....	10
Party Lists.....	11
Flexibility and Simplicity.....	11
Single Transferable Vote.....	12
Geographic Representation.....	12
Voter Choice.....	12
Absence of Party Lists.....	13
Complexity in the Eye of the Beholder.....	13
Alternative Vote.....	13
Voter Choice.....	14
A Saleable Alternative.....	14
List Proportional Representation.....	14
Communities of Interest.....	14
Party Lists.....	15
Flexibility and Simplicity.....	15
Parallel System.....	16
Proportionality.....	16
Simplicity and Saleability.....	16
Two-Round System.....	16
Other Ideas.....	17
Condorcet Method.....	17
Approval Voting.....	17
Weighted Vote.....	17
“None of the Above”.....	18
Other Systems.....	18
Demographics and Representation.....	18
Aboriginal Peoples.....	19

Northern Ontario .....	19
Citizens' Assembly Process .....	20
Possible Referendum.....	20
Related Issues.....	21
Public Education .....	21
Voter Participation.....	21
Accessibility for People with Disabilities .....	21
Nomination of Candidates.....	22
Other Issues.....	22
Conclusion .....	22

# 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?<sup>1</sup>
  - 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](http://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 public 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.

---

<sup>1</sup> The 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.

## 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.

## A Few Statistics

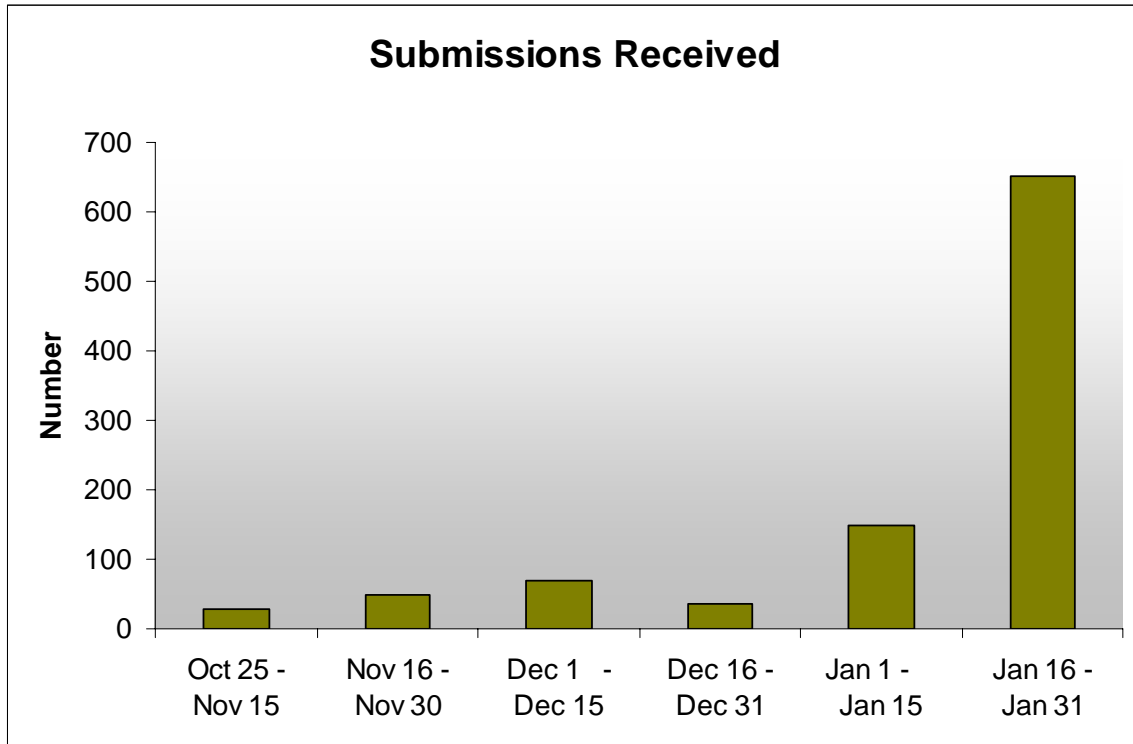
The Assembly received 986 written submissions by January 31—a total of 3,547 pages<sup>2</sup>. About 52% of submissions are one page or less; 42% are between 2 and 10 pages; and 6% are 10 pages or more. The longest submission is 142 pages and the shortest is just 5 words.

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

---

<sup>2</sup> 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.

Figure 1



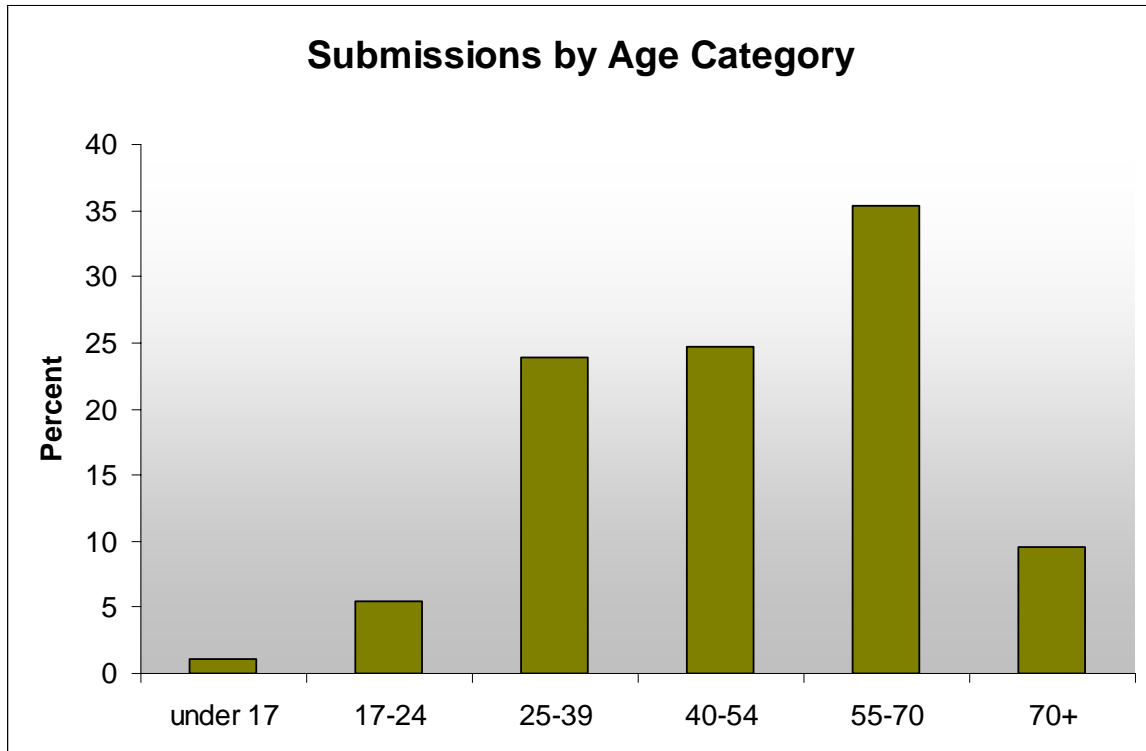
### Profile of Submissions

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 organizations, 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](http://www.studentsassembly.ca))

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

Figure 2



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.<sup>3</sup>

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

<sup>3</sup> 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.

**Table 1**  
**Submissions by Category**

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

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**

<b>Electoral System</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
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
<b>Total</b>	<b>721</b>	<b>100</b>

## 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)<sup>4</sup>*

## **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.

---

<sup>4</sup> The 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.

*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.

## **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 21<sup>st</sup> 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 underrepresented 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 underrepresented 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 Wennekers, 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, straightforward, 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 advantageous 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](http://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 votes], 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 underrepresented 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 underrepresented 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 Peoples**

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 hearing 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.