



Why Should Women Vote Yes for Election Reform



On October 10, 2007, Ontario voters will decide whether or not to adopt a new system of voting in provincial elections.

The government passed legislation in 2006 which mandated the establishment of a Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform. Between September 2006 and April 2007 the Citizens' Assembly – 103 randomly selected Ontarians – heard submissions at province-wide public meetings, on-line submissions, and were instructed by academics versed in electoral systems world-wide. At the end of the process, their mandate directed them to recommend either keeping the present system or adopting a new one.

On April 15 the Citizens' Assembly made their recommendation to change our voting system to a Mixed Member Proportional (MMP). This system would reflect voter wishes by ensuring the make-up of the provincial legislature would be in proportion to the votes received by each party. The last election saw the Liberals win 70% of the seats with only 46.5% of votes cast – an MMP system would mean they would have 46.5% of the seats in the legislature.

Under a MMP system voters would have two votes. The first would be the same as now, voters would vote for a MPP to represent their riding for a total of 90 seats. Then a second vote would identify support for a particular political party. These MPPs would be elected based on each party's share of the popular vote for a total of 39 seats. Each party will have a list of candidates from which to select these MPPs.

Winning Electoral Reform isn't going to be easy. Rather than a simple majority of voters supporting the new system for passage, the McGuinty government has built in a barrier. In order to pass, the referendum requires that 60% of voters support MMP - along with more than half the voters in 60% of the ridings. This is called a super majority.

It is critical that women come out and vote. We have the power to get the 60% double majority that is needed to force the government to make the proposed changes.

Women in Canada are being left behind in the struggle for political equality. In 1943, Agnes Macphail was one of two women first elected to the Ontario Provincial Parliament. Today, there are only 18 female MPP's at Queen's Park. At the rate we are going, it will take 123 years to get up to 50% female representation of women in the Ontario legislature. While it is clear that many of the barriers to women and visible minorities relate to the internal machinations

of the parties, research shows that our First-Past-the-Post system performs the worst of all electoral systems in electing women (averaging 18%). Right now the Liberals have **25.0%** women, the NDP have **33.3%** and the PCs have **21.7%**. By contrast, the switch to MMP in New Zealand increased the number of women legislators to **32%**.

Why should women care about voting system reform?

- Fair representation for women and for minorities and Aboriginals will reflect the diversity of our society.
- We have reached a "glass ceiling" of approximately 20% representation of women in parliaments across Canada.
- At the rate we are electing women, it will be over a hundred years before we reach parity.
- Canada ranks 49th in the world in representation of women in parliament.
- Because of this, national, regional and local priorities—i.e., how resources are allocated—are typically defined without meaningful input from women.
- The United Nations has stated that we need at least 30% representation for our voices to be heard.

- Studies of proportional representation reveal that it sufficiently alters the political structure to enable women to transcend the 'winner-take-all' competition for votes we now see in Canada.

What Do Women Want?

Women want a voting system that will encourage the removal of barriers to their representation in parliament. They want to see fair representation and a true reflection of society by electing more women, aboriginals and racialized minorities.

Women want to see the number of women MPPs increase to fairly represent the different priorities of the female half of the population, be it child care, pay equity, anti-violence measures, housing, or health care.

For more details on how this system works go to the following websites:

The Citizens' Assembly: www.citizensassembly.gov.on.ca

Equal Voice: www.equalvoice.ca

Fair Vote Ontario: www.fairvotecanada.org.en.Ontario

Vote Yes for MMP Campaign: www.VoteYesForMMP.ca