



**Fair Vote Canada**  
Newsletter

**Représentation équitale au Canada**  
Bulletin d'information

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**This semi-annual newsletter includes articles previously circulated in Fair Vote Canada email newsletters and posted on the FVC web site over the past six months.**

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## **The Ontario legislature has unfinished business on electoral reform (November 28, 2007)**

As the 39<sup>th</sup> Ontario provincial parliament prepares to sit, Fair Vote Ontario is calling on all parties to address the unfinished business of electoral reform.

“On Thursday we will hear the throne speech from yet another phony majority government, elected by just over forty per cent of the voters in an election with the lowest ever turnout,” said June Macdonald, President, Fair Vote Ontario. “The only ‘mandate’ such a government should have is to immediately launch a better-funded and fairly managed citizen-driven electoral reform process.”

Fair Vote Ontario rejects the claim that the government honoured a pledge for an open and informed public debate on electoral reform.

“While using a citizens’ assembly and referendum for electoral reform is the right approach, that process must have adequate time and resources to allow for an informed public debate and decision,” said Macdonald. “Whether intentional or not, the poor management of the process over the past two years made a mockery of the exercise.”

Fair Vote Ontario cited the following problems:

- The Citizens’ Assembly was not convened until late in the last government’s term, unduly reducing the time it had for deliberation and consultation and for the subsequent referendum.
- The referendum was triggered by a recommendation by the Citizens’ Assembly, but neither the Assembly’s report nor summary brochure were distributed to all voters. In fact, the government ceased printing the Assembly brochure in late summer.
- Due to poor government promotion and media coverage, about half of the electorate had very little understanding of the role and mandate of the Citizens’ Assembly.
- When voting in the referendum, only about half of the electorate had even a rudimentary understanding of the MMP system proposed by the Citizens’ Assembly.
- At least a quarter of the electorate had no idea a referendum was being held. In some polls, very few voters knew about the referendum.
- The Election Ontario public education program left most voters bewildered and uninformed – e.g., the official public education campaign would not tell voters the reasons for the Assembly recommending the MMP system or how key aspects worked.

- By setting an unfair 60 per cent threshold, under-funding and misdirecting the public education program, the government created a widely shared impression that the whole process was cynically designed to fail.

In his 2003 election platform, Dalton McGuinty said: "I find it unacceptable that [my children's] generation may be so turned off by our political system that they will virtually abandon representative democracy. We cannot let that happen. I will not let that happen." A poll taken just days before the referendum found that more than 60 per cent of young voters, ages 18-34 were in favour of the proposed reform.

"We call on Premier McGuinty to put democratic renewal and citizen-driven electoral reform back at the top of the agenda where it belongs," said Macdonald. "As Mr. McGuinty said, we cannot afford to let the status quo continue."

### **Toronto Star says Fair Vote should give up (Nov. 29, 2007)**

"Some people just won't take no for an answer". So began the November 29 editorial in the Toronto Star slamming Fair Vote Canada and Fair Vote Ontario for saying the Ontario legislature has "unfinished business" on electoral reform.

FVC executive director said: "For the first time, I agree with the Star's editors on an electoral reform issue. It's true, we won't take no for an answer. When it comes to gaining full and equal rights at the ballot box for all Canadians, we'll only take yes for an answer."

### **Fair Voting BC challenges government on referendum commitment (November 30, 2007)**

Fair Voting BC has called upon the British Columbia government to honour its commitment to a May 2009 referendum on BC-STV, despite partisan posturing around the recent Electoral Boundaries Commission report.

"This government has already acknowledged that the 58% of British Columbians who voted for STV in the last referendum cannot be ignored, and this government needs to state clearly that it will hold a referendum [in May

2009] regardless of its position on the Electoral Boundaries recommendations," said Bruce Hallsor, President of Fair Voting BC.

The British Columbia government caucus issued a press release indicating that the electoral boundaries legislation was likely to be withdrawn, because the NDP is not prepared to support it. The government caucus also indicated that it will likely vote against the recommendation of the Electoral Boundaries Commission, which means that the next election could be contested using the same electoral districts that were adopted based on the 1996 census, making no accommodation for population changes in the last decade.

Of more concern to Fair Voting BC is that the government made a throne speech commitment to hold a referendum on the STV electoral system, in which a map of STV ridings would be presented alongside a new map of single member ridings. If the Electoral Boundaries Commission report is rejected, there will be no maps for voters to reference in the coming referendum. Fair Voting BC is concerned that this action could jeopardize the government's commitment to resolve the impasse created by the 2005 results with a second referendum in 2009.

### **Footdragging on the environment -- another symptom of electoral dysfunction (December 17, 2007)**

Pointing to a landmark study on voting systems and policy outcomes, Fair Vote Canada today said growing public anger with current and former federal governments' inaction on environmental problems has its roots in Canada's dysfunctional electoral system.

"A bad electoral system almost guarantees bad politics," said Stephen Broscoe, President of Fair Vote Canada. "It's time to connect the dots on how first-past-the-post affects the daily lives of our families, communities and our environment."

Arend Lijphart, a leading international expert on electoral systems, noted two relevant studies in *Patterns of Democracy*, his landmark comparative assessment of electoral systems in 36 nations.

He cited a 1997 study that measured environmental policy performance through a composite index based on carbon dioxide emissions, fertilizer consumption, and deforestation. On a zero to 100 scale, countries with proportional or fair voting systems scored 10 points higher than those with winner-take-all voting systems. Lijphart also studied energy efficiency, using the World Bank's figures for GDP divided by total energy consumption for the years 1990 to 1994. He concluded the correlation between countries using proportional electoral systems and energy efficiency is "extremely strong", even when controlling for the level of development.

"A fair voting system, in itself, cannot create better environmental management," stated Larry Gordon, Executive Director of Fair Vote Canada. "But what it does create is a truly representative parliament, which better reflects the views of the electorate. For many years, public support for environmental action has been far ahead of any Canadian government's willingness to act."

### **Assessment of Ontario's Vote for MMP campaign (December 20, 2008)**

After the disappointing loss in the Ontario referendum, Vote for MMP campaign leaders and volunteers engaged in a multi-faceted assessment process. Numerous Fair Vote chapters in Ontario held assessment meetings, all campaign riding captains were surveyed and the Fair Vote Ontario council held a one-day meeting in late November.

In the survey, riding captains indicated the following local campaign activities worked relatively well: explaining MMP to voters, setting up information tables, leafleting and placing lawn signs. Problems or weaknesses included: finding prominent local supporters, distributing posters, attending all-candidate meetings and doing effective outreach to other groups.

Regarding central campaign activities, riding captains said the following worked well: development of campaign materials, the speakers' bureau, campaign updates to supporters, the radio ads and the campaign website. Central campaign activities rated as

weak included: producing/distributing lawn signs, guiding volunteers, guiding riding captains, and having too few riding captains and volunteers for a major campaign.

The assessment meeting also reviewed external factors which had a major effect on the outcome, such as the poor public education program by Elections Ontario and the negative media environment. However, it was also noted that a number of factors were internal: 1) confused, inconsistent, soft campaign messaging, 2) insufficient ground network, i.e., too few chapters and volunteers, and 3) lack of funds and late arrival of major donations.

While disappointed with the loss, all were buoyed by having 1.5 million Ontarians vote for a proportional voting system. The activists were also buoyed by Dr. Fred Cutler's research indicating a strong majority of Ontarians would have voted yes had they been well informed, as well as the polling data showing a strong majority of young voters intended to vote for MMP.

Fair Vote Ontario has now established a strategy committee to identify strategic priorities and actions for 2008 to help advance PR at all levels of government.

### **Quebec chief electoral officer releases detailed report on MMP system (December 21, 2007)**

Marcel Blanchet, Quebec's Chief Electoral Officer, today issued a detailed 400 page report analyzing various features for a mixed-member proportional (MMP) voting system for Quebec. His report responded to a government request to examine eight specific issues, including proportionality, geographic representation, and better representation for women and ethnocultural minorities.

The prior Liberal government had tabled draft legislation for an MMP system, but a subsequent all-party special committee failed to reach agreement on specific features of the proposed system.

While the report does not make specific recommendations, it favourably presented the arguments for having nine regions for the list

(or at-large) candidates. The report also highlighted that the percentage of women parliamentarians could easily be boosted by requiring parties to alternate men and women on the regional candidate lists, and requiring that half the regional lists have a woman at the top.

When first elected premier in 2003, Jean Charest promised to introduce a proportional voting system within two years. While draft legislation for an MMP system was prepared in 2006, the government has done little to honour its commitment on electoral reform.

### **Poll showing Canadians comfortable with minority government is no surprise (January 7, 2008)**

News reports this weekend that Canadians are now very comfortable with minority governments should come as no surprise, according to Fair Vote Canada (FVC).

A Canadian Press Harris/Decima survey asked respondents how they would like to allocate seats among the parties in a hypothetical Parliament of 100 seats. On average, respondents gave 36 seats to the Liberals, 31 seats to the Conservatives, 15 to the NDP, 10 to the Bloc and 8 to the Greens.

"Those percentages are very similar to the levels of public support for the parties. Polls are showing the percentage support for the two major parties in the mid to low 30s, with the other parties below 20 per cent," said Stephen Broscoe, FVC president.

"For many years, polls have shown a strong majority of Canadians believe that the portion of seats a party wins should reflect the portion of the votes they receive, which is what we see respondents doing intuitively with this hypothetical parliament," Broscoe noted. "The basic democratic principle of voter equality is deeply engrained in our political culture. Canadians don't understand why a party with only 40 per cent of the votes can capture 60 per cent of the seats and 100 per cent of the power. That's why respondents in this poll were not handing a majority of seats to any party, because none deserve majority control."

Broscoe also said recent electoral reform referendum results have been misread by some commentators, who wrongly conclude Canadians have shown no interest in adopting fair and proportional voting systems.

"In recent days, I have read yet another reference in a respected major daily that British Columbians 'rejected' a proportional voting system in the 2005 referendum when, in fact, nearly 58 per cent voted in favour. If a party received that level of support, the headline would have read 'landslide'," Broscoe noted. "Likewise, I have read that the recent Ontario referendum indicates that Ontarians rejected electoral reform, rather than one specific alternative during a campaign widely criticized for very poor public education on that alternative."

Canadians not only support reform, they are ready for a federal electoral reform process.

"Some of our political leaders are now talking about a referendum on the future of the Senate," said Larry Gordon, Executive Director of Fair Vote Canada. "Last fall, a poll for The Hill Times showed half of Canadians also support holding a national referendum on proportional representation. It remains to be seen how much more evidence our federal political leaders need before they put electoral reform on the front burner in Ottawa."

### **More evidence that minority government OK with voters (January 28, 2008)**

Yet another poll shows that Canadians are increasingly comfortable with minority government, which is good news for proponents of fair voting systems.

According to a Canadian Press Harris-Decima telephone poll, conducted during the third week of January, more people would find acceptable either a Conservative or Liberal minority government than a majority government by either party:

- 54% said a Conservative minority would be acceptable, while 49% said the same for a Conservative majority government.

- 59% said a Liberal minority would be acceptable, compared to 50% who said the same for a Liberal majority.

The poll shows the minority government experience of the past several years has affected voters' thinking. Canadians have been used to one party wielding majority power, but it appears the benefits of forcing parties to negotiate and compromise are now more apparent. If Canada had fair election outcomes, coalition governments would be the norm, as a single party would seldom win a majority of votes.

Electoral reformers also note that coalitions and minority governments formed through proportional voting systems would be very stable, unlike minority governments formed under first-past-the-post. Once parties understand they will never gain an unfair seat advantage, then the political culture changes. Parties can only advance their agendas through negotiation and compromise, and can no longer hope to gain a windfall of undeserved seats by forcing a needless election.

### **First-past-the-post misrepresents Alberta voters (March 4, 2008)**

Ed Stelmach's Progressive Conservatives won 53% of the popular vote, but the voting system rewarded them with 88% of the seats. Almost half of the electorate voted for opposition parties, which now hold only 11 of the 83 seats in the legislature.

Had voters used a fair voting system, the PCs would have won about 44 seats, the Liberals 22, the NDP 7, Wild Rose Alliance 6 and the Green Party 4.

Fair Vote Alberta issued a statement highlighting the inequities for voters: "To put tonight's results in perspective, it only took about 7,000 votes province-wide to elect a PC candidate. It took 31,000 votes to elect a Liberal MLA, and 40,000 votes to elect a representative of the NDP. The 64,000 voters who cast ballots for the Wild Rose Alliance were shut out completely, as were the 43,000 supporters of the Alberta Greens. It is no wonder that Albertans are tuning out on a

massive scale when so few of their votes count."

Both Fair Vote Alberta and Fair Vote Canada called on the new government to convene a citizens' assembly on electoral reform, similar to those in BC and Ontario, and let the voters of Alberta decide in a referendum whether to adopt a fairer and more proportional voting system.

### **BC referendum legislation tabled, but issues remain (March 6, 2008)**

Fair Vote Canada congratulated BC Premier Gordon Campbell for tabling legislation to enable the May 2009 referendum on the proposed BC-STV voting system.

"The BC government has honoured its commitment to hold a second referendum in conjunction with the next provincial election," said FVC President Stephen Broscoe. "However, we are concerned that the referendum question will be determined by an order of the Lieutenant Governor in Council. In the 2005 referendum, the question was set by the Citizens' Assembly. We call upon the government to use the same referendum question from 2005, making it free from political interference."

FVC also criticized the retention of the undemocratic 60% threshold for the next referendum.

"In 2005, nearly 58% of British Columbians voted to switch to BC-STV, which should have been more than adequate for adoption," said Broscoe. "Now, the 2009 elections will be contested with a voting system that was overwhelmingly rejected in the last referendum. A simple majority voting in favour of BC-STV this time should be sufficient for adoption of the new system."