

**ELECTORAL REFORM INITIATIVES  
IN CANADIAN PROVINCES**

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## ELECTORAL REFORM INITIATIVES IN CANADIAN PROVINCES

### INTRODUCTION

Discussion about electoral reform in Canada is not new. Every time the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system returns a lopsided or distorted result, including the under-representation of women and minorities, there are renewed calls for reform. As a result, five provinces have recently undertaken studies to see whether reform of the electoral system might help to alleviate Canada's "democratic deficit."

### BRITISH COLUMBIA

The British Columbia Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform was the first of its kind in the world. It was "an independent non-partisan assembly of citizens who [met] to examine the province's electoral system."<sup>(1)</sup> The Assembly had 160 members: 80 women and 80 men. Two were Aboriginal people and the rest were chosen from each of British Columbia's 79 electoral districts. The members were selected by draw from a list of names that reflected the gender, age and geographical make-up of British Columbians.

The Assembly spent nearly one year (from January 2004 until 10 December 2004, when it submitted its final report) deliberating on whether British Columbia should change its electoral system. In order to help with these deliberations, the work of the Assembly was divided into three phases.

- During the first phase, from January until March, the Assembly examined different electoral systems in use around the world. On 21 March 2004, the Assembly issued *A Preliminary Statement to the People of British Columbia*, which summarized its work to date and provided information on a number of electoral issues.

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(1) Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, *Citizens' Assembly in Action*, <http://www.citizensassembly.bc.ca/public/inaction>.

- The Assembly conducted public hearings during May and June as the second phase of its work. During this time the Assembly also accepted submissions from the public.
- The final phase of the Assembly's work took place in the fall of 2004, when members chose and recommended an electoral system they felt would be best for the province. Members were instructed to ensure that, when they made their recommendation, any model put forth was "consistent with both the Constitution of Canada and the Westminster parliamentary system."<sup>(2)</sup>

On 24 October 2004, the Citizens' Assembly chose the single transferable vote (STV) system for British Columbia. This system was "selected over all competing electoral systems because members felt it best addressed three over-riding values: proportionality, local representation and voter choice."<sup>(3)</sup> Currently, the STV system is used in Ireland, Malta, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory.

The STV proposal was put to the voters of British Columbia as a referendum question at the provincial election held on 17 May 2005. In order for the referendum to pass, it needed to be approved by 60% of the validly cast ballots province-wide, and by a "simple majority" of the validly cast ballots in 60% of the 79 electoral districts. The referendum fell short of the 60% majority, gaining 57% support across British Columbia. The question was approved in 77 out of 79 ridings.

Given the results of the referendum, it is not surprising that the issue of electoral reform remains alive in British Columbia. On 12 September 2005, the Speech from the Throne at the opening of the 1<sup>st</sup> Session of the 38<sup>th</sup> Parliament indicated that the government would schedule another referendum on the STV system, along with the applicable electoral boundaries, at the same time as the November 2008 municipal elections. Equal funding would be provided to support active information campaigns by supporters and detractors, with the same rules and thresholds to apply as in the May 2005 referendum.

British Columbia's Chief Electoral Officer, however, raised concerns that there would not be enough time to implement changes to enable a referendum to be held in November 2008. For this reason, the government announced on 25 May 2006 that the referendum on electoral reform would be held in tandem with the 2009 provincial general election, and implementation of the STV system was scheduled for the 2013 general election, in the event voters chose that system.<sup>(4)</sup> [TEXT AND FOOTNOTES DELETED.]

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(2) Ibid.

(3) Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, "A made-in-BC PR-STV electoral system," December 2004, <http://www.citizensassembly.bc.ca/resources/deliberation/BCSTV-FactSheet.pdf>.

(4) British Columbia, Legislative Assembly, *Debates*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 38<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 27 April 2006, <http://www.leg.bc.ca/hansard/38th2nd/h60427p.htm>.

In May 2009, a referendum on the STV electoral system was held. Despite the support of a number of current and former politicians, as well as the Canadian Taxpayers Federation and prominent artists and environmentalists, the STV proposal fell well short of the 60% threshold required for adoption, garnering only 39% of votes province-wide and 7 of 85 electoral districts (51 of 85 electoral districts were required).

## **NEW BRUNSWICK**

The Commission on Legislative Democracy was established on 19 December 2003 to study democratic reform in New Brunswick. The eight-person Commission was given a broad mandate “to examine and make recommendations on strengthening and modernizing [the] electoral system and democratic institutions and practices in New Brunswick to make them more fair, open, accountable and accessible to New Brunswickers.”<sup>(5)</sup>

Regarding electoral reform, the Commission examined and made recommendations on implementing a proportional representation (PR) electoral system for New Brunswick. The Commission was instructed to propose the PR model that it considered would best ensure fairer representation, greater equality of votes, an effective legislature and government, and a continued role for directly elected members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) representing specific geographic areas. In addition, the Commission considered:

- the principles and procedures that should guide future changes to the province’s electoral boundaries;
- the possibility of fixed election dates; and
- ways to increase voter turnout, particularly among young voters.

In order to accomplish this ambitious task, the Commission sought the views of New Brunswickers through public hearings and submissions and conducted research and analysis as required.

On 7 May 2004, the Commission launched its public consultation process. This included public hearings, round-table discussions with community leaders, and a website that allowed for online submissions and provided information and fact sheets on democratic reform. Also included was a paper entitled *Your Voice. Your Vote. Your Turn!*, which set out the main issues and questions of study and incorporated a questionnaire that allowed New Brunswickers

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(5) Commission on Legislative Democracy, *Mandate*, <http://www.gnb.ca/0100/mandate-e.asp>.

to communicate their views on these subjects to the Commission.<sup>(6)</sup> On 22 September 2004, the Commission released *Options: A progress report to New Brunswickers*.<sup>(7)</sup> In the report, the Commission explained that it was considering a regional mixed member proportional (MMP) system as the PR system best suited for the province. This system is based on those found in Scotland and Wales, and is similar to those in place in New Zealand and Germany.<sup>(8)</sup>

In its final report, released on 19 January 2005, the Commission recommended a regional MMP system that would combine 36 single-member riding seats with 20 list PR seats, elected within four approximately equal-sized, multi-member, regional districts. The Commission proposed that each of the four regions would elect five MLAs from closed party lists, and that parties must receive at least 5% of the list vote on a province-wide basis to be eligible to win any list seats.<sup>(9)</sup>

In order to implement this change, the Commission advised that the Government of New Brunswick hold a binding referendum no later than the next provincial election so that, should the change be accepted, it could be in place in time for a provincial election in 2011. The Commission also set out detailed instructions as to how the referendum process should be conducted, including approval of the referendum question by the Legislative Assembly. Furthermore, the Commission proposed that the Chief Electoral Officer establish two referendum committees – one in support of the referendum question and the other in opposition to the question.<sup>(10)</sup>

The Commission also recommended the adoption of fixed election dates, commencing on Monday, 15 October 2007, and continuing on the third Monday in October every four years thereafter. It is suggested that nothing should affect the powers of the Lieutenant-Governor, including the power to dissolve the Legislative Assembly at the Lieutenant-Governor's discretion.<sup>(11)</sup>

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(6) Commission on Legislative Democracy, *Your Voice. Your Vote. Your Turn!* April 2004, [http://www.gnb.ca/0100/Doc/voice\\_vote\\_turn-e.pdf](http://www.gnb.ca/0100/Doc/voice_vote_turn-e.pdf).

(7) Commission on Legislative Democracy, *Options: A progress report to New Brunswickers*, September 2004, <http://www.gnb.ca/0100/Doc/options-e.pdf>.

(8) For more information on the proposed model, see Commission on Legislative Democracy, *A Regional Mixed Member Proportional Representation Electoral System for New Brunswick*, <http://www.gnb.ca/0100/Doc/proportion-e.pdf>. For more information on electoral systems generally, see International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, *Electoral System Design: The New International IDEA Handbook*, May 2005, <http://www.idea.int/publications/esd/index.cfm> [TEXT REMOVED]; or Law Commission of Canada, *Voting Counts: Electoral Reform for Canada*, Ottawa, 2004, <http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/Collection/J31-61-2004E.pdf>.

(9) Commission on Legislative Democracy, *Final Report and Recommendations*, December 2004, <http://www.gnb.ca/0100/FinalReport-e.pdf>.

(10) For more information, see Commission on Legislative Democracy (2004), pp. 48–9 and 178–9.

(11) *Ibid.*, pp. 56–9.

The provincial government responded to the final report and recommendations of the Commission by issuing on 20 June 2006 a report entitled *Improving the Way Government Works*, in which it made a commitment to undertake 17 fundamental initiatives during the ensuing months. These initiatives included:

- establishing fixed election dates for the third Monday in October, every four years; and
- holding a referendum on 12 May 2008 with regard to changing the province's electoral system to a form of MMP representation.<sup>(12)</sup>

Subsequent to the change in government in the fall of 2006, a new report was prepared in response to the Commission's recommendations and was released on 28 June 2007 under the title *An Accountable and Responsible Government*. The report described 20 initiatives that the province will undertake to improve and enhance legislative democracy in New Brunswick between 2007 and 2012. This response document recommended a thorough review of relevant electoral reform initiatives occurring in other jurisdictions, both across Canada and internationally, to inform further improvements to New Brunswick's single-member plurality electoral system. The report did not, however, endorse the Commission's recommendation to hold a referendum in 2008 on a proportional representation system for the province.<sup>(13)</sup>

## ONTARIO

On 23 October 2003, Premier Dalton McGuinty announced the creation of the Democratic Renewal Secretariat, to be located within the Ministry of the Attorney General. The Secretariat intends to strengthen all aspects of democracy by:

- increasing the role of members of the legislature;
- making government more accountable; and
- examining democratic institutions, and in particular the electoral system.

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(12) Communications New Brunswick, Executive Council, "Province releases response to Commission on Legislative Democracy report," News release, 20 June 2006, <http://www.gnb.ca/cnb/news/ex/2006e0794ex.htm>.

(13) Communications New Brunswick, Executive Council, "Government response to Committee on Legislative Democracy report," News release, 28 June 2007, <http://www.gnb.ca/cnb/news/ex/2007e0859ex.htm>.



The Secretariat is studying various elements of the electoral system, including Internet voting, transparent and effective limits on money in politics, fixed election dates, and ways to get more young people involved in the democratic process. It is committed to holding debates and public consultation on the electoral process.<sup>(14)</sup>

On 18 November 2004, Premier McGuinty announced that a citizens' assembly would be created to examine the FPTP electoral system and to recommend possible changes. A referendum would be held if an alternative electoral system was recommended by the citizens' assembly.<sup>(15)</sup>

The *Election Amendment Act, 2005* received Royal Assent on 13 June 2005. The Act includes provisions that allow Elections Ontario to select volunteers for a Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform and a Citizens' Jury on Political Finance.<sup>(16)</sup> The *Election Statute Law Amendment Act, 2005* received Royal Assent on 15 December 2005. The Act provides for fixed election dates in Ontario: Ontario provincial elections will now be held on the first Thursday in October every four years, beginning on 4 October 2007. Should the government lose the confidence of the Legislative Assembly at any point, the Lieutenant Governor would still have the power to dissolve the legislature and call an election. The next scheduled election would then return to the first Thursday of October in the fourth calendar year following the unscheduled election. Ontario thus becomes the second province to adopt fixed election dates.

The *Election Statute Law Amendment Act, 2005* also introduces new rules for disclosure of political contributions to political parties and leadership candidates. Contributions over \$100 must be disclosed within 10 business days of their being deposited in a bank account. The public would then be able to track these transactions over the Internet. Another provision of the Act is to preserve 11 northern ridings and increase the number of southern ridings from 92 to 96 in order to secure strong representation for all Ontarians in the legislature.

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(14) Office of the Premier, "McGuinty Government Creates Two New Ministers, Secretariat," News release, 23 October 2003, <http://www.premier.gov.on.ca/news/Product.asp?ProductID=2>.

(15) Office of the Premier, "Ontarians to Have a Say on Electoral Reform," News release, 18 November 2004, <http://www.premier.gov.on.ca/news/event.php?ItemID=4498&Lang=EN>.

(16) Democratic Renewal Secretariat, "The Election Statute Law Amendment Act, 2005," Backgrounder, 7 March 2005, <http://ogov.newswire.ca/ontario/GPOE/2005/03/07/c1881.html?lmatch=&lang=e.html>. See also Bill 176 2005, The Election Statute Law Amendment Act, 2005, [http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/bills/bills\\_detail.do?locale=en&BillID=154&isCurrent=false&ParlSessionID=38%3A1](http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/bills/bills_detail.do?locale=en&BillID=154&isCurrent=false&ParlSessionID=38%3A1).

The selection process for the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform began in April 2006 and was completed in June of that year. Acting independently of the government, the Assembly was composed of 103 randomly selected citizens. Members of the Assembly began meeting in September 2006 with a mandate to examine current and prospective electoral systems through public meetings and written submissions.<sup>(17)</sup> In a report entitled *One Ballot – Two Votes: A New Way to Vote in Ontario*, released 15 May 2007, the Assembly recommended a MMP system combining members elected in local districts and members elected for the whole province from party lists to serve as members of provincial parliament (MPPs) in the legislature.<sup>(18)</sup>

The government held a referendum on this recommendation in conjunction with the general election of 10 October 2007. The result was to be binding if the proposed electoral system was selected in at least 60% of all the valid referendum ballots cast and in more than 50% of the valid referendum ballots cast in each of at least 64 electoral districts. However, the alternative electoral system proposed by the Citizens' Assembly garnered only 36.9% of the popular vote, while the existing FPTP system received 63.1% of the popular vote.<sup>(19)</sup>

## PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

In January 2003, the Government of Prince Edward Island appointed the Honourable Norman H. Carruthers, a retired Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Prince Edward Island, to examine options for reform of the Island's electoral system. The one-person commission was asked to “engage Islanders on the important issue of electoral reform so that the *Election Act*, associated legislation and the manner in which [the] Legislative Assembly is selected continues to be relevant and effective.”<sup>(20)</sup>

The Commissioner looked into a number of major electoral systems, and in April 2003 he released a discussion paper containing four models. Public meetings across the province followed in May and June 2003.

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(17) Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, “About the Citizen's Assembly: A Process Like No Other,” <http://www.citizensassembly.gov.on.ca/en-CA/About.html>.

(18) The Citizen's Assembly on Electoral Reform, *One Ballot, Two Votes: A New Way to Vote in Ontario*, 15 May 2007, <http://www.citizensassembly.gov.on.ca/assets/One%20Ballot,%20Two%20Votes.pdf>.

(19) Ontario Democratic Renewal Secretariat, News release, “McGuinty Government Introduces Referendum Legislation,” 24 October 2006, <http://ogov.newswire.ca/ontario/GPOE/2006/10/24/c3947.html?lmatch=&lang=e.html>.

(20) Government of Prince Edward Island, “Commissioner Appointed to Consider Electoral Reform,” News release, 21 January 2003, <http://www.gov.pe.ca/news/getrelease.php3?number=2913>.

On 18 December 2003, Justice Carruthers presented his report to Premier Pat Binns. It included a discussion of the FPTP electoral system in use in Canada, other electoral systems used around the world, how electoral reform corresponds with the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, and the impact on rural communities of district boundary changes resulting from population shifts. The report concluded by stating:

The 2003 Prince Edward Island Electoral Reform Commission believes that the best two Electoral Systems which might be considered as models for up-dating the present First Past The Post System would be either the Mixed Member Proportional System (MMPS) or the Single Transferable Vote System (STVS).

The Commission is of the further view that the system having the most likely chance of acceptance by the Island electorate as an alternative to the present First Past The Post System (FPTP) would be a Mixed Member Proportional System (MMPS) based on the system now in use in Germany, New Zealand, Scotland and Wales.<sup>(21)</sup>

The Commission felt that the MMP system was preferable to the STV system because it would involve less change to the current electoral system and would preserve the existing relationship between the voters and their member of the legislature, while allowing each elector to play a meaningful role in the electoral process. Despite this conclusion, the Commissioner recommended further study of the issue, including more public consultation that would incorporate an educational component to ensure that all citizens are properly informed of the issues. He also urged that representation issues concerning women and Aboriginal people must be carefully considered in the design and implementation of any modifications to the FPTP system.

The Commission advised that any change to the electoral system must be made by the people of Prince Edward Island by referendum. The report proposed that a Prince Edward Island version of the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform be used to formulate a clear and concise question for a referendum.

On 16 December 2004, the Legislative Assembly passed a motion that directed the Standing Committee on Legislative Management to appoint an eight-person commission to be known as the Commission on Prince Edward Island's Electoral Future. The Commission was

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(21) Prince Edward Island Commissioner of Electoral Reform, *2003 Prince Edward Island Electoral Reform Commission Report*, [http://www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/er\\_premier2003.pdf?PHPSESSID=39e691d3388c41a312d95cfd75a7a6bf](http://www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/er_premier2003.pdf?PHPSESSID=39e691d3388c41a312d95cfd75a7a6bf), p. 98.

directed by the Standing Committee to further the work of the Prince Edward Island Electoral Reform Commission by mandating it to develop and conduct a public education program, to increase citizens' awareness of the FPTP and the MMP systems. In addition, the Commission was required to develop a clear and concise plebiscite question and to make a recommendation on when the plebiscite should be held. Regarding the outcome of the plebiscite, the Commission was to ensure that the definition of a "majority" fully reflects the diversity of Prince Edward Island, with consideration given to the approach taken in British Columbia."<sup>(22)</sup>

Appointments to the Commission on Prince Edward Island's Electoral Future were announced on 17 February 2005. These consisted of a chair and one person from each of the four federal ridings, selected by the Standing Committee on Legislative Management. The final three members of the Commission were selected by each of the political parties registered with Elections PEI for the 2003 General Election.<sup>(23)</sup> It should be noted that when considering the matter of possible appointees, the "Committee felt that it was appropriate to place an advertisement in Island newspapers seeking expressions of interest from those Islanders who might be interested in serving on the Commission."<sup>(24)</sup> The Commission began meeting on 2 March 2005.

On 27 May 2005, the Commission issued a report detailing the proposed MMP system for Prince Edward Island. It held 12 public meetings during September and October 2005 to discuss the proposed system. In a plebiscite held on 28 November 2005, voters were asked whether or not they supported a switch to MMP. An overwhelming majority – more than 63% – of those who voted opted to retain the province's FPTP system. The plebiscite, however, will likely not end the debate on electoral reform in the province. Proponents of MMP claim that a lack of public education and a lack of funding for Elections PEI resulted in the relatively low voter turnout. Given that the province is known for unusually high voter turnouts, and that many people said they did not understand the proposed system, these criticisms may fuel the argument for another plebiscite in the near future. In the November vote, the provincial

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(22) Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island, *Motion No. 32, Prince Edward Island's Electoral Future*, <http://www.assembly.pe.ca/sittings/2004fall/motions/32.pdf>.

(23) For the 2003 General Election, the three registered political parties were the Liberal Party, the New Democratic Party and the Progressive Conservative Party.

(24) Government of Prince Edward Island, "Appointments Announced to the Commission on Prince Edward Island's Electoral Future," News release, 17 February 2005, <http://www.gov.pe.ca/news/getrelease.php3?number=4026>.

government maintained it would not be bound by anything less than 60% in favour of the MMP system. This may also be a point of future contention, as the Commission on Prince Edward Island's Electoral Future established the threshold at 50% of eligible votes cast plus one.

The Special Committee on Electoral Boundaries recommended that another plebiscite dealing exclusively with the question of fixed election dates be held at the same time as the next general provincial election, which took place in spring 2007. However, the plebiscite was not included.

## QUEBEC<sup>(25)</sup>

In March 2003, the Estates General on the Reform of Democratic Institutions (the Béland commission) presented its report to the Minister Responsible for the Reform of Democratic Institutions. In addition to studying the reform of the voting system, the Commission looked at such issues as lowering the voting age and fixed election dates. The Steering Committee for the Estates General had visited 20 towns in Quebec and held 27 public hearings, and in February 2003 some 1,000 people had been brought together to deliberate on these issues. The Commission recommended a change in the voting system to a form of regional proportional representation that would add compensatory measures to correct for proportionality while maintaining the link between citizens and their representatives.

Two days after the report's release, a provincial election was called.<sup>(26)</sup> Although the new government did not act on the recommendations of the Estates General, in early June 2004 the Minister Responsible for the Reform of Democratic Institutions submitted to the members of the National Assembly a parliamentary reform project containing 140 proposals designed to "bring about sizeable changes in the relationship between citizens and their representatives and in the way the National Assembly conducts its business."<sup>(27)</sup>

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(25) For background information on electoral reform in Quebec, see Henry Milner, "First Past the Post? Progress Report on Electoral Reform Initiatives in Canadian Provinces," *Policy Matters*, Vol. 5, September 2004, <http://www.irpp.org/pm/archive/pmvol5no9.pdf>.

(26) Rapport du Comité directeur sur la réforme des institutions démocratiques, *Prenez votre place!*, March 2003, pp. 34–5.

(27) Secrétariat à la réforme des institutions démocratiques, *Parliamentary Reform*, "Summary of Proposals," [http://www.institutions-democratiques.gouv.qc.ca/reforme-des-institutions/cahier\\_propositions\\_en.htm](http://www.institutions-democratiques.gouv.qc.ca/reforme-des-institutions/cahier_propositions_en.htm).

A draft bill was presented to the National Assembly on 15 December 2004. Among other reforms, the draft bill proposes a new mixed electoral system. The number of seats in the National Assembly would increase from 125 to 127, with 77 members elected by FPTP. The remaining 50 seats would be designated as “district seats.” These seats would help to ensure that the number of seats a party wins is proportional to the percentage of votes it receives. The 24 to 27 districts would comprise about three constituencies each and would have two seats available for election. For these 50 seats, candidates would be selected from closed lists established by the party. Should a party be awarded a district seat, the candidate at the top of the list would be declared elected.<sup>(28)</sup>

Electors would still cast only one vote.<sup>(29)</sup> The candidate with the most votes in the riding would be elected, as is currently the case. The remaining district seats would be awarded to the parties that obtained the highest quotients per district. This quotient (Q) is calculated by dividing the total number of votes received by a party in the ridings of the district (V) by the total number of seats (S) won by the party in the ridings of the district, plus 1 (S+1).<sup>(30)</sup> Each time a party is awarded a seat, that party’s quotient is modified by adding 1 to the divisor, thereby reducing the party’s quotient.<sup>(31)</sup>

On 15 June 2005 the National Assembly adopted a motion to appoint a nine-member parliamentary committee to study and make recommendations on the draft bill introduced in December 2004. The select committee, which began its proceedings on 1 November 2005, was assisted by an eight-member Citizens’ Committee, made up of four men and four women. Public consultations were held across Quebec beginning in January 2006.

On 21 April 2006 the Citizen’s Committee presented to the National Assembly a report in which it rejected the government bill and proposed a MMP system similar to that used in Germany. More specifically, they proposed a two-vote polling system whereby electors

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(28) Ibid., “Ministerial Statement,” and *Une plus juste représentation de la volonté des citoyens*, [http://www.institutions-democratiques.gouv.qc.ca/reforme-des-institutions/communiqués/2004/srid\\_com20041215.htm](http://www.institutions-democratiques.gouv.qc.ca/reforme-des-institutions/communiqués/2004/srid_com20041215.htm).

(29) It should be noted that in many mixed member systems, voters cast two votes – one for a party list and one for a candidate.

(30) The formula for this would be:

$$\frac{V}{(S+1)}$$

(31) For further information and examples of how this would be applied, see Secrétariat à la réforme des institutions démocratiques, *Comprehensive Plan to Reform Democratic Institutions*, “So That Each Vote Will Count – Mixed Proportional Representation,” [http://www.institutions-democratiques.gouv.qc.ca/publications/fiche\\_1\\_chaque\\_vote\\_compte\\_en.pdf](http://www.institutions-democratiques.gouv.qc.ca/publications/fiche_1_chaque_vote_compte_en.pdf).

would select, on the first round, 60% of the Assembly members by the FPTP method. The remainder of the members (40%) would be elected by means of a second ballot pertaining to the elector's choice of party. The Citizens' Committee faulted the bill particularly for proposing a single-vote system that would not accurately reflect the popular vote and that would perpetuate the practice of strategic voting.

In December 2006, the Minister Responsible for the Reform of Democratic Institutions convened a working group composed of Members of the National Assembly to examine, among other issues, the prospect of implementing an MMP system. The working group was expected to report back to the National Assembly in June 2008.<sup>(32)</sup>

On 21 December 2007, a report prepared by the Chief Electoral Officer discussing the characteristics of a compensatory mixed system was made public. Through simulations and analyses, various consequences that might result from the introduction of a compensatory mixed system were compared, showcasing differing scenarios depending on the system's design.<sup>(33)</sup>

## CHRONOLOGY OF PROVINCIAL ACTIVITIES

### A. British Columbia

30 April 2003	The Attorney General of British Columbia asks the legislature to support the creation of the Citizens' Assembly. The motion is unanimously approved. A special committee of the legislature is set up to review Assembly staff appointments, and to receive interim reports from the Assembly chair on the progress of the Assembly's work.
22 December 2003	The final two members of the Assembly are selected.
January 2004	Assembly begins "learning phase" of its work.
21 March 2004	Assembly issues <i>A Preliminary Statement to the People of British Columbia</i> .
May and June 2004	Public hearings held across British Columbia.

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(32) As of 15 October 2008, the report was unavailable from the Government of Quebec's Press Centre website.

(33) For more information on the report, see Le Directeur général des élections du Québec, "Press release No. 2 – Report of the Chief Electoral Officer on the voting system," 21 December 2007, <http://www.electionsquebec.qc.ca/english/news-detail.php?id=2306>.

- September to November 2004 “Deliberation phase” of the Assembly’s work begins.
- 23 and 24 October 2004 Assembly announces that it will recommend a change from the FPTP system to a STV system.
- 10 December 2004 Final report of the Assembly released.
- 20 December 2004 Technical report of the Assembly released.
- 17 May 2005 Referendum on electoral reform held. The results see 57% of voters support the STV system in 77 of 79 electoral districts, just short of the 60% required for the referendum results to be binding.
- 12 September 2005 In the Speech from the Throne, the government commits itself to another referendum on the STV system before the next provincial election.
- 25 May 2006 Government announces that the referendum on the STV system will be pushed back to coincide with next scheduled provincial election in 2009.
- 12 May 2009 A referendum on electoral reform is held. The STV proposal falls well short of the 60% threshold for adoption, garnering only 39% of votes province-wide and 7 of 85 electoral districts (51 of 85 electoral districts were required).
- B. New Brunswick**
- 19 December 2003 The Commission on Legislative Democracy is established.
- 7 May 2004 Comprehensive public consultation process begins.
- 18 May 2004 Public hearings begin.
- 22 September 2004 Commission releases *Options: A progress report to New Brunswickers*.
- 19 January 2005 Commission releases final report.
- 20 June 2006 The provincial government responds to the final report and recommendations of the Commission by issuing *Improving the Way Government Works*.
- 28 June 2007 Subsequent to the change of government in the fall of 2006, a new report was prepared in response to the Commission’s recommendations and released under the title *An Accountable and Responsible Government*.



### C. Ontario

- 23 October 2003 Premier Dalton McGuinty announces the creation of the Democratic Renewal Secretariat.
- 1 June 2004 Premier McGuinty and Michael Bryant, Minister Responsible for Democratic Renewal, introduce legislation that would set fixed election dates for Ontario.
- 18 November 2004 Premier McGuinty announces that a citizens' assembly will be created to examine the electoral system and recommend possible changes.
- 7 March 2005 Bill 213, The Election Amendment Act, 2005, is introduced to allow Elections Ontario to select volunteers for a Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform.
- 9 June 2005 Bill 214, The Election Statute Law Amendment Act, 2005, is introduced in the Ontario Legislative Assembly. Among other things, the bill provides for fixed election dates and real-time disclosure of political contributions.
- 13 June 2005 The *Election Amendment Act, 2005*, S.O. 2005, c. 23 is passed.
- 15 December 2005 The *Election Statute Law Amendment Act, 2005*, S.O. 2005, c. 35 is passed.
- 27 May 2006 The first members of the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform are selected.
- April to June 2006 The selection process names 103 randomly selected citizens to the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform.
- September 2006 Members of the Assembly begin schedule to meet twice a month for eight months.
- 15 May 2007 The Assembly releases a report entitled *One Ballot – Two Votes: A New Way to Vote in Ontario*, which recommends the MMP system.
- 10 October 2007 Referendum on electoral reform held. The results show 36.9% of voters in support of the MMP system, well short of the 60% required for the referendum to be considered binding.

#### **D. Prince Edward Island**

- 21 January 2003 Premier Pat Binns appoints an independent and accountable one-person commission on Prince Edward Island's electoral system.
- April 2003 Justice Carruthers releases a discussion paper on electoral reform for Prince Edward Island.
- May and June 2003 Commission holds seven public meetings across the province, inviting public input.
- 18 December 2003 Electoral Reform Commission Report presented to Premier Binns.
- May 2004 Premier Binns announces intention to appoint a commission to come up with a new electoral model and to educate Islanders on this model.
- 16 December 2004 Legislative Assembly passes a motion directing the Committee on Legislative Management to appoint an eight-person commission, to be known as the Commission on Prince Edward Island's Electoral Future.
- 17 February 2005 Appointments to the Commission on Prince Edward Island's Electoral Future are announced.
- 2 March 2005 First meeting of the Commission on Prince Edward Island's Electoral Future is held.
- Fall 2005 Public hearings are held by the Commission on Prince Edward Island's Electoral Future.
- 28 November 2005 Plebiscite is held. The MMP system is rejected by a substantial majority.

#### **E. Quebec**

- March 2003 Estates General on the Reform of Democratic Institutions presents its report to the then Minister Responsible for the Reform of Democratic Institutions, Jean-Pierre Charbonneau.
- June 2004 The Minister Responsible for the Reform of Democratic Institutions, Jacques Dupuis, submits a project for parliamentary reform comprising 140 changes, including reform of the electoral system.

- 15 December 2004      The Minister for the Reform of Democratic Institutions introduces a draft bill that proposes a mixed electoral system for Quebec.
- 15 June 2005      The National Assembly adopts a motion to appoint a select committee of the National Assembly, assisted by a committee of citizens, to consult with the people of Quebec on the draft bill on reform of the electoral system.
- 1 November 2005      Select committee begins its proceedings.
- January 2006      Public consultations to begin.
- 21 April 2006      Citizens' Committee rejects draft bill and recommends a two-ballot system.
- December 2006      Working group is formed to examine, among other issues, the prospect of implementing an MMP system.
- 21 December 2007      Report of the Chief Electoral Officer on a compensatory mixed system is made public.

## **APPENDIX**

### **LINKS**

British Columbia – Citizens’ Assembly on Electoral Reform:

<http://www.citizensassembly.bc.ca/public>

New Brunswick – Commission on Legislative Democracy:

<http://www.gnb.ca/0100/index-e.asp>

Prince Edward Island – Electoral Reform Commission:

<http://www.electionspei.ca/electoralreform/>

Quebec – Secrétariat à la réforme des institutions démocratiques:

[http://www.institutions-democratiques.gouv.qc.ca/index\\_en.htm](http://www.institutions-democratiques.gouv.qc.ca/index_en.htm).