



# **A Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform**



The bottom line is that the PCs needed 23,043 votes to win a seat. But the Liberals needed 139,631 votes for every seat they won. The Greens were shafted most of all: their 279,174 votes resulted in exactly one seat.

It should, among other things, make anyone who cares about the health of democracy recognize that our current electoral system is not fit for purpose.

This, of course, is the way our so-called First Past the Post (FPTP) system works. It rewards some big-time and leaves others in the dust. And this time it produced a result that is patently unfair, completely unrepresentative, and is bound to increase even further the widespread cynicism about electoral politics that leads to such a dismal turnout. Why bother to vote, many will conclude, when the system is so rigged?

It's time to put electoral reform — specifically proportional representation — back on the agenda. Ontario Liberals, as they figure out how to get their party out of the ditch it landed in, should embrace that idea and stick with it.

If electoral reform is to have any chance...the politicians have to show leadership.

It may still be pie in the sky, but it's the right thing to do.



**STAR EDITORIAL BOARD**

June 9, 2022



*It's time to talk about*

# Electoral Reform

A Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform is a "mini public" convened to study and give recommendations. The citizens are selected by sortition (like a jury), with steps taken to ensure the Assembly is representative of the population.

## Are you concerned about:

- Low voter turnout, especially youth
- Majority government with 41% of the vote
- Drastic policy swings
- Polarization and extremism
- 24% Liberal support = only 8 seats





# About Citizens' Assemblies

Citizens' assemblies are built on the belief that when given the knowledge, resources and time, citizens can find solutions to complex and challenging issues.

Citizens' assemblies empower people to develop in-depth understanding of an issue and to build a consensus free of partisan interference and considerations.

"Members were genuinely struggling to find the 'best' system for their community, and whether any option might benefit or hurt any specific party was not a relevant consideration."

When Citizens' Decide: Lessons from Citizens' Assemblies on Electoral Reform. Oxford University Press, 2011



# Report: Catching the Deliberative Wave

The use of deliberative processes is increasing rapidly around the world. In 2020 the OECD released a report on best practices based on 279 citizen processes. They recommend citizens assemblies for values-driven dilemmas, complex problems that require trade-offs, and long-term issues that go beyond short-term incentives of electoral cycles.

## Benefits of Citizens' Assemblies

-  Better policy outcomes from informed citizen deliberation rather than public opinion.
-  Greater legitimacy to make hard choices.
-  Enhances public trust by giving citizens an effective role in policy making.
-  Makes governance more inclusive to a more diverse group of people.

# Experience around the world

## On the Random Selection Process:

"The most common thing we heard was, "I wish I'd got that selection letter." There was a genuine desire by citizens to be involved in something really important, that could change the way they experienced politics."

## On the Power of a Deliberative Process:

"The biggest thing I got out of the Citizens' Assembly was faith in my fellow citizens to be able to tackle a complex issue in a thoughtful and collaborative way.

Someone would say "Thanks for speaking out. I totally disagree with you and here are my reasons why." Lived experience was invaluable. Then we'd go on to have this really thoughtful discussion."



Shoni Field

**Hear Shoni talk  
about her  
experience on  
the BC Citizens'  
Assembly:**



**Read about  
citizens'  
assemblies in  
Scotland:**



**Read about  
citizens'  
assemblies in  
Ireland:**







# Spotlight on Ireland

Ireland has become a world leader in citizens' assemblies. Since 2016, citizens' assemblies have been used successfully to tackle the toughest issues, including abortion, gender equality, biodiversity and climate change. All the major parties now support citizens' assemblies.

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Citizens' assemblies have served the country very well. They were certainly ahead of politicians, or maybe in a better place to take more courageous decisions... That then enabled politicians to consider that they broadly had a cross-section of the will of the people and to legislate accordingly.

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John Lahar, TD, Fianna Fáil



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