

The Ballot - August 2006

Welcome to the August issue of The Ballot!

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From the Chair



The first Assembly meeting begins in less than three weeks. I have been in touch with most Assembly members over the summer and they are definitely looking forward to the opportunity to learn about, and consider, the relative merits of different electoral systems.

The topic is an important one, but we are also testing a model of citizen engagement that has never been tried before in this province. During our first weekend, we will spend significant time discussing the procedures and values that should guide the way we work together. I will suggest that the **way** we learn, consult and decide as representative citizens will be as important as **what** we ultimately decide. In this way, we can help the present and future Ontario governments decide whether this unique model of citizen participation should be tried again when other issues of major importance are being considered.

I hope you will take advantage of the learning materials being presented in The Classroom section of our website and that you will consider taking part in the consultation process that will run from November to January. You can learn along with us and you can help us learn.

George Thomson



The Learning Phase Begins Next Month!

The Assembly's Learning Phase begins on September 9th. Assembly members will gather in Toronto, for six weekend-long sessions, to learn about electoral systems.

Learning sessions will take place at Moot Court, Osgoode Hall, York University (Keele Campus). Plenary sessions are open to the public and simultaneous English/French translation will be available. Please contact the Citizens' Assembly Secretariat if you plan to attend a plenary session and require special accommodation.

An outline of the Learning Phase follows. A [detailed schedule](#) is available on our site.

Weekend 1 September 9-10	Creating Community
Weekend 2 September 30 – October 1	Parliament, Parties and Values
Weekend 3 October 14-15	Electoral Systems I Plurality/Majority > discussion of First-Past-the-Post
Weekend 4 October 28-29	Electoral Systems II Proportional Representation/Mixed Systems
Weekend 5 November 11-12	Values and Electoral Reform > international experiences
Weekend 6 November 25-26	Simulated Elections

Learning materials will be posted on our site the Friday before each weekend, and video footage from the weekend will be added later in the week following. So visit The Classroom often to learn along with the Assembly.

The Ballot Box with Dr. Rose



Electoral systems are as diverse as fingerprints. While many share the same characteristics, no two are exactly alike. One of the most obvious distinctions is how many representatives are elected in each electoral district. In some systems, voters elect only one member. In others, voters elect several members or even several dozen in each district.

Another difference among electoral systems is the way voters choose candidates. Voters in some countries choose one candidate or party, but in others they are asked to rank candidates in order of preference. The most common electoral system is called List Proportional Representation or List PR for short. Approximately 35% of the world's countries and territories use List PR, representing a population of around 1.18 billion people.

On the other end of the scale is the Borda Count, an electoral system that is little known outside of the one country that uses it. It is used by the Republic of Nauru, a tiny island nation in the Pacific that has an area of 21 square kilometres and a population of only 13,000 people.

The Borda Count is named after Jean Charles de Borda. A true renaissance man, he was a mathematician, physicist, nautical astronomer and sailor. When he was not busy with these interests, Borda spent time debating electoral systems with Marie Jean Antoine Nicolas Caritat, the Marquis de Condorcet. It was during these discussions that Borda found an ingenious way to elect representatives.

The Borda Count allows voters to rank-order candidates according to preference. In this system first preferences are worth one vote, second preferences are worth 1/2 of a vote, third preferences are worth 1/3, etc. Borda wanted a system that ensured that votes have less weight as the ranking of the candidate decreases. Supporters like that this system ensures that **all** the preferences of **all** voters influence the results of the election.

In addition to being the only country in the world to use the Borda Count, Nauru has the highest percentage of independent representatives. Currently, 15 of the 18 members of its legislature are not members of any political party. It's hard to know whether this result is a product of the Borda Count since there is no other country that uses this system. Either way, Nauru and its electoral

system demonstrate the diversity of the ways citizens elect representatives.

New on Our Site

New content is being added to the Citizens' Assembly website every week. Recently launched areas include:

- [The Classroom](#)
- [The Library](#)
- [The Assembly in the News](#)

Contact Us

Questions or comments about The Ballot? Send an e-mail to: theballot@citizensassembly.gov.on.ca

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