

# ONTARIANS HAVE TO WAIT ANOTHER DECADE

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**By Dikran Abrahamian BA, MD** October 6, 2007

Throughout Ontario's history many governments have been elected without the support of most of the popular vote because of the "first-pass" system.

At times majority governments have been formed by barely garnering 40% of the popular vote, leaving 60% of the electorate out of the loop of governing. To address this anomaly the MPP (Mixed Member Proportional representation) is proposed for a referendum. It is designed to give a chance to small parties and minorities to have representation in the legislature and governance. Advocacy groups of poverty, gender equality, better health care, environment, in addition to a host of others, are considered minorities in this context.

MPP entails "electing" 39 members of legislature who will be allocated to competing parties in proportion to the percentage of voters that various parties have attracted, provided they attain or surpass the 3% threshold mark. This will complement the 90 representatives elected in the traditional manner.

Advocates of MMP maintain that the proposed system will enhance democracy and bring into legislature parties that otherwise can't get elected under the traditional system. They predict that MMP will promote genuine majority rule. Those who oppose MMP underscore the fact that none of the parties will be able to form a majority government. They will be compelled to negotiate with fringe parties which could be unpalatable and extreme in their views, and hence lead to unstable short-lived governments. They maintain that the present system despite its shortcomings is functioning well. Why to opt for a new system the outcome of which is not clear? Both proponents and critics draw examples from other countries where the system of MMP or a similar variant is in place.

How does MMP affect political, ethnic or religious minorities? It's a moot question at this stage as size and militancy of such groups play a decisive role. The political context of the times will determine how they exercise their rights. With respect to the Armenian community in Ontario, size being a defining element, a pragmatic rather than an ideological approach should be entertained, keeping an open mind and playing by ear.

MMP did not get adequate coverage during the election campaign and probably it won't see the light of the day at least for some time for a variety of reasons. The divisive issue of faith-based school funding derailed the discussions and there was not sufficient exchange of views of what MMP means. People tend to go along with the status quo if a new proposal of prime magnitude has not been exhaustively explained and understood. Leaders of the parties were excluded from discussing the subject and hence the referendum was not appropriately highlighted. Lastly, living in an atmosphere of understandable political anxiety, some minorities are not yet wholeheartedly welcome in the political process.

Likely Ontarians need to wait for another decade to revisit the idea of proportional representation!



