



A New Voting  
System that  
is a Genuine  
Step Forward  
for  
**Democracy!**

Produced by  
**Le Collectif Féminisme et Démocratie et le Mouvement pour une Démocratie Nouvelle**  
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## PRODUCTION

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## 3 Introduction

## 4 What the Government is Proposing

## 6 Does the Government's Proposal Meet our Democratic Aspirations?

A. Reflect the Will of the People - (6 to 8)

B. Representation of Political Pluralism - (9)

C. Regional Representation - (10)

D. Equal Representation of Women and Men - (11 to 12)

E. Representation of Quebec's Diversity - (12 to 13)

## 14 Conclusion

## 15 To Learn More

## 16 What's Next?



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## INTRODUCTION

Reform of the voting system has been on the agenda in Quebec for nearly 40 years – but that is where it has remained! Former Premier René Lévesque in fact freely labelled the present voting system as defective democracy. In an attempt to make the system more democratic and fair, he tried to initiate reform. Regrettably, he ran up against resistance from within his own party, similar to others party leaders, such as Claude Ryan, Paul Cliche, Jean Allaire, etc.

In the 1998 election, the Parti Québécois was the winner with a majority of seats despite the fact that the Liberals won the majority of the popular vote. A social movement draw from several sources and groups has since combined efforts to call on the government to present a proposal for reforming the voting system in a way that would strengthen and enhance democracy in Quebec. The Mouvement pour une démocratie nouvelle (MDN), joined soon after by the Collectif Féminisme et Démocratie (CFD)<sup>1</sup>, have initiated broad public awareness and education campaigns to encourage citizens to mobilize in support of a more democratic voting system.



### FOR A VOTING SYSTEM REFORM

- ✓ that more accurately reflects the will of the people
- ✓ that achieves equal political representation for women and men
- ✓ that embodies the diversity of Quebec
- ✓ that reflects political pluralism
- ✓ that recognizes the importance of the regions of Quebec

**In response to civil society pressures**, the PQ government assigned a legislative committee to consult with the public concerning the voting system. Many briefs were submitted, but the committee unfortunately never released its report. At the same time, in 2002, the Comité directeur des États généraux sur la réforme des institutions démocratiques<sup>2</sup> crossed Quebec asking the public its opinions about the voting system, among other aspects. The États Généraux held in February 2003, in which a thousand citizens participated, confirmed the will of the population to move ahead with reform of our voting system.

**Since the États généraux**, two other organizations have been formed: the Mouvement Démocratie et Citoyen-

neté du Québec (MDCQ), which is also calling for reform of the voting system, and the Regroupement ethnoculturel pour l'action politique (REAP),<sup>3</sup> which is working toward more equitable representation of citizens from ethnocultural communities in political institutions, and consequently on reform of the voting system.

**The idea of changing the voting system in Quebec is therefore gaining ground.** The public has become increasingly aware of this issue, and is increasingly in favour of voting system reform.

**In the last election, all political parties committed themselves to changing the voting system.**

**The movement in Quebec can also be understood within a broader context.** At the Canadian federal level, Fair Vote Canada has been active for several years in promoting voting system reform. In 2002, an important report by the Law Commission of Canada invited a discussion of the issues involved in electoral reform. A number of Canadian provinces have already started the process of reforming their voting systems. British Columbia has done this through a novel model of citizen participation, one that bodes well for participatory democracy. In New Brunswick, work is already well underway. Ontario and Prince Edward Island have also been making motions in this direction. **In Quebec, the government introduced a draft bill to change the voting system in December 2004.**

**With this document, we invite everyone, individuals and social groups alike**, to get involved in the public debate over the next few months, so that the proposed reform of the voting system will be a genuine democratic step forward for Quebec.

It is not every day that a society has the opportunity to improve its voting system. It is too important an issue for half measures, or for minor, cosmetic changes. This reform is too fundamental to all citizens to be left in the hands of politicians or experts alone. Analyzing the government's proposal and participating in the consultation are the responsibility of citizens. We must accept that responsibility and keep our eyes fixed on the democratic aspirations of the population so that we may place Quebec firmly on a forward-looking path for improved political representation.

1. Translation: (MDN) Movement for a New Democracy / (CFD) Feminism and Democracy Collective.

2. Translation: Steering Committee of the General Estates on Reform of Democratic Institutions

3. Translation: (MDCQ) Democracy and Citizenship Movement of Quebec / (REAP) Ethnocultural Coalition for Political Action

# WHAT THE GOVERNMENT IS PROPOSING

## SUMMARY

### A DRAFT BILL THAT, ACCORDING TO THE GOVERNMENT, MEETS THE FOLLOWING OBJECTIVES:

Excerpt from the draft bill: purpose of the bill  
TRANSLATION

- “ensure that electors have effective representation, consistent with the equality of each citizen’s vote;
- ensure an equality of opportunity in elections for all candidates and all political parties, in particular as concerns electoral financing and the effective monitoring of election expenses;
- promote the equitable representation of women and men in the National Assembly;
- promote the equitable representation of members of ethnocultural minorities in the National Assembly.

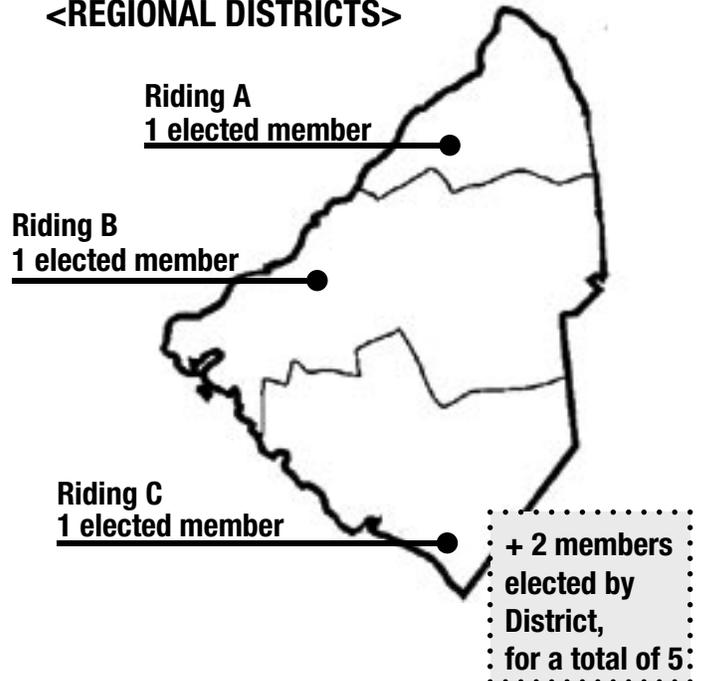
### THIS DRAFT BILL, WHICH THE GOVERNMENT HAS SUBMITTED FOR PUBLIC DISCUSSION, CONTAINS THE FOLLOWING CHANGES:

#### A NEW VOTING METHOD CALLED MIXED PROPORTIONAL:

The government is proposing that the existing voting system be replaced by a voting system that it describes as [TRANSLATION] “mixed proportional ... so that every vote counts”. It would require a new geographic division of the electoral map into:

- 77 ridings, the size of which might ultimately be similar to the size of the present federal electoral districts. The Iles-de-la-Madeleine would continue to comprise an electoral division, and a new electoral division would be added for Nunavik;
- 24 to 27 regional districts, which would constitute new regional groupings, each with an average of 3 electoral ridings.

### ILLUSTRATION OF THE NEW GEOGRAPHIC DIVISION OF THE ELECTORAL MAP INTO <REGIONAL DISTRICTS>



- There would be 127 members in the National Assembly (two more than at present).
- The members would be elected in two ways (hence the reason for using the term “mixed”):
  - 77 members elected in 77 ridings, using the present voting system: first-past-the-post;
  - 50 members elected in 24 to 27 districts (2 members per district, subject to exceptions) based on the proportion of votes received by each party (hence the reason for using the term “proportional”). The members would be chosen from a list of candidates prepared by each political party.
- The people in each district would thus have 5 members to represent them.

**RESULTS: a National Assembly composed of 127 members, 60% of whom (77 members) would be elected in the ridings, and 40% of whom (50 members) would be elected in the districts.**

## A SINGLE VOTE

- **The government is proposing that a single ballot be used to elect both types of members:**

- Voters would therefore vote only once in her/his electoral riding... exactly as is done currently. A voter would use this single ballot to choose the MNA for her/his riding.
- The same ballot would also be used (according to the proportional vote) to elect two members for the district.

- These two district seats would be allocated from among the individuals on the **list of names that the parties have prepared**, according to the ordering of names: first, second, third, etc.

- Candidates can compete in an electoral riding and also be included on her/his party's list for a district seat; however, they may not hold both seats concurrently. If the candidate wins the riding seat, he/his name will be stricken from the list, and the next person on the list would win the district seat.

### EXAMPLE OF AN ELECTION IN A DISTRICT

#### Results of elections in the 3 electoral ridings

PARTIES	ELECTORAL RIDINGS			TOTAL
	A	B	C	
Red	15 745	20 403	19 534	55 682
Blue	17 269	17 852	15 627	50 748
Beige	7 619	6 121	5 860	19 600
Orange	5 109	5 101	6 348	18 052
Yellow	3 554	1 530	1 465	6 549
Elected	Blue	Red	Red	
% of votes	34%	40%	34 %	

*The Blue Party receives one riding seat, the Red Party 2 riding seats*

To calculate who gets the two district seats the “highest average” method is used. To do that, we must calculate the total number of votes received by each party in the 3 ridings (A+B+C). That total is divided by a quotient determined for each party as follows: the number of seats won by the party + 1. The party with the highest average is entitled to one district seat (Blue=25,374). For the second seat, the calculation is done again for the Blue party, taking the previous result into account. The party with the 2nd highest average is entitled to the second district seat (Beige=19,600).

#### Calcuton for determining district seats

PARTIES	Votes obtained	% of votes	Quotient seat+1	Average	Total: MNAs by type	% of seats
Red	55 682	37%	2+1= 3	18 560	2 ridings	40%
Blue	50 748	33,7%	1+1= 2 2+1= 3	25 374 16 916	1 riding +1 district	40%
Beige	19 600	13%	0+1= 1	19 600	+1 district	20%
Orange	18 052	12%	0+1= 1	18 052	none	0
Green	6 549	4,3%	0+1= 1	6 549	none	0

The first person on the Blue Party's list and the Beige Party's list are elected. When a candidate who would have been elected from the list is already elected in her/his riding, the second person on the party's list is declared elected.

#### FUNDING INCENTIVES FOR ACHIEVING MORE EQUITABLE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

The government is proposing a financial incentive to encourage political parties to recruit more female candidates.

This would consist of additional funding, which would vary based on the number of female candidates presented by each party. These measures would be temporary and would cease when 50% of the elected members of the National Assembly were women. (See page 11 for a detailed explanation of these proposals.)

#### FUNDING INCENTIVES FOR ACHIEVING MORE EQUITABLE REPRESENTATION OF MINORITIES IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

The government is proposing a financial incentive to encourage political parties to recruit candidates who are members of minority groups.

This would consist of additional funding, which would vary based on the number of such candidates presented by each party. These measures would be temporary and would cease when 20% of the elected members of the National Assembly were members of ethnoculturally diverse groups.

(See page 12 for a detailed explanation of these proposals.)

# DOES THE GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSAL MEET OUR DEMOCRATIC ASPIRATIONS?

In order for a new voting system to make a real contribution to democracy in Quebec and provide remedies for the democratic deficits, inequalities and distortions produced by the present voting system, it must, in our opinion, produce five major results. We invite you to read them, to examine the arguments that we present for your consideration, and to judge for yourselves whether the government's proposal meets "your" democratic aspirations.



## A. REFLECT THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE

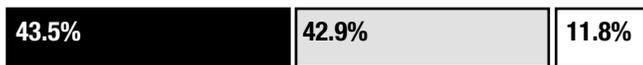
An election is the process by which citizens select the people who will represent them and govern on their behalf for a fixed period of time. We might well expect the will of the citizens to be scrupulously recognized, and that each citizen feel legitimately represented.

### OUR PRESENT VOTING SYSTEM

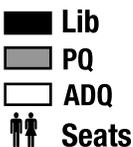
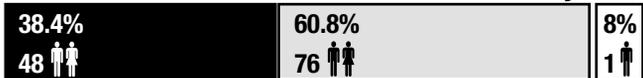
The first-past-the-post electoral system is one in which the electorate casts one ballot in favour of one person in their electoral riding. The person elected is the person who has obtained the largest number of votes ... even if the number of votes received surpasses the other candidates by only one vote. The party that wins is the party that wins the largest number of riding seats... not necessarily the largest number of votes overall. In this system, the will of the people is not necessarily recognized, and not all citizens are equally represented.

In the 1998 election, for example, the Liberal Party received 43.5% of the popular vote and the Parti québécois received 42.9%. Nonetheless, the Parti québécois was elected, because it had more MNAs elected by riding.

#### Votes 1998 Elections

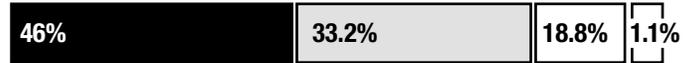


#### Distribution of the seats in the National Assembly

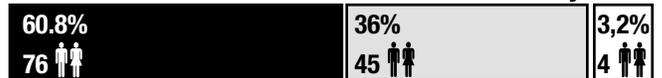


Similar, in 2003, if the party that had won the election had also been the party with the most votes, there would still have been distortions when we consider the vote and the composition of the National Assembly:

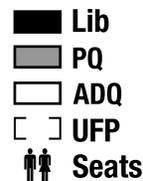
#### Votes - 2003 Election



#### Distribution of the seats in the National Assembly



→ The UFP did not win any seats



### THESE RESULTS SHOW

- **Major distortions:** the number of seats won by a party does not accurately reflect the number of votes the party received. As we have just seen, there are cases in which the party that "won" a majority of seats received fewer votes than the party that "lost"! (In addition to 1998, this occurred in 1944 and 1966.)
- **Inequalities among votes:** each vote does not have the same weight. In 2003, an average of 28,204 votes were needed to elect a PQ MNA, 23,103 votes to elect a Liberal MNA and 174,250 to elect an ADQ MNA.
- **Thousands of "lost" votes:** the candidate elected is the one who receives the most votes. If you did not vote for that person, your vote is "lost"; you are not represented according to your political choice. For example, if 10 people voted for Candidate A, 4 people voted for Candidate B, 8 people voted for Candidate C and 2 people voted for Candidate D, Candidate A would win, with 10 votes, and 14 people would have no representation. The present system therefore very often creates a "majority of losers" who are not properly represented, or are not represented at all in the National Assembly. In 2003, for example, 90,237 people received no representation because they supported parties that did not win any seats (40,422 for the UFP, 16,875 for the Green Party, etc.).

## DOES THE GOVERNEMENT'S PROPOSAL REMEDY THESE DISTORTIONS AND INEQUALITIES?

### LET'S TAKE A LOOK:

- **The difference between the current and proposed models** lies in the fact that 60% of seats would be allocated using the present voting system and 40% would be allocated by a method that the government describes as “proportional”, which is used to remedy the distortions in the current FPTP system; this is also why it is called a “mixed compensatory system”, because the proportional aspect compensates for the distortions in the first-past-the-post system. Citizens would continue to vote for one person in their riding to elect 77 members using the present voting system. However, that single vote would also be used to allocate the 50 district seats (2 per district) according to the proportional representation system.

- **The first unpleasant surprise** lies in the fact that votes would be calculated by district and not Quebec-wide. The votes received by the parties in one district would be compiled to elect the two district members as though there were 24 to 27 elections, all independent of one another. According to this allocation of the 50 district seats, it would not be possible to add up all the votes received across Quebec to award them to each party proportionate with the Quebec-wide popular vote. And yet studies show that the smaller the district, the less proportionality there is in the results.

All votes would in fact be counted, for allocating the district seats, but given the small number of seats allocated on a district basis (only 2), there is no guarantee that all votes would function to elect one or more district members. Rather, it is certain that some electors would not receive fair representation in the National Assembly. The best that we could say is that there would be fewer votes lost.

- **The second unpleasant surprise** lies in the fact that the elector would have only one vote, unlike the situation in all the mixed proportional voting systems worldwide wherein the voter always has two votes: one for her or his local riding and the other vote to be cast based on the ideas and program of the party of her or his choice. Under the government's proposal, the voter is not given the flexibility to express a range of political opinions or to qualify her/his support for a particular party. Rather, the same vote would be counted twice to express two distinct preferences: the candidate of my choice and the party of my choice. The current government assumes that these two preferences are necessarily identical for everyone, and this is false. Why not give the Quebec voters a choice?

(...)In Germany, 20% of ballots were marked for different candidates and parties (split ballots) in 1998; this was the case for 22% of ballots in 2002. Recently, where personalized proportional voting has been introduced, the electorate seems to have quickly become fond of vote splitting: it accounted for 20% of ballots in Scotland and 19% in Wales in 1999, and has become remarkably popular in New Zealand: 37% in 1996, 35% in 1999 and 39% in 2002.<sup>1</sup>

- **A surprising assumption** of the current government is that it would be too complicated for Quebecers to have two ballots! Millions of people throughout the world vote in a mixed proportional voting system, and no one finds it too complicated. Would Quebecers be less intelligent than they are in municipal elections, where there are two ballots: one for mayor and another for councillors?

### TWO BALLOTS; TOO COMPLEX?

Experiences to date in Wales and Scotland show that introducing two separate ballots was not at all complicated.

The populations of those countries were used to a system similar to the one currently in effect in Quebec, and yet the electorate was able to understand the process of a two-step vote – one vote for the riding and one vote for the party – and the vast majority of voters succeeded in voting without any confusion. Contrary to fears previously expressed in this regard, older voters were able to understand the new system very well. In fact, the people who had the most difficulty voting were generally those with less education. Given these facts, it would simply be a matter of paying special attention to this particular group, as part of a broader information campaign for the public at large. The key element underlying the success of the introduction of a two-vote system in these two cases was the organization of broad public education campaigns before the election was held.<sup>2</sup>

1 Massicotte, L. (2004) [translation]. La révision de mode de scrutin. À la recherche d'un mode de scrutin mixte compensatoire pour le Québec. En bref, Gouvernement du Québec. Working paper, p. 11.

2 MDN newsletter, May 2004

## WHAT SHOULD WE MAKE OF THE GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSAL?

### **More proportionality ... but not for the benefit of everyone!**

The "Quebec model" proposed by the government remedies some of the distortions created by electing members by riding. The calculation used to elect people at the district level makes the number of seats in the National Assembly more proportional to the number of votes... but only for the three parties currently represented in the National Assembly. The other parties are still excluded from the game. In addition, under this model, all regions will not have the same choice of candidates: we can easily imagine that some parties will not have the resources to field candidates in all districts across Quebec.

**More proportionality ... but not true proportionality.** Because the electorate has only one vote, voters are limited to one choice for the expression of two preferences. Their ultimate choice is exaggerated because it will be made to count twice: once for the riding choice and once for the district list choice. The voter is given no flexibility, no liberty to express each preference freely, which is contrary to the very spirit of the mixed proportional voting system.

**Fewer votes lost... but still too many!** The table on page 5 shows that thousands of votes received by parties in each district will be "lost". These votes are not counted in making up the political representation in the National Assembly. And imagine the thousands of votes lost across Quebec if we add up the lost votes in each of the 24 to 27 districts in which the same situation will automatically be reproduced, for one party or another.

In order to be certain of electing a district MNA, a party would have to have a minimum of 17% of the votes in a district. Below that percentage, their chances decrease significantly, and if they receive below 13% their chances are nil. This entails a significant percentage of votes that would be lost in the calculation of political representation in the National Assembly.

## CONCLUSION

**THE GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSAL IS A SMALL STEP FORWARD, BUT DOES NOT REFLECT THE POPULAR VOTE AND THE WILL OF THE ELECTORATE AS ACCURATELY AS IS POSSIBLE.**

## WHAT WOULD WE HAVE TO DO TO AVOID THIS SITUATION?

- **Count** all the votes received by all the parties, Quebec-wide, and not simply in each district.
- **Allocate** the 50 compensatory seats proportionally, based on the percentage of votes obtained by each party Quebec-wide; if necessary, this would mean setting a minimum threshold (for example, 3%) as is done in a number of countries that use proportional voting. A minimum threshold means that a party has to attain that "minimum threshold" in order to be entitled to partake in the calculation of seats in the legislature. (This avoids a fragmented legislature and too many "small" parties.)
- **Provide** two ballots so that electors are able to express their political choices as fully as possible.



**IT WOULD BE SO MUCH SIMPLER IF I HAD TWO VOTES!**



## B. REPRESENTATION OF POLITICAL PLURALISM

Political pluralism speaks to the capacity of an electoral system to express the diversity of political opinions, political platforms of parties, and of new ideas that emerge in society. In Germany, for example, the Green Party has created a political party that reflects the public's new awareness of environmental issues. If it were not for the proportional voting system, this party would never have been able to have representatives elected, and thus to influence environmental policy.

### IN OUR PRESENT SYSTEM

Our present system favours a two-party system, wherein political power alternates between two major parties that enjoy a monopoly over the votes cast. It is a system that is based on the false assertion that voters will find all the political ideas that reflect their opinions within those two parties. Societies have changed, they are more diverse: Quebecers are no longer divided simply into "red" and "blue". Political parties have been created to reflect the diversity of opinions and political sensibilities. Democracy requires that it be possible for this pluralism to be reflected in the National Assembly, and this is not the case under our current system.

Emerging, "smaller" parties often convey ideas that are new or that are in the minority, and they have little chance of sending a representative to the National Assembly – or, in the case of "third parties", they may elect a few individuals but not be able to genuinely influence debates in the National Assembly. For example, the ADQ received 19% of the vote in 2003, but only 4 seats ... even after 10 years in existence. The National Assembly continues to reflect two currents within popular opinion but they are supposed to represent society in its entirety.

### DOES THE GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSAL ALLOW FOR GREATER POLITICAL PLURALISM?

LET'S TAKE A LOOK:

- **The status quo is preserved for electing MNAs in the riding.** The 77 representatives of electoral ridings are elected exactly as they are currently, which allows for little political pluralism, or allows for it only in specific circumstances. For example, in order for a third party to gain a seat in the current system, monopolized as it is by two well-established parties, its votes must be highly concentrated in a given riding, or it must rely heavily on the local popularity of its leader. The "small" parties have practically no chance of winning a seat unless all their supporters move to a few electoral ridings!
- **Votes are counted by district only.** The government's proposal would lead to 24 to 27 elections, each being held separately, as though independent of one another. Only two people

would be elected by the proportional vote; the possibility of expressing political pluralism will be slim. Studies show that the smaller the geographical area (for example, a district), the less diversity in political ideas and opinions are reflected.

All voting simulations that have been done by experts arrive at this perverse conclusion: only the three parties now present in the National Assembly can expect to win district seats. It will be extremely difficult for a "small" party to win a seat, since it will have to get a minimum of "13% to 17% of the vote" in the district. The fragmenting of Quebec into districts will occur to the detriment of expressing political pluralism.

• **Voters have only one vote to express all the nuances of their political opinions and choices.** Having only one vote completely distorts the very idea of a "mixed" system on which proportional voting is based – a system that is designed to balance political representation between the members elected by the first-past-the-post system with the members elected by proportional voting. The mixed system is also designed to express both the electorate's attachment to their local riding and the expression of their political ideas, by offering them an opportunity to express both preferences by choosing a candidate in the riding and by expressing their preference for the societal vision of each political party.

**In the government's proposal, the mixed nature of the system is diluted and it is biased in favour of electing members in the riding, as is the case in our current system.**

### CONCLUSION

**THE GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSAL DOES NOT ALLOW FOR THE EXPRESSION OF THE FULL RANGE OF POLITICAL PLURALISM PRESENT IN QUEBEC SOCIETY.**

### WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

A voting system in which every vote really counts, and in which political preferences – even minority trends – can be represented in the National Assembly requires:

- **Making provision for Quebec-wide compensation, not proportionality calculated by district.** At least 40% of seats in the National Assembly – 50 seats – should be allocated in proportion to the number of votes **across Quebec** obtained by each party. This is the only means with which we can correct for most of the distortion created by electing 60% of MNAs – 77 members – by the first-past-the-post system.
- **Provide two ballots:** each voter must be able to use two separate ballots in order to express the nuanced intentions of her/his political ideas and preferences.



## C. REGIONAL REPRESENTATION

A voting method that allows for the expression of regional realities is a system in which the members of the National Assembly represent the people in specific regions, where they advocate with respect to regional issues, where the public develops a connection with their representatives. Quebecers have developed a strong feeling of belonging to their regions. Their elected representatives personify the connection between the people and their political institution, the National Assembly. The voting method chosen must reflect that sense of belonging, and our political culture of representation.

### IN OUR PRESENT SYSTEM

One could say that the 125 MNAs are currently elected in “regional” electoral divisions. Those electoral divisions are geographic entities that correspond to specific portions of the 17 administrative regions of Quebec. In a region, the people who are elected tend to organize jointly (when they belong to the same party) to advocate on behalf of “their” region. On the other hand, when the electorate in a region does not vote for the “right” side, there is a strong chance that the government’s sleeve ... and purse-strings ... will have to be pulled harder to get any attention to the region’s needs. Although this political practice seems to be disappearing, when a region “loses” its elections, it does not feel as well “represented” in the National Assembly; having a member in opposition is not quite the same as having one who is a part of the governing party.

Generally speaking, however, the present voting system is certainly one that recognizes regional feelings of belonging.

### DOES THE GOVERNMENT’S PROPOSAL RECOGNIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF THE REGIONS?

#### LET’S TAKE A LOOK:

Regional identity is still an important part of Quebec political life in Quebec that must be recognized. Although the voting system may contribute to recognizing the regional realities of Quebec, the “deficit of power” from which the regions suffer in our present system cannot be solved solely by reforming the voting system. It is not clear that the voting system will resolve issues relating to the decentralization of powers, the equitable distribution of resources among the regions, and so on. In fact, no voting system will be a panacea for the regions’ problems.

The government’s proposal aims at reflecting the importance of the regions, but it does so at the expense of representing a diversity of political ideas.

• **The ratio between electoral division members and members elected by proportional representation is 60:40.** There are more electoral riding MNAs (77) than MNAs elected by proportionality from party lists (50). District MNAs are regional representatives elected by counting the same votes as were cast to select the riding MNAs. In fact, there is a double-counting of regional identities, at the expense of a diversity of political visions.

• **Representation of the regions is preserved.** The 77 ridings could be the same as the geographic units used in federal elections, which also correspond with specific portions of the 17 administrative regions of Quebec. Electors would therefore continue to have a connection to their elected representative and to feel that “their” region is represented, that its interests are advanced, and placed “on the agenda”.

• **Districts: a new map of districts to be superimposed upon the current electoral map of ridings.** Quebec would be divided into 24 to 27 districts, each of which would incorporate an average of 3 ridings. Each district would be entitled to 2 MNAs from party lists in addition to the three electoral districts. These would be additional, new regional entities.

In order for a voting method to be consistent with a number of principles, all of which are equally important (for example, the importance of the regions, political pluralism, the will of the people, equality between women and men, ethnocultural diversity), an effort must be made to harmonize these diverse principles and to seek a balance among them. In the case of the regions, the government’s proposal tends to over-emphasize this principle, in relation to the other principles of recognizing the will of the people and political pluralism.

### CONCLUSION

**THE GOVERNMENT’S PROPOSAL ASSIGNS GREAT IMPORTANCE TO THE REGIONS AT THE EXPENSE OF OTHER IMPORTANT ELEMENTS SUCH AS POLITICAL PLURALISM.**

### WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

A mixed voting system may be beneficial for regional representation, but it is our opinion that it must not be advanced at the expense of political pluralism. Nonetheless, that is the impact of the government’s proposal. In a genuine mixed proportional representation system, regional representation and representation of various political visions must exist side by side. Accordingly, we must:

• **Count** all votes Quebec-wide, not by district, when allocating the 50 compensatory seats to be used to remedy distortions.

• **Require** that the first half of a Quebec-wide party list contain the names of candidates from all of the regions.



## D. EQUAL REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN AND MEN

Equality is a fundamental value of democracy. Demanding equality between women and men in political representation is not a request for special privileges; it is an effort to ensure that women and men are able to hold positions of authority in our political system, to exercise power jointly, and that political authority does not continue to be a male preserve. By putting equality at the heart of our argument, what we are arguing for is justice.<sup>1</sup>

### IN OUR PRESENT SYSTEM

The under-representation of women in the National Assembly is a kind of “chronic disease”. More than 60 years after women won the vote and became eligible for election, they still comprise only 32% of the elected MNAs. Progress is slow, fragile and precarious. If the trend continues, and if we assume one election every 4 years, we would have to wait until 2050 to achieve equality... without counting possible setbacks!

The present voting system is not neutral with respect to this situation. It tends to limit the egalitarian representation of men and women. Among other things, the fact that the system operates on the basis of ridings means that it is difficult to ensure there is an equal number of female and male candidates.

### DOES THE GOVERNMENT’S PROPOSAL ALLOW FOR EQUALITY BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN TO BE ACHIEVED IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY?

#### LET’S TAKE A LOOK

The government is proposing to provide a financial incentive for parties that make an effort to present a significant number of female candidates. This incentive would be provided in two ways:

- by increasing the annual funding given to parties (in addition to the \$0.50 per vote that the parties already receive) if they present a significant number of female candidates;
- by increasing the refund of election expenses incurred by female candidates and those female elected MNAs who receive at least 15% of the vote (the Act already provides for refunding 50% of MNA’s election expenses).

% of female candidates presented by a party in order to receive a financial bonus	Increase in annual funding allocated to each official party	Refund of election expenses for female candidates who receive at least 15% of the vote	Refund of election expenses for female candidates elected
30% to 34 % candidates	+ 5%	60%	65%
35% to 39% candidates	+ 10%	65%	70%
40% or more	+ 15%	70%	75%

### WHAT PART OF THE GOVERNMENT’S PROPOSAL SHOULD BE ADOPTED?

- The government is seeking to achieve **more equitable representation, not egalitarian representation**: this is a retreat from the objective of equality and from the target of 50-50 representation.
- The government is proposing **only one measure** (a financial incentive given to the political parties) when only a cohesive set of complementary measures, in combination, will make it possible to achieve equality.
- The government is **refusing to require** the political parties to present a list comprised of alternating names of women and men.
- The government is **not proposing a Quebec-wide list** for effecting compensation, even though those are the lists that provide a better chance for women, because they make it possible to see what efforts that parties are or are not making to include female candidates and put them in good positions on the lists.
- The government is **giving financial compensation for the parties for the number of female candidates presented and not for the number of women elected**, even though it is those who are elected who count when it comes to the National Assembly. Under that system, a party could, in practice, collect the money ... without having a single woman more elected:
- The government is starting to give financial bonuses to the parties at too low a level, having regard to the number of female candidates already presented by the parties and elected. For example, 34.8% of elected PQ members are already women, as are 31.5% of Liberal members. To encourage the parties to achieve 50%, their additional effort, not what they are already doing, must be rewarded.

### CONCLUSION

**THE GOVERNMENT’S PROPOSAL PROVIDES NO GUARANTEE THAT EQUAL POLITICAL REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN AND MEN WILL BE ACHIEVED.**

### WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

It is a prerequisite for equality between women and men that the parties have the firm political will to achieve it, and that a cohesive set of measures be instituted, some of which are mandatory while others are educational or involve incentives, to achieve that objective within a reasonable timeframe.

1. Pour et vers l’égalité entre les femmes et les hommes dans la représentation politique, CFD, 2004



## E. REPRESENTATION OF QUEBEC'S DIVERSITY

• **Make EQUALITY** the target, not equity (a vague concept that provides encouragement for not aiming for equality).

• Draw up Quebec-wide lists with **mandatory alternating** names of female and male candidates, starting with a woman.

• **Require** political parties to adopt an action plan that provides for the adoption of concrete measures to achieve equality. The implementation of this plan would be funded by the bonuses received by the parties (increases in their annual allocations). These funds would have to be invested by each party in a special fund dedicated to promoting and supporting equality between women and men in the party.

• **Require** that political parties report annually to the Directeur général des élections (concerning the extent to which the objective of equality is achieved, measures adopted, and money invested, etc).

• **Improving the effectiveness of the incentives:**

-a financial bonus should be given to the parties based on the percentage of **women elected**, not simply on the basis of female candidates. An increase in the annual allocation to political parties should be accorded to parties who elect **35% or more women** (35 to 39% women = +5%; 40 to 44% women = +10%; 45% women and over = +15%);

-a refund of election expenses should be accorded to female candidates (who receive over 15% of the vote) and elected female MNAs when their party presents **35% or more female candidates** (35 to 39% women = refund of 60%; 40 to 44% women = refund of 65%; 45% women and over = refund of 70%). An additional 5% increase in the refund of election expenses would be given to women who are elected, as compared to the refund given to women candidates;

• **Keep these measures in place** for three elections after equality is achieved, to consolidate this accomplishment.

A democratic voting method must allow for representation of the ethnocultural diversity of a society. In the last thirty years, the face of Quebec has become increasingly diverse, largely due to immigration. It is important that this diversity be reflected in the National Assembly.

### IN OUR PRESENT SYSTEM

The present voting method provides no guarantee of diversified representation. For example, the National Assembly currently has only 9 members from diverse ethnocultural communities, accounting for 7% of elected MNAs, while nearly 30% of the population of Quebec reports having origins other than French (according to the government's definition).

Members of minority groups, and particularly visible minorities, do not participate adequately in the political process because they have no real foothold in electoral politics. Why not make electoral reform an instrument of inclusion to encourage enhanced civic participation?

### DOES THE GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSAL ALLOW FOR BETTER REPRESENTATION OF ETHNOCULTURAL DIVERSITY?

#### LET'S TAKE A LOOK:

The government is proposing to give a **financial incentive** for parties that make a special effort to present **candidates** who are members of "minorities" (the government talks about "minorities", i.e. individuals whose origins are other than French). This incentive would operate in two ways:

- by increasing their annual allocation (in addition to the \$0.50 that the parties already receive) if they present a significant percentage of candidates who are members of "minorities";
- by increasing the refund of election expenses accorded to candidates and elected members who receive at least 15% of the vote (the Act already provides for refunding 50% of their election expenses).

% of candidates representing ethnocultural diversity presented by a party to be entitled to a financial bonus	Increase in annual funding allocated to each official party	Refund of election expenses of candidates who receive at least 15% of the vote	Refund of election expenses for candidates elected
10% to 12% of candidates	+ 5%	60%	65%
13% à 16% of candidates	+ 10%	65%	70%
16% or more	+ 15%	70%	75%

**This measure is an incentive: it does not guarantee that the National Assembly will better reflect Quebec's ethnocultural diversity.** We can imagine that parties would rather present a winning "candidate", one who has good chances of winning an electoral division, rather than a person from a "minority" who may have less chances of winning the seat... even if the party will receive a financial benefit. When the choice is between winning an electoral district and pocketing a few extra dollars... the choice is obvious!

Giving a financial bonus for simply presenting candidates, rather than for electing minority MNAs, will not necessarily prompt the political parties to make a genuine effort to recruit and elect "minorities". The parties are not necessarily going to share their winnable constituencies with minority candidates.

Moreover, although this incentive could operate to encourage the inclusion of candidates from minorities on district lists, because the parties are not bound to do so, the effects of a mere "financial incentive" may not count for much – not to mention that only the candidates at the top of the district list have a real chance of winning a seat.

Additionally, because the English-speaking minority is included in what the government calls "minorities", there is a serious risk, at least in some electoral divisions or districts, that they would be recruited at the expense of representing ethnocultural diversity and visible minorities.

With this system, a party could, in practice, fill its financial coffers... without having a single person from an ethnoculturally diverse group elected.

**The government is not proposing a Quebec-wide list for calculating the proportional compensation,** even though larger lists provide a better chance for candidates from ethnoculturally diverse groups, because they make it possible to see what efforts the parties are or are not making to include candidates from those ethnoculturally diverse groups; moreover, we can evaluate whether they are placed in winning positions on the list in recognition of the contribution these groups make to Quebec society.

## CONCLUSION

**THERE IS NO GUARANTEE OF MORE EQUITABLE REPRESENTATION OF ETHNOCULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY.**

## WHAT SHOULD BE DONE

- **Establish** Quebec-wide lists.
- **Require** that the composition of these Quebec-wide lists take ethnic diversity into account by proposing more binding measures to ensure that the political parties include candidates from ethnoculturally diverse groups in winning positions on their lists.
- Require that political parties adopt an action plan that provides for the adoption of concrete measures to achieve the equitable representation of ethnocultural diversity in the National Assembly. Implementation of this plan would be funded by the bonuses received by the parties (increases in their annual allocations). That this money would have to be invested by each party in a special fund dedicated to promoting and supporting the equitable presence of individuals from ethnoculturally diverse groups within the party.
- **Improving the effectiveness of the bonuses:**
  - a bonus given to parties should be based on the percentage of elected MNAs, not simply on the basis of candidates from ethnocultural minorities;
  - an additional 5% increase in the refund of election expenses should be accorded to elected MNAs, as compared to the refund given for candidates.
- **Require** that political parties report annually to the Directeur général des élections (concerning the extent to which objectives were achieved, measures adopted, and money invested, etc.).
- **Keep these measures in place** for three elections after more equitable representation of cultural diversity in the National Assembly is achieved, to consolidate this accomplishment.

# CONCLUSION

## IN ORDER THAT THE NEW VOTING METHOD

• accurately recognize the will of the people • make it possible to achieve equality between women and men in political representation • embody the ethnocultural diversity of Quebec • reflect political pluralism • recognize the importance of the regions in the reality of life in Quebec:

## THE GOVERNEMENT'S PROPOSAL MUST BE IMPROVED SUBSTANTIALLY BY ADOPTING THE FOLLOWING MEASURES:

- ✓ **Institute two separate ballots** so that electors are able to express all the nuances of their political preferences: one for expressing preferences among candidates in the ridings and the second for expressing preferences among the parties (and candidates on their lists).
- ✓ **Allocate at least 40% of the seats** in the National Assembly (50 members) for proportional representation, based on results calculated at the Quebec-wide level (and not by district).
- ✓ **Use Quebec-wide lists** submitted by each political party so that electors are able to select the party of their choice and thereby express the political pluralism that exists in Quebec society.
- ✓ **Require that the Quebec-wide lists ensure:**
  - equality between women and men (alternating names on the list, starting with a woman)
  - representation of all regions (in the first half of the list)
  - ethnocultural diversity (in winnable positions on the list).

**WE WANT  
A VOTING SYSTEM  
THAT CAN BE A  
GENUINE STEP  
FORWARD FOR  
DEMOCRACY  
IN QUEBEC!**

**IN ORDER FOR THE PUBLIC TO BE INFORMED** about the democratic issues involved in the proposed voting reform, and about how it operates, and in order that they be able to participate in the debate, the Government should organize a public information and education campaign and carry it out in partnership with concerned groups within civil society.



## TO LEARN MORE

### **GOVERNMENT OF QUEBEC**

[www.institutions-democratiques.gouv.qc.ca](http://www.institutions-democratiques.gouv.qc.ca)  
see "Publications"

### **GROUPS WHICH AUTHORED THIS DOCUMENT**

Collectif Féminisme et Démocratie  
[www.feminismeetdemocratie.ca](http://www.feminismeetdemocratie.ca)

Mouvement pour une démocratie nouvelle  
[www.democratie-nouvelle.qc.ca](http://www.democratie-nouvelle.qc.ca)

### **OTHER RESOURCES RELATING TO VOTING SYSTEM REFORM IN QUEBEC**

Association pour la revendication des droits démocratiques  
[www.ardd.qc.ca/tiki-index.php](http://www.ardd.qc.ca/tiki-index.php)

Mouvement démocratie et citoyenneté du Québec  
[www.mdcq.cjb.net](http://www.mdcq.cjb.net)

Regroupement ethnoculturel pour l'action politique  
<http://reap11.tripod.com>

### **OTHER RESOURCES RELATING TO VOTING SYSTEM REFORM IN CANADA**

British Columbia  
[www.citizensassembly.bc.ca/public](http://www.citizensassembly.bc.ca/public)

Law Commission of Canada  
[www.lcc.gc.ca](http://www.lcc.gc.ca)

Equal Voice- À voix égales  
[www.equalvoice.ca/](http://www.equalvoice.ca/)

Prince Edward Island  
[www.gov.pe.ca/electoralreform/index.php3](http://www.gov.pe.ca/electoralreform/index.php3)

Fair Vote Canada  
[www.fairvotecanada.org](http://www.fairvotecanada.org)

New Brunswick  
[www.gnb.ca/0100/index-e.asp](http://www.gnb.ca/0100/index-e.asp)

Ontario  
[www.democraticrenewal.gov.on.ca](http://www.democraticrenewal.gov.on.ca)

# TOGETHER, WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE



## WHAT'S NEXT

**BECOME INFORMED, CONSULT THE INTERNET SITES LISTED HERE OF THE GROUPS THAT ARE INVOLVED IN VOTING REFORM.** More specifically:

**Le Collectif Féminisme et Démocratie** monitors information about voting system reform on its website. It also offers training sessions on these issues for women's groups and mixed groups across Quebec. A memoire for general distribution is being prepared, along with a guide that can help individuals and groups prepare a presentation for the legislative committee.

The **Mouvement pour une démocratie nouvelle** website offers documents to facilitate public participation in the debate, provides information about the anticipated results of reform and on models used around the world, and posts invitations to participate in the debate and become a member.

**ORGANIZE A PUBLIC EDUCATION CAMPAIGN AMONG MEMBERS OF YOUR ORGANIZATIONS AND FOR THE PUBLIC.** Everyone is capable of understanding voting system reform and the issues it involves. This document is a contribution to that process: circulate it widely.

**MONITOR THE GOVERNMENT CLOSELY AND CHALLENGE IT.** The Government has committed itself to consulting the public via a travelling legislative committee. We must encourage the government to follow through on that commitment, and be sure to express our views during the consultation by submitting briefs. Monitor relevant websites and the media to learn the dates by which briefs must be submitted, and how to proceed.

**MEET WITH YOUR ELECTED MNA** to let them know your positions and ask them to make representations to the government.

**USE THE MEDIA** to get attention by submitting letters or "opinion pieces" to newspapers. Take part in call-in shows.