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NEWS RELEASE

Why do Canadians say no to electoral reform?

IRPP study examines Ontario's 2007 referendum on proportional representation

Montreal – A new study from the Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP) finds that even if the 2007 Ontario referendum campaign had been more informative, the proposed mixed member proportional (MMP) electoral system would likely not have obtained the 60 percent support required in order to pass. In the referendum vote held in October 2007, Ontarians clearly rejected the proposed change. Only 36.9 percent voted in favour of changing the electoral system, compared with 63.1 percent who indicated a preference for the status quo.

In the IRPP study, “Ontario’s Referendum on Proportional Representation: Why Citizens Said No,” authors Laura Stephenson and Brian Tanguay investigate several aspects of Ontario’s recent experience with electoral reform, from the political context that brought about the process, to the details of the Citizens’ Assembly, to Ontarians’ general attitudes toward electoral reform.

The study uses data from a survey of 1,000 Ontarians conducted immediately after the election to analyze the factors that contributed to voters’ choices. While there was little evidence of strong discontent with the current electoral system, the authors found that cynicism about government was a factor in the referendum, as the most cynical voters were more likely not to vote, and informed cynical voters were significantly more likely to oppose the electoral change. Partisanship, however, had little effect on the outcome of the referendum vote.

“Before pushing ahead with calls for electoral reform, proponents would be wise to consider whether or not they can propose a system that mirrors the clarity and certainty that Canadians are used to, and indeed, that they seem to like,” says Stephenson. “Unless such a system is put forward, the chances of any electoral reform succeeding in Canada are minimal.”

“Ontario’s Referendum on Proportional Representation: Why Citizens Said No,” by Laura Stephenson and Brian Tanguay, can be downloaded free of charge on the Institute’s Web site, www.irpp.org.

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