



VOTING. EVERY DAY IT MATTERS.

*Voting in Ontario  
Provincial Elections*

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This publication is intended as a guide to provincial elections in Ontario only and defers to the *Election Act* and other legislation referenced as the absolute authorities.

Disponible en français.



## *Voting in Ontario Provincial Elections*

was prepared by Elections Ontario, a non-partisan agency of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Ontario (the Provincial Parliament).

Elections Ontario:

- √ carries out the necessary day-to-day activities required to be ready for a provincial election at any time
- √ runs an election when one is called.

One of the greatest rights any free people can have is the right to vote. This right is at the core of our democracy. It gives you the right to have a choice and the right to voice your opinion in choosing the political candidate you want to represent you in Ontario's Provincial Parliament.

In this brochure, you will find important information about the organization of Ontario's electoral process and a guide to voting.

We encourage you to take the time to read it carefully – to understand your voting rights and how, by voting, you can make your voice heard and our democracy stronger.

*The first Ontario provincial election was held in 1867.*

## *Elections In Canada*

Canadian citizens can vote in elections for three levels of government – federal, provincial and municipal, or local, government.

The federal government is responsible for matters that affect all of Canada. Provincial and territorial governments look after such matters as education, health care and highways. Municipal governments are responsible for local matters such as policing, firefighting, libraries and parks and recreation.

The Chief Electoral Officer of Canada is responsible for the administration of federal elections, referendums and other important aspects of Canada's electoral system. Ontario provincial elections are run by Ontario's Chief Electoral Officer. Municipal clerks run municipal elections for mayors, city councillors, aldermen, controllers, and school trustees which are held every four years in November, under the laws of the Province of Ontario.

## *Ontario's Election Laws*

The Legislative Assembly makes the laws of Ontario, including those governing voting in provincial elections. Three main laws, or Acts, govern the election process:

The *Election Act* – the rules and regulations for Ontario provincial elections.

The *Election Finances Act* – the rules and regulations for financial contributions to political parties and candidates and their election expenses.

The *Representation Act* – the Act establishing the number, names and boundaries of Ontario's electoral districts, or ridings.

*Women were not allowed to vote in Ontario provincial elections until 1917.*

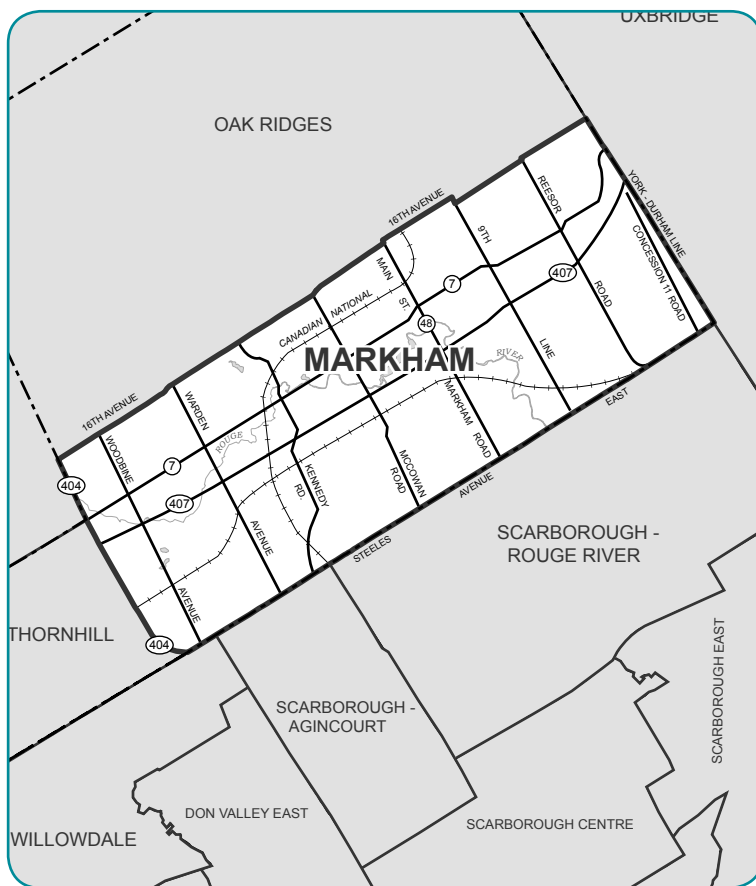
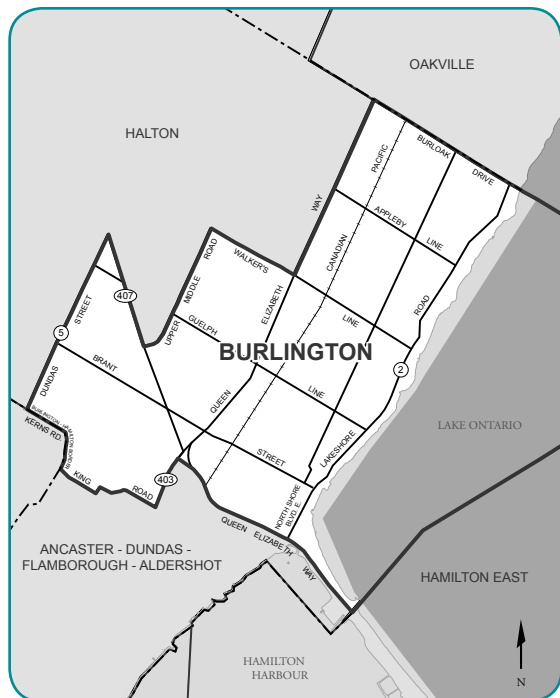


## Electoral Districts

Ontario is divided into 107 electoral districts, sometimes called ridings, and each is represented by an elected Member of the Provincial Parliament (MPP). An election is held in each riding to choose the MPP to speak in the Legislative Assembly for the riding's citizens. The MPPs meet to make the laws to govern Ontario.

The number of electoral districts is determined by the population in a geographical area. When populations increase or decrease in an area, the number of electoral districts may be adjusted.

*The first Ontario provincial election included 82 electoral districts.*





## *Who runs the election?*

The Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) directs the work of Elections Ontario and ensures the rules and regulations set out by the legislation are followed, including the voting process and campaign financing rules.

The Lieutenant Governor in Council (The Cabinet) appoints a Returning Officer for each electoral district who works under the direction of the Chief Electoral Officer. The Returning Officers organize and conduct the election in their electoral district. Some of their duties include:

- √ setting up an office
- √ hiring staff to work during the election,
- √ making sure the ballots are ready,
- √ assisting electors to register to vote,
- √ confirming the final count of the ballots, and
- √ declaring the winning candidate for their electoral district.

*824 tonnes of supplies are shipped to 107 returning offices and 29 satellite offices.*

*73,715 people work at the polls on Election Day.*

*During the 2007 provincial election, 286,610 telephone calls from electors were handled by help desk agents.*

## *When are elections held?*

A provincial general election – an election in all of Ontario's provincial electoral districts at the same time – is held every four years on the first Thursday in October, unless:

- ✓ that Thursday is a day of cultural or religious significance or
- ✓ the Lieutenant Governor in Council calls an election earlier at the request of the Premier.



## *How are elections called?*

The Premier visits the Lieutenant Governor – the representative of the Queen in Ontario – and advises that he or she wants to end the current Legislative Assembly.

The Chief Electoral Officer then prepares Writs of Election. These are the formal, legal documents to start the election in each of Ontario's electoral districts. These writs are signed by the Lieutenant Governor and the Chief Electoral Officer and one is sent to the Returning Officer in each electoral district, giving him or her the authority to hold an election.



A Writ of Election

## *Electing Members (MPPs) to the Provincial Parliament*

Once a provincial election is called, candidates from political parties or candidates who are independent from any political party submit their names for the election. Qualified electors vote by marking an X beside the name of the candidate of their choice on a ballot. The candidate who gets the most votes in a riding wins and becomes the Member of the Provincial Parliament, or MPP, for that electoral district. This MPP represents the people in his or her riding in the Legislative Assembly at Queen's Park in Toronto. The political party that elects the most MPPs forms the next provincial government.



*In 1971, the voting age was lowered from 21 to 18.*

## *By-Elections*

Between general elections, by-elections are held to replace Members who have died or left the Legislative Assembly. When this happens, a by-election is held in their electoral district. This means an election is held in that electoral district and only electors who live in that electoral district can vote in the by-election. At times, there may be more than one by-election held because there is more than one vacancy.



*At each election, the people of Ontario shape the future of Ontario with their vote.*

## *Who Can Vote?*

Anyone who is:

- ✓ 18 or older on polling day, and
- ✓ A Canadian citizen, and
- ✓ A resident of the electoral district.

## *Registering to Vote*

Before eligible electors can vote, they must register by having their name and address added to the Voters List. The process is easy. You simply show identification to prove who you are and where you reside. Once registered, you can vote.

Between elections, Elections Ontario maintains an up-to-date Permanent Register of Electors so it is always ready when an election is called.

## *When can I vote?*

You can vote on Election Day or before Election Day at an advance poll. Advance polls allow you to participate in the election even if you will be unable to vote on Election Day. Advance polls often are less busy, making it easier for those who need assistance with voting.

If you cannot vote on Election Day or in advance, you can still vote by proxy by having someone vote at your direction on your behalf. The Returning Officer has the forms and information on how to vote by proxy.

## *Where do I vote?*

Eligible electors are assigned to a polling place in a voting location based on their address. Voting may be held in a school, community centre, apartment building or long-term care facility to make it convenient for residents there to vote.

*For the 2007 provincial election, there were 9,090 voting locations across Ontario to accommodate 27,596 polling places*

## *Who will I see at the voting location?*

Elections Ontario hires almost 74,000 people to work on Election Day. The people who work at a voting location are called poll officials. An Information Assistant greets you when you enter a voting location and helps you find your poll or directs you to the Polling Day Revision Assistant if you are not on the Voters List. The Polling Day Revision Assistant will take your information, add you to the List, and then direct you to your poll to vote. A Deputy Returning Officer is in charge of the poll. He or she make sure the voting at that poll is carried out correctly. A Poll Clerk works with the Deputy Returning Officer to strike off the names on the Voters List and assists with the counting of the ballots. The voting location is the responsibility of the Supervising Deputy Returning Officer who supervises the officials who work at the polls in that location.



In addition, scrutineers representing the candidates may also be present to watch the voting process and may challenge the eligibility of any elector by speaking to the Deputy Returning Officer. Scrutineers may also be present when the Deputy Returning Officer counts the ballots.

# What do I do when I go to vote?

Here are the steps you would follow when you go to vote.



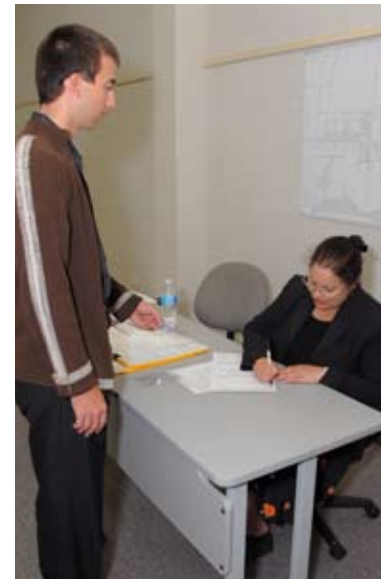
A poll official will greet you and direct you to the table where you are to vote.

If you are not sure whether or not you are registered to vote, staff at the poll can check the Voters List when you go to vote.



Go to the table that has your assigned poll number.

If you are not on the Voters List, you can still register and vote when you are at the correct polling place. You will be directed to a specific registration table to complete the necessary form. You must show proof of identity and residence to have your name added to the List and proof of identity to receive a ballot.



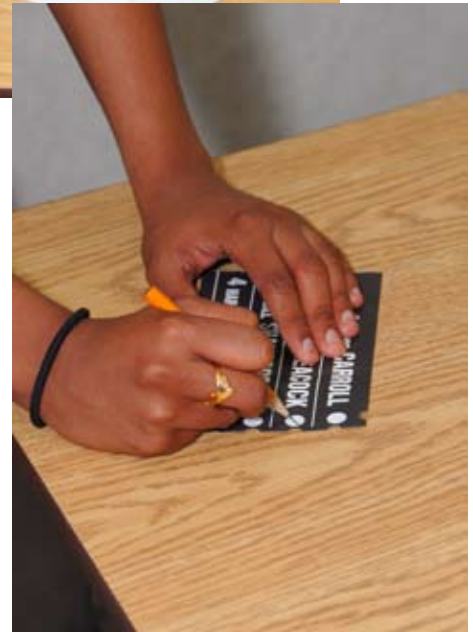
Give your name and show ID. Poll officials will locate your name on the Voters List, cross it off, and write your name and elector number in the Poll Record.



Go to the voting screen and mark your ballot in private.



You will be given a folded ballot with the poll official's initials on the back.



Refold your ballot and return it to the poll official. He or she will check for his or her initials on the back and hand it back to you.



Put the folded ballot in the ballot box.



*Paper ballots were first used in 1875. In elections before that, a person would make a public declaration of their choice.*

*10,529,950 election ballots are printed for use at advance polls and on Election Day.*

## *How do they count the ballots?*

After the polls close and in the presence of scrutineers, the Deputy Returning Officer opens the ballot box, counts the ballots and records them as being either Valid (properly marked), Unmarked (no mark on the ballot), Rejected (declared invalid by the poll official because of improper marking), or Declined (returned by any voters who said they decline to vote). Unless a judge orders a recount, this is the only time these ballots will be counted.



The Deputy Returning Officer then:

- √ completes the Ballot Statement of the Poll and gives each scrutineer a copy



- √ places all the ballots and voting supplies in a special ballot envelope and sends the envelope to the Returning Officer



*599 candidates ran in the 2007 provincial election to win one of the 107 seats in the Ontario Provincial Parliament.*

√ Phones in the results to the Returning Officer who provides them to the media so voters and candidates can get early results of the Election.

Using this information, the media and political experts make predictions. Soon a Province-wide pattern of voting begins to appear and the political make-up of the new Government begins to emerge.



## Official Tabulation

All the materials are sent back to the Returning Officer, who then adds the votes from all of the Ballot Statements of the Poll. This is called the Returning Officer's official tabulation.

If no recount is ordered by a judge, seven days after this count, the Returning Officers provide the Chief Electoral Officer with the name of the winning candidate in each riding.

The Chief Electoral Officer then prepares the official list of winning candidates and sends it to be published in the Ontario Gazette, the official publication of the Government of Ontario.

*For each of the 27,596 polling places there is one corresponding ballot envelope.*



## *What happens next?*

For months after an Election, the staff at Elections Ontario continues working hard, reviewing any problems experienced during the election, suggesting solutions, preparing and studying possible changes to the *Election Act* and getting ready for the next election.

After each newly-elected Member has been sworn in, the Premier calls the new Legislative Assembly to Queen's Park for its first session.



The Legislative Assembly Of Ontario at Queen's Park  
Toronto, Ontario.

## *For more information*

Elections Ontario's web site has lots more information about voting in Ontario. Visit: [www.elections.on.ca](http://www.elections.on.ca)

You can email any questions to: [info@elections.on.ca](mailto:info@elections.on.ca)

You can call us and we'll be happy to answer any questions. Call: 416-326-6300



## *Words You Should Know*

### **The People Involved**

**Elector** – a person who is eligible to vote in an Ontario Provincial Election.

**Voter** – a person who accepts a ballot at a polling place.

**Chief Electoral Officer** - appointed as an Officer of the Legislative Assembly by the Lieutenant Governor in Council (The Cabinet). He or she has overall responsibility for conducting Ontario provincial elections.

**Deputy Chief Electoral Officer** – appointed as an Officer of the Legislative Assembly by the Lieutenant Governor in Council (The Cabinet). Acts on behalf of the Chief Electoral Officer if he/she is absent, ill, or the Office is vacant.

**Returning Officer** - appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council (Cabinet) for an electoral district. Works under the direction of the Chief Electoral Officer. Responsible for the conduct of elections in an electoral district.

**Election Clerk** - appointed by each Returning Officer to help administer the election in the electoral district.

**Revising Agent** - appointed by the Returning Officer to visit residences to confirm voter information and add the names of qualified electors who are missing from the Permanent Register of Electors or the Voters List.

**Revision Assistant** - appointed by each Returning Officer to help revise the Voters List.

**Deputy Returning Officer** - appointed by the Returning Officer and responsible for the conduct of the election at a specific polling place.

**Poll Clerk** - appointed by the Returning Officer to assist the Deputy Returning Officer at the polling place.

**Scrutineer** - a person representing a candidate at the polling place. Scrutineers watch the voting and the counting of the ballots. Only one scrutineer per candidate is allowed in the polling place at any one time. Only scrutineers eligible to vote in Ontario can challenge the eligibility of an elector.

## Things to know.

**Writs of Election** - a Writ is prepared for each of Ontario's electoral districts. Writs are official documents, issued in the name of the Queen. They state that the election has begun.

Writs set out the dates for the close of nominations and Election Day. They are sent to the Returning Officers by the Chief Electoral Officer. After the election, each Returning Officer completes the reverse side of the Writ, filling in the name of the candidate elected. This is the official notification to the Chief Electoral Officer of the winning candidate.

**Permanent Register of Electors** – an up-to-date list of those who are eligible to vote in Ontario. It is updated between elections.

When an election is called, the Voters List for each electoral district is taken from the Permanent Register of Electors. Under the *Election Act*, the Register may only be used for electoral purposes.

**Electoral District** – also known as a Riding. It is the geographic area one person is elected to represent in the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Ontario. Electoral boundaries are set out in the *Representation Act*.

**Polling Division** – the Electoral District is divided into geographic areas called polling divisions for the election. There is at least one polling place for each division.

**Certificate to Vote** – If an Eligible Elector is not on the Voters List, he or she may get a Certificate to Vote from the Returning Officer before Election Day. The certificate is exchanged for a ballot when the Elector goes to vote.

**Nomination Paper** – a form candidates complete with their name, address and the political party they represent. The nomination paper must be signed by at least 25

qualified electors and filed with the Returning Officer.

**Preliminary Count** – as soon as the poll closes, the Deputy Returning Officer counts the ballots in front of those persons who are entitled to be present. The results are recorded on the Ballot Statement of the Poll and telephoned to the Returning Officer. This unofficial count is considered preliminary until the Returning Officer completes the Official Tabulation.

**Official Tabulation** – The Returning Officer tabulates the vote from the Ballot Statement of the Poll from each polling place at a specified place, date and hour. This is done in the presence of the Election Clerk and the candidates or their delegates or scrutineers.

The Returning Officer declares the candidate with the most votes elected.

**Ballot Statement of the Poll** – records the number of ballots provided to the Deputy Returning Officer for polling day. The statement includes:

- √ The valid ballots cast for each candidate
- √ Rejected ballots
- √ Unmarked ballots
- √ Declined ballots
- √ Other ballots unused for any reason.

**Judicial Recount** - the Returning Officer must apply to a judge for a recount when the difference between the two candidates with the most votes is less than 25 votes. A judge will set a time and place shortly after Election Day for the recount.

A judicial recount can also be requested by a candidate or an elector if the results are close.