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Ontario Strengthening Provincial Electoral Processes

Ontario is proposing a series of reforms to strengthen and increase public trust in the province's electoral system, including by removing American-style fixed election dates in favour of the province's traditional electoral process and strengthening regulation and oversight of election financing and campaign spending.

"The proposed reforms will return Ontario to an electoral process that served our province well for nearly a century and a half, prior to the imposition of American-style fixed election dates," said Attorney General Doug Downey. "With these reforms, governments will be better positioned to respond to changing circumstances and external threats, including by seeking a fresh mandate from the people of Ontario when it's needed."

Proposed reforms to the Election Act would see provincial elections take place on a date determined by the Lieutenant Governor on the advice of the Premier, as has

traditionally been the case in Ontario. Ontario will continue to observe and be subject to the five-year maximum legal limit between elections that is mandated by the Constitution.

Ontario is proposing additional reforms to the Election Finances Act that would strengthen the rules around campaign finances and electoral spending, as well as reflect the removal of fixed election dates. These reforms would:

Discourage bad actors by establishing new financial penalties for those who do not comply with the Election Finances Act, including by failing to provide information to the Chief Electoral Officer and not complying with political advertising rules. Proposed changes would also increase the maximum existing penalties around failure to register, third parties exceeding political advertising spending limits and political parties, candidates and constituency associations exceeding campaign expense limits.

In response to recommenda-

tions from Ontario's Chief Electoral Officer, provide new tools to the Chief Electoral Officer to ensure third parties follow political advertising rules. This includes investigative powers to allow them to request information from third parties, whether they have registered or not.

Require third parties to provide proof of registration status to broadcasters and publishers before placing political advertisements during an election period. This would ensure third parties that advertise during this period are following election laws.

Make the quarterly per-vote subsidy that is received by all parties a permanent measure, rather than allowing it to expire at the end of 2026. This measure implements a recommendation from the Chief Electoral Officer following the 2022 provincial election, to ensure a balance of public and private spending in elections.

Eliminate pre-writ spending limits for third parties and politi-

cal parties, which were introduced to prevent the ramping up of political spending in the lead up to a fixed election.

Increasing the annual amount a person can contribute to a political party from \$3,400 to \$5,000 beginning in 2026, which is consistent with or less than the maximum allowable amount in other provinces such as Manitoba, Alberta and Nova Scotia. Future increases would

be indexed to the rate of inflation.

Ontario is also considering measures to ban political advertising on government property, whether it be on buildings, billboards or transit stations. If implemented, a coordinated approach across government and its agencies would ensure flexible, appropriate measures are implemented across different properties.

In 2024, the last extension of quarterly per-vote subsidies for registered political parties received all-party support.

Any third party spending \$500 or more on political advertising during an election period must register with the Chief Electoral Officer. A third party is a person or organization that is not a registered candidate, political party or constituency association.



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