

Unfair Elections-Free Zone Guide

Take action to protect democracy in your community

In early February, the Harper government introduced Bill C-23, the so-called Fair Elections Act. If passed, the 244-page bill would result in sweeping changes to Canada's election rules that would undermine our democratic rights. As a result, opponents have dubbed the bill the "Unfair" Elections Act.

The Harper government is trying to push the bill through Parliament with little debate and even less public scrutiny. Public opposition has been strong and is growing rapidly.

[Opinion polling](#) shows that a majority of Canadians aren't aware of the Unfair Elections Act, but when asked, most oppose the provisions in the Unfair Elections Act that would eliminate the voucher system, prevent Elections Canada from publicly reporting on election fraud, and cancel Elections Canada's research and public education programs.

The Council of Canadians, along with the Canadian Federation of Students and Leadnow, has delivered petitions signed by more than 80,000 people who oppose the Unfair Elections Act to the House of Commons. But rather than slowing down and listening to peoples' concerns, the government is still trying to fast-track the bill to get it passed by early May 2014.

The Unfair Elections Act is an attack on democracy because:

- It muzzles the Chief Electoral Officer and Elections Canada, prohibiting promotional campaigns to increase voter turnout, like the Student Vote program, or notifying the public about complaints related to fraud.
- It hampers future investigations of electoral misconduct by making the Commissioner an agent of the government rather than of parliament.
- Investigators will have significantly less independence and no new authority to investigate election fraud.
- It will prevent voters from finding out if other voters have complained of misconduct during elections.
- It does not contain any of the important measures proposed arising from the electoral fraud legal cases.
- Nothing in the bill would hold political parties responsible when their databases are used to perpetrate widespread voter suppression or electoral fraud.
- The bill should go through the normal parliamentary process and have public input. When even the Chief Electoral Officer says that the bill is an "affront to democracy," surely there should be public debate about it.
- The bill may be unconstitutional, since it negatively affects the rights of electors, which are constitutionally protected. By eliminating the use of vouching and Voter Identification Cards, the legislation could deny as many as 520,000 people their right to vote. With changes to fundraising and spending rules, the legislation stacks the deck in favour of the Conservative Party for the next election.

WHY UNFAIR ELECTIONS-FREE ZONES?

There has been widespread opposition to the Unfair Elections Act, but the government still isn't listening. Municipalities and school boards can take action to defend democracy locally by declaring that they are Unfair Elections-Free Zones.

While municipal resolutions are non-binding federally in this case, they are a significant step to show people will not be silenced and that public opposition is growing. The more communities voice their opposition to this attack on democracy the greater our chances of building the political pressure necessary to stop it.

TAKE ACTION! HAVE YOUR COMMUNITY DECLARED AN UNFAIR ELECTIONS-FREE ZONE

Your municipality or school board can become an Unfair Elections-Free Zone by:

1. Passing a resolution opposing the Unfair Elections Act
2. Writing to the Federal government expressing your opposition to the bill

CASES IN POINT

Vancouver City Council debated and [passed a motion opposing the Unfair Elections Act](#) unanimously on April 1, 2014. The Ontario Public School Boards' Association has [written an open letter to the government](#) opposing the Unfair Elections Act and calling for public hearings.

STEPS TO CREATING AN UNFAIR ELECTIONS-FREE ZONE

Councillors and school board trustees will be more likely to support a resolution if they hear from many constituents about the issue. Here are a few things you can do to build support for passing a resolution:

1. Using the information provided in this guide, develop a strategy to promote democracy, protect the right to vote, and reject the Unfair Elections Act in your community.
2. Identify councillors who would likely be in favour, those who would not be in favour, and those who are swing votes (open to being convinced about the need for supporting a resolution on the issue).
3. Create an online petition and a public list online listing councillors' / school board trustees' positions on the issue.
4. Organize community meetings in the areas of the councillors who are swing votes and not in favour can play an important role them deciding to support a resolution (publicize it widely on social media and in the media if said councillor hasn't come out in favour).
5. Once a resolution is put forward to be voted on, organize constituents to email and phone your councillors or school board trustees to call on them to vote in favour of the resolution.

WE ARE HERE TO HELP

Community members are organizing locally to defend the right to vote across the country. Contact us to join the network of community activists, workers, and local government officials working on defending democracy. [Send an email](#) and update us on your progress, or call us toll free at 1-800-387-7177. We would love to feature your work on our [website](#) and share your stories and ideas with other communities in Canada. Visit our website to find out more about this ongoing campaign.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

What community activists can do:

- Support a municipal declaration or resolution opposing the Unfair Elections Act.
- Ask your Member of Parliament to support efforts to stop the Unfair Elections Act.
- If your community isn't an Unfair Elections-Free Zone yet, work in coalition to introduce a motion for your local municipality or school board to oppose the Unfair Elections Act.

What municipalities can do:

- Sign a municipal declaration or resolution opposing the Unfair Elections Act.
- Call on regional municipal bodies to oppose the Unfair Elections Act.
- Promote democracy through public education campaigns.

SAMPLE RESOLUTION

This sample resolution is adapted from a resolution passed unanimously by Vancouver City Council on April 1, 2014.

OPPOSITION TO FEDERAL BILL C-23, SO-CALLED “FAIR ELECTIONS ACT”

WHEREAS the Government of Canada has introduced Bill C-23, the so-called Fair Elections Act, which is currently before parliamentary committee

WHEREAS the proposed changes, which are described by the Federal Government as “sweeping,” include:

- Rescinding the hard-fought right of Canadians without ID to vote through vouching.
- Disallowing the use of a Voter Identification Card as proof of address.
- Forbidding the Chief Election Officer from educating citizens about these changes and any other proactive education on the voting process in Canada.
- Increasing the contribution limit by 25% and exempting some expenses from spending limits.
- Introducing bias into the oversight of the voting process by allowing the governing party to recommend names for poll supervisors.
- Removing the ability of the Chief Election Officer to enforce penalties against those found to have violated the Act.

WHEREAS these changes were proposed with no public consultation and with only an hour long meeting with the federal Chief Election Officer who has subsequently publicly criticized the Act; and

WHEREAS these changes would have major impacts on voter participation, including directly disenfranchising 120,000 voters who were able to vote in the last federal election as a result of vouching, and make it even harder for the 500,000 Canadians who say they did not vote in the last federal election because they lacked sufficient ID; and

WHEREAS any change that undermines voter turnout and confidence in the integrity of the democratic process at any level of government has a negative impact on all levels of government.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the [City or School Board] of _____ write a letter to local MPs, the Minister of Democratic Reform and the Prime Minister stating opposition to Bill C-23, the so-called Fair Elections Act, based on the provisions which are likely to reduce voter turnout and confidence in the integrity of the democratic process; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the [City or School Board] of _____ call upon the federal government to conduct countrywide public hearings to allow Canadians and experts to make submissions on measures to improve electoral accountability and transparency, and increase voter turnout.



For more information about the Council of Canadians' campaign to stop the Unfair Elections Act visit our website at www.canadians.org/election or call us toll-free at 1-800-387-7177.