

Toronto Civics 101
Session 5, Elections and Women in Politics
November 12, 2009

Themed responses from small group discussions

Discussion questions:

1. What influences your decision to vote?
2. What is the one thing that you think would increase voter turnout in Toronto?

Summary Responses: What influences your decision to vote?

Theme 1: Youth Outreach

Participants felt that specific attention should be paid to young people

- Involve youth in community and municipal work
- Start with youth – if they are interested at a young age, they hopefully will stay interested as they mature
- Develop habits during secondary school- mock votes using actual information about candidates
- Create a sense of duty, having your voice heard
- Use on-line and new technology

Theme 2: Special Day, Date and Time

Participants felt that greater attention to the day selected would increase turnout

- Spread voting over two days – one of which is a weekend
- More time for advance voting – extend them
- Make last day of election special or a day off
- Declare public holiday on election day

Theme 3: Making the issues relevant to Citizens

Participants wanted to stimulate voter turnout with relevant, controversial issues

- Allow referendum on key issues facing Council
- Bring controversy into the election – make candidates run on an issue.
- Allow voters to write issue/cause on ballot to pass on to the person they are voting for.
- Make politics mainstream accessible and relevant – including people's issues throughout not just at election-time

Theme 4: Fines or Incentives

Participants felt that either a carrot or stick approach would boost turnout

- Give discount card on city services when people vote
- Make it mandatory to vote in all elections
- Tax credit for voting
- Give out "I Voted" pin, cookies, provide entertainment, air-mile points
- Institute a fine for not voting

Theme 5: Education, information, awareness and Advertising

Civic literacy including benefits and responsibilities of voting would help

- Use TV, community meetings, close to where people live
- More Civics 101 sessions
- Stress benefits and duty of voting
- Educate about role of public, what Councillors do, how city works
- More information on candidates and key election issues
- Make information accessible, multilingual, clear

Theme 6: Hold Candidates/ Elections Accountable

Participants suggested more people would vote if they knew the impact of their choice

- Voter turn out will increase when candidates are held responsible to their promises
- "transparency" seeing the end results of the elections process
- Right to recall a candidate – based on ward turnout and petition
- People are disillusioned with the process, person that runs must have integrity
- Candidates must demonstrate they are accountable, successful

Theme 7: Representative Electorate

When candidates and council reflect Toronto's diversity, voting will increase

- Candidates that are representative of the community will increase turn out
- People need to see others who look like them on the ballot
- Encourage more people with diversity and qualifications to participate so electoral can identify with them
- More outreach to communities in different languages and ways

Theme - Other

- Social Media/New Technologies Explore on-line voting and other electronic methods
- Accessibility at polling stations etc
- Program for employers to encourage employees to vote
- More media involvement – election education too
- Party politics
- Make it fun - provide whiskey, make it like Christmas...exciting!

Summary Responses: What is the one thing that you think would increase voter turnout in

Theme 1: Duty, Rights and Privilege

If electors see voting as a duty they would participate in greater number

- The importance (duty) of voting was emphasized within my family from an early age
- Being a visible minority, and a woman equals being political – Voting isn't an option for me it's a necessity
- Not voting was never an option
- My great-grandfather instilled a strong sense of duty with respect to voting. For me it is not a right but a

Voting is a hard fought for right that should be exercised

- responsibility
- Became a citizen as an adult and wanted to exercise the RIGHT
- I'm influenced by the desire to be a more engaged citizen. As a black Canadian I'm also aware that this was a right that was fought for and I want to respect and honour that
- Just having the right to do so and knowing if I don't vote I have right to complain about anything the politicians do or don't do
- It is my right to cast my voice
- It emphasizes that we are free to make our own choices. Others are not so fortunate
- I'm proud of what others have sacrificed so I now have the vote.
- It would never occur to me not to vote – It's both a privilege and a responsibility that I take very seriously
- I vote because I appreciate the freedom we have to vote
- Knowing I am able to without having to fight for it or die for it

I vote because it is a privilege and an honour

Theme 2: Local or Critical Issue

Voter turn out increases if people related to the issues or see them as urgent

- If there is a critical issue affecting the City such as rising prices, user fees etc.
- The candidate that exhibits and talks openly about local issues – listens attentively to voter issues will provide strong representation for the ward
- My desire to bring about change in the issues that affect me: racism, joblessness (immigrants cannot get jobs), high taxes, other expenses which go along with living in Toronto (costs are too high)
- The candidate's view regarding essential issues
- I vote when the result affects large complex issues in my neighbourhood
- I vote when there are controversial issues at hand
- An issue that I'm passionate about or an issue that affects me

Theme 3: The Candidate

The personality, character and qualification of the Candidate can influence voting

- Ensure Candidate is suitable for the job and ensure that he/she is not doing for their own interest
- A Candidate's profile
- My voting pattern is reflected in the "quality" of the candidates. The candidates that sympathise with my issues – I sometimes vote strategically so the other candidate fails
- A candidate that is genuine, trustworthy, qualified, financial knowledge
- Charm, vision, soul
- How involved the candidate is in the the community. What changes they are advocating, and how they represent themselves – are they sincere, or power

hungry? Do they have a hidden agenda? Also, are they qualified for the job?

- Knowledge of, or sense of connection with at least one of the candidates

Theme 4: Don't vote

Some participants don't vote and don't see that changing – some would like to vote, if the rules changed

- The illusion that voting once every 4 years is a symbol of democracy not true, the rest of the time the voter is muzzled
- I don't think my 1 vote makes a difference
- People don't vote because they don't know the candidate, don't know the issues, don't know what their candidate represents, don't believe their councillor has any impact on issues important to them
- Unfortunately I have never voted. Not because of lack of interest but rather I believe from lack of awareness, education, upbringing and other social constructs that may have prevented someone from voting.
- I wish I could vote but as me, there are thousands of permanent residents what have to wait 1095 days in order to be able to contribute in the decision making process
- I am not a Canadian citizen, but I would love the opportunity to have a say in who represents me and my family
- I do believe that if/when the media predicts landslide vote results many citizens do not think their vote will make a difference

Theme 5: Each Vote Makes a Difference

Participants vote because they believe in the impact of each marked ballot

- If a believe my vote will make a difference
- To make my voice be heard
- To have a say and input about how the city is to be run
- I vote to protect my privilege to complain about the results
- Knowing that one person/each person can influence the outcome
- To have a positive impact on society
- I would like to see changes – I dream of community participation
- Making a difference through the candidate I choose to elect
- I believe in democracy – it is important that I take the opportunity to be a part of the decision making process

Theme 6: Good Information

Participants felt that access to clear, reliable information influenced their choice to vote

- My awareness of how council affects my city, my life, my daily activities
- Knowledge of, or sense of connection with at least one of the candidates
- Quality of the information provided
- Level of knowledge of the issues facing Council – if no

knowledge, no interest in voting

Theme 7: Political Platforms

A mandate that resonated with participants made it more likely they would vote

- Believing in the Candidates platform of governance
- Ability of the Candidate to sell his promises, programs, how believable he/she is
- Quality of candidates and intentions re mandates
- Where candidates stand on ward issues
- Campaign agenda of each candidate and their background
- Candidate platform and ideas influence my decisions to vote

Theme 8: Other

- The opinions from my friends and colleagues
- I am voting for how my hard-earned money is to be spent
- Opportunity to influence future direction
- Hands-on, creativity
- More changes and opportunities for diversity
- The ability to get to the voting station before it closes
- Change, new faces, younger blood, improvements, progress