

## Promising Recent Developments

### Making Local Elections Work in Toronto

Toronto seems ready to embark on a journey of electoral evaluation. The effects of our system have been clearly labeled and lamented by politicians, prominent leaders and the media. The connection simply has to be made between the problems and the cause. Voting reform has been a provincial and federal agenda for years, and perhaps it's time to bring it local.

#### The Challenge

Elections in Toronto are not meeting our expectations. Voter turn-out is surprisingly low. New faces on City Council are uncommon. Local ward races receive little media attention. And, perhaps most importantly, our City Council does not reflect the evolving demographic of Toronto's population. The challenge is to determine whether our current voting system plays a role in these outcomes, and whether an alternative system would produce more effective results for Toronto.

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#### Current Situation

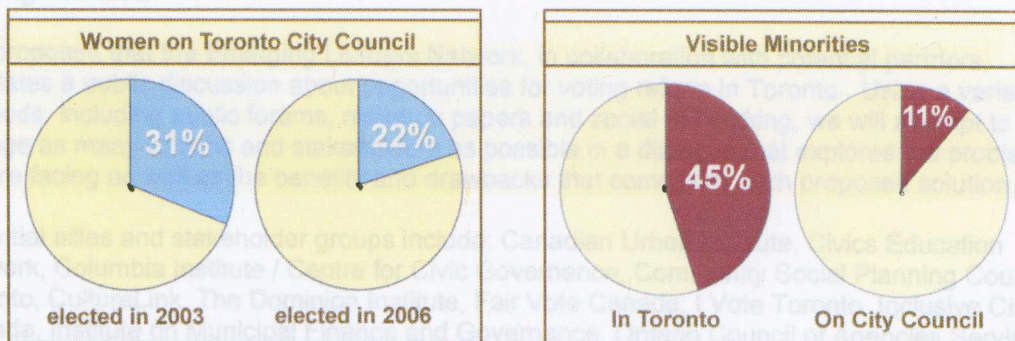
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**Voter Turnout:** Only 41% of eligible voters participated in the 2006 civic election. This is significantly lower than provincial or federal elections.

**Turnover & Effectiveness:** Turnover is very low at City Hall. Once elected, the position is considered a job-for-life, as incumbents rarely lose their seat. This is partially due to popularity, but also a result of our particular voting system. Toronto's system (single ballot, single-member district - SMDP) is designed for races in which there are only two candidates (or parties). With two candidates, whoever gets the most votes wins. Simple enough. As soon as you have 3 or more candidates, the system breaks down. We end up with very strange results that have far-reaching effects. For example, in 2006, fourteen candidates 'won' their seat in wards in which most voters did not choose them. In fact, some candidates won their seats with less than 25% of the vote. Seven incumbents were returned to office, even though most of their constituents did not want them back.

To make matters worse, the mere threat of 'vote-splitting' often discourages people from running for office at all, and discourages people from voting for their candidate of choice. Strategic voting, lower participation and distorted results are all undesirable and unintended results of our voting system.

**Diversity:** Toronto prides itself on its cultural diversity. "Diversity our strength" is our motto. Yet, our City Council is surprisingly non-representative. Both gender balance and ethnic diversity are severely lacking, and the numbers show that the situation is getting worse, not better.



## Moving Forward

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Immigrants, Ryerson University, School For Civics (Playfree Foundation), School of Public Policy & Governance (U of T), Spacing Magazine, The Toronto Party, Toronto City Summit Alliance, Toronto Community Foundation, Toronto Democracy Initiative, Toronto Women's City Alliance, Urban Alliance on Race Relations and the Urban Studies Program (Innis College)

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While the focus of provincial and federal campaigns is to shift us towards "proportional representation" this would not necessarily be the case for Toronto, as we do not have political parties in Toronto. There are other options that could provide solutions without having to introduce parties or proportionality.

There are many signs that people are hungry for electoral change at the municipal level. The "iVote Toronto" campaign launched this year, trying to extend voting rights to non-citizen residents of the city. A group called The Toronto Party was recently formed and is planning on running a slate of candidates, as a party, in 2010. A private member's bill has been introduced at Queen's Park the creation of an all-party select committee to look at municipal governance in Ontario's big cities.

## International Examples of 'Solutions'

There are many successful models of municipal government we could explore: in Canada, the US, and across the world. Vancouver has a vibrant party system, with local civic parties that are independent from Provincial or Federal parties. Cambridge uses a proportional STV model – Single Transferable Vote - and has a very diverse Council. San Francisco has a simpler model, using a ranked preferential ballot (instant runoff). Montreal has elected Borough Councils and New York City has Borough Presidents. All these systems would be worth exploring. Some systems would require significant change to our current system (such as parties or STV) while other systems would be rather easy to implement (such as a ranked ballot).

## Barriers to Progress

The viscosity of political change is often thick. Old habits die hard, particularly with electoral systems. Simply put, politicians rarely want to let go of a system that got them elected in the first place. There is also a fear of change amongst many voters that can perhaps be overcome by demonstrating how systems have worked effectively in other cities.

## Moving Forward

It is proposed that the Emerging Leaders Network, in collaboration with potential partners, facilitates a public discussion about opportunities for voting reform in Toronto. Using a variety of methods, including public forums, research papers and social networking, we will attempt to engage as many citizens and stakeholders as possible in a dialogue that explores the problems we are facing as well as the benefits and drawbacks that come with each proposed solution.

Potential allies and stakeholder groups include: Canadian Urban Institute, Civics Education Network, Columbia Institute / Centre for Civic Governance, Community Social Planning Council of Toronto, CultureLink, The Dominion Institute, Fair Vote Canada, I Vote Toronto, Inclusive Cities Canada, Institute on Municipal Finance and Governance, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, Ryerson University, School For Civics (Maytree Foundation), School of Public Policy & Governance (U of T), Spacing Magazine, The Toronto Party, Toronto City Summit Alliance, Toronto Community Foundation, Toronto Democracy Initiative, Toronto Women's City Alliance, Urban Alliance on Race Relations and the Urban Studies Program (Innis College).