

New report urges reforms to spur voter interest

# ELECTORAL ENGAGEMENT

By Leah Wong

In the 2011 federal election, average voter turnout in Greater Toronto Area riding hit 59.1 per cent, a little better than the provincial average but lower than the Canada-wide rate of 61.1 per cent.

With a federal vote looming later this year—and the all-important Toronto-area ridings key targets for the major national parties—a citizen engagement group is calling for reforms to encourage voters not just to head to the polls but to become active participants in the democratic process.

“We wanted to put the focus on democracy beyond the ballot box,” **Samara Canada** research director **Jane Hilderman** told *NRU*. “We hope it’s a chance to spur Canadians to think about what could change. In an election year there are lots of ways to get involved.”

Her comments follow today’s release of Samara’s *Democracy 360* report card on the state of Canada’s democracy, which found that Canadians are becoming less engaged in politics over-all, not just on voting day. The report, which gives Canadian democracy a C grade, concluded that Canadians are not participating in politics and feel their representatives are neither influential nor effective.

One of the report’s recommendations calls on federal parties to add to the diversity of candidates in upcoming nomination meetings across the country. With elected members to the House of Commons who mirror the diversity of their communities, observes the report’s authors, Canadians of all backgrounds would see themselves represented in Parliament by politicians who understand their needs.

“You [need] a diverse candidate pool to get diversity in the House of Commons and we’re falling short in terms of having a house that resembles what the Canadian population looks like,” said Hilderman. Samara found that Canada falls short on five measures of representation: visible minority status, gender, foreign-born Canadians, youth (age 18 to 30) and indigenous people.

Representation by candidates who are ethnically diverse and who chose to settle in Canada is seen as increasingly important in the Greater Toronto Area, which has become a magnet for newcomers from a wide range of cultures. According to **Statistics Canada**’s diversity projections, approximately 60

2011 federal election

## Voter turnout (%) by GTA riding

Ajax-Pickering: 60.3	Mississauga—Brampton South: 56.2
Ancaster—Dundas—	Mississauga East—Cooksville: 55.6
Flamborough—Westdale: 68.5	Mississauga—Erindale: 60.3
Barrie: 59.8	Mississauga South: 63.2
Bramalea—Gore—Malton: 53.5	Mississauga—Streetsville: 57.8
Brampton—Springdale: 57.7	Newmarket—Aurora: 63.0
Brampton West: 54.0	Oak Ridges—Markham: 59.1
Burlington: 66.5	Oakville: 67.9
Dufferin—Caledon: 60.0	Oshawa: 56.8
Durham: 63.2	Pickering—Scarborough East: 61.2
Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—	Richmond Hill: 55.2
Brock: 63.0	Thornhill: 60.0
Halton: 61.7	Vaughan: 55.1
Hamilton Centre: 53.6	Wellington—Halton Hills: 66.2
Hamilton East—Stoney Creek: 57.0	Whitby—Oshawa: 62.5
Hamilton Mountain: 61.0	York Centre: 58.9
Markham—Unionville: 54.1	York—Simcoe: 57.8
	York South—Weston: 51.9
	York West: 48.1

Source: Elections Canada

per cent of people living in the Toronto census metropolitan area in 2031 will belong to a visible minority group.

Municipalities within the Toronto CMA also have the highest proportion of visible minorities in Ontario, with Markham at 72.3 per cent and Brampton at 66.4 per cent in 2011.

Federal parties decide who will run as nominees and thus have a responsibility to recruit candidates who reflect the diversity of local ridings, says Hilderman. As well, she said, nominated candidates need to ensure their campaigns are welcoming to all potential voters.

The report assessed the satisfaction of Canadians with their current political leaders, with Ontario

# GTA IN BRIEF

## DURHAM

[Whitby school recommended for heritage designation](#)

**Whitby** planning & development committee considered a report recommending designation under the *Ontario Heritage Act* of R.A. Sennett Public School, located at 300 King Street, for its historic and architectural value and interest. The classic revival style of this building is an example of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Ontario scholastic

architecture. Dating to 1920-21, the school is one-storey in height with large windows and a distinctive low-pitched hopped roof with central square skylight and overhanging eaves. Constructed of red brick, the school is topped by an elaborate cornice with wide overhang and bracket detailing.

## HALTON

[Oakville common element condominium approved](#)

At its March 9 meeting,

**Oakville** planning and development council authorized draft plan of condominium approval to **Fernbrook Homes (Dorval) Ltd.** for its property at the northwest corner of Dorval Drive and Rebecca Street. Submitted by **David Faye & Associates** and prepared by **J.D. Barnes Ltd.**, application seeks permission for a common element condominium inclusive of a private rear lane, sidewalks, 16 visitor parking spaces and landscaping for a 62-unit townhouse development.

[166 townhouse units in Oakville](#)

At its March 9 meeting, **Oakville** planning and development council approved a draft plan of condominium submitted by **Peppergate Developments Inc.**, prepared by **Rady-Pentek & Edward Surveying Ltd.**, for the property at 2420 Baronwood Drive. The application proposes a 166-unit stacked townhouse development inclusive of 255 parking spaces, a private road, landscaping and pedestrian walkways. CONTINUED PAGE 8 ▶

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residents the most content about the state of democracy compared to voters in other provinces. About 16 per cent of Ontario residents were “very satisfied” with democracy and 72 per cent expressed “overall satisfaction,” according to the report.

Voter turnout is one important indicator of the effectiveness of Canada’s democracy, according to Hilderman, but she added that it is also important to look at other ways that people are civically engaged.

The report measured the civic engagement of Canadians using yardsticks, such as charitable giving and volunteerism. For example, the report found 83 per cent of Canadians have donated to charity, volunteered or been involved with a community group. Despite this high level of engagement, citizens are not choosing to join a political party or volunteer on a political campaign, according to Samara, with only 37 per cent of Canadians reporting a formal involvement in politics.

“Canadians clearly care about causes and see problems

they want to improve in their communities and do see in some of their civic activities,” said Hilderman. “But that energy and talent isn’t transferring over the political arena as much.” **nr**



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We are currently seeking a **Senior Advisor, Design Excellence Integration** to contribute to the planning of mobility hubs and stations across the organization, in support of the objectives outlined in The Big Move and Mobility Hub Guidelines.

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