

## Suggested Actions

### Preservation of Democracy: Increasing Voter Turnout

At the Annual General Meeting in 2014 the CFUW membership adopted a resolution urging CFUW and its member Clubs to initiate, engage in, and promote activities and programs to educate all Canadians about the importance of participating in our democratic system of government and to exercise our right and our responsibility to vote in all elections.

The impetus for the resolution has come from the significant decline in voter participation in Canada since the late 1950's, when voting in federal elections peaked at 79% of the eligible population.<sup>1</sup> In 2008, Canada recorded its lowest ever voter turnout in a federal election, with just 58.8% of eligible voters casting ballots. There was a slight increase in participation in the last federal election in 2011, but voter turnout remained low at just 61.1%. According to Statistics Canada, the main reasons for not voting in the May 2011 federal election were:<sup>2</sup>

- 27.7% not interested, felt their vote would not make a difference - highest in Quebec at 35%.
- 22.9% too busy - Ontario was above the national average; Alberta was the highest at 28%.
- 10.1% out of town/away
- 8.5% illness or disability
- 7.6% didn't like candidate
- 3.8% forgot
- 3.7% not on voter list
- 2.9% transportation problem
- 1.3% religious beliefs
- 0.1% weather
- 11.4% other

An analysis by province/territory shows PEI with the highest participation rate of 74%, and New Brunswick, Quebec, Yukon and Nova Scotia in the low to mid 60th percentile. Saskatchewan, Ontario, BC, Manitoba, Newfoundland and Alberta range through the 50th percentile while the Northwest Territories and Nunavut register at 47.4% and 39.4% respectively.<sup>3</sup>

The voter turnout at municipal/regional elections across Canada reflects an even lower percentage rate of voter participation - in comparison with provincial or federal numbers. For example, nationwide, the turnout rate for selected municipal and provincial elections held in 2001 and the first part of 2002 showed an average of 41.8% turnout in municipal elections compared with 64.1% in provincial.<sup>4</sup> In the 2006 Municipal elections in 12 communities in central Ontario, voter participation

<sup>1</sup> Estimation of Voter Turnout by Age Group and Gender at the 2011 Federal General Election, *Elections Canada - Working Paper Series*, [http://www.elections.ca/res/rec/part/estim/estimation41\\_e.pdf](http://www.elections.ca/res/rec/part/estim/estimation41_e.pdf), p. 2

<sup>2</sup> Reasons for not voting in the May 2, 2011 federal election, *Statistics Canada, The Daily*, July 5, 2011, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/110705/dq110705a-eng.htm>, p. 1

<sup>3</sup> Estimation..., p. 8-9

<sup>4</sup> Roberts, Lance W., *Recent Social Trends in Canada 1960 - 2000*. p.97

ranged from 23% to 39%.<sup>5</sup> In 2013 in Alberta, Calgary voter participation was at 39% while Edmonton registered just 34.5%.<sup>6</sup> And in Montreal in 2013, only 43% of eligible voters participated, despite widespread corruption scandals.<sup>7</sup>

Declining voter participation is a troubling trend because it threatens our democracy. A recent poll demonstrated that only 55% of those polled were satisfied with democracy in Canada, down 20% from 2004 when 75% of Canadians said they were satisfied.

Persuading more Canadians to exercise their right to vote will be challenge enough, but persuading them that their vote will make a difference may be an even greater challenge. According to researchers cited in the Library of Parliament publication on *Youth Voter Turnout*, voters both young and old show a lack of interest in public affairs and often doubt whether going to the polls every four years can truly influence the decision-making process.<sup>8</sup> As a result, people stay away from the polls and this can lead to distrust and cynicism over time. This is a challenge where CFUW can play another important role in promoting political engagement and voter participation within your own communities at the grassroots level.

All CFUW Clubs are encouraged to assist your members, friends, families, networks, and communities in having their voices heard in the political process. Only through exercising our rights to vote, and becoming actively engaged in democracy between elections will we be able to influence decision-making. And that, indeed, is what true democracy is all about.

## Elections at Different Levels of Government

### Municipal Elections

Municipal elections in Canada fall within the jurisdiction of the provinces and territories, which usually hold their municipal elections on the same date every two, three or four years, depending on the location. During a Municipal Election communities will usually elect a Mayor, Councillors, and School Board Trustees.

Several provinces including, Ontario, British Columbia, Manitoba and Prince Edward Island will be holding municipal elections at various times in the fall of 2014. For more information, see this [fact sheet](#) with election dates in each of the provinces and territories.

Most municipal councils do not have explicit party structures, rather candidates run for elected office independently. In Ontario for instance, political parties at the municipal election are not permitted under the Municipal Elections Act. However, some municipalities such as Vancouver and Montreal do have party structures.

### Federal Elections

The fixed federal election date is October 17, 2015 but could be called earlier. There is some speculation that the Government of Canada could recommend that the Governor General dissolve

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<sup>5</sup> *Boosting Voter Turnout*, Toronto Star, P Gombu, November 10, 2010. Available :

[http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2010/10/22/boosting\\_voter\\_turnout\\_a\\_challenge.html](http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2010/10/22/boosting_voter_turnout_a_challenge.html)

<sup>6</sup> "Naheed Nenshi re-elected as Calgary mayor". CBC news. Posted Oct. 21, 2013. Available:

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/Canada/Calgary/municipal-election/neheed-nenshi-re-electd-as-calgary-mayor-1.2128671>

<sup>7</sup> "Marois disappointed in municipal election turnout", Montreal Gazette. November 4, 2013. Available:

<http://www.montrealgazette.com/news/Marios+disappointed+municipal+election+turnout/9124324/story.html>

<sup>8</sup> Youth Voter Turnout in Canada – 2. Reasons for Decline. Ottawa. LOP. April 20, 2010. Available:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca/content/lop/researchpublications/2010-21-e.htm>

parliament for an election in the spring following the release of the 2015 budget.

Some facts:

- The federal election period in Canada lasts a minimum of 36 days
- Canada has 5 major political parties (click the links to see their party platforms/policy positions):
  - [Conservative Party of Canada](#) (current Governing party – 162 MPs)
  - [Canada's NDP](#) (Official Opposition – 97 MPs)
  - [Liberal Party of Canada](#) (37 MPs)
  - [Bloc Québécois](#) ( 2 MPs)
  - [Green Party of Canada](#) ( 2 MPs)

For more information about federal elections, please visit the website of [Elections Canada](#).

## Provincial and Territorial Elections

Elections at the provincial and territorial level are monitored and organized by independent provincial election commissions. Since 2001, most Canadian provinces and the Northwest Territories have passed laws establishing fixed election dates, in most cases calling for elections every four years on a specific day and month. However, elections may take place before the fixed date, if for example a minority government is in power and the legislature is dissolved as the result of a failed confidence vote (e.g. the budget).

To find out when a provincial election may be held in your province, visit your respective Provincial or Territorial Election Commission website. You can find links to these sites here:  
<http://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=lin&dir=ceo&document=index&lang=e#nf>

All Canadian provinces and Yukon have electoral systems dominated by major political parties. In most provinces the prominent parties are the same as at the federal level. However, the provincial party may or may not have an official affiliation with the federal party of the same name.

## Suggested Actions

### Club

Throughout 2014/2015 dedicate one or more of your meetings (either as a Club or interest/issues group) to discussing how women fit into the political landscape, the policy debates, and strategizing how your members can participate in elections locally (federally, provincially and municipally). Below are some suggestions:

- Host a non-partisan open meeting before an election – (e.g. a round table “hot topic” format to talk about voting and the difference it makes - discuss local issues).
- Promote voting among your Club members, your networks, and the public:
  - Share information about the candidates in your riding(s)/electoral district(s) and major political parties if relevant (e.g. invite them to your meetings/events), and follow candidates on Facebook and Twitter.
  - Organize an All Candidates meeting once an election is called and invite media. You may want to enlist the help of other interested organizations.
  - Circulate information about how, when and where to vote
  - Encourage members, networks and the public to vote in advanced polls
  - Circulate information to members about what they can individually do to help

increase electoral/democratic participation, such as Samara's Political Participation Activities checklist downloadable from:

<http://www.samaracanada.com/docs/default-source/default-document-library/political-participation-activities-blank-checklist.pdf?sfvrsn=0>

- Utilize social media for all of the above, either through your Club Facebook page and/Twitter account, or new page to publicize local election information, including party platforms, candidate information, poll locations and advanced poll options.
- Produce non-partisan flyers encouraging people to vote.
- Participate in [Canada's Democracy Week](#) during the third week of September
- Challenge sister CFUW Clubs in the area to a friendly regional competition to register the highest voter turnout among your members.
- Form or join a coalition/network of organizations in your community interested in increasing voter turn-out. Together you could develop some community based strategies to "get out the vote". Start by doing some research on who is doing what in your local community currently.
- Encourage and mentor high quality women candidates from within CFUW membership and your other networks. See Equal Voice's campaign "[Run Her](#)".
- Produce and wear "Just Vote" buttons before the election
- Produce and distribute "I Voted" stickers to be handed out near polling stations.
- Invite a speaker to your Club to discuss women in Canadian electoral politics – for instance, there may be a [chapter of Equal Voice](#) in, or near, your community.
- Start a Book Club inspired by authors writing about political participation and democracy in Canada, some book ideas include:
  - [Tragedy in the Commons](#)
  - [Shopping for Votes](#)
- Work with local high schools, universities and colleges, and their respective [student associations](#) to promote the political participation of youth. As a first step, try to set up meetings with these groups to find out what they are working on and see if they want/need your support. Some supports may include:
  - Referring civics teachers to [www.samaracanada.com](http://www.samaracanada.com) for their high school resources;
  - Assisting schools in holding mock elections as part of school curriculum;
  - Sponsoring an all-candidates' debate for students in university, college and/or high school;
  - Encouraging school trips to federal and provincial legislatures, as well as municipal councils;
  - Preparing and distributing an analysis of issues that will have an impact on youth/students in your community. See the Canadian Federation of Students Ontario video "[Generation Vote](#)" on the impact of municipal politics on students;
  - Preparing and distributing information on where/how youth away at university can vote (university student associations/unions may already be working on this); and
  - Organizing voter registration drives at universities and colleges(university student associations/unions may already be working on this)

## Individual Members

- Learn about the candidates in your riding/district/ward and the political parties they represent (if at the federal or provincial level). You can follow them on Facebook and Twitter to keep up to date on the issues they are prioritizing, what events they are attending, and even engage them in some discussion.
- Use Samara's [Political Participation Checklist](#).
- Join a political party and/or volunteer for a candidate you support.
- Talk to your family, friends and networks about the election, candidates, issues, and the

- importance of voting.
- Share information about the election, candidates, issues and the important of voting through Facebook and Twitter.
  - Host an Election Day party for family and friends.
  - Bring a friend to vote on Election Day or the advanced polls.
  - If you know someone who may have difficulty getting to their polling station on Election Day for mobility or caregiving reasons, offer to give them a ride and/or watch their family member(s) for a short time.
  - Start a Book Club inspired by authors writing about political participation and democracy in Canada, some book ideas include:
    - [Tragedy in the Commons](#)
    - [Shopping for Votes](#)
  - Vote!

## Advocacy with Provincial/Territorial Governments and Educational Institutions

Provincial Government:

- Urge Provincial Governments to require mandatory civics courses for a full semester. Ontario is the only province with such a course for Grade 10 students. Read this Maclean's article "[Get voters while they're young](#)" for more information and inspiration.

Encourage Federal, Provincial and Municipal Governments to investigate:

- Mandatory voting (as in Australia)
- Holding Advanced Polls at major workplace sites and universities/colleges and schools
- Promote more Advanced Poll days
- Online and telephone voting (electronic voting now allowed in 6 provinces)

## Resources

Elections Canada, an independent, non-partisan agency that reports directly to Parliament.

<http://www.elections.ca/home.aspx>

Samara, a non-partisan charitable organization that works to improve political participation in Canada. See their website here: [www.samara.com](http://www.samara.com)

- Some key resources:
  - [Political Participation Checklist](#)
  - [Lightweights? Political Participation Beyond the Ballot Box](#)

Making Votes Count Report: Creating a Culture of Civic Engagement

<http://www.cawi-ivtf.org/sites/default/files/publications/making-votes-count-where-we-live-2014.pdf>

Creating a City for All Brochure (this document is focused on the Ottawa municipal election, but you could develop a similar brochure for your own community)

<http://www.cawi-ivtf.org/sites/default/files/publications/creating-a-city-for-all-eng-2014-web.pdf>

Generation Vote, a short video about the impact of municipal politics on students

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z5ZwwY75TDc&feature=youtu.be>

Canadian Federation of Students, list of Student Associations/Unions

<http://cfs-fcee.ca/about/members-students-unions-2/>