



# TO PUT PEOPLE AT THE HEART OF LOCAL DEMOCRACY

VOTE ON  
June 26

## Toronto needs a healthy local democracy.

It's about representation, engagement, and meaningful participation where people are at the centre of local decision-making. A healthy local democracy welcomes people into the process and removes barriers to participation for everyone. But Toronto's local democracy is in trouble with record low voter turnout, limited opportunities for residents to meaningfully participate, and a 'strong mayor' system that places most of the power in the hands of just one person.

**The upcoming mayoral by-election is an opportunity to improve the health of our local democracy, centring resident voices, rebuilding relationships with communities, and ensuring meaningful engagement in local decision-making.**

## What's the Problem?

### Voter Turnout is at a Record Low & Participating Meaningfully is a Challenge

Last year's municipal election had the [lowest voter turnout that Toronto had experienced in decades](#),

with just **29.7%**

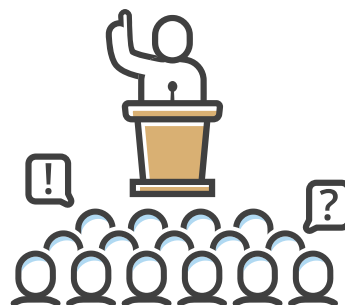


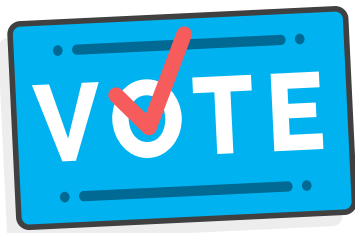
of eligible voters casting a ballot.

Residents face barriers to participating in local decision-making and question whether their participation makes a difference. For example, Community Council meetings and other committees that report to City Council only meet during the weekday and daytime hours. Community members who work during regular business hours need to book time off to attend a meeting. Most City reports, including the annual budget, are created behind closed doors. By the time the public has a chance to voice its concerns many of the decisions have already been made. Even when residents participate, many question whether their input matters. Research shows about one in four Toronto residents has [low confidence in City Hall](#) and the numbers are worse for [younger people](#).

### Strong Mayor Powers are Undemocratic

In 2022, the Ontario government passed legislation that [introduced](#) and then [expanded](#) 'strong mayor' powers for Toronto and Ottawa. Among these extraordinary powers, the Mayor has the authority to prepare and table their own budget for the city — one person in charge of a multi-billion dollar budget! The Mayor can also overturn any decision of Council if it isn't consistent with provincial priorities, undermining the priorities of local government. If Council wants to change the Mayor's decision, it will take two-thirds of Council to vote in favour. This loss of majority rule is [unheard of in western democracies](#). It relegates City Councillors — our elected local representatives — to the role of advisors and leaves residents on the sidelines.





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## Hundreds of Thousands of Torontonians Don't Have the Right to Vote

There are hundreds of thousands of people who make Toronto their home, pay their taxes, and contribute to life in the city but aren't allowed to vote because they don't have Canadian citizenship. For many years, [advocates](#) in Toronto have called for permanent residents to have the right to vote in local elections, with similar campaigns in [other cities](#). Young people are also [advocating](#) to lower the voting age from 18 to 16.

In Toronto, [over 52,000](#) residents are 16 and 17 years of age. While these young people can drive a car, get a job, pay taxes and carry other adult responsibilities, they aren't allowed to vote. Young people don't have a say in who represents them or sets public policy that will affect them and their futures.

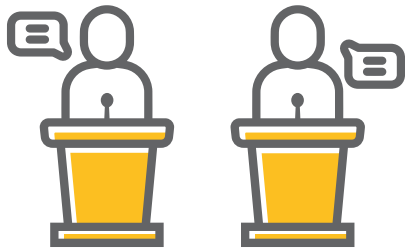


Lowering the voting age and providing permanent residents with the right to vote could increase civic engagement and participation, strengthening our local democracy. Toronto City Council has [asked the provincial government](#) to change the law to allow permanent residents to vote. So far, the Province hasn't.

# Take Action!

## 1. Ask the Mayoral Candidates If They Will Commit to The Following Actions:

- Fight against provincial interference in municipal democracy, protect City Council decision-making, and stop the 'Strong Mayor' powers.
- Allow residents and communities to shape the budget from the planning stage to the final vote at Council by resourcing budget engagement and removing barriers to participation.
- Meaningfully collaborate with residents, community organizations, and advocates to shape policy, budgets, and programs.
- Increase access and support for residents to participate in decision-making (such as interpretation, child minding, and accommodations).
- Make the City's public consultation processes more accessible, transparent, and accountable to residents, including reporting back to residents on how results are informing decision-making.
- Advocate for the provincial government to extend the right to vote to permanent residents and/or provide the City of Toronto and other municipalities with the power to make decisions about their own elections, including who gets to vote.
- Explore the proposal to lower the voting age in local elections from 18 to 16 years of age. Engage youth and other community members in this work.



## 2. Learn More About the Candidates

Check out [our election resources](#) and attend an event, such as a Mayoral Debate, to learn more about the election issues, and where candidates stand.



## 3. Pledge to Vote

[Election day](#) is on June 26.

[Advanced polls](#) are from June 8-13.

[Apply to vote](#) by mail from May 1-26.