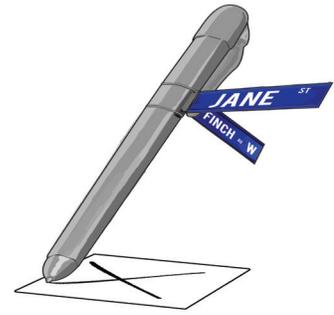


# #JaneAndFinchVotes: Mobilizing For Change



#JANEANDFINCHVOTES



Citizen Empowerment Project

2015 Total number of votes in Humber River-Black Creek: 59%

- 36,192 out of a total 60, 994 eligible voters

2011 Total number of votes in Humber River-Black Creek: 48%

- 27, 991 out of a total 58, 090 eligible voters

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# A Message from the Founder of the Citizen Empowerment Project

February 2016

#JaneAndFinchVotes is a nonpartisan civic engagement and voter turnout campaign organized by the Citizen Empowerment Project, a Canadian non-profit organization based in Toronto. The goal of the campaign is to engage with communities underrepresented in Canada's democracy, including youth, newcomers and low-income families. We envision a Canada where all Canadians play a role in shaping the country's political priorities.

The purpose of #JaneAndFinchVotes is to bring a community organizing approach to democratic participation, which was popularized in American cities by the Barack Obama campaigns in 2008 and 2012. Community organizing, as defined by Harvard University professor Marshall Ganz, is to "identify, recruit and develop leadership; build community around that leadership; and build power from the resources of that community." This approach is necessary where there is a need to build capacity in communities to meaningfully engage the political process as voters, constituents and, most importantly, Canadian citizens.

#JaneAndFinchVotes was launched in August 2015 in partnership with a team of youth workers led by lifelong Jane and Finch resident Andrew Newsome. Leadership for the campaign included a diverse group of community residents and organizations, youth workers, Osgoode Hall Law School students and volunteers from across the Greater Toronto Area.

This report will provide an overview of the #JaneAndFinchVotes activities to increase voter turnout in the 2015 Canadian federal election, as well as ideas for how to continue building on our momentum in 2016 and beyond. This is only the beginning.



**Jamil Jivani**

Founder of the Citizen Empowerment Project  
Visiting Professor and Scholar at Osgoode Hall Law School

We believe all Canadian cities have something to learn from our experience in the Jane and Finch community, just as we have something to learn from all Canadian cities.

# Acknowledgments

The Citizen Empowerment Project thanks everyone who voted in the 2015 Canadian federal election for making their voice heard.

We are particularly grateful to the communities in Humber River-Black Creek who opened their doors to us, debated with us, welcomed us to community events and pledged to vote to make Canada a better place. We also thank all of our volunteers who have made #JaneAndFinchVotes possible through their vision and leadership.

The 2015 #JaneAndFinchVotes voter turnout campaign would not have been possible without the support of Osgoode Hall Law School and the Laidlaw Foundation.

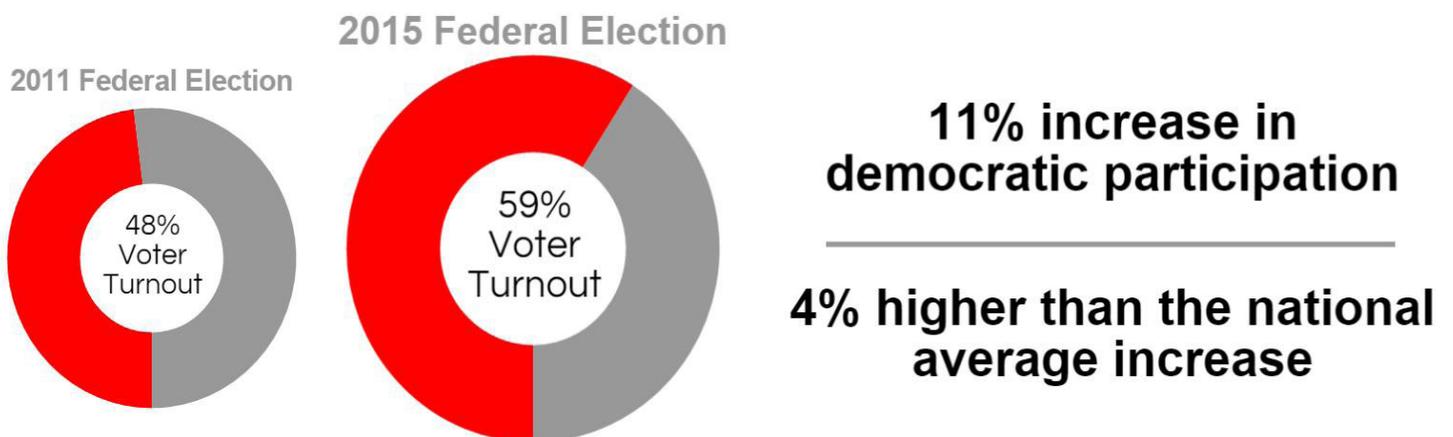


We would like to acknowledge our community partner for making this entire project possible. Our community partners include:

- Black Creek Community Health Centre
- Elections Canada
- Emery Adult Learning Centre
- Firgrove Learning and Innovation Community Centre
- Driftwood Community Centre
- Freedom Fridayz
- Helping Neighbourhoods Implement Change
- Jane and Finch Boys and Girls Club
- Jane Finch Church Coalition
- Jane/Finch Community and Family Centre
- JVS Youth Employment Services
- Oakdale Community Centre
- Success Beyond Limits
- The Spot
- Westview Centennial Secondary School
- York University Law & Society Students Association
- York United Black Students' Alliance

# Election Summary

The #JaneAndFinchVotes strategies proved to be successful, perhaps the most successful non-partisan campaign in the 2015 Federal Election. In 2011, there was 48% voter turnout in the Humber River- Black Creek Riding, in 2015, this percentage increased to 59%. This is an 11% increase in democratic participation, which is 4% higher than the national average increase. 462 new or unlikely voters confirmed with us that they voted during Advance Polls or Election Day, and many brought their friends and family with them to vote. By all indications, #JaneandFinchVotes surpassed expectations.



2,000 phone calls, texts and emails

6,000 homes visited



8,000 pieces of literature delivered



**1,100**

community members pledged to vote with #JaneAndFinchVotes

**462**

new or unlikely voters confirmed that they voted in advanced polls or on election day.

65 volunteers from diverse communities



## Why #JaneAndFinchVotes

Two trends in Canadian voters influenced the #JaneandFinchVotes strategy:

- 1) Younger Canadians consistently vote less than older Canadians.
- 2) Visible minority Canadians also vote consistently less than other



Low voter turnout by these communities suggests that there isn't proper representation of all Canadians people in the municipal, provincial, and federal government. Young people and visible minorities are not having their voices heard. At the same time, older and non-visible minority Canadians are overrepresented, and having a greater impact on law and policy.

In the 2011 Federal Election, Elections Canada - the independent, non-partisan agency responsible for conducting federal elections - reported the lowest voter turnout amongst the two youngest groups of eligible voters. An estimated 45.1% of Canadians aged 25-34 voted in the Election, as compared to the national average of 61.1%. For Canadians aged 18-24, representation was even poorer with a voter turnout of 38.8%. On the other hand, older Canadians, aged 55-64 and 65-74, turned out to vote at a rate of 71.5% and 75.1%, respectively.

An analysis of the Ethnic Diversity Survey, the largest dataset on immigrants' participation in municipal, provincial, and federal elections, shows a similar trend of low voter turnout for non-European immigrant groups. Among visible minority Canadians, the proportion of habitual non-voters across recent provincial and federal elections has been 29% in comparison to 14% among other Canadians. This means that Canadians who are members of a visible minority group are 15% less likely to vote on a regular basis than other Canadians.

In Toronto, the 2011 Census has shown that visible minorities and immigrants comprise nearly half of the total population of 2.6 million people, with 45% of the population speaking a mother tongue other than English or French. Despite this strong representation, a recent study by the Maytree Foundation found that, in the past three Toronto municipal elections, the higher the percentage of immigrants in a given area, the lower the voter turnout is in that same area.



## References

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- Liviana Tossutti, "The Electoral Participation of Ethnocultural Communities", Working Paper Series on Electoral Participation and Outreach Practices, Elections Canada (2007).
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- Statistics Canada "2011 Census of Population", Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-311-XCB2011018 (2011).

# Making A Difference

#JaneandFinchVotes utilized leading and recognizable community members, organizers and leaders in all aspects of the project. We reached out to well-established groups and leaders in the community to make sure our message was heard throughout the community. This strategy had three important benefits:

- 1) Having leaders in the community that residents recognized helped #JaneandFinchVotes gain trust in the community, especially with activities like canvassing door-to-door or in community hubs.
- 2) It supported local leadership of the campaign, which built further trust and will continue to do so into the future. This ensures that the leaders of the project are and continue to be residents who are authentic in their desire to help their community by boosting civic participation.
- 3) Recognizable faces helped drive and deliver the team's message also solidifies the non-partisan aspect of the project and the overall genuine aim of project members to help the community participation.



This year, a lot of “first time” voters participated in the voting process. This one gentlemen, who was 32 years of age, voted for the first time and brought his family to watch him. He is now going to make this a family event so when his kids get older they would know how important it is to vote.

-Chris Blackwood, Weston-Mount Dennis Community Program Coordinator

Having the opportunity to work with a team of motivated and passionate individuals on the Jane Finch Votes initiative, has allowed me to become aware and knowledgeable in the importance of voting; so we don't drown out when we need to be heard; the power of your voice is a vital component for change to happen.

-Harpreet Gill



I think the JFV is an amazing approach to not only increase voter turnout, but to increase civic engagement. Once people vote, they start to pay more attention to the process. They in turn have expectations, and with increased knowledge begin to hold politicians accountable to their promises. It is important because you need to know and be a part of a system in order to make it work for you.

- Phil Edwards

## B. THE MESSAGE

The message of #JaneandFinchVotes was clear and simple: Vote! However, our team could not ignore the fact that many eligible voters in the community were skeptical of the impact their vote would have. Instead of fighting against this often well-reasoned skepticism, we embraced it. Team members often reminded citizens of the issues surrounding low voter turnout in the area and linked this with the skepticism in the community. We took the view that if no one votes, nothing changes, and shared that message with community members in various ways.

An important aspect of our message was that we are a non-partisan campaign. #JaneandFinchVotes delivered a message that empowered people to be a part of the change they wanted to see regardless of their political opinions.

## C. CANVASSING

Canvassing was an important aspect of creating a presence in the community and the overall success of the project. #JaneandFinchVotes volunteers canvassed door-to-door daily in the community in the lead up to the Election, collecting pledges from eligible voters. These pledges were a personal commitment to vote, but also a way for #JaneandFinchVotes to collect information about how to help each voter with information on various policy issues (all non-partisan) as well as registration, transportation to the polls, and advanced polling. Volunteers knocked on over 6000 doors and garnered 1100 pledges.



## D. OUTREACH TO SCHOOLS

### Emery Adult Learning Centre

One of the most successful strategies employed by our campaign was taking our message to Emery Adult Learning Centre. #JaneandFinchVotes held an assembly at the school to talk about the importance of voting, with hundreds of students in attendance. Students then attended break-out sessions with their instructors and #JaneandFinchVotes volunteers to discuss more specific details surrounding the election and address any questions or concerns that the students had.

### Westview Centennial Secondary School

Advance poll voting was scheduled over Thanksgiving weekend. Although there was initial concern that this may distract voters from the election, Westview's leadership stepped up to partner with #JaneAndFinchVotes to host a turkey giveaway for Thanksgiving. This helped draw attention to the election and advance poll voting opportunities, in addition to making democracy more tangible by connecting political action with immediate needs, like the need for families to share a good meal on Thanksgiving weekend. With Westview's support, this turkey giveaway reached 300 families from across Northwestern Toronto, led to over 250 completed voter pledges and, most importantly, introduced voting to many youth and newcomers who will be future first time voters.

## E. TRADITIONAL AND NEW MEDIA

The team engaged different media outlets including print, radio, and television at the beginning of the project and at several peak times before the elections. This involved interviews and coverage of team members who were actively involved on the ground. This strategy was aimed at raising awareness about the campaign and creating a sense of familiarity with potential voters.

Recognition was an essential strategy in helping to promote the team's objectives. In order to be recognized, the team needed to create simple but distinguishable brand. The team's marketing strategy involved all team members wearing a #JaneAndFinchVotes t-shirt with a unique logo associated with the project. The logo, which consisted of a sleek pen and ballot, was both simple and powerful as it became easily recognizable within the community and portrayed our underlying message: Cast your ballot!



# Lessons Learned

## What Worked

In considering the different strategies employed through the voter turnout campaign, the following are aspects of the campaign that were found to have great success:

**Delivery of practically useful information:** In convincing potential new voters to turn up at the polls, it was incredibly important to present the act of voting as an easily completed task. Especially in light of recent changes that were made to the process (i.e. changes to voter ID requirements or changes to the locations of polling stations), this meant getting potential voters the information they needed to be able to actually cast their ballots. Therefore, a primary focus of the educational component of the campaign was to highlight the practical steps that make up the voting process. Specifically, this meant providing information about what it means to be eligible to vote, how to register to vote, where one can go to vote and what one needs to bring with them to be allowed to cast their ballot.



**Using the act of pledging as a way to ensure commitment:** Throughout the campaign, one of our aims was to have potential voters take a pledge to vote in the election. In doing this, potential voters were committing to follow through by getting out and voting. This emphasis on collecting pledges allowed for follow-up interactions to act as reinforcement to these earlier commitments by adding a

## Lessons Learned

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**Using multiple outreach methods to make sure that contact with potential voters was consistent and engaging:** While time-consuming, the strategy of door-to-door canvassing ensured that outreach was always of the highest quality. By following up on in-person interactions with phone calls and emails, the campaign was able to maintain personal and

interactive contact with potential voters from beginning to end. At the same time, this meant that potential voters were able to be consistently engaged with the campaign.

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**Partnering with community-based organizations to deliver our message and increase awareness:** Relying in part on trusted leaders already working in the community was helpful for delivering a persuasive message to potential voters. In addition, this allowed the campaign to more easily connect the act of voting with a commitment to the communities that potential voters live in and to more easily convince potential voters of what politics can mean for change in their communities. This was also helpful to cultivating a sense of voting as a behaviour that can be understood as a group or communal activity.

## Areas for Improvement

Having addressed what strategies worked well in the #JaneAndFinchVotes campaign, it is also important to consider what improvements can be made and what steps might be taken to make these improvements moving forward. The following are key areas that have been identified as those where there is room to grow and do better:

**Identifying and employing methods for overcoming language barriers:** Especially as door-to-door canvassing was a primary strategy employed by the campaign, ensuring high quality outreach requires that volunteers are able to effectively communicate with potential voters. This might mean that more of an emphasis is placed on recruiting organizers and volunteers who are able to overcome the language barriers that can be encountered in door-to-door canvassing and in follow-up phone calls.

**Increasing online presence to spread the campaign story and build relationships:** As the youth represent a group with great potential for the prospect of increasing voter turnout, it would be worthwhile to make efforts to use interactive mobile and internet based methods for engaging



potential voters. This could enhance the word-of-mouth communications that drive the campaign, by further expanding the campaign's web of connections beyond those interacted with in person. It could be effective in terms of getting the campaign's message out, in building relationships with a target audience, and in potentially engaging that audience in two-way conversation.

## Areas for Improvement



Providing information that goes beyond that which is practically useful: While practically useful information is of course important to having potential voters get out to the polls, more time spent on engaging potential voters in discussions about democratic engagement more generally is also important to nurturing a culture of democratic participation. This is especially important for young voters and newcomers.

Helping these potential voters to better understand the Canadian electoral system and to appreciate democratic engagement beyond the mere act of voting could help people to see that the issues that matter to them have a political dimension.

Working to carry forward momentum and continue discussions around voting: Though voter turnout campaigns are usually run during the time leading up to an election, it is just as important that the work of encouraging democratic engagement continues in the time between elections. Doing so only helps to ensure that campaigns are well-received and that upward trends in voter turnout continue. In a campaign strategy that emphasizes partnering with community organizations, it would be helpful to identify ways in which discussions around voting can be embedded in a more lasting way into existing programs within trusted community organizations. This would ensure that the campaign's message becomes more regular and is better received when the next election takes place.

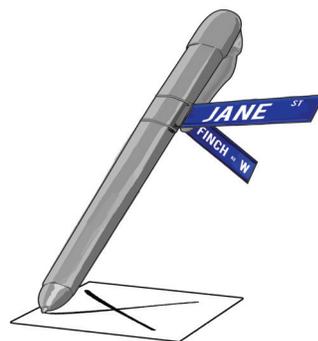
## Next Steps

The Citizen Empowerment Project is continuing to lead the #JaneAndFinchVotes campaign in partnerships with community organizations across the Greater Toronto Area.

With the support of the Laidlaw Foundation, we are creating civic education resources for youth and integrating these resources into various youth programs. We have also partnered with Westview Centennial Secondary School to launch a Corporate Partnerships Committee, which is bringing private sector resources and opportunities to the Jane and Finch community.

Our ultimate goal is to empower underrepresented communities to lead civic engagement and voter turnout initiatives in the Jane and Finch community and beyond. If you're interested in working with us toward this goal, please contact us at our website:

[www.citizenempowerment.ca](http://www.citizenempowerment.ca)



**#JANEANDFINCHVOTES**



# Citizen Empowerment Project