

A QUESTION OF LACKING ACCESS OR DIVERSIFYING ACTION?

**RESEARCHING THE CIVIC
AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT
OF LATIN AMERICAN
NEWCOMERS
IN TORONTO**



**Mennonite New Life Centre of Toronto
Community Engagement Program
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INTRODUCTION

The Mennonite New Life Centre of Toronto (MNLCT) envisions a society in which all people from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds participate fully in all aspects of Canadian life. As a multi-service community centre for new immigrants to Canada, our mission is to facilitate newcomer settlement and integration through holistic services and community engagement, carried out within a gender justice and anti-oppression framework. We recognize that for many racialized new immigrants, the process of settlement in the City of Toronto is riddled with a variety of socio-economic challenges. Being civic and politically engaged under such circumstances is no doubt challenging, all the more so when structural barriers prevent access to many political spaces. However, attributing a lack of political engagement among newcomers solely to an issue of access fails to scrutinize the kinds of political spaces to which access is being sought.

This study focuses on the newcomer Latin American community, particularly to investigate the limits of mainstream definitions of Civic and Political Engagement in the North West area of Toronto, Ontario. Through the use of Participatory Action Research methodology we sought to explore the experiences and perceptions of Latin American newcomers with formal and informal political spaces and to what extent each channel is responsive to the kinds of struggles they are facing. We found that the complexities of the migration experience and the particularities of the civic and political landscape in Toronto lead to complicated notions of which political spaces are deemed to be fulfilling and which ones provide avenues for addressing pressing socio-economic issues. The distance between informal and formal political spaces is found to be at least as much about the quality and purpose of the political energy as it is about the access to it. In the context of the 2014 Toronto municipal elections, the question of enfranchisement of Permanent Residents, although primarily an access question, played an important part in the perceptions newcomers held about the city government and its commitment to promote civic and political engagement among immigrants.

The first part of the report, provides a brief literature review relating to the political engagement of Latin American immigrants. This is followed by an analytical description of how we, the Community Engagement Program at the MNLCT, have approached this topic. The section on methodology details how participatory action research tools have been used in this study. Following the summary of participant profiles are the main findings, in visual form and thereafter in analytical form. The report concludes with a summary of key challenges and recommendations for the City of Toronto about how to address the findings of this study.

BACKGROUND

Previous research

Existing literature on the civic and political engagement of the Latin American community in Canada largely concentrates on the material reasons - low income, lack of English skills, lack of “civic literacy,” lack of established networks, discrimination, etc. - for low levels of electoral participation by this community and includes work by Chute (2004), Long (2002), and Escobar (2000), among others. Looking beyond the electoral realm and access to it, Ginieniwicz (2010) and Armony et al. (2004) challenge certain paradigms of civic and political engagement. Ginieniwicz argues that as an alternative to the formal political channels, much of the Latin American community has been civic and politically engaged at what he calls the “grassroots” level. An unfortunate shortcoming of this analysis is the breadth of this grassroots category, which, by including social/recreational and cultural activities, dilutes what it means to be civic and politically engaged.

Our Approach

As with all of our work at the MNLCT, this project is guided by our commitment to anti-oppression values in pursuit of a socially-just city. In this vein, we consider civic and political engagement, not simply an end in and of itself, to be promoted for the sake of maintaining faith in a rhetorical ideal of democracy. Instead, we are primarily concerned with civic and political engagement as a means of improving the material conditions of marginalized communities in the City, including the Latin American community. Substantive equity in the political sphere, for us, goes beyond mere inclusion and must explore what it is that newcomers are struggling to be included in.

Our starting point is an asset-based approach rather than a deficiency-based lens towards community members. In the context of civic and political engagement, this means we do not accept at face value that the Latin American community is politically apathetic. Guided by principles of popular and/or community-based education, we recognize and value experiential, non-institutional sources of knowledge and understanding. Being informed by the generations of Latin American migrants who bring with them rich histories of activism including human rights work, community organizing, union activism, and student movements, we recognize and respect this broad spectrum of political engagement.

We therefore investigated the definition of political engagement and how it is being used as a criterion by which the Latin American community is being evaluated in terms of participation. We then explored whether there might be opportunities to make this definition more inclusive and holistic to better take into account the political assets that this community has to offer.

Both our community work and our research promote the collective over the individual, the popular over the institutional and the critical over the complacent. This stance is based on the understanding that conditions of oppression occur in patterns affecting groups, therefore the pursuit of equity must raise popular consciousness and bring oppressed communities together for shared struggles.

The function of our research is to actively contribute to these goals by igniting critical conversations that promote institutional development for MNLCT, but more importantly, a development in community consciousness.

METHODOLOGY

MNLCT works to support newcomer communities to engage in critical reflection and action that promote inclusivity through social change. For this reason, we have designed and implemented several Participatory Action Research (PAR) processes, enabling community members to be active participants and collaborators.

For us, PAR is a way to empower newcomer community members. PAR mobilizes participants to address real-life concerns by reflecting collectively on the structural causes using their personal experiences as sources of analytical information. From the development of practical new knowledge, PAR promotes solutions to better overcome the conditions which inhibit a life of dignity.

For this specific PAR on researching the Civic and Political Engagement of Newcomer Latin Americans in Toronto, participant involvement was aligned with our community organizing and partnering work.

Narrowing the scope

During the design phase of the research, which spanned from July to September 2013, the Newcomer Advocacy Committee of the MNLCT worked together with the research team in defining the thematic concerns, the purpose of the research and agreeing on the following terms of references:

- **Civic engagement:**

Individual and collective actions designed to identify, understand and address issues of public concern. For the City of Toronto, this means that community members shape a vision for the future, plan changes in their neighbourhoods, provide information and insight on the issues Council is debating, it also serves on the City's agencies, board and commissions

- **Formal political engagement:**

Activities that take place within the structure of the political system and aim to influence elected representatives, decision makers and other agents of government. Actions include voting, encouraging others to vote, volunteering for a candidate or a political party, fundraising and canvassing, contacting officials, taking part in resident committees hosted by government bodies, making deputations, attending city council meetings, etc.

- **Informal political engagement**

Those types of participation that involve "working directly with others, where the action is not necessarily aimed at elected or appointed officials" (Junn, 2004). Actions include joining an organization concerned with socio-political issues, attending demonstrations, advocating for a socio-political issue, organizing a group of people to address an issue without direct government support.

- **Newcomers**

First generation immigrants who are in the process of settlement or have settled already who may or may not face challenges like lack of English language skills, un(der)employment, lack of networks in Canada, etc. These challenges may persist even after individuals have officially received Canadian Citizenship and have been residing in Canada for a number of years.

Collecting data

Once the scope of the PAR and the general terms of reference were developed, the research team defined three techniques to collect qualitative information:

- **Focus Groups**

In order to further explore understandings of civic and political engagement and collectively arrive at some ideas of formal and informal means of this involvement, we carried out 6 focus groups to elicit qualitative data. Three of the focus groups were conducted with newcomer community groups connected to a specific settlement service provider, two with community-based coalitions that focus in different ways on civic engagement and one with newcomer English students.

Using popular education techniques we went through two group exercises: the Axis-ing Ideas/Mapping model and IAPI chart (Identifying and Addressing Pressing Issues). In the first exercise, facilitators drew two axes, one for political nature, stretching from political to apolitical, and one for level of engagement, stretching from active engagement to passive engagement. Each participant got 2 or 3 pieces of paper, each with an activity written on it. Participants had to place their pieces of paper on the axes as they saw fit.

Once all the pieces had been placed the facilitator gave each participant another piece of paper with “Voting in Elections” written on it, which they also placed on the axes. Finally, the facilitator debriefed the placements in order to tease out collective ideas of civic and political engagement, paying special attention to the location of the “Voting in Elections” stickers. In the IAPI chart exercise, participants were given a cue-card to answer two questions: 1) What is one issue/concern that you face on a daily basis in Canada as an immigrant, worker, parent, community member, Latino/a, 2) Have you engaged in a political action to address this issue? Yes/No? If yes, what did you do? If not, why not? . Once participants had completed the above cue-card, the facilitator invited them to report back to the larger group about the factors that they consider encourage and discourage political action of the Latin American community. After each focus group a report was written documenting the discussion and highlighting the outcomes according to the goals of each activity.

- **In depth-interviews**

With the goal of deeply exploring some participants’ points of view, feelings and perspectives, we conducted 11 interviews, 6 with well-known and politically experienced Latin American community members and 5 with Spanish-speaking workers who provide settlement or community services to Latin American newcomers. The interviews were designed with a semi-structured format ensuring that important questions would not be forgotten. Although we had some pre-planned questions to be asked during the interview, we also allowed questions to flow naturally, based on the information provided by the respondents as they were highly knowledgeable about or involved in our research topic. For this reason, the flow of the conversation dictated the questions asked and those omitted, as well as their order. During the interviews, we not only took written notes on respondents’ answers but also audio-recorded them.

- **Surveys**

Participants’ demographic backgrounds, as well as qualitative information about their experience of settlement and civic and political engagement were documented in a self-administered survey distributed by the facilitators at the beginning of each focus group, in each in-depth interview and to a random group of clients of the Mennonite New life Centre. Specifically we collected 75 surveys. A small number of individuals chose not to share information with us. The survey included questions related to participants’ immigration status, years in Canada, career trajectory, annual income, self-assessment of English language ability, pressing issues of the Latin American community, level of involvement in civic and political activities since their arrival to Canada, understanding of formal/informal political engagement, barriers to participation, and the upcoming municipal elections.

SUMMARY OF PARTICIPANT PROFILES

- **Age :** The median age of participants was approximately 45 years
- **Gender:** 76% of participants were female (57 out of 75)
- **Country of origin:** participants represented 15 different countries of origin in Latin America
- **Years in Canada:** 65% of participants had been in Canada for less than 6 years
- **Immigration process:** over half of the participants (52%) had temporary or precarious immigration status when they arrived to Canada. Today 92% of them are Citizens or Permanent Residents.
- **Education:** Participants received education in over 20 different disciplines, and 72% of respondents attended university (51 out of 71)
- **English Level:** 55% respondents self-assessed their language proficiency as high or medium high (41 out of 74)
- **Employment:** 48% of participants were unemployed or were ESL students (36 out of 75)
- **Income:** 53% of respondents lived below the poverty line (33 out of 62)

Pressing Issues

Income/employment was identified as the top (66%) issue of priority by participants, followed by education (54%) and health (49%).

Issue	%	Details
• Income/Employment	66%	Living wages, job security, under-employment and social assistance.
• Education	54%	Recognition of international credentials and accessing quality education for their children.
• Health	49%	Quality and affordability issues like medication, vision and dental; the availability of services in their own language, especially in mental health.
• Childcare • International Affairs and Environmental Issues	TIE 39%	Childcare concerns include quality and affordability issues. International affairs concerns include extraction of natural resources, free trade agreements, humanitarian and development aid relating to the country of origin.
• Housing	38%	Affordability and safety.

Activities considered to be civic and political engagement (CPE) and to what extent

Voting in elections (82%) and volunteering for a not for profit (NFP) (75%) were most likely to be considered civic and political engagement activities, while practicing vegetarianism (14%) was least likely to be so considered.

Most likely to be considered CPE	%	Less likely to be considered CPE	%
• Voting in elections	82%	• Practising vegetarianism or veganism	14%
• Volunteering for a NFP or community centre	75%	• Going to a Latin dance event	23%
• Starting a community group	71%	• Joining an arts group • Donating to an election campaign	TIE 39%
• Avoiding waste and recycling	68%	• Going to a religious service • Joining a workplace strike	TIE 39%
• Being part of an international solidarity group	64%	• Joining a well-being group	34%

Participation in Formal Political Channels (FPC)

Perception of Experience:

The most common reported perception of experience with formal political channels was “pleasant but did not meet my expectations.” Qualitative assessments ranged from positive to critical.

Quantitative Data		Qualitative Data
• Pleasant but did not meet my expectations	45%	In general 3 trends emerged: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants felt that formal political participation at the local level is relatively the most accessible to achieve change. • Some participants reported feeling politicians were receptive. • Others reported feeling discriminated against by politicians and formal political spaces and like they were not being taken seriously.
• Very good. Surpassed my expectations	30%	
• Unpleasant but I would participate again	20%	
• Very unpleasant and I would not participate again	5%	

Rate of Participation:

About 75% of participants had never voted at any level of elections in Canada. Nonetheless, voting, “sometimes” and “often” was reported as the most common form of engagement with formal political channels, especially at municipal and provincial (27% for both) levels.

Quantitative Data						Qualitative Data
Participated “OF-TEN”	%	Participated “NEVER”	%	Participated SOMETIMES	%	
• Voted in Municipal Elections	21%	• Donated to an election campaign	87%	• Read MP/MPP Newsletter	24%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local school boards and city services were identified as the most likely sites for civic engagement by participants. Engagement with the federal government was limited to individual immigration issues, including citizenship application processing, deportation appeals etc.
• Voted in Provincial Elections	21%	• Made a deputation	86%	• Written a letter to politician	19%	
• Voted in Federal Elections	19%	• Registered with a political party	86%	• Attended all-candidates meeting	12%	
• Took part in a consultation hosted by a government body (E.g. Police, TCHC, TDSB/TCDSB etc.)	18%	• Volunteered for an election campaign	81%	• Attended city council meeting	11%	

Participation in Informal Political Channels (IPC)

Perception of Experience:

A large majority of participants (71%) rated their experiences with Informal political channels as “very good. surpassed my expectations.” Qualitative data indicate that participants’ experiences are diverse in this regard and many do hold critical views of the informal spaces in which they have taken part.

Quantitative Data		Qualitative Data
• Very good. Surpassed my expectations	71%	<p>In general the following trends emerged:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experience is influenced by country of immigration, time in Canada, reasons for immigration, class, and race. Latin American community is diverse, not all members need or welcome the same informal political spaces. Immigration can isolate people; informal political participation can bring people together. Some participants have negative perceptions of some of the most active informal political organizations. Critiques include: resistant to change, hierarchical, undemocratic, male-dominated, unresponsive to community needs.
• Pleasant but did not meet my expectations	37%	
• Unpleasant but I would participate again	6%	
• Very unpleasant and I would not participate again	0%	

Rate of Participation:

Overall, the rate of reported participation in Informal political channels, through activities being engaged in “Sometimes” or “Often”, was higher than in formal political channels. The two activities most commonly participated in were Community groups (47%) and Demonstrations/rallies/protests (31%).

Quantitative Data					
Participated “OFTEN”	%	Participated “NEVER”	%	Participated “SOMETIMES”	%
• Community groups	18%	• Consumers’ groups	89%	• Artistic and Cultural groups	32%
• Religious groups	16%	• Tenants groups	88%	• Community groups	29%
• NGOs	14%	• Unions/taking part in a strike/work action	85%	• Religious groups	24%
• International solidarity group	12%	• Gender organizations • Student movements	TIE 81%	• Parents groups	22%

Participation in Formal Political Channels (FPC) Vs Informal Political Channels (IPC)

FPC	IPC
47% of respondents said they NEVER participated in any FPC activity	16% of respondents said they have NEVER participated in any IPC activity
Of the IPC activities most commonly engaged in (top 5) by respondents who had NEVER participated in FPC are: Religious groups, Community groups, Parents groups, Arts and cultural groups, International solidarity organizations	
32% of respondents said that they have NEVER participated in any FPC but have participated in some IPC activity	
9% of respondents said that they have NEVER participated in any FPC or IPC activity	
1% of respondents said that they have participated in FPC but NEVER in IPC activities	

October 2014 Municipal Elections

In general, participants expressed a desire to vote and felt prevented from doing so because of lack of voting rights.

Voting Plans	%
• Will vote	19%
• Do not want to vote	7%

Would vote if...	%
• I had voting rights/was a Canadian Citizen	48%
• Candidates met my expectations (approached Latin American community, were sympathetic to the immigrant experience etc.)	10%
• I had time/information/English language	9%

Civic Engagement Programs

Overall, participants saw value in civic engagement programs and asked for more accessibility of such programs.

Quantitative Data				Qualitative Data
Participation	%	Experience of Participation	%	
• Yes	28%	• It gave me a thorough understanding of government structures in Canada and increased my political participation	65%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants wanted a chance to develop in-depth knowledge. • Participants want politicians to approach the community to promote civic engagement. • “Building Blocks” series by MNLC T perceived as a positive model.
• No	73%	• It gave me a good understanding on government structures in Canada but I still do not feel confident about political participation	20%	
		• It did not give me a good understanding of government structures in Canada and it did not affect my political participation	5%	
		• It increased my confusion about the government structures of Canada and decreased my political participation	0%	

Did not participate because...	%	Would participate if...	%
• Lack of English language skills; program in English	45%	• Tokens provided	42%
• Lack of knowledge that such programs exist	23%	• Refreshments provided	39%
• No interest in participating	19%	• Childcare provided	37%
• Lack of time	13%		

Trans-national narratives of political participation

The notions of CPE emerging from this study offer some insights into the dynamic processes of the consolidation of trans-national narratives of political participation. The experience of migration, especially from a developing world context to a developed country, has significant impacts on the form and substance of the political engagement of migrants. What it means to be political and apolitical is neither static nor uncontested but is an indication of the socio-economic and historical context in which it emerges.

The participants in this study, most of who migrated to Canada less than six years ago, have not only inhabited diverse geographical spaces but also a variety of economic, cultural, and political spaces. Each individual story of immigration is unique, and should not be analyzed as homogeneous. The experiences of Latin Americans in Toronto are diverse with rich intersectionalities. Their ideas of CPE, which seem to blend both Canadian and Latin American discourses, suggest a simultaneous process of uneven internalization occurring in the country of immigration along with uneven retention from the country of emigration.

This dialectic can be appreciated through a look at what activities participants considered to be “Civic and Political Engagement.” Activities like “volunteering” and “avoiding waste and recycling” were among the most commonly-identified as examples of CPE, and so were “starting a community group” and engaging in “solidarity” work. While the former two are values promoted in Canada, they do not feature prominently in many parts of Latin America. In contrast, the latter two represent more popular forms of political engagement in Latin America but not to the same extent in Canada. In fact, a Colombian participant expressed her surprise at these findings. “Volunteering and recycling do not have the same kind of place in the Latin American discourse of political engagement as they do here. That is definitely not to say that caring about the environment and about the community are alien values but the methods of practising these are very different,” she said.

In contrast, “starting a community group” and engaging in “solidarity” work – the latter response was especially common among respondents identifying as refugees, exiles and political migrants - are much more likely to be the methods used to address various issues including environmental and community concerns in the Latin American context. In Canada, however, participants expressed that these activities seem to not be as common. This particular group of Latin Americans in Canada, therefore, tends to adopt values from both contexts simultaneously.

Attitudes towards the Formal Political Channels

This study suggests that attitudes in the Latin American community in Toronto towards FPC are relatively diverse. The spectrum ranges from rigid scepticism to cautious optimism. Many participants expressed a complete lack of desire to engage with FPC. Much of this sentiment was related to the belief that formal political channels in the Canadian context are unlikely to be useful in promoting desirable social change. This assessment may be the results of a lack of knowledge and awareness in some participants or a heightened critical lens in others about decision-making processes.

On the other hand, almost half (48%) of the participants insisted that they would participate in the upcoming municipal elections if they had the right to vote.

The presence of such attitudes suggests that scepticism about the outcomes of engagement can be present alongside the desire to nonetheless have the ability to engage. Access to the formal political channels, especially voting, may thus be construed as a necessary but insufficient factor of engagement.

A distinction must be drawn here between the form and substance of formal political engagement. The forms or channels of Formal Political Engagement (FPE), i.e. voting in elections, making deputations, taking to politicians, are usually the subject of access questions. The substance of FPE, in contrast, is what is being sought by the engagement, i.e. social and economic change of various kinds, and usually is not considered as an access matter. In the case of the participants of this study, they want access to this form of formal political engagement; however, as Permanent Residents they are not eligible to vote in elections.

Understandings of Civic and Political Engagement

Informed engagement in political channels requires some assessment of the anticipated outcome, or the substance of such engagement. The demographics of the participants and the issues that they identified correlate to their criteria for civic and political engagement. By these criteria, the forms of CPE should help people that have common interests to come together, raise awareness of the causes of social issues and address concerns collectively. The aim or substance of CPE, according to this group, should be to promote the realization of an equitable society where social and economic human rights are universal. Such an understanding of CPE tends to favour informal political channels over the formal ones and seems to diverge from the City of Toronto's outline for CPE, which is much more procedural. As a result, formal political channels, are inaccessible to the Latin American community in Toronto because of the lack of voting rights for permanent residents, and other known barriers to access such as language, technical information and discrimination, among others. However, there may be a much more profound disconnection between the very ideas or substance of what it means to be civic and politically active in this city.

Feedback on Civic Education Programs

Civic education programs, which are meant to help community members navigate FPC, are usually not available in Spanish and frequently neglect to make analytical connections between the socio-economic realities of participants and the political structures responsible for them. Of the 73% of respondents who had not participated in such programs, forty-five percent said it was because they were only offered in English, indicating that there is a greater need for Spanish-language programming in this area.

Pressing issues and political engagement

There is a noticeable discrepancy between the issues participants identified to be important to them and those issues they were involved in addressing through civic and political engagement. While income and employment was by far the top issue of concern according to the survey results, it was the second issue, of education, which generated the most political engagement. The PAR results suggest that a relative lack of CPE around income and employment issues is because many employment and/or income experiences in the community are not in the public sector, not unionized, perhaps “under the table”, or dependent on social assistance, which contributes to atomization, stigmatization, and alienation, preventing critical awareness, and collective action around these issues. The other concern which tends to be the focus of CPE, immigration, did not make the list of top 5 issues. As analyzed below, CPE around these two issues, education and immigration, is determined by complex intersections of the objective and subjective landscapes that communities find themselves in.

School Board

Latin Americans face some unique challenges in the public education system in Toronto. Although many of these are shared with other racialized, low-income communities, participants in this study referenced some particular challenges they hope to address through their political engagement. These include the high drop-out rate of Latin American high-school students, low educational performance, streaming of students into non-academic courses, and the exclusion of non-status students from accessing their right to education.

The school boards in particular are considered to be the most accessible of the formal political channels. This assessment must be scrutinized both from the structure and the agency lens. From the structural perspective public education is unique in the Canadian context, in that it is perhaps the only public service which forces interaction upon a large segment of the population, i.e. children under 18 and their parents or guardians. Due to this mandatory and group-based nature, its collective impact is perhaps more easily felt than that of other public services. From the subjective perspective, children's education enjoys a popular acceptance unlike anything else, especially in the context of a recent immigrant community. For new immigrants, who might find individual interactions with formal political spaces to be intimidating, children's education-related issues also provide opportunities for collective responses, which can feel more empowering.

Education is also considered to be a righteous fight that cuts across various otherwise conflicting identities. In fact, for many participants, their children's education and their engagement with the structures related to it were not "political" at all. As a result of its nature, the depoliticizing and therefore widely acceptable discourses surrounding it, the public school boards were the most accessed and considered to be the most accessible by these members of the Latin American community in Toronto.

Immigration System

In contrast, the interactions participants had with the immigration system were perceived to be disempowering and discouraging. Structurally, the immigration system atomizes communities on a case-by-case basis, making it difficult to formulate a collective response to issues. It also seems to function much more opaquely, requiring navigation through endless technicalities, leaving individuals who are beholden to it feeling powerless. At the same time, the stakes involved in interacting with the immigration system are usually very high, with consequences as dire as deportations, and life or death. At the subjective level, immigration is a sensitive and controversial topic within the Latin American community around which it is difficult to achieve consensus. For these reasons, while many participants felt it necessary to interact with the formal immigration system, this was done at an individual rather than a collective level. From both the structural and the subjective lenses, immigration-related interactions with the FPC were usually viewed negatively.

KEY CHALLENGES TO BE ADDRESSED & RECOMMENDATIONS

- **LACK OF SUBSTANTIAL DEFINITION OF CIVIC AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT**

The City of Toronto's existing definition of Civic and Political Engagement is primarily procedural. It is silent on what the purpose, or substance of this engagement should be, thereby failing to put forward a socially-conscious vision. It also does not include key elements of informed collective engagement which would help people who have common interests to come together, to raise awareness of the causes of social issues and to address concerns collectively.

The City of Toronto's definition of CE should be broadened to explicitly include a commitment to anti-oppression or social justice principles, and the full realization of universal social and economic human rights.

- **LACK OF RECOGNITION AND FACILITATION OF NEWCOMER ENGAGEMENT IN SCHOOL BOARD**

The school board is not currently given the kind of recognition it merits as a site of formal political engagement. The results of this research found that the school board is considered to be the most accessible of the formal channels. The City, therefore, is missing important opportunities to engage immigrant communities, who are otherwise hesitant to get involved in municipal civic spaces, in public education decisions.

The City should recognize that newcomer families are positively inclined towards the public school system, and should prioritize this space to promote meaningful newcomer CE.

- **LACK OF VOTING RIGHTS FOR PERMANENT RESIDENTS AT MUNICIPAL LEVEL**

Permanent Residents are not legally entitled to vote in municipal elections, which effectively shuts out approximately 360,000 residents of the city from being represented at City Hall. This is despite the fact that these non-Citizens contribute to Toronto as property taxpayers, city programs consumers, and full participants of the life of Toronto. This sends a contradictory message to newcomers about the commitment of the City to the engagement of its newest members.

The City of Toronto should lobby the provincial government to make the necessary legislative amendments to grant municipal voting rights to Permanent Residents.

- **LACK OF MULTILINGUAL AND SUBSTANTIAL CIVIC EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

The majority of existing civic engagement programs for immigrant communities are inaccessible because of language and do not spend adequate time on analysis of community issues. Thus, the very programs which are meant to increase civic engagement of newcomers can often do the opposite if the delivery is done in a generic and superficial level.

The City should support the development and implementation of a community issues-based Civic Education curriculum in the first language of immigrant communities.

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