



DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT

Democratic Engagement means being involved in advancing democracy through political institutions, organizations, and activities.

A society that enjoys a high degree of democratic engagement is one where citizens participate in political activities, express political views, and foster political knowledge; where governments build relationships, trust, shared responsibility, and participation opportunities with citizens; and where citizens, governments, and civil society uphold democratic values at local, provincial, and national levels. A healthy democracy needs citizens who feel their votes count, are informed, participate, debate, and advocate. It needs governments at all levels to be transparent, inclusive, consultative, and trustworthy. In essence, political leadership, citizen participation, and communication demonstrate the level of democratic engagement.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

The most recent *federal* election in October 2015 saw over two-thirds of eligible voters in Oxford County (67.9%) come out to vote, which is a similar turnout to other areas across the country (68.3%). Like other regions, voter turnout for the federal election was up significantly from previous elections.

Voter turnout in Oxford County in the last *provincial* election was much lower with slightly over half of residents (51.9%) voting for their MPPs. Although, the voter turnout in Oxford County is slightly higher than the turnout across Ontario as a whole (51.3%), it represents a lower level than in West Region (53.4%). More troubling, voter turnout in Oxford County for the last election of regional council was only about one-third of eligible voters (37.6%). Oxford residents turned out less for their municipal elections than the average rate in Ontario overall (43.1%). These lower levels of engagement in regional and provincial elections are unfortunate because voting represents the most tangible means by which citizens can engage in the democratic process and shape the society they desire.

About 1 in 10 residents of Oxford County belong to a political organization, law or advocacy group (9.7%), which is notably higher than the percentages for West Region (4.2%), Ontario (3.8%) and Canada (3.7%). This higher rate of involvement by Oxford residents might be attributable in part to slight differences in the wording of the question on the Community Wellbeing Survey to that used in the national survey. Nevertheless, Oxford residents appear to be more actively engaged in the democratic life of their communities.

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Four of the ten members of Oxford municipal Council are women (40.0%). This level of representation is higher than the average percentage of women sitting as councillors in other municipalities across Ontario (21.6%), which is down from the one-quarter representation provincially following the 2010 elections (26.0%). It should be noted, however, that the ratio of females-to-males on Oxford County Council is based on a total of ten councillors, so a change in the sex of one person would result in a 10 per cent shift in the overall percentage of women. Nevertheless, with over 50% of Ontario's population comprised of women, our democratic and decision-making institutions should fairly reflect their values and opinions, so more work is needed to encourage women to become involved in our governments and to remove barriers to their involvement.



voter turnout to most recent elections by Oxford residents

REGIONAL	37.6%
PROVINCIAL	51.9%
FEDERAL	67.9%

COMMUNICATION

Members of Parliament (MPs) for Oxford County dedicate a greater percentage of their total expenses to communications (8.5%) than in other areas. Such communications typically take the form of newsletters or pamphlets mailed directly to householders in their ridings. This percentage is more than 3% higher than in West Region (5.4%) and more than 2% higher than the provincial and national averages (6.9% and 5.9% respectively). Politicians' investments in communications is a reflection of the strength of the connection between citizens and their local representative in Parliament, and a means of sharing activities and progress towards goals. As politicians increasingly turn to social media to communicate with their constituents, print materials are relied upon less, so the recent decline in budgets dedicated to this form of communication is not unexpected.