

Winds of change only occur when votes are cast

Written By RACHEL MORGAN

Canadians have a civic duty. The responsibility of electing the person in charge of our federal, provincial, and municipal offices is in our hands.

Yet so many Canadians do not vote.

Political apathy is defended with a diversity of reasons. Some people feel they are too busy to visit the polls while others are just not interested in politics. But the reason heard often, especially among young people, is "my vote does not count".

It is easy to see why many Canadians feel this way. Particularly if the voter is choosing an unlikely candidate, would their ballot really make a difference?

Yes. That is the short answer. The long answer is that a vote represents the voice of the individual. The vote states how that person feels about their municipality, province, or nation.

Eyal Winter, professor of economics at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem put it this way: "We use voting as a tool to transmit who we are." Regardless of the outcome of the election, a vote expresses what one wants and values.

If one vote still does not seem like a big deal ? especially in a country with a population of 37 million people ? try to look at it this way. What if 30 percent of the population felt their vote did not matter? How about 40 percent? That is a lot of potential votes not cast; a lot of voices not heard.

What if every person who did not vote would have voted for the same party? The entire outcome of the election could change. Now, this scenario may seem unreasonable but it makes a point. If only just over half of the population votes, the results do not appear to be very democratic or representative of the people.

As Canadians, we are lucky to live in such a free country. Many people living in other nations would literally kill and die for the political freedom that we take for granted.

It was not too long ago we were fighting for these rights ourselves. It took from 1916 to 1940 for every Canadian province to grant women the right to vote. We endured 24 years of suffrage for a vote many women do not put to use.

Voter turnout in Canada has been steadily declining since the second half of the 20th century. In the early 1960s, voter turnout peaked at just under 80 percent of eligible voters casting a ballot. In the 21st century, this number has dropped to around 60 percent. The last time votes were near this level was in 1871.

But that is not all. The 2008 election experienced the all-time lowest Canadian voter turnout at just 58.8 percent.

Dufferin-Caledon, we are just as shameful as the rest of the country. The June 2018 provincial election saw only 58.55 percent of eligible voters in the Dufferin-Caledon riding at the polls.

And these numbers will only continue to drop. If parents do not vote, they will raise children who do not understand the importance of voting. Sooner or later we will be living in a town of politically apathetic citizens who are not represented by the government. Soon enough Canadian democracy will not be representative of the people as a whole, but of the small percentage who bothered to show up at the polls.

The simple act of casting a ballot makes someone a part of Canada. Voting lets everyone know that you will not stand to be silenced.

We cannot let power intimidate us from putting our voices out there. Canada cannot thrive without the voice of each of its citizens. We have earned the right to vote. Now it is our responsibility to cast the ballot to keep our true North strong and free.

Rachel Morgan is a journalism student at Carleton University. She is originally from Caledon Village.