



Healthier Democracies in Rural Ontario

Democracy today

WINDSOR STAR

News / Local News

Essex County meeting ca after unruly protest

Brian MacLeod
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43 Comments



One MP said t

Montreal

Quebec launches helpline for politicians following wave of resignations at municipal level

Hundreds have left public life since 2021

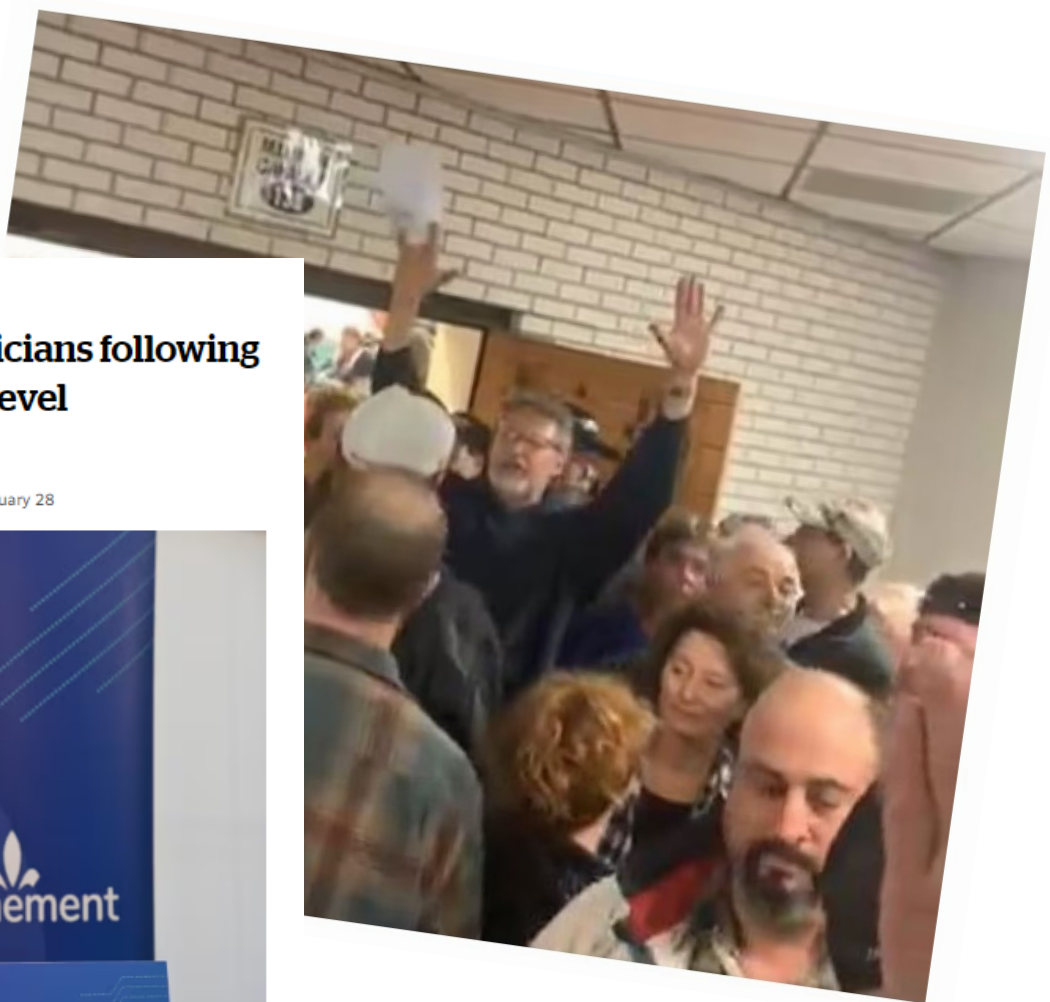
The Canadian Press - Posted: Feb 28, 2024 1:26 PM EST | Last Updated: February 28



Quebec Municipal Affairs Minister Andrée Laforest says a growing number of elected officials are quitting because of intimidation and harassment. (Jacques Boissinot/The Canadian Press)

f X e t in

Quebec is committing \$2 million to connect politicians and their families with psychological aid after a wave of resignations and leaves of absence among elected municipal officials.



al's office closes social media
a wave of hateful remarks

s have been 'abusive, misogynistic and racist' in nature

Election trends

The good. More women running—more women elected.

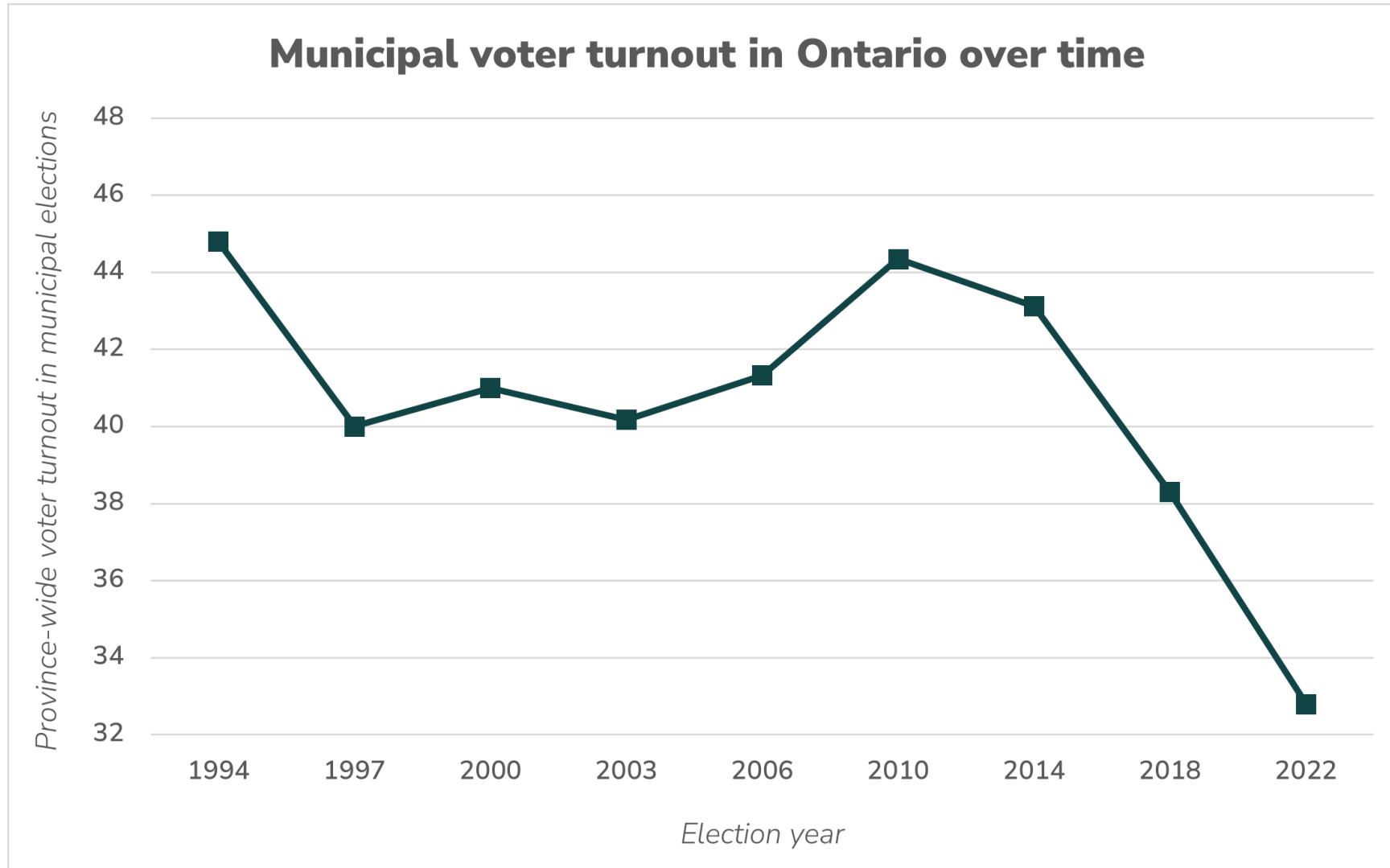
	2010	2014	2018	2022
Women running	1,495	1,647	1,808	1,939
Women elected	26%	21.6%	698	750
Women heads of council	100	78	92	110

The not good. Voter turnout decline and acclamations rise

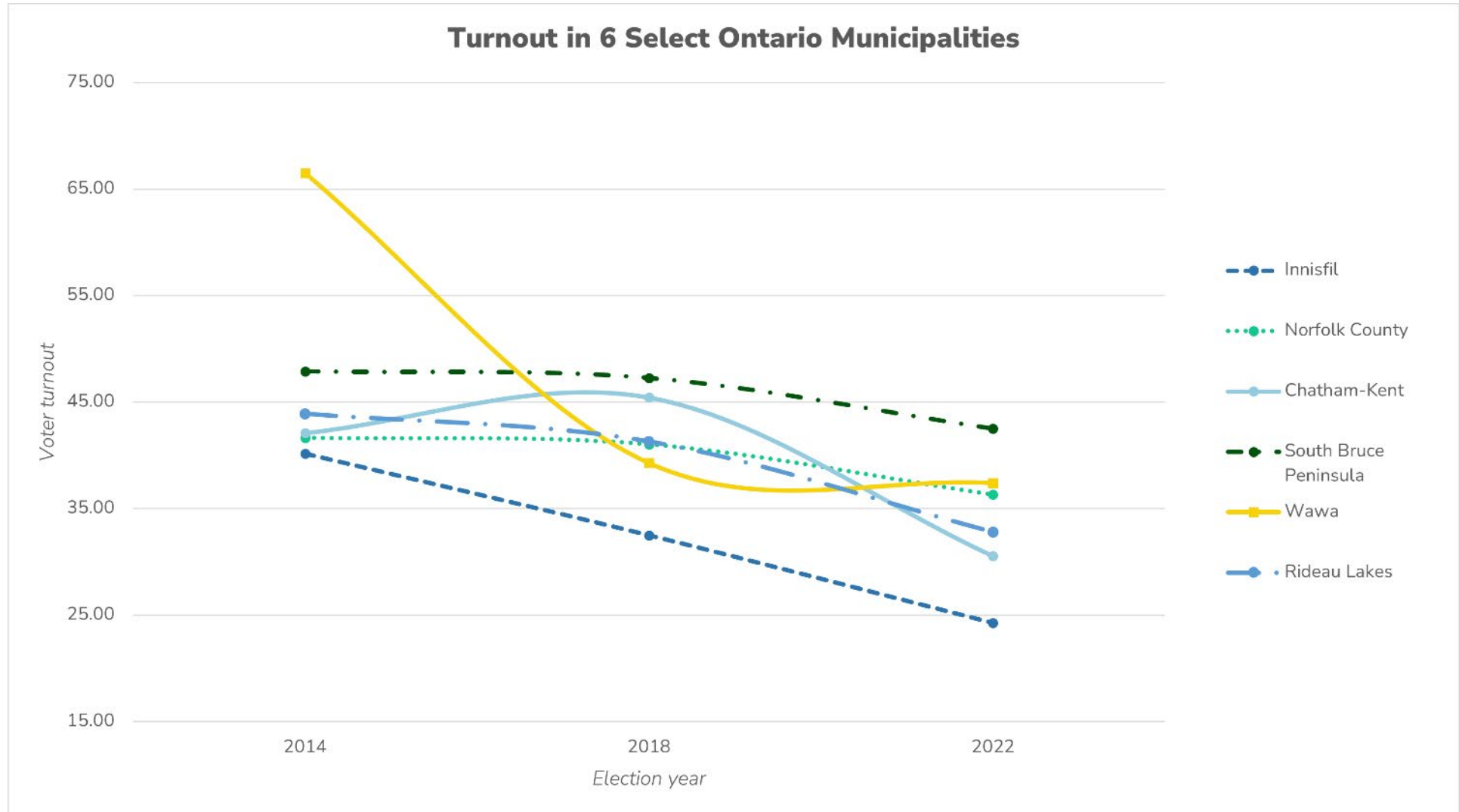
	2010	2014	2018	2022
Position acclamations		390	477	553
Full council acclamations	30	18	26	32
Voter turnout	44.35%	43.12%	38.30%	36.30%
Candidates	8,039	7,290	6,658	6,325

■ Source: AMO election data

Voter turnout



Voter turnout



AMO's Response: Healthy Democracy Project

A project built on collaboration and optimism

- AMO's Healthy Democracy Project promotes the value and importance of municipal governments in Ontario's political system, including the importance of diversity of leadership and perspectives.
- The Healthy Democracy Project builds on AMO's 2021—2022 **We All Win** campaign and works to:
 - Attract more diverse candidates to municipal office.
 - Support elected officials to be equity-informed leaders.
 - Promote more respect for the people engaged in democratic processes.
 - Encourage greater participation in local democracy and an increase in voter turnout.
 - Promote greater civic engagement and greater awareness of the role of municipal government.

Healthy Democracy Project

Foundations, Engagement & Partnerships

- Advisory Group provides strategic advice on Healthy Democracy Project direction, research, and initiatives. The Group includes previous and current elected officials, AMCTO, OPSBA, candidate support organizations, national equity-focused organizations
- Through the HDP, AMO engages with a growing variety of aligned partners:
 - Toronto Metropolitan University's Democratic Engagement Exchange, Apathy is Boring, Monumental Projects, CIVIX, Canadian Municipal Barometer, electHER Now, Politics NOW, Proud Politics, Equal Voice, Nominee, The Jean Collective, Ontario Library Association, Ontario Public School Board Association, Young Politicians of Canada, Rideau Hall Foundation, Future Majority, Tamarack

AMO **Healthy Democracy Project**

We All Win

- Representative councils
- Resources, tools, and training
- Equity-informed leadership
- People running for office don't feel alone and have recourse

Respect for Democracy

- Increase trust in local government
- Improving the tone of discourse
- AMO as a thought leader on participatory democracy

Engagement & Education

- Civic education and youth engagement
- Civic engagement support for AMO members
- AMO member engagement in Healthy Democracy work

From research to action

How municipalities can respond—building momentum



Reducing the barriers to
running for office



Improving the quality of
municipal civic education



Accelerating democratic
and political engagement

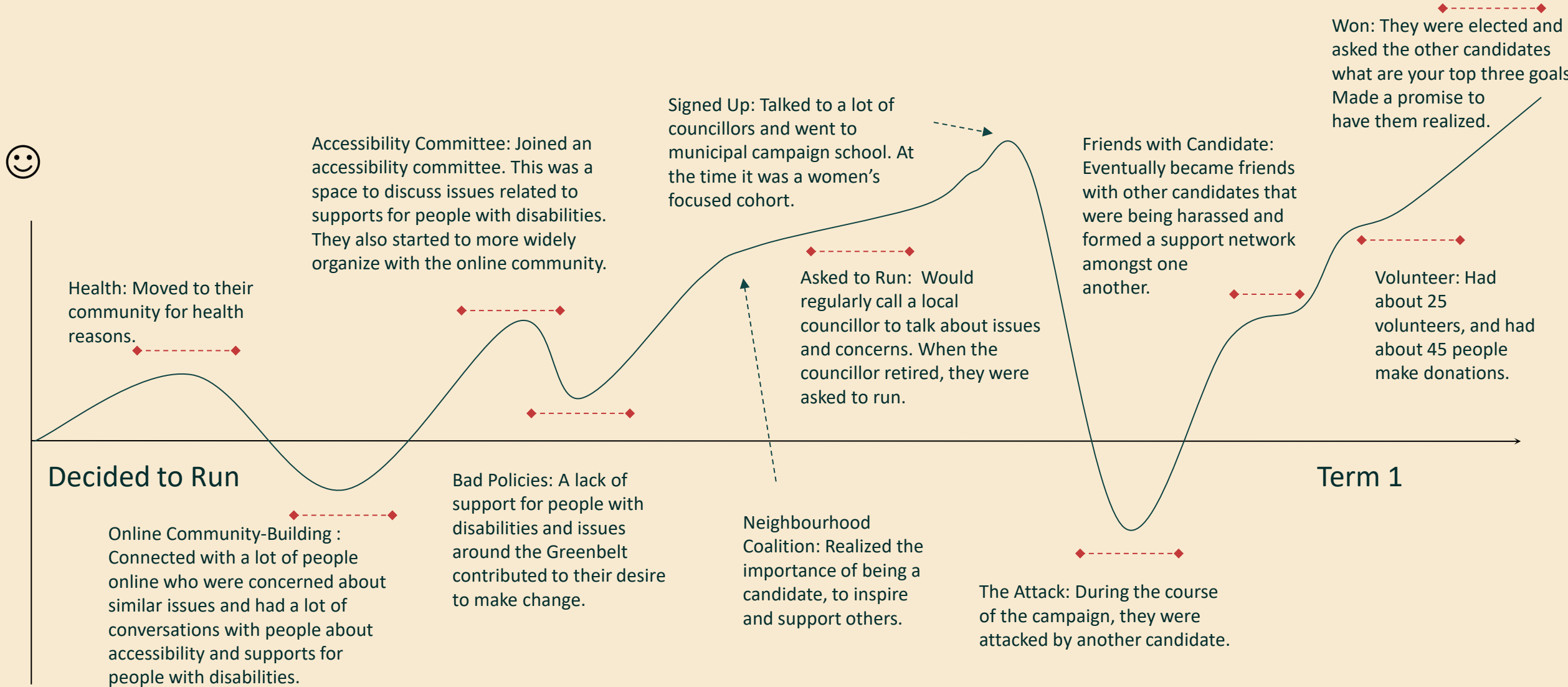
Mapping the Experiences of Diverse Candidates

The Risk-Reward Paradox

- For many **the risks (negative realities) of running outweigh the potential benefits**
- **It's not certain that over time it will be easier for diverse candidates.**
While socially, Canada is getting more open in people's views generally (e.g., polling data), at the same time politics is getting more toxic
- The **job itself takes a major toll on families, mental health, your career,** and it is financially precarious
- Our focus group with potential possible candidates made it clear that **many people see change as easier to make, with less personal cost, outside of government**



This research participant was the first non-binary councillor to be elected in their ward, motivated to resolve the lack of accessibility and supports available to people living with disabilities in their community.



Common enablers, assets, and motivators

Personal skills and capabilities

Advocates, mentors, and cheerleaders within the system

Rooted in community, identity, and/or professional groups

Identity-based motivations

- i.e., wanting to increase representation

Policy-based motivations

- i.e., wanting to move forward specific policy wins

Place-based motivations

- i.e., commitment to their local community

Common barriers to running

Mental health toll: bullying, harassment, discrimination

Timing: family and career conflicts, incumbents

Financial barriers

Access to social capital: mentors and volunteers

Accessibility challenges

Examples of potential solutions to explore

Support campaign schools for potential candidates

Mentorships from elected officials from diverse backgrounds

Hotline for reporting harassment of abuse during campaigns

Facilitation through the campaign process, focus on the registration paperwork and process

Access the full [research results and executive summary here](#) or scan this QR code:



Civic Education partnership with CIVIX



Communicating the Value of Municipal Government

GUIDE FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS

CIVIX **REP DAY** **AMO** Association of Municipalities of Ontario

HANDOUT 3.2: Government Responsibilities

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITIES	PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITIES	MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITIES
Citizenship and passports	Colleges and universities	Animal control
Criminal law	Drivers' licensing and highways	Fire protection
Currency	Education	Land use planning (zoning)
Federal taxes	Hospitals and healthcare delivery	Local parks
Fisheries and oceans	Municipalities	Local police
Foreign affairs and international trade	Natural resources	Road maintenance
Indigenous lands and rights	Property and civil rights	Recreation and community facilities
National defence	Provincial law and courts	Public transportation
Official languages	Provincial taxes	Waste management
Postal service	Social services	Water supply and treatment
Veterans affairs		

ACTIVITY 1.1: LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

CIVIX REP DAY

What do you know already? Work with a partner to fill in what you already know first. Afterwards, complete the rest using online resources.

QUESTION	FEDERAL	PROVINCIAL/TERRITORIAL	MUNICIPAL
What is the official title of the leader at this level of government?			
Who currently holds this position and, if applicable, which political party do they represent?			
What is the official name of the elected members at this level of government? How many members are there?			
Who currently holds this position for your geographic area? If applicable, which party do they represent?			
Where does this level of government meet (name of the building and city)?			
What are three or more responsibilities at this level of government?			
When is the next election?			

Accelerating democratic and political engagement

AMO's Democratic Engagement Solutions Bank

A catalog of existing Canadian and international solutions

Seven ways we can improve local democracy

- Supporting candidates and newly elected officials
- Improving electoral participation
- Encouraging Democratic Participation
- Countering misinformation and supporting local media
- Engaging Diverse Communities
- Improving Civic Education
- Fostering civility and respect

Have a peek at the Democratic Engagement Solutions Bank [early test prototype!](#)





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Municipality Type

Municipality Tier

Clear all

Done

SUPPORTING CANDIDATES,
IMPROVING CIVIC EDUCATION,
CIVILITY AND RESPECT

**A.I.S. Central Unit -
Proposed British agency to
address abuse, intimidation
and safety of locally elected
politicians and candidates**

Creating a dedicated
resource to educate and
support

IMPROVING CIVIC EDUCATION,
CIVILITY AND RESPECT

**Apathy is Boring's Table
Topics**

Starting meaningful
conversation circles

DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT
MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS
CIVILITY AND RESPECT

Canada
Democracy
report -
Six-Step
Democracy
Online

Monitori
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online h

Sign In



Solutions > Marathon's "Student Councillor" program



Marathon's "Student Councillor" program

Providing youth a seat at the council table

Marathon's unique student councillor program sees local youth who are active in their high school student council also serve on town council, providing a youth perspective relating to the issues the town faces. Student councillors are given time to report to council, participate in discussions around the council table, and learn from elected officials. While student councillors do not have voting privileges, they learn valuable skills about municipal governance from people actively working in the field.

- Student councillors are allowed to participate in discussions and present their own specific reports on youth issues, but do not vote on council matters

<https://www.marathon.ca/en/news/2023-student-councillor-s.aspx>

Category	Jurisdiction	Type of solution	Duration of solution
Engaging Diverse Communities	Local/Municipal	Organizations, committees, and positions	One school year (Oct to June), positions rotate over term of council
Solution in use	Types of partners		
2010 - Present	Government; Academic institutions		
Partners Involved			
• Town of Marathon			
Source of funding			
• Town of Marathon			
Country	Province or State		
Canada	Ontario		
Municipality	Municipality Pop (2021)	Municipality Type	Municipality Size
Marathon	3,138	Northern	Small
Municipality Tier			
Single			

Additional References

- <https://www.marathon.ca/en/news/2023-student-councillor-s.aspx>
- <https://www.snewsatch.com/inspire/inspire-student-councillors-connect-municipality-with-youth-voice-6980348>

What's coming next?

- **Voter Turnout Model:** design of a high-level logic model and stakeholder map that details the various barriers/approaches required to have a sustainable positive impact on voter turnout in local elections.
- **Youth Engagement Better Practices:** developing a guide and webinar based on feedback from youth and youth-serving organizations to support improved youth involvement in local democracy, politics, decision making.
- **Rural Healthy Democracy Forum:**
an AMO event in partnership with ROMA—a series of presentations, panels and hands-on workshops targeted at improving the health of Ontario's rural municipal democracies. Topics could include:
 - How to increase voter turnout
 - Improve youth engagement
 - Encourage more people to run for office
 - How to improve the tone of political discourse
 - New resources for civic education

Let's work together

- As rural leaders-how does the focus of our work and current initiatives align with what you experience locally?
- Do you have suggestions on interventions or actions that would help your communities?
- Would you attend a rural focused Healthy Democracy Forum? If so, what would you like to hear and have input on?

Contact the Healthy Democracy Team



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