

# **TOWN OF AJAX REPORT**



**REPORT TO:** General Government Committee

**SUBMITTED BY:** Martin de Rond, Director of Legislative & Information Services/Clerk

**PREPARED BY:** Nicole Wellsbury, Manager of Legislative Services/Deputy Clerk

**SUBJECT:** **2014 Municipal Election: Debrief & Assessment**

**WARD(S):** All

**DATE OF MEETING:** January 22, 2014

**REFERENCE:** GGC Report May 23, 2013 – Voting Methods for 2014 Election  
GGC Report Nov 21, 2014 – 2014 Election Update  
GGC Report March 20, 2014 – 2014 Election Update

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## **RECOMMENDATION:**

**That the Debrief & Assessment report on the 2014 Municipal election be received for information.**

## **BACKGROUND:**

In May of 2013, Ajax Council approved internet and telephone voting as the sole methods of voting for the 2014 Municipal Election, putting the Town on track to deliver the most progressive municipal election in Canada. The Town retained Intelivote Systems Inc. to provide internet and telephone voting services, which were offered for a continuous 8-day period from October 20 to October 27. In person polling opportunities were offered at 10 locations using laptops or “e-voting kiosks” rather than paper ballots.

Thorough post-election debrief sessions were conducted with the following groups:

- Core LIS Election Team
- Voting Place Managers
- Information Technology team
- Intelivote Systems Inc.

In addition, the following resources have assisted with the Town’s post-election assessment:

- Professionally conducted survey of voters, Centre for e-Democracy: Munk School of Global Affairs, University of Toronto (*19% Response Rate*)
- Election Workers Post-training/Pre-election survey (*54% Response Rate*)
- Feedback forms from Election Workers
- Various letters and emails from Ajax voters and candidates

The above resources have provided a clear picture of which aspects of the 2014 election worked well, and which need to be improved for the 2018 election.

**DISCUSSION:****Overall Election Assessment**

The 2014 Ajax Election was a considerable success and is now regarded as the most progressive election ever delivered by an Ontario municipality. The substantial contributions of the Information Technology team, the Communications team, and staff in many areas of the corporation enabled the Clerk's office to move to a more innovative election model that sought to improve the convenience and accessibility of voting for Ajax electors, and reduce election-related paper consumption.

The overall Voter Turnout increased from 25.4% in the 2010 election to 30.4% in the 2014 election. Significant and noteworthy increases occurred in north Ajax, where turnout has traditionally been much lower than in the older and more established south Ajax. For example, turnout in Ward 2 increased substantially from 20.65% in 2010 to 30.61% in 2014. Staff view this as a very positive indication that new Ajacians are becoming more interested and engaged in local democracy.

A professionally conducted post-election survey of Ajax voters indicated overwhelming support for the move to electronic voting, with a voter satisfaction rate of 97.8% (ATT-1, Q5).

Approximately 70% of voters cast a ballot independently/remotely without attending a polling station, whereas approximately 30% of voters visited an advance or election day poll. While the great majority of persons visiting a polling station were accepting of the electronic voting and left satisfied, most of the negative feedback received did come from voters who opted to vote from a polling station rather than remotely. The in-person voting experience is the area requiring the greatest amount of improvement for 2018. Based on constructive feedback from voters and election workers, the major problem areas included a lack of privacy (e.g. voting kiosks too close together, overly helpful election workers), slow network connections, hardware and software deficiencies, and logistical deficiencies (e.g. polling stations that were too small to handle evening volumes).

Voting session data (ATT-2) demonstrates that 55% of those who voted did so on October 27<sup>th</sup>, the final day of the 8-day voting period. An important focus in the 2018 election will be to persuade voters to vote early, and remotely, unless they truly require assistance, with an aim to alleviate pressures on the polls.

Voting electronically was a much quicker experience than traditional voting, for most. On average, it took voters 2 minutes 49 seconds to vote by internet, and 4 minutes 14 seconds to vote by telephone. Persons travelling outside of Ajax during the voting period were also able to vote easily and independently without the need for a proxy; votes for the Ajax election were cast from 16 different countries, 26 U.S. states, and 6 Canadian provinces (see ATT-2).

Data from the U of T survey indicates that Ajax voters are largely comfortable using the internet and computers, and found e-voting to be simple, easy, and convenient. The following survey figures support this conclusion:

- 90% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I feel I have a pretty good knowledge of computers and the internet." (ATT-1, Q16J)
- When asked how often they accessed the internet, 68% of respondents said "Several times per day", 25% said "Every Day", and 5% said "Several times a week". In total, this means that 98% of Ajax respondents access the internet with great regularity. (ATT-1, Q14)
- 97% of respondents said that they would recommend online voting to others (ATT 1 – Q7).

## **Voters List**

The poor quality of the Ajax Voters List was a primary cause of challenges during the Voting Period. There were an inordinate number of long-time residents and property owners missing from the list, as well as persons who had long moved away from Ajax but remained on the list. Incorrect information such as wrong dates of birth and addresses created further challenges. These issues are particularly problematic for municipalities using forms of unsupervised voting, such as internet voting or mail-in voting.

The Town received the Preliminary List of Electors (PLE) from the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) in August. Following its receipt, staff invested a great deal of time cleaning the data to remove duplicate entries, remove persons who were deceased as per our death registry information, and correct invalid mailing addresses. However, without conducting our own enumeration activities, it is not possible to verify who is missing from the list or who ought to be removed. Staff have submitted a letter of complaint to MPAC, alongside other Durham municipalities, regarding the poor quality of the PLE and are awaiting a response.

### **Potential Improvements for 2018:**

- It is evident that the Town can no longer rely on MPAC for an accurate Voters List, and may have to dedicate resources to undertake its own enumeration and list-scrubbing activities in the future in order to ensure a higher quality list. Staff will endeavor to utilize information from existing databases (e.g. V-tax, death registry, AMANDA) to improve data accuracy.

## **Advance Polls, Special Polls, and Election Day Polls**

As indicated above, in-person Voting Locations are the area requiring the greatest amount of improvement for 2018. Early voting opportunities included seven in-person advance polls which were offered leading up to October 27<sup>th</sup> at the Town's Community Centres and at Town Hall, offering daytime, evening, and weekend in-person voting opportunities. In addition, special polls were operated at three Seniors buildings and two long-term care facilities. There were small line-ups at certain advance polls while others were not busy. The special polls (seniors buildings and long-term care) ran smoothly, were well-attended, and extremely worthwhile.

On October 27<sup>th</sup>, the Town operated 10 polling locations (7 town facilities, 3 schools) with a view to closely mirroring the quantity and location of polls offered in previous elections. The polls operated extremely smoothly throughout the day, however, large volumes of last-minute voters and persons needing to be enumerated from approximately 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. created some challenges. Three polling locations had line-ups at 8:00 p.m. which caused a delay in the tabulation and announcement of the results. Staff have conducted a thorough post-election review of each location and documented any issues related to network speed, parking sufficiency, space limitations, etc.

### **Potential Improvements for 2018:**

- Staff need to be better prepared for line-ups when polls open on the first day; Generally, Advance Polls require more resources in order to better handle busy periods;
- In 2018, staff hope for greater cooperation from Long Term Care facilities to better enable the Town to continue to provide on-site voting services to their residents.
- Avoid use of schools in future elections due to difficulty in securing reliable internet connection and challenges in working with the school board administration; opt for Town-owned facilities wherever possible;

- Have fewer (but much larger) voting locations (e.g. 1 per ward) on Voting Day, and potentially during the advance voting period; Each location will need many more resources (e.g. 25-30 voting kiosks instead of 7-10) to ensure they are better adept to handle high volumes of voters at peak times;
- Improve voter privacy by placing each kiosk on its own table; consider proper laptop privacy screens;
- For logistical simplicity, do not distinguish between advance and election-day polls. Set up and operate all polls on each day throughout the voting period. This would remove the need for cumbersome setup/teardown activities, as well as serving as an opportunity to train most election day staff in advance of the final day of voting.

## **Voting Website**

Feedback on the voting website was very positive. It was intentionally designed to be very simple so that it would load quickly and render properly on a wide range of devices. The simple black-and-white theme provided high-contrast for persons with vision challenges, and all text was written at a grade 6 level for ease of understanding. Following a series of internal debrief sessions, a fulsome debrief was conducted with Intelivote systems to offer suggestions on how their voting system could be improved for future elections. Some of the suggestions were as follows:

- Some felt there were too many confirmation screens for each race and that the voting process could be streamlined in this respect.
- Voters felt the final confirmation screen needed to more clearly state, “You are Finished Voting”.
- Some suggested that the online voting experience could be made to feel more like the paper ballot experience, for example by having a composite ballot (all races on one screen)
- When a person chose to Decline a race, he/she would receive a message indicating that all selections from the previous page would be void; many voters took this to mean that votes cast for previous races would be null and void if they declined a particular race. This was a common misunderstanding which indicates that a wording change is required.

## **Accessibility & Diversity**

Accessibility was a key priority in the 2014 Ajax Election and a key driver for the introduction of e-voting technology, a move which was strongly supported by the Ajax Accessibility Advisory Committee. In the Ajax Voter Survey, 82% of voters agreed with the statement, “Being able to vote online made the process more accessible for me” (ATT-1, Q25). E-voting technology enables persons with mobility challenges and other challenges which may make it difficult to leave home, to vote easily and privately without the need to attend a polling station. The option to vote from home also enabled persons with assistive devices to utilize them for the purpose of voting. Telephone voting greatly improved the accessibility of voting for persons with visual impairments or those unable to use a computer. As required by legislation, staff have prepared a post-Election accessibility report for submission to the Province which details the efforts made toward ensuring the election was accessible to persons with disabilities.

All aspects of the election were also planned with diversity in mind. Efforts were made within the worker recruitment process to ensure a wide range of languages were spoken by workers at voting locations in the interests of customer service. A large part of the worker training focused on providing quality customer service to a diverse community.

Many aspects of communications plan were focused on reaching diverse groups within the community. For the first time, a 'Multicultural Media Night' was held where various groups and community leaders were invited to attend a series of presentations by town staff on the 2014 election, and how diverse communities could become involved. Town staff also worked closely with CDCD and the Welcome Centre to ensure that new residents were informed about the election, and Communications assisted certain community groups to translate election materials into different languages.

## **Election Staff**

The 2014 Election required approximately 120 temporary workers. Advance and special polls were largely operated by Town staff, and each Election Day polling location was managed by a town staffperson. The remainder of the positions were comprised of casual or part-time town staff, advisory committee members and town volunteers, and persons retained through general recruitment. Town staff piloted a new and extremely effective group interview format to select election workers. Workers were required to complete an online webinar training session, as well as an in-person training session. The quality of workers retained by the Town for this election was exceptionally high, with all persons demonstrating strong work ethic and excellent customer service skills, a factor which was central to the success of the event; the town received a great number of accolades for the quality of customer service provided at the polls by election workers.

### **Potential Improvements for 2018:**

- It was noted that employees should be cross-trained on all positions in order to fill in for each other/allow for breaks.
- Election workers responsible for using software requested the ability to access the software from home in order to practice prior to election day.

## **Use of Corporate Resources for Elections Policy**

Candidates were provided with a copy of the Use of Corporate Resources for Election Purposes Policy and were largely compliant. As is typical, most issues that arose involved use of the Town's digital content such as logos and images. There were also a number of reported instances of candidates undertaking campaign activities on Town property.

### **Potential Improvements for 2018:**

- As per the request of several candidates and incumbents, consideration will be given to permitting campaign material (literature, etc.) on town property during candidate debate events, should such events be held at town facilities;
- Portions of the policy may be expanded to clarify rules around the use of town-owned digital content and linking to online resources owned by the town.

## **Election Signs**

Bylaw Services Staff report that compliance with the Town's election sign rules was high in 2014, with fewer violations than in previous elections. Candidates made notable efforts to understand and comply with established rules, and most contraventions were inadvertent.

### **Potential Improvements for 2018:**

- Staff have identified a need to further clarify rules around car wraps and stickers within the Sign By-law prior to the next election.
- Staff wish to explore options to reduce the permitted time for election signs from 6 weeks to 4 weeks, and to introduce set-back requirements for areas where signs have been already placed by other candidates.

## **Candidate Contribution Rebate Program**

Contribution Rebate receipts will be accepted until December 1, 2015, and will be processed in monthly batches for candidates who have filed their Form 4 Financial Statement. LIS staff continue to audit the program closely to ensure that only eligible persons are issued a rebate.

### **Potential Improvements for 2018:**

- In 2012, Council approved a modification to the program which put a 'check' in place to require that Council review and reconsider the program prior to each municipal election, to ensure that it continues to be effective in meeting its objectives. An analysis similar to the one conducted in 2012 will be done well in advance of the 2018 election to determine whether the program is indeed meeting its objectives of increasing citizen participation in elections, removing financial barriers to running, and reducing the dependency of financial contributions from corporations by registered candidates.

## **Election Communications**

The Communications Plan for the 2014 Election was more extensive than in previous elections and was very well-planned and executed by the Town's Communications team. Components included a website, social media plan, advertisements in all Town facilities, infographics and brochures, GO Station ads and mobile signs, promotional videos, and an 'Inside Internet Voting' workshop for residents featuring several internet voting experts and hands-on voting demos.

Staff also undertook extensive outreach initiatives to target particular groups within the community with information about the upcoming election. Information booths, presentations and poster campaigns were arranged for seniors' clubs and residences, the Welcome Centre, and long-term care facilities. Election information booths and revision centres were set up at community centres and at town events such as Doors Open, Pumpkinville, and Music in the Square. In the final week leading up to the election, a large-scale campaign was enacted to encourage residents to avoid the polls and opt for the convenience of voting remotely. These efforts went a long way in lessening the capacity and volume issues that staff were anticipating on October 27<sup>th</sup>.

The Ajax election also garnered a great deal of positive media attention from major GTA newspapers, radio stations, and television networks, and helped to put Ajax on the map in terms of embracing the evolution of election delivery.

**Potential Improvements for 2018:**

- Messaging encouraging residents to 'vote remotely' and 'avoid the polls' should be central to the communications campaign from the beginning.
- The Voter Information Letter can be improved to be clearer, more concise, and further encourage remote voting.

**Results Tabulation & Release**

The results tabulation process with e-voting is very quick. However, it is necessary to wait until all voting locations are closed before the results are tabulated and released publically, for the reason that released results could potentially influence voters who have not yet cast a ballot but are entitled to by virtue of having entered the voting station prior to the doors closing at 8:00 p.m. The final voting station to close on Election Night was J. Clarke Richardson at 9:00 p.m. The final results were tabulated moments later.

While it was intended that the results would be posted on the Town's election website (ajaxvotes2014.ca), the hosting company for that website encountered server complications which resulted in the site being shut down unexpectedly and without notice. Communications staff responded diligently by distributing results via other channels (Ajax.ca, social media, hardcopies, etc.) The site was eventually restored approximately 16 hours later.

**Potential Improvements for 2018:**

- In the future, addressing the issue of late-evening line-ups at polling stations will ensure that results are available much sooner.
- A formal plan will be established for the release and distribution of results, and staff will ensure that the results webpage is housed locally, or by a reliable and reputable hosting service.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

The cost of the 2014 Election was \$210,000, which is within the allocated budget of \$227,000. These figures do not include costs attributed to the Contribution Rebate Program, which are expensed in the 2015 fiscal year and are expected to cost approximately \$15,000 based on historical use of the program.

**COMMUNICATION ISSUES:**

This report will be posted on the Town's website, and shared with other area clerks who have indicated an interest in utilizing e-voting in future elections. The Ajax election model will likely be shared with other municipalities through presentations at AMCTO events and in other similar settings.

**CONCLUSION:**

As indicated throughout this report, there are a number of policies, by-laws and programs that will need to be reviewed prior to the 2018 Election. The approximate timing of those items is as follows:

February 2015 – Use of Corporate Resources for Election Purposes Policy  
Spring/Summer 2015 – Temporary Sign By-law  
Spring 2016 – Candidate Contribution Rebate program  
Spring 2017 – Voting Methods for the 2018 Municipal Election  
*TBD* – Ward Boundary Review (pending Regional Council composition review)

Ajax has long been a leader in progressive and innovative election delivery, being among the first municipalities to employ digital scan vote tabulators, and the 'vote-anywhere' model using live-list management. Ajax should be very proud of its continued leadership in improving and evolving the delivery of elections to reflect changing lifestyles and technologies, while still maintaining the integrity of the election process and working within the confines of provincial legislation. With the support of Council, staff look forward to the continued evolution and improvement of elections in Ajax.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

ATT-1: Excerpts from Ajax Voter Survey, Centre for e-Democracy: Munk School of Global Affairs, University of Toronto  
ATT-2: Election Statistics (General)  
ATT-3: Voting by Age, Gender, and Device

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Nicole Wellsbury – Manager of Legislative Services/Deputy Clerk

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Martin de Rond – Director of Legislative & Information Services/Clerk



**ATT-1: Excerpts from Ajax Voter Survey, Centre for e-Democracy: Munk School of Global Affairs, University of Toronto**

**Q5 - How satisfied were you with the online voting process?**

Not satisfied at all	35	1.05%
Not very satisfied	39	1.17%
Fairly satisfied	454	13.60%
Very satisfied	2810	84.18%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3338</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

**Q7 - Would you recommend Internet voting to others?**

Definitely no	38	1.13%
Probably no	21	0.62%
Probably yes	390	11.59%
Definitely yes	2876	85.44%
Dont know	41	1.22%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3366</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

**Q14 - How often do you access the Internet?**

Several times a day	2254	67.79%
Every day	834	25.08%
Several times a week	164	4.93%
About once a week	22	0.66%
Several times a month	10	0.30%
About once a month	5	0.15%
None/never	11	0.33%
Other (please specify)	25	0.75%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3325</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

**Q3 - What is the main reason you chose to vote online in the 2014 Municipal Election?**

Convenience	2639	77.98%
Accessibility	197	5.82%
Wanted to try something new/ Interest	284	8.39%
Suggestion from a Friend(s) or Family member(s)	32	0.95%
Suggestion from a Candidate	12	0.35%
Positive past experience with voting online	7	0.21%
Privacy	18	0.53%
Internet and telephone voting were my only choices	57	1.68%
Other (please specify) :	92	2.72%
It was the only method of voting offered in my municipality	46	1.36%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3384</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

**Q16j - I feel I have a pretty good knowledge of computers and the Internet.**

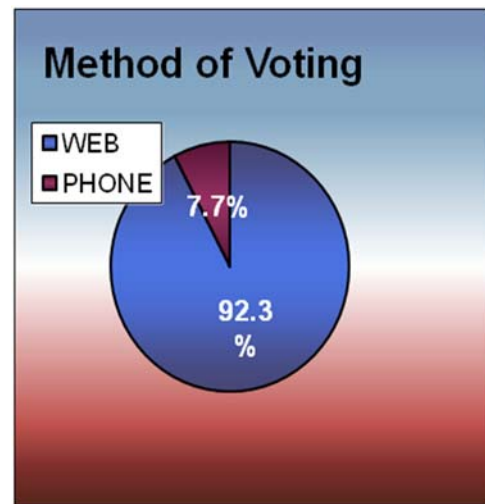
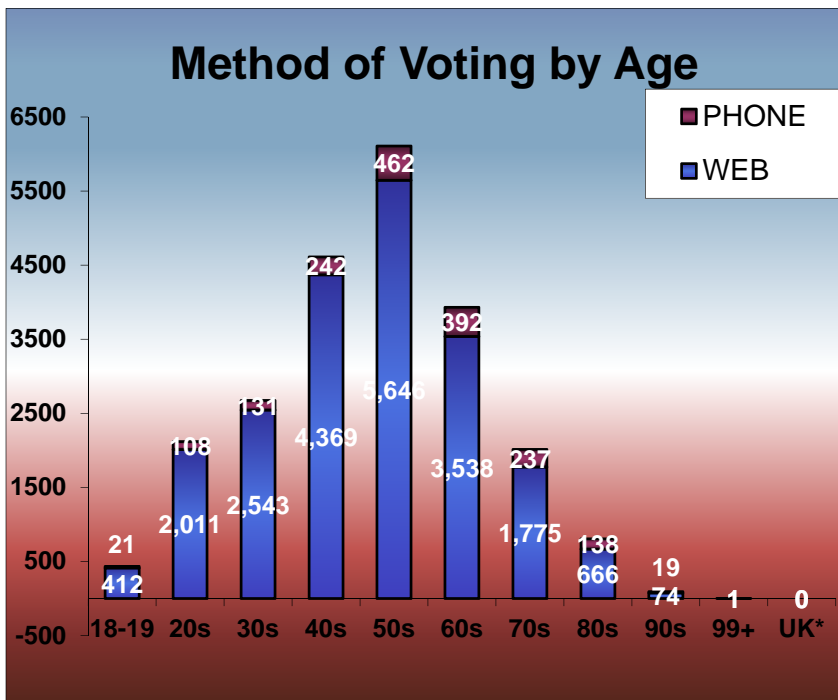
Strongly Disagree	20	0.70%
Disagree	65	2.28%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	204	7.15%
Agree	1424	49.88%
Strongly Agree	1142	40.00%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2855</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

**Q25 - Being able to vote online made the voting process more accessible for me.**

Strongly Disagree	85	2.63%
Disagree	135	4.17%
Neither agree nor disagree	370	11.44%
Agree	1250	38.65%
Strongly Agree	1394	43.10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3234</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

**ATT 2 – Election Statistics (General)**

Information Base	Number	%
Number of eligible electors setup in system.	74,891	
Number of electors who cast a vote for at least one contest.	22,785	
Participation rate.	<b>30.4%</b>	
Voters who used the Internet to vote.	21,035	92.3%
Voters who used the phone to vote.	1,750	7.7%
Voters casting ballots with "Resident" status.	22,276	97.8%
Voters casting ballots with "Non-Resident" status.	114	0.5%
Voters casting ballots with unknown residency status.	395	1.7%
Average amount of time a voter spent voting using the Internet.	2 min. 49 sec.	
Average amount of time a voter spent voting using the telephone.	4 min. 14 sec.	
Number of voters on the elector list with age listed.	73,583	98%
Number of voters with no age listed.	1,308	2%
Other Canadian Provinces votes - Total phone and Internet votes from 6 provinces. (AB, BC, MB, NS, QC, SK)	258	1%
United States votes - Total phone and Internet votes from 26 US states. (AZ, CA, CO, CT, FL, GA, IA, IL, IN, MA, MD, MI, MN, MO, NC, NE, NJ, NV, NY, OH, OR, TN, TX, VA, WA, WI).	292	1%
Total Internet votes from outside North America. (Australia, Barbados, Finland, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Italy, New Zealand, Seychelles, Sweden, Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom)	36	0%





**ATT-3: Voting by Age, Gender, and Device**

Age Breakdown of Who Voted							
Age		ELIG.	VOTED	WEB	PHONE	% Part.	Total Part.
18-19	F	1,040	205	194	11	20%	20%
	M	1,168	226	216	10	19%	
	UK	3	2	2	0	67%	
20s	F	6,054	1,132	1,084	48	19%	18%
	M	5,991	979	919	60	16%	
	UK	8	8	8	0	100%	
30s	F	7,250	1,529	1,447	82	21%	20%
	M	6,281	1,139	1,090	49	18%	
	UK	6	6	6	0	100%	
40s	F	7,986	2,464	2,316	148	31%	31%
	M	7,064	2,138	2,045	93	30%	
	UK	11	9	8	1	82%	
50s	F	8,147	3,183	2,898	285	39%	38%
	M	7,787	2,916	2,739	177	37%	
	UK	10	9	9	0	90%	
60s	F	4,414	2,000	1,762	238	45%	45%
	M	4,320	1,922	1,768	154	44%	
	UK	8	8	8	0	100%	
70s	F	2,042	1,034	893	141	51%	52%
	M	1,852	970	874	96	52%	
	UK	8	8	8	0	100%	
80s	F	1,061	451	354	97	43%	44%
	M	744	351	310	41	47%	
	UK	2	2	2	0	100%	
90s	F	214	60	45	15	28%	30%
	M	93	32	28	4	34%	
	UK	1	1	1	0	100%	
99+	F	12	1	1	0	8%	6%
	M	6	0	0	0	0%	
UK*	F	650	0	0	0	0%	0%
	M	658	0	0	0	0%	
Total		74,891	22,785	21,035	1,750	30%	

Device	Operating System	Voter Sessions
Computer	Linux	88
	Macintosh	1,716
	Windows 7	12,734
	Windows 98	1
	Windows NT	2,395
	Windows Vista	739
	Windows XP	1,441
Smart Phone	Android	614
	Blackberry	49
	iPhone	330
	Windows	6
Tablet	Blackberry Playbook	16
	HP	5
	iPad	1,829
Other	iPod	4

Gender	Total Eligible	Total Voted	Participation
Female	38,870	12,059	31%
Male	35,964	10,673	30%
Unknown	57	53	93%
<b>Total</b>	<b>74,891</b>	<b>22,785</b>	<b>30%</b>

Gender	WEB	PHONE
F	10,994	1,065
M	9,989	684
UK	52	1

