



CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN STUDIES
& TOIVO THINK TANK

VOTING IN THE HOOD

IMMIGRANT VOTING BEHAVIOR AT A GLANCE

END REPORT, SUMMARY/MAY 2012

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INTRODUCTION

The laws governing the rights of foreigners to participate in politics and political organizations have been strict in Finland for most of the time since independence. Around the 1990s, the legislation started loosening up, more or less. When the Association Act was revised in 1989, foreign citizens were granted rights, similar to those of Finnish citizens, to participate in associations. This big step made it possible for migrants to establish their own associations and to join organizations with political goals.

People from other Nordic countries gained voting rights at the local level in Finland in the 1970s. It took over twenty years before people of other nationalities received similar rights, as it happened after Finland had joined the European Union and the municipal law was reformed in 1995. Nowadays, all EU citizens who have resided in a Finnish municipality for more than 51 days before the municipal elections receive voting rights. For people from countries outside the EU, the time limit is two years of residence.

Nevertheless, even if migrants have relatively extensive political rights, at least at the local level, studies show that participatory parity is almost never the case. It is commonly known that foreigners and migrants have been relatively invisible in Finnish politics and the electoral turnout among migrants with voting rights in municipal elections in Finland has been correspondingly low. Voting among migrants in Finland is lower than that among corresponding groups in other Nordic countries. Even after the 1995 municipal law reform, voter turnout has remained below 20 percent in Finland.

Voting in the 'Hood, a study of immigrant voting behavior, is based on an Internet poll addressed to immigrants in Finland and one-on-one interviews, to recognize the challenges and driving forces behind the movers and shakers in different communities, and to increase political participation as a step towards better social integration. This project was meant to discover possible obstacles to voting amongst immigrants, and to ask our new Finns about their interest in taking part in the next election, and their feedback about the political process to the National Coalition Party.

BACKGROUND

Migration to Finland is still a fairly new phenomenon. There has been more movement away from Finland, such as that which took place a couple of decades ago when a lot of people moved to Sweden. At the moment, the migrant population in Finland is still one of the smallest in Europe. Immigration to Finland started in the 1980s, but has increased since, especially during the last two decades. Today, migrants account for approximately 2.6 percent of the total population of 5.3 million people. Migrants mostly reside in the metropolitan areas of the bigger cities. Finland is now facing the same situation most other nations of Western Europe found themselves in some decades ago. The reasons migrants move to Finland are many and varied. They tend to be young and biggest singular groups come from Russia, Estonia, Sweden, Somalia, and China.

Foreign population in Finland 1980-2010

Year	Foreign citizens	Citizens born in foreign country	Foreign language speaking
1980	12 843	39 153	9 146
1981	13 667	41 229	9 629
1982	14 282	43 677	10 334
1983	15 659	46 112	11 347
1984	16 765	48 120	12 191
1985	17 034	49 747	12 959
1986	17 269	51 192	13 767
1987	17 730	52 885	14 925
1988	18 676	55 056	16 537
1989	21 174	58 775	19 488
1990	26 255	64 922	24 783
1991	37 579	77 088	35 498
1992	46 250	85 580	43 898
1993	55 587	94 641	53 254
1994	62 012	100 415	59 459
1995	68 566	106 303	65 649
1996	73 754	111 131	70 941
1997	80 600	118 070	78 366
1998	85 060	125 050	86 085
1999	87 680	131 120	93 949
2000	91 074	136 203	99 227
2001	98 577	145 135	109 197
2002	103 682	152 057	117 013
2003	107 003	158 867	124 817
2004	108 346	166 361	133 183
2005	113 852	176 612	144 334
2006	121 739	187 910	156 827
2007	132 708	202 528	172 928
2008	143 256	218 626	190 538
2009	155 705	233 183	207 037
2010	167 954	248 135	224 388

Table 1 Source: Institute of Migration

The Finnish State has taken some legislative measures in order to lower the threshold for migrants to participate more easily in politics. The Integration Act requires that municipalities (for example, ELY Centers) should provide social education and guidance for migrants. Local multicultural advisory boards have been established in the largest cities. This process does not, however, prove that political participation is equal in all groups throughout the population of Finland. There are still big differences in practice around the country as political opportunities are not equally available to all migrants. Due to the short period of immigration and the relatively heterogeneous migrant population, most immigrant organizations are small and have limited resources. The ways political parties in Finland offer political opportunities to migrants still have rather a low profile. However, activity is increasing, and from the beginning of 2000, political organizations have also started to focus on the distribution of services to migrants, and parties have put more effort into inviting new Finns to take part in decision making.

Foreign citizens voting in municipal elections 1996-2008

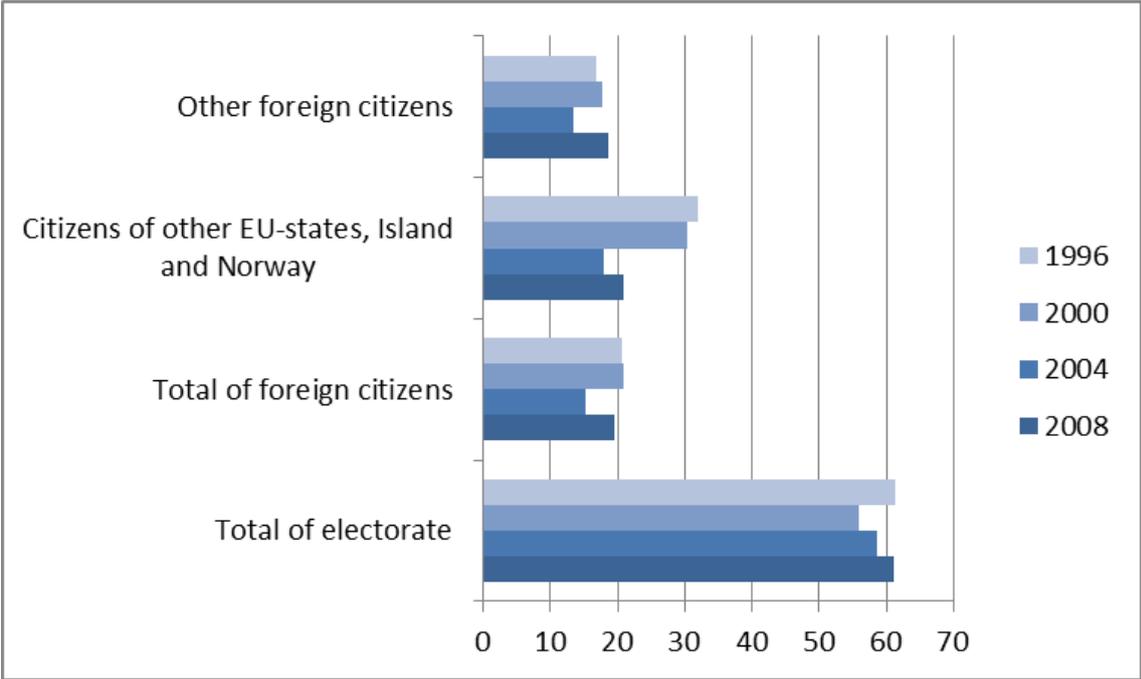


Table 2. Source: Ministry of Justice Table

Table 2 shows the voting behavior of foreign people in Finland since 1996, when the reform of the municipal law with rather comprehensive voting rights for migrants became valid. As can be seen, generally around twenty percent of migrants throughout the nation vote in elections. Between 1996 and 2008, the difference varied by around ten percent. International studies indicate that electoral activity is lower at the beginning of immigration, and rises over time (Wust, Andreas M. 2010 Conclusion; The political Representation of Immigrants and Minorities. Voters, parties and parliaments in liberal democracies. Karen Bird, Thomas Saalfeld & Andreas M. Wust. Routledge, p. 57). Looking at the candidates running for municipal elections in 2008, there were 539 candidates who spoke a language other than Finnish as their mother tongue, which is 1.4 percent of the total number of candidates. There were 527 candidates who spoke a native language other than Finnish, Swedish, or Same, and were born in foreign country. When looking at the ratio between the total number of people in the electorate and the number of foreign-speaking candidates, then foreign-speaking people are clearly underrepresented. For example, despite the fact that the majority of the foreign-speaking population lived in the Uusimaa (capital city) region during the election in 2008, less than one third of the foreign-speaking candidates were from the same area. There were 69,571 people with a non-Finnish native tongue eligible to vote in Uusimaa, which is 6.3 percent of the total electorate. At the same time, there were 149 foreign-speaking candidates, while the total number of candidates was 5188, which means that foreign-speaking candidates made up only

2.9 percent of all candidates. At the 2008 municipal elections, 96,371 foreign nationals were eligible to vote in Finland. There were 242 foreign nationals standing as candidates, which is 0.6% of the total number of candidates. Swedish, Russian, and Estonian citizens were the most common nationalities of the candidates, and these nationalities accounted for more than half of the foreign candidates. Twelve foreign citizens were elected, of whom seven were Swedish nationals.

In the 2007 Parliament election, there were about 34,000 foreign-speaking voters living in Finland, which is 0.8 percent of the total electorate. In the municipal election year 2008, foreign speakers with the right to vote made up 3.1 percent of the total electorate. Table A.1 clearly shows the foreign-speaking population is increasing, and the percentage of this group with voting rights will increase for the 2012 municipal election.

Foreign speaking electorate divided by language in municipal election 2008

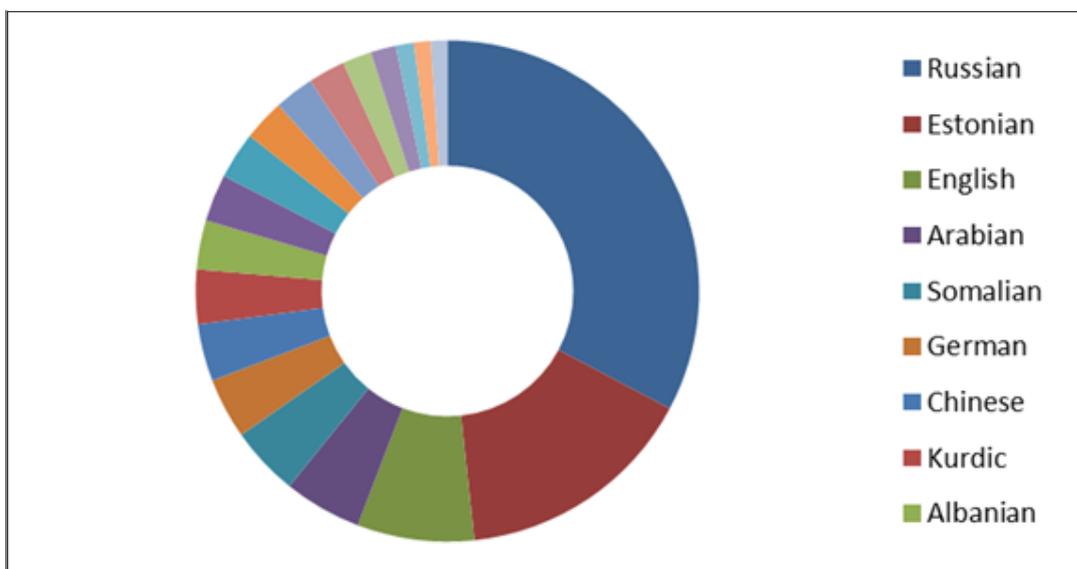


Table 3. Source: Ministry of Justice

As statistics and studies clearly show, electoral turnout among migrants has not increased, even if some activities run by the government or independently by political parties have tried to change that. A mixture of institutional context, the party system, socioeconomic factors, individual voter interest and history reflects on participation in the political process.

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

The results were published immediately after Sauli Niinistö was elected President of Finland. A Questback Internet poll was available for approximately one month across January and February 2012. The National Association of Immigrants (KAMUT) invited migrants to participate in the survey through personal and professional networks. A web link to the questionnaire was also published in social media (Expat Action Tank) and on the web site of Toivo think tank. Interviews were conducted through individual face-to-face meetings.

IMMIGRANT VOTING BEHAVIOR

A study of voting in the 'hood

Summary report

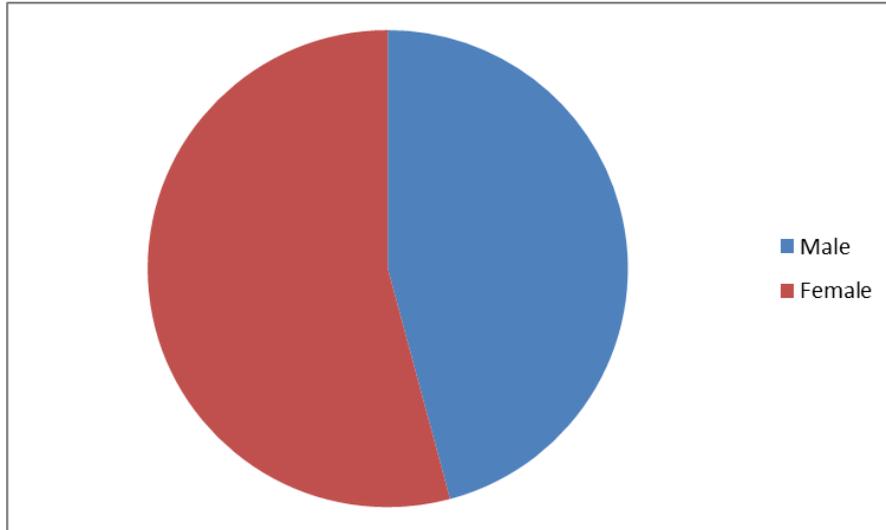
N=238

Published: 14.2.2012

1. Gender

Number of replies: 227

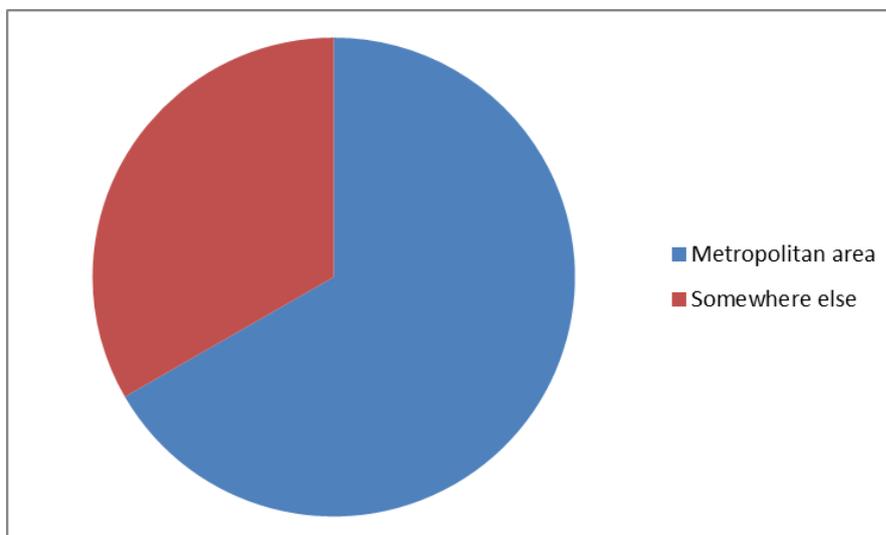
	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Male	104	45.81%					
2.	Female	123	54.19%					
Total		227	100.00%					



2. Place of residence

Number of replies: 225

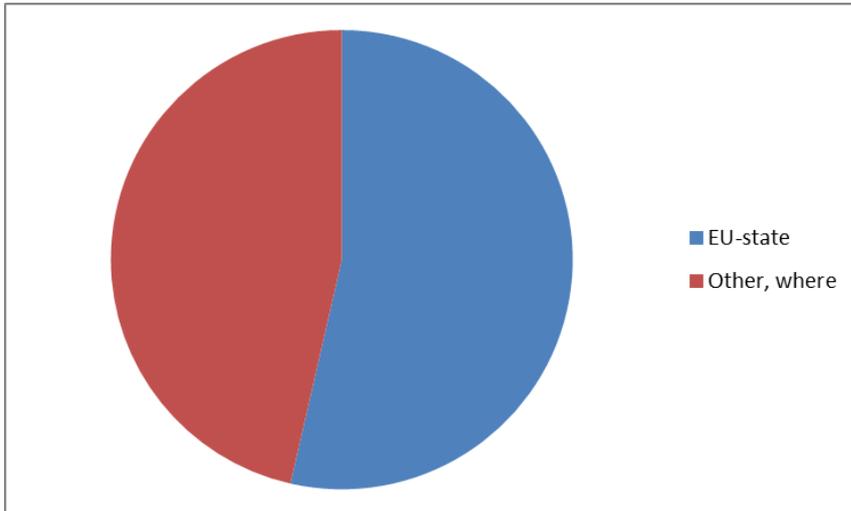
	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Metropolitan area	150	66.67%					
2.	Somewhere else	75	33.33%					
Total		225	100.00%					



3. From where did you come to Finland?

Number of replies: 224

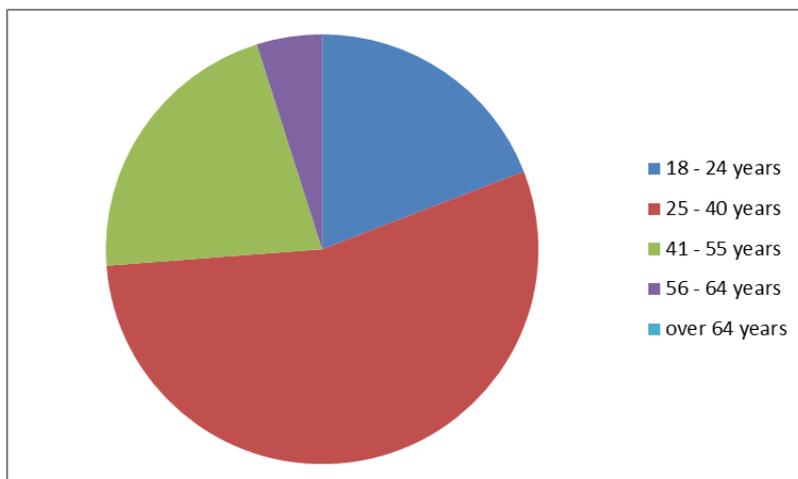
	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	EU state	120	53.57%					
2.	Other - where?	104	46.43%					
Total		224	100.00%					



4. Age groups

Number of replies: 225

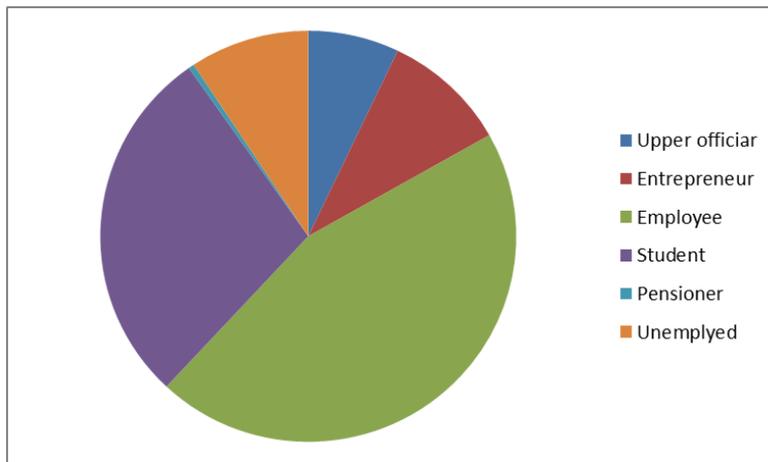
	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	18 - 24 years	43	19.11%					
2.	25 - 40 years	123	54.67%					
3.	41 - 55 years	48	21.33%					
4.	56 - 64 years	11	4.89%					
5.	Over 64 years	0	0.00%					
Total		225	100.00%					



5. Educational level

Number of replies: 247

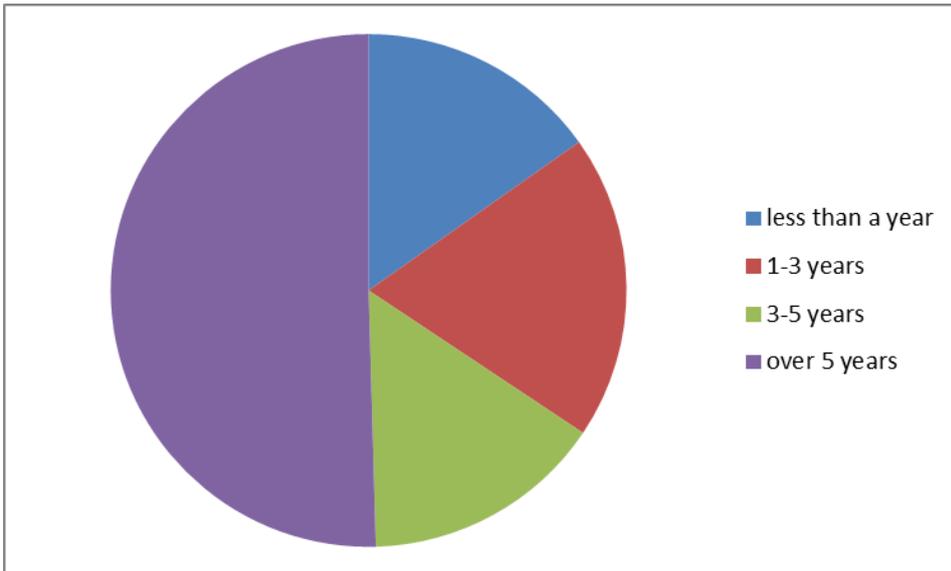
	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Upper management	16	7.08%					
2.	Entrepreneur	22	9.73%					
3.	Employee	102	45.13%					
4.	Student	64	28.32%					
5.	Pensioner	1	0.44%					
6.	Unemployed	21	9.29%					
	Total	226	100.00%					



6. How long have you lived in Finland?

Number of replies: 224

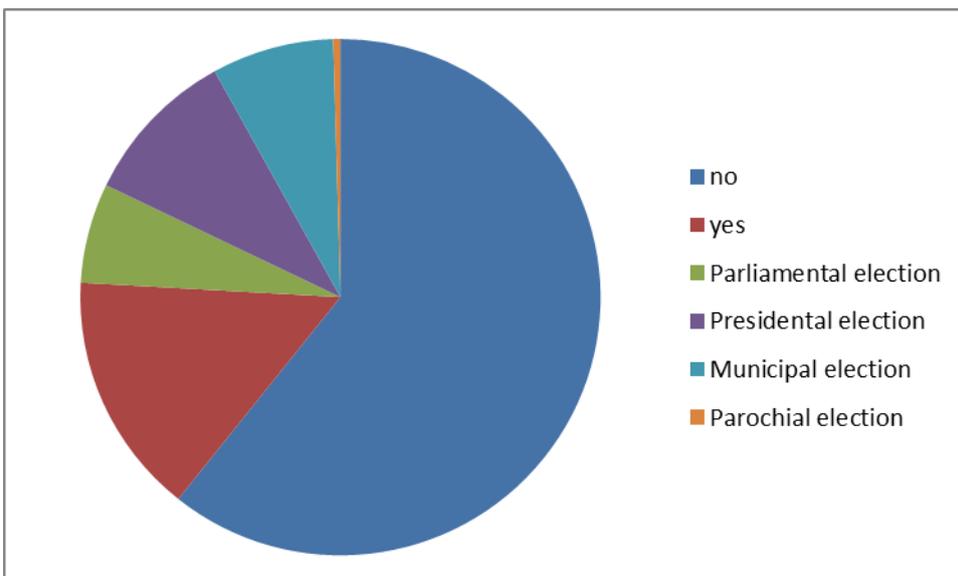
	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Less than one year	34	15.18%					
2.	1-3 years	43	19.20%					
3.	3-5 years	34	15.18%					
4.	Over 5 years	113	50.45%					
	Total	224	100.00%					



7. Have you voted in Finland?

Number of replies: 224

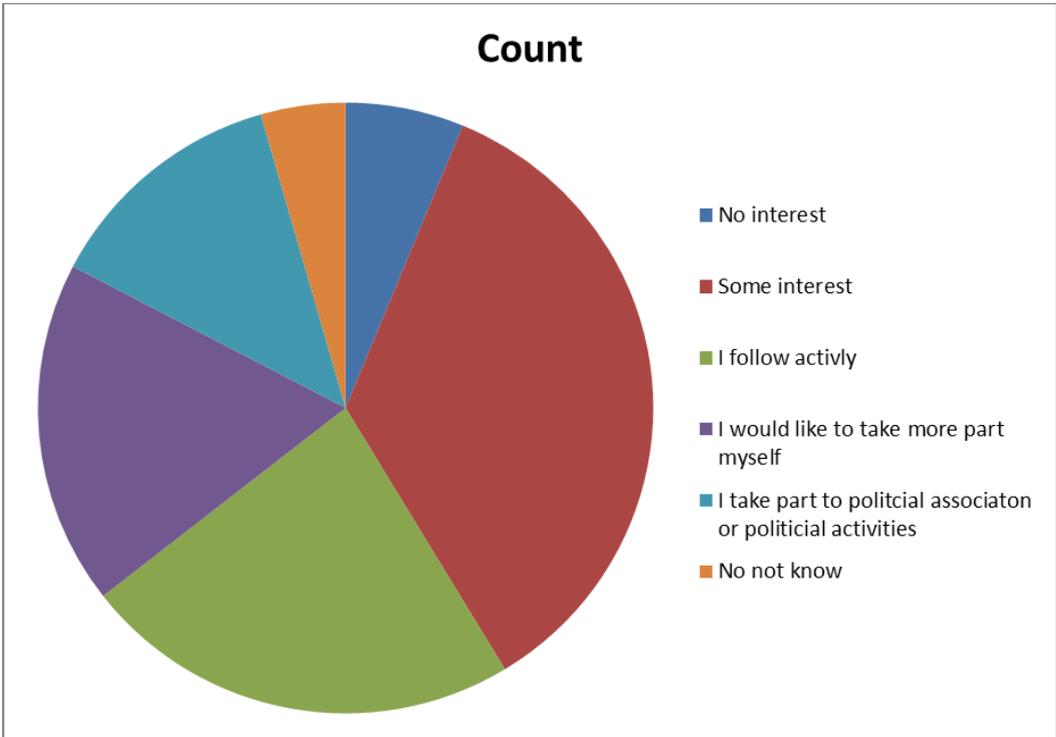
	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	No	136	60.71%	[Horizontal bar chart showing 60.71%]				
2.	Yes	34	15.18%	[Horizontal bar chart showing 15.18%]				
3.	Parliamentary election	14	6.25%	[Horizontal bar chart showing 6.25%]				
4.	Presidential election	22	9.82%	[Horizontal bar chart showing 9.82%]				
5.	Municipal election	17	7.59%	[Horizontal bar chart showing 7.59%]				
6.	Parochial election	1	0.45%	[Horizontal bar chart showing 0.45%]				
	Total	224	100.00%					



8. Are you interested in societal decision making?

Number of replies: 225

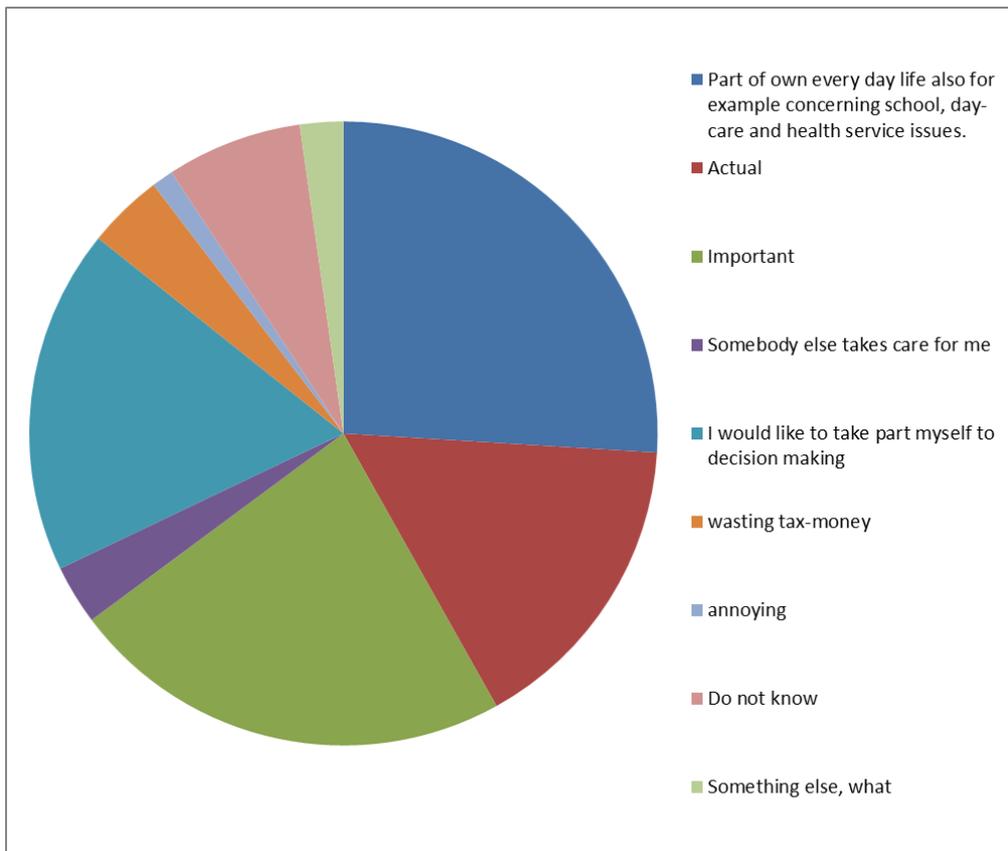
Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1. No interest	14	6.22%	[Horizontal bar chart showing 6.22%]				
2. Some interest	79	35.11%	[Horizontal bar chart showing 35.11%]				
3. I follow actively	52	23.11%	[Horizontal bar chart showing 23.11%]				
4. I would like to take more part myself	41	18.22%	[Horizontal bar chart showing 18.22%]				
5. I take part in political association or political activities	29	12.89%	[Horizontal bar chart showing 12.89%]				
6. No / Don't know	10	4.44%	[Horizontal bar chart showing 4.44%]				
Total	225	100.00%					



9. Which of the following qualities describes societal decision making and its impact on you?

Number of replies: 235

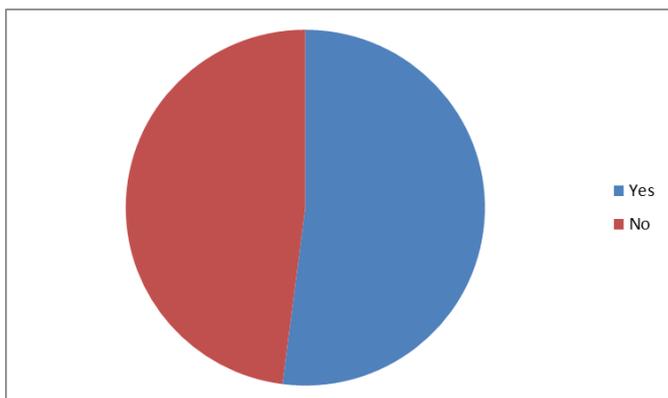
Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1. Part of everyday life (e.g. school, daycare health services)	93	41.89%					
2. Actual	57	25.68%					
3. Important	82	36.94%					
4. Somebody else takes care of it for me	11	4.95%					
5. I would like to take part in decision making	64	28.83%					
6. Wasting taxes	14	6.31%					
7. Annoying	4	1.80%					
8. Don't know	25	11.26%					
9. Other	8	3.60%					
Total	225						



10. Is there enough information available about the political system and decision making process in Finland?

Number of replies: 221

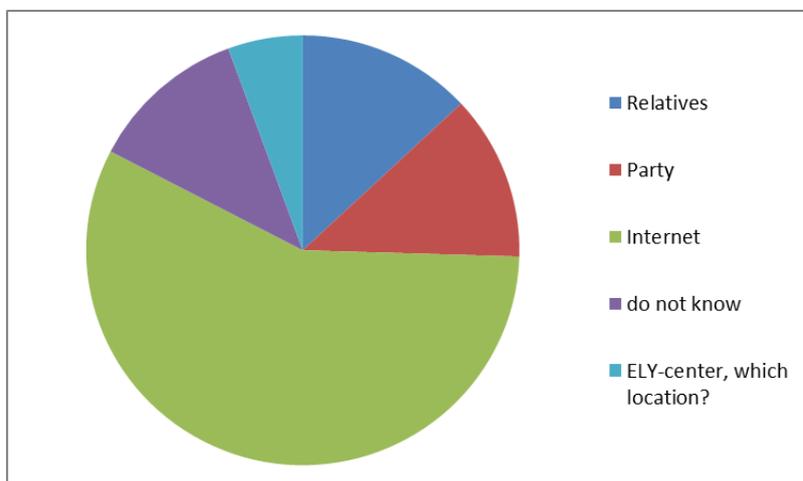
	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Yes	115	52.04%					
2.	No	106	47.96%					
Total		221	100.00%					



11. From where have you received information about the political system and decision making process in Finland?

Number of replies: 220

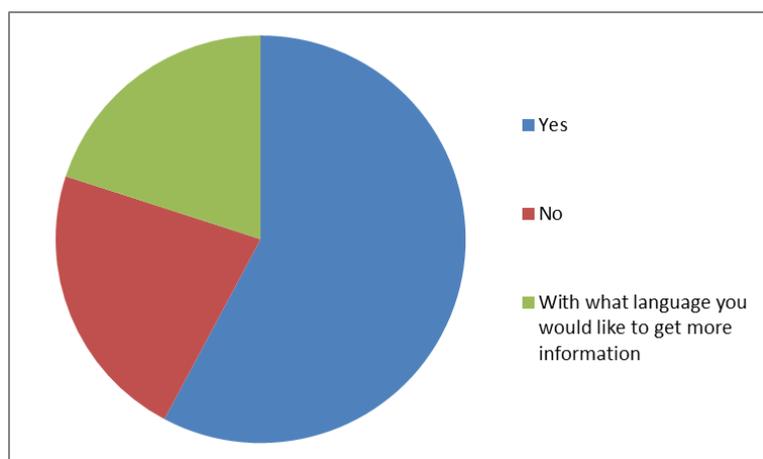
	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Finnish friends	59	26.82%					
2.	Relatives	21	9.55%					
3.	Party	20	9.09%					
4.	Internet	92	41.82%					
5.	Don't know	19	8.64%					
6.	ELY Center - which location?	9	4.09%					
Total		220	100.00%					



12. Are your language skills good enough to learn about the Finnish political system?

Number of replies: 225

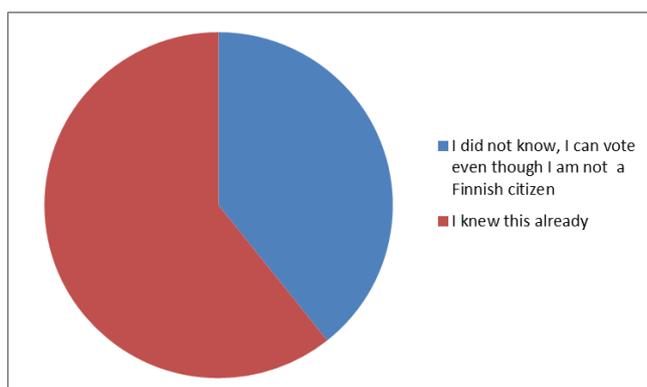
Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%		
1. Yes	130	57.78%							
2. No	50	22.22%							
3. In what language you would like to get more information	45	20.00%							
Total	225	100.00%							



13. Are you familiar with your rights in the next municipal election? In Finland, all citizens of EU states, Iceland, and Norway who are at least 18 years of age have the right to vote. In addition, all foreign nationals who have been resident in Finland for at least two years have the right to vote.

Number of replies: 224

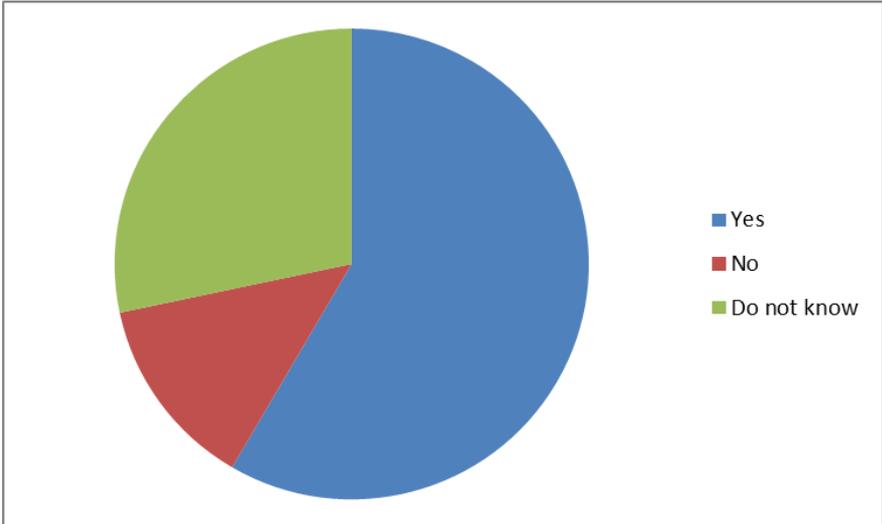
Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%	
1. I did not know I can vote, even though I am not a Finnish citizen	88	39.29%						
2. I knew this already	136	60.71%						
Total	224	100.00%						



14. Are you planning to vote in the next municipal election?

Number of replies: 226

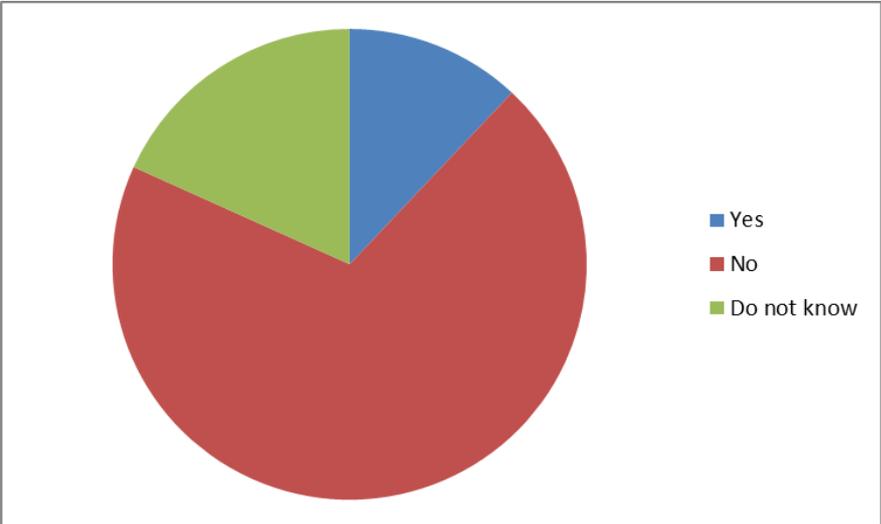
	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Yes	132	58.41%					
2.	No	30	13.27%					
3.	Don't know	64	28.32%					
Total		226	100.00%					



15. Would you like to be a candidate yourself in next municipal election?

Number of replies: 225

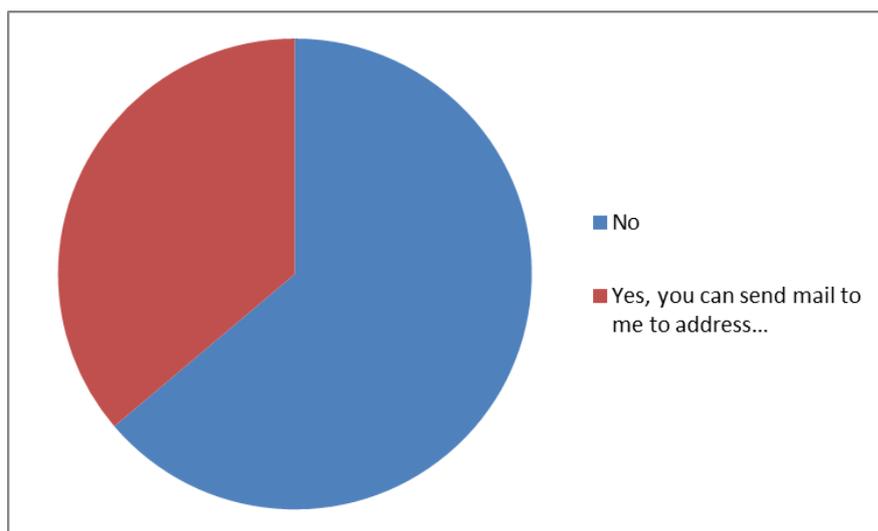
	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Yes	27	12.00%					
2.	No	157	69.78%					
3.	Don't know	41	18.22%					
Total		225	100.00%					



16. Would you like to have more information from KAMUT?

Number of replies: 221

Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1. No	141	63.80%					
2. Yes, you can send mail to me at this address...	80	36.20%					
Total	221	100.00%					



SUMMARY OF OPEN RESPONSES

The survey's open questions received most responses from the larger cities in Finland. The biggest singular group of respondents outside of the capital area were from Tampere. In addition, Turku, Vaasa, Joensuu, and Jyväskylä were mentioned multiple times. The Internet survey reached people across the whole country: 75 of the 230 responses to this survey also came from other, smaller towns in Finland, such as Lieksa, Kirkkonummi, Taipalsaari, and Pori.

Approximately 46% of respondents moved to Finland from a country outside of the EU. Around 10% of that group came from Russia, and nearly the same number came from Afghanistan and the USA. Other countries around the world were also mentioned multiple times, such as China, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and India. About 54% of the respondents came from another EU state to Finland.

When asked about their Finnish language skills, around 58% of the respondents answered that their Finnish skills were good enough learn about the Finnish political system. Around 22% wanted information in another language. Over 30 answers wanted information in English.

Two comments emerged when asked about current decision making and its political impact:

"How the Finnish political system impacts on my principles and how human rights are valued in Finland?!"

"Equal Human Rights, Indifference, Domestic Violence, Global Warming, Poverty & Hunger, Health Care, Cancer, HIV & Parkinson's,..."

COMMENTS WERE SOMETIMES DIRECTED AT KOKOOMUS, WHEN IT WAS POSSIBLE TO EXPRESS THOUGHTS AND IDEAS CONCERNING POLITICAL ACTIVITY AND THE PARTIES

“Since I have lived in Finland now 15 years, it is my primary home, yet I cannot vote for Parliament... Any change to that on its way? “

“I would like to know more about all the parties and their programs. I want to have that information so at the time when I can finally vote myself, I know which would be the best choice for me.”

“I believe that the Finnish system is doing pretty well, especially when compared with other European countries. Moreover, irregardless of where our place of residence may be, whether it’s at home, in Finland, or abroad, we Finnish citizens should be utterly proud of Finland as a country for providing its people throughout the years with stability, & more importantly, security & luxury!!!”

”I wish that the voice of migrants would be better heard and that the migrant candidates would be more visible in public!”

“Please arrange a round table with all immigrant candidates to be quizzed by KAMUT members.”

“I voted for Kokoomus in the previous election. When taking decisions, the parties should consider minority and refugee groups as well. All the decisions are more based on Finns. I suggest that workshops with different ethnic groups will give you a clear picture. My suggestion is that all immigrants who are receiving “toimentulotukki” must go and help in elderly homes, and service houses for the elderly. Under supervision and with a small course, they can take the elderly out, give baths, go to shops, do cleaning and cooking. People can be active and part of the community, so make a change in the law. I am ready to share my views.”

“Encouragement to foreigners about studying and learning the Finnish language will give them the tools to participate in building the country.”

“Foreigners are neglected .We do not have a voice. Besides the Swedish party, there should be an immigrant party. Finland is a closed system and the foreigners themselves are living in self-deception.”

“I think political activity is the best way to have an impact on matters, even though it feels like decision making is too long a process and one needs to be persistent.”

“If I could understand all the options, I would vote. But I don’t think there is one web site where I could read about all the candidates, both in English and Finnish.”

“For me personally it would be nice if the parties themselves had info in English as well. I think some did during the last elections - not sure though.”

”There is huge potential in the well-educated immigrants in Finland. Do not waste it.”

“I hope the hype about the Perussuomalaiset is pretty much over by now. They scare me a bit, as I come from a nation where the right wing has been in power for quite a while, therefore I KNOW they just ruin everything...”

“Being a foreign student, I have been working hard & paying tax. In return, I get nothing. I have to apply for visa every year, although I have right to study till the end [of my course]. It just sucks”

“There should be more campaigns on the management of multicultural diversity in Finnish workplaces, Diversity is coming to Finland and there is no way people can assume that it’s not happening. The health sector is overflowing with diverse staff as well as a diverse community seeking care. So the views of society as well as government regarding diversity really need to be addressed.”

“Finland’s great!”

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW

Name:	Paul JD Brennan
Years in Finland:	8
Country of birth:	Ireland

What are your thoughts regarding the local elections in Finland? Can you share any impressions or ideas or describe in a few words their meaning to you?

Being a foreign entrepreneur and not speaking Finnish means I don't get much time to try to engage myself with the Finnish media on the topic. Moreover, it doesn't feel that politics is really for foreigners in Finland. With my project to help integrate Finns and foreigners, I have spent over 6 years dealing with the public sector. It doesn't really feel like politicians are listening or have time to listen to foreigners while keeping the locals happy.

What ways (actions, measures, activities) could be used to motivate migrants in Finland so that they would go to vote and they would take part in the political decision making at a local level?

Make them feel that Finland cares. Communicate with us in our language, and not just in English: take advantage of existing research to know where those migrants are from, work out what languages will reach the most sectors, and keep the dialog open. Put more migrants in the driving seat, and let them be in charge of helping their communities. No one knows the problems and solutions of the migrant better than that migrant.

Do you have plans to take part in the next local elections in autumn 2012? Do you intend to be a candidate yourself? If not, would you consider joining another candidate's campaign team? Are there other ways in which you see yourself taking part in election activities? If the answer is "No" to all of the above, please explain why not.

We are considering taking part and running. My company runs a community to help create more engagement between Finns and Internationals. We use sports and networking events to build bridges between communities who otherwise wouldn't mix. The community has 19,000 members. With those numbers, it might be possible to succeed. However, it would depend on how many Finns I could get to join the campaign.

Is there some activity related to the upcoming local elections that you would like to organize with your local party association? Or an activity that the party association could organize and you would be interested in taking part in?

We run the Expat Action Tank. My organization would like to be part of an event where all the relevant politicians and the public stakeholders, international and local, are gathered together. Our role there would be to capture the actions promised by officials and follow up that they are done. We have already designed how such an event should work based on feedback from our community about the lack of action from previous events they have been part of.

Should immigrants have a clear, separate profile during the local election campaign? Should their non-Finnish background be made clearly visible? Perhaps that should be up to the candidate. If I ran, I would be proud to have all the things that are different about me as part of what would help bring all people who are different together. Participation is a big part of cohesion, whether it's in sports or elections.

What is your greatest concern that the local council (local politicians) should try and deal with at the moment? What is your “burning issue” related to your neighborhood or town? Don’t think big political decisions now; it can be an example very close to your home.

Locals and migrants need to network more to build community and a feeling of belonging. This fact is known, so perhaps the burning issue is to tackle the lack of action and to conduct research into this topic. Action is needed. It needs to be transparent and it needs to be driven by the need of the communities, local and new.

How/where would you feel most comfortable to express your concerns to a candidate? For example, over the phone, in a seminar, face-to-face, in writing, etc.

At events and seminars, I believe would be best for me personally. All channels are needed in general if resources allow. Online forums are in general unproductive since the conversation is not then action based and can turn to complaining and normally pushes originally optimistic people apart. Facilitation is key we believe.

Name:	Radu Szekely
Years in Finland:	12 years
Country of birth:	Romania

What are your thoughts regarding the local elections in Finland? Can you share any impressions or ideas or describe in a few words their meaning to you?

It is the opportunity for people living in a municipality to influence the way their town is administered. It makes me think of a home, a household, that from time to time needs a renovation or small things fixed. You need to see what works well, what needs to be changed/improved, and how are you going to finance the household for the next period. You discuss it for a while, look at different options, and then everyone gets together and decides how the household should develop in the next four years. Ideally, everyone living in the household gets involved, because after that, they cannot change much for the next four years.

In another sense, my image of Finnish local elections is that of a tool given to people to do something for themselves. It gives people in a town a sense of ownership over their governance. It is important to realize that the closer the government is to the people, the more impact it has on their lives. So the local government, being closest to the local community, has the greatest influence on their lives. As a result, it would be normal that citizens vote more actively in local elections; yet this is not the case, since national and presidential elections regularly attract more people – even if their influence on individual lives is not always significant. That makes me wonder why people do not make better use of this tool through which they can influence their own lives?

What ways (actions, measures, activities) could be used to motivate migrants in Finland so that they would go to vote and they would take part in the political decision making at a local level?

I think migrants should have two major things clearly explained to them:

- how to vote: where, when, what they need to do, who has the right to vote, etc. It should be shown that every vote counts, maybe with some clear examples of people who lost local elections (in the town in question) with the outcome of the election very close.

- why to vote: local officials make huge decisions about our lives that are often undervalued. There should be clear examples of which decisions are made at the local level. Perhaps it could be done

as a quiz, to check if people know at what level the decision is made (local, national, European), and it should be clear that most decisions are made at the local level.

On a concrete level, perhaps find some burning issues (important problems) for an area of the town where immigrants live and showcase how the local council would need to act in order to solve the problem. This sort of scenario would involve interaction/video, not written text.

Another option is a door-to-door campaign, or visiting organizations belonging to the migrant community, and explaining the importance of local elections.

Do you have plans to take part in the next local elections in autumn 2012? Do you intend to be a candidate yourself? If not, would you consider joining another candidate's campaign team? Are there other ways in which you see yourself taking part in election activities? If the answer is "No" to all of the above, please explain why not.

Yes, I will (most probably) run for my local council.

Is there some activity related to the upcoming local elections that you would like to organize with your local party association? Or an activity that the party association could organize and you would be interested in taking part in?

A lot of things. I would like an information campaign, but I'm not sure how it should be planned

Name:	Dimitri Tarzalainen
Years in Finland:	13.5
Country of birth:	Russia

What are your thoughts regarding the local elections in Finland? Can you share any impressions or ideas or describe in a few words their meaning to you?

Yes, it means more independence for municipalities and as low a dependence on the nation and obligations to it as possible. The government constantly invents new rules for local municipalities, while cutting national funding at the same time.

What ways (actions, measures, activities) could be used to motivate migrants in Finland so that they would go to vote and they would take part in the political decision making at a local level?

Only with direct contact.

Do you have plans to take part in the next local elections in autumn 2012? Do you intend to be a candidate yourself? If not, would you consider joining another candidate's campaign team? Are there other ways in which you see yourself taking part in election activities? If the answer is no to all of the above, please explain why not.

I decided last November to run for office, so yes, I will be a candidate.

Is there some activity related to the upcoming local elections that you would like to organize with your local party association? Or an activity that the party association could organize and you would be interested in taking part in?

- The sausages in market places worked well during the presidential election
- The ministerial roadshows

What is your greatest concern that the local council (local politicians) should try and deal with at the moment? What is your “burning issue” related to your neighborhood or town? Don’t think big political decisions now; it can be an example very close to your home

For me, municipal politics provide a chance to:

- help people [individually and locally]
- help the whole of Finland to get along
- have an impact on possibilities
- fight against social democracy and communism

Name:	Ahmed Ladarsi
Years in Finland:	34 years
Country of birth:	Tunisia

What are your thoughts regarding the local elections in Finland? Can you share any impressions or ideas or describe in a few words their meaning to you?

Migrants are part of Finnish society. During the campaign, the migrants must be considered so that in the local communities and town councils, work is done for all municipal citizens.

What ways (actions, measures, activities) could be used to motivate migrants in Finland so that they would go to vote and they would take part in the political decision making at a local level?

It is, overall, a big challenge to motivate all citizens (migrants as well as others) to vote. The real problem is that the action of parties is outdated. There is no belief in the promises made by politicians.

Do you have plans to take part in the next local elections in autumn 2012? Do you intend to be a candidate yourself? If not, would you consider joining another candidate’s campaign team? Are there other ways in which you see yourself taking part in election activities? If the answer is “No” to all of the above, please explain why not.

I will be active in the next local election, even though I haven’t yet decided to run as a candidate myself. To have a successful campaign, you need a trustworthy support group, the time and the finance.

Name:	Catherine Malingrey
Years in Finland:	22 years
Country of birth:	Finland

What are your thoughts regarding the local elections in Finland? Can you share any impressions or ideas or describe in a few words their meaning to you?

I was born in Helsinki in 1963, at a time when there were not so many foreigners around, or at least obvious ones. I lived my first five years in Finland, after which I went to Paris to go to school. I studied there and I came back in 1985. In 1998, I moved to the French Caribbean, from where I came back to Finland in 2008. I consider the municipal election most important, because it gives everyone an opportunity to vote and influence political decisions.

What ways (actions, measures, activities) could be used to motivate migrants in Finland so that they would go to vote and they would take part in the political decision making at a local level?

I would like to see each party prepare an advertising campaign that could be seen in such places as in buses and on advertising boards with pictures of some foreign candidates (such as candidate Malingrey) and a message in different languages saying something like “Yes, I can be part of decision making” or “I also vote”.

There should also be candidates from different countries, whose profiles would become clearly visible during the campaign.

Do you have plans to take part in the next local elections in autumn 2012? Do you intend to be a candidate yourself? If not, would you consider joining another candidate’s campaign team? Are there other ways in which you see yourself taking part in election activities? If the answer is “No” to all of the above, please explain why not.

I will be running as a candidate myself.

Is there some activity related to the upcoming local elections that you would like to organize with your local party association? Or an activity that the party association could organize and you would be interested in taking part in?

To get foreigners voting in Finland, they should be informed first that they have such a right in her or his own language. Events with tents in market places should be organized with people from different countries attending and documents performed.

Name:	Katalin Valjento
Years in Finland:	2.5 years
Country of birth:	Hungary

What are your thoughts regarding the local elections in Finland? Can you share any impressions or ideas or describe in a few words their meaning to you?

As I have never voted in any municipal elections in Finland yet, I would like to get to know more about the procedure, after which I’m sure that I could share my ideas better. Maybe somebody could introduce it to me?

What ways (actions, measures, activities) could be used to motivate migrants in Finland so that they would go to vote and they would take part in the political decision making at a local level?

In my opinion, we immigrants are interested in political decision making, and I’m sure we could share a lot of ideas, but I think we don’t know enough about the procedure, or possibilities. Maybe it would be a good idea to let the people (immigrants) know about participation in political decision making by sharing it on boards in public places, where most of the people walk on a daily basis.

I’m sure that marketing and advertising could raise interest, because as I mentioned, most of us don’t even know about it.

Do you have plans to take part in the next local elections in autumn 2012? Do you intend to be a candidate yourself? If not, would you consider joining another candidate’s campaign team? Are there other ways in which you see yourself taking part in election activities? If the answer is “No” to all of the above, please explain why not.

I think when I get to know more about the whole procedure, I might take part in it somehow.

Is there some activity related to the upcoming local elections that you would like to organize with your local party association? Or an activity that the party association could organize and you would be interested in taking part in?

Due to [my current] lack of knowledge about municipal elections in Finland, I could maybe answer this question a bit later.

CONCLUSIONS

Looking forward to the autumn 2012 Helsinki municipal election, it seems that there are clear obstacles to, yet also great potential in, immigrant voting behavior in Finland.

Foreigners in Finland can be easily approached when using the right networks, which can be seen by the relatively high number of respondents to the small internet poll that collected information for this survey. It was possible to ask serious questions and form a coherent picture of immigrant attitudes and interest towards societal decision making.

Over half of the respondents (55%) were 25-40 years of age. About 90% of the respondents were employed, mostly in management, as entrepreneurs, or students. Around 61 % of all the respondents had not yet voted in a Finnish election. Meanwhile, only 10 % answered that they had no interest in politics or did not know. So, the good news is that 90% of the 230 respondents answered that they had some interest, they followed politics actively, they would like to take part more in local politics, or they were already taking part in political associations or political activities.

Over 58% of the respondents said they would vote in the next election, but around one third (33%) did not know. Yet 48 % indicated that they do not have enough information about the political system in Finland. Nearly 40 % did not know about their right to vote, even though they do not have Finnish citizenship, so it is remarkable that so many announced their plans to vote in the next municipal election.

A general lack of information and, more specifically, a lack of information in English (and other languages) emerged as important themes through the survey, open questions, and one-on-one interviews. It seems that the Internet is the most usual place that respondents look for information (nearly 42% got their information online).

Visibility and public awareness of foreigners and migrants was another key theme identified through the open questions and one-on-one interviews. The feeling was described in the following comment quite clearly:

"I wish that the voice of migrants would be better heard and that the migrant candidates would be more visible in public!"

The results of this study paint a fairly optimistic view of the future for immigrant participation in the political process in Finland: people appear to be enthusiastic and interested, as long as they have the information they need. At the very least, this research gives us useful information about immigrant voting behavior in Finland, and points towards ways that will help our new Finns to participate more in societal decision making. The individual face-to-face interviews were particularly good in helping in the collection of ideas and suggesting where to take those ideas next. So the question must be asked: can we reconcile with the short history of immigration in Finland and accept the fact that our nation is an international environment – also politically?

Survey by Questback and Toivo Think Tank
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Sources:
Practising participation, Ministry of Justice
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