

# 2023 Questionnaire

## Toronto Mayoral Candidates

**The Catholic Church** considers that elected democratic office is a position of immense responsibility, to be held in high trust and exercised with great humility, wisdom, and respect, in the interest of the common good. Our leaders are meant to help gather us in a spirit of mutual cooperation and support, setting for us an example of listening and collaboration as together citizens seek common ground for authentic growth as human beings. This applies fully to municipal offices, including that of Mayor. Cities are homes to the majority of citizens, and are often the first recourse of new citizens for safety, housing, and well-being.

The 10 open-ended questions below are meant to allow you to share, in your own words, your plans for working toward the true welfare of all Torontonians.

Please start by confirming your name and preferred contact information:

Candidate's name: Kiri Vadivelu  
E-mail: socialistmayor@kiri-vadivelu.ca  
Phone: 647-986-1917  
Social Media Handle(s): kiri\_vadivelu

## YOUR VISION FOR SERVICE AS MAYOR

### Your Political Vocation

Q. 1. What draws you to the vocation of service as Mayor of Toronto, a city of nearly 3 million people?

Toronto is in crisis, the product of a failed capitalist system. Only socialist measures offer solutions. I fight for immediate mass social housing construction, expropriation of giant landlords, and free public transit . We seek to repair our schools, and cut police budget by at least 50%. We demand a climate justice agenda, replacement of the "strong mayor" powers with a grassroots participatory budget process, and steep taxation of the properties of big business and the rich.

There are many ways you can contribute to our grass-roots campaign. Firstly, you can help us overcome the media blackout of the socialist campaign by sharing this message with your network online. Secondly, you can distribute our campaign flyers, leaflets and posters to community members in your proximity. In that way, those in your circles will know about our good work instead of relying on the political options featured by the corporate media. When the first two options are not feasible, you can donate to our campaign.

Regardless what support you decide to provide, I urge you to challenge the status quo that works primarily for the privileged few. Let's organize, fight, and win economic democracy for the vast majority, and put an end to oppression and exploitation forever.

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Q. 2. What experience do you have that qualifies you to serve as Mayor? (Please feel free to point to an online or attached CV if desired)

I immigrated from Sri Lanka to escape genocide of Tamils as a child, and successfully resisted illegal eviction of my family at the Ontario Landlord and Tenant Board during the 2020 emergency lock down. I believe good housing is a human right. I am a founding member of the Scarborough Tenants' Union, a leading voice of Toronto Acorn, and a committed member of Justice for Workers. I was a shop steward in the United Steelworkers Union where I fought for better working conditions, and was the recipient of a 2019 union leadership award.

I am a social justice activist and a member of the Municipal Socialist Alliance (MSA) which ran 10 candidates across southern Ontario last October, receiving about 15,000 votes. I was the MSA candidate in Scarborough Centre ward 21 gaining 1,800 votes. I am the first Tamil-Canadian to seek the mayor's office in Toronto.

Q.3. What are the most important things you hope to accomplish as Mayor?

Uproot the causes of poverty & crime  
Stop houseless death on streets  
Make housing a human right

Invest in mental health care for all  
Stop privatization of public assets  
De-fund police to fund community services

Free public transit to save environment  
Support local community gardens  
Make climate justice a public priority

Create participatory budget process  
Heavily tax properties of big business  
Replace monopoly with economic democracy

### Life & Human Dignity

Q.4. Catholics believe that we are all lost children of God, and that the purpose of this life is to find our way home to God – most importantly, by ensuring that our neighbours are enabled and encouraged to search for truth as well. What is your understanding of the purpose of life, and how does that inform your proposed policies?

As we come out of the long pandemic, Toronto still have no plans in place to address the needs of working, young and the vulnerable in the city. Our wages shrink, expenses skyrocket and we consume the inflation all alone while billionaires sell junk wisdom but that is not a concern for status quo servants.

Children who eat breakfast tend to do better in school. But many working families cannot afford the meal due to low take home pay. The city should fill the breakfast gap. The breakfast program can easily be funded by reallocating police budget.

However, City of Toronto elegantly criminalized poverty through evicting houseless people while Ottawa struck peaceful protesters with iron fist for resisting vaccine mandates. COVID 2020 reminded that capitalism cannot be reformed, that is why I am running for mayor to change the system.

Q.5. Many Torontonians are rightly concerned with making diversity, equity, and inclusion a reality within our city. True efforts in such direction will not neglect those challenged by mental or physical disabilities. What is your plan for making Toronto truly accessible to all?

We, as individuals may have different opinions and views; however, we are the 99 percent and share the common goals. The 1 percent who owns everything, do not live with us but continue to dictate politics around us. Therefore, we must rise to stop the tyranny, hate and division from mocking our democracy.

Together, we can change the culture of city hall from oppression and exploitation to true democracy and representation. The proof is in the program, I invite you to read and share with everyone you care, instead of relying on the political options featured by the corporate media.

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Q.6. Prominent current issues facing Toronto include homelessness and access to affordable housing. What can or should the City of Toronto do about housing? Are there others – other levels of government, charitable agencies, for example – that might be supported, called upon, and encouraged to help in such work? How should any such organizations cooperate?

Media hype about crime but fail to report the fact that last year 187 Torontonians were killed due to lack of care. After all, most corporate media outlets are owned by few individuals, undemocratically. In such social condition where people die in our streets without a home, non-partisan means pro-establishment.

In the midst of the COVID lock down, Toronto police evicted houseless people from public parks. It was state- funded violence that injured members of the public who defended the vulnerable from the blows of police brutality. Overfunding Police is not the way to solve homelessness and mental health issues in the big city; instead, funding must be reallocated to cure the disease of poverty.

Q.7. The news suggests that anxiety and mental health are also among the important issues facing Toronto – incidents, including violent attacks, on the TTC, for example. What can or should the City of Toronto do about to address mental health and safety on the sidewalk? Are there others – other levels of government, charitable agencies, for example – that might be supported, called upon, and encouraged to help in such work?

People across the political spectrum agree that Ontario's healthcare system is in crisis, but what are the causes and what are the solutions? For the Ford government the cause is public healthcare, and the solution is private healthcare. This is based on a series of old myths that predated the current crisis, and that continue to be reused every time governments want to push further privatization.

Whether they're upselling or double-billing, private clinics put profits first – and this move will undoubtedly hurt patients and the public healthcare system we all depend on. In these difficult times, we should be taking care of one another, not corporations and their shareholders

On the transportation policy, students and workers should never have to choose between bus fare and lunch in a wealthy city. Criminalizing poverty through expensive fare enforcement is unjust, not just a bad look for tourism. Putting police in the TTC to demand money from people who have nothing in wallet and the belly is the cruelest policy. A systematic criminalization of poverty keep poor people in the vicious cycle of poverty. For an example funding to end the need of Food Bank is better than donating to charities to prolong the suffering of poor, disabled and the ill.

### Care for the Environment

Q.8. The City of Toronto has long been engaged with care for the environment. Yet it can do more, particularly as awareness grows of the urgent nature of climate crises. Catholic teaching recognizes that what happens with the environment affects every aspect of our lives, everywhere on the planet. Pope Francis, like many faith leaders before him, has called on us to “work together” to ensure God’s creation is protected for future generations. How do you intend to promote collaborative and effective approaches to municipal climate change commitments, such as the TransformTO Net Zero strategy, to ensure care for the environment is consistently and urgently prioritized?

The capitalism is at war with people and planet. I am fighting for immediate mass social housing construction, expropriation of giant landlords, and free public transit . We seek to repair our schools, and cut police budget by at least 50%. We demand a climate justice agenda, replacement of the "strong mayor" powers with a grassroots participatory budget process, and steep taxation of the properties of big business and the rich.

For an example, punishing the cyclists is the worst way to support climate crisis. Increasing the safety of pedestrians and cyclists will aid the transition to a greener, cleaner, healthier, more sustainable urban mode of transportation. Cops ticketing cyclists underscores the need for safer, more visible and self-contained bicycle paths. Instead of lecturing drivers to get out of their cars, invest in reliable, efficient public transportation to give workers a meaningful choice. Stop plundering the protected green belt.

### An Economy to Serve People

Q.9. Among the greatest challenges faced by Toronto is affordable, accessible, and timely public transportation, particularly as an alternative to the use of personal vehicles. Vehicle congestion aggravates not only health concerns, but difficulties faced by Torontonians in maintaining dignified and fulfilling work. What are your plans for effectively addressing this problem? What approach would you take to expanding public transit, improved access for pedestrians and cyclists, and rejuvenation of infrastructure to make it easier for people in Toronto to access all the opportunities Toronto has to offer?

As particular examples:

- How do you propose to address highway congestion, including for example on the 401, 427, Gardiner, and DVP highways?
- In view of its success, do you support rapid expansion of the King Street Pilot Project to other streetcar lines?
- Do you support expansion of the streetcar system?
- Do you support expansion of the bike lanes system?
- Do you support installation of overhead electrical charging for the electric buses the TTC proposes to buy?

The Gardiner Expressway has long been a feature of Toronto's transportation horror-scape. It blocks Torontonians from enjoying easy access to Lake Ontario and has become a blight on the waterfront. Its very construction was an environmental assault on then-existing parkland. It was a project first built in segments from 1955 until 1964 by the Metropolitan Toronto government to connect the city by expressway along the lake shore. The plan incorporated an elevated portion that obstructed public access to the city's eastern port lands.

Kiri Vadivelu, the Municipal Socialist Alliance candidate for mayor, says "It is time to tear down this blight and construct a pedestrian and bike friendly boulevard -- instead of investing billions more dollars to repair the Gardiner Expressway. We can follow the example of leading European cities. Toronto needs to reduce its emissions from vehicular traffic and to increase greenspace to fight climate change."

Sunk costs are said to be \$550 million dollars according to a recent staff report. The total construction bill to rebuild sections of the Gardiner Expressway is \$1.89 billion according to the report.

Even Dillon Consulting, which prepared the report on the Gardiner options regarding hybrid rebuild or teardown, favors the removal option. Dillon favours the latter because it "allows the full development of an urban district introduced by a tree canopied urban boulevard". A teardown also gives "lower green house gas emissions and greater opportunity to create new natural habitat." Finally, a teardown has greater economic feasibility as it has a lower net 100-year lifecycle cost.

The only viable option that embodies livability, park space, environmental sustainability and economic feasibility is the teardown of the Gardiner Expressway. Kiri Vadivelu, 37, the first Tamil-Canadian to run for Toronto mayor, is committed to building a city that is livable and one in which infrastructure development is seen through dual lenses – what is best for the working class of the city, and the need to reduce emissions to fight catastrophic climate change already a threat to life as we know it.

### Order & Public Safety

Q.10. As noted above, anxiety and mental health issues arising from the pandemic seem to be the cause of an alarming number of violent assaults in Toronto, including on the TTC, with many people - including those suffering mental illness - becoming victims. Street racing remains a hazardous and potentially lethal pastime among young Torontonians. What steps would you take to both reduce the threat of these and other hazards, and to address their underlying causes?

Community safety and the failure of the police are blantly obvious. Overfunding police instead of address the root causes of social problems did not work. Evidence based approach is to view public safety as a social problem rather than just law enforcement inadequacy.

On April 13, Toronto Police marked the second anniversary of the release of the Report of the Independent Civilian Review into Missing Persons Investigations (Missing & Missed Report), which found that systemic discrimination against the LGBTQ, new immigrants and refugees, and other racialized and marginalized communities, led to significant failings of Toronto Police concerning its missing persons investigation.

Socialist mayoralty candidate Kiri Vadivelu condemns Toronto Police for patting themselves on the back, despite their sluggish implementation of the 151 recommendations in the report. The Toronto Police would like to appear as if they are atoning for their years of inaction regarding violence experienced by marginalized individuals.

“We know this is a farce” says 37-year old tenant organizer, Kiri Vadivelu. “Marginalized communities disproportionately experience violence at the hands of Toronto Police. Women experiencing domestic violence are consistently ignored, despite their pleas for help and protection. There is an extreme lack of care regarding missing and murdered people working class, queer, and racialized people. The establishment expects that we stay silent as our city becomes increasingly securitized - with the consistent harassment and violence exerted by the Toronto Police towards house-less folk, Toronto police patrolling the TTC, and the \$48.3M increase in police budget.

We will not fall for the use of buzzwords and attempts to placate us into accepting shallow apologies of the Toronto Police. We will continue to fight injustices in the city; we will continue to protest violence perpetrated by the TPS; we will continue to stand with marginalized communities; and we will continue to call for the city to Defund the Police.”