

WHO VOTES AND WHY

1.0 Who Is More Likely To Vote?

Many studies have been done on the socio-demographic profiles of who votes in Canada. Though most of the studies focus on turnout at the federal level, it is generally accepted that the trends apply to the provincial and municipal levels.

1.1 Education

Education is the most prominent indicator of whether or not someone will vote. The more educated a person is, the likelier it is that they will vote. Perplexingly, turnout has decreased over time while overall education levels have increased. Studies find that this phenomenon is generally caused by the generational effect discussed below in section 1.2.

1.2 Age

The older someone is, the likelier it is that they will vote. An analysis of Canadian voter data collected between 1968 and 2000 shows that generational effects are the primary cause for the recent voter decline. This means that the probability of a young person voting today is less than when their parents and grandparents were their age. This generational effect emphasizes how important it is to create first-time voters because a person who votes the first time they are eligible is more likely to become a habitual voter.

1.3 Income

Income is the most important determinant of voting after a person's education level and age.

2.0 Why Don't People Vote?

Elections Canada has done numerous studies on why Canadians don't vote. The most common responses are summarized below in order of ranking:

- Didn't like candidates or parties
- Didn't think their vote made a difference
- Election doesn't affect them
- Not enough time to vote; had to work*
- Injury, illness*
- Not enough information on where and when to vote*

*Attachment 3 lists what initiatives The City does to address these concerns.

3.0 Underlying Reasons

The underlying reasons behind why people don't vote are diverse and interrelated. Findings from Elections Canada follow:

3.1 Changes in Canadians' Values

3.1.1 Decline in Deference

Citizens in Western democracies have experienced a "decline in deference" towards traditional institutions. People's growing sense of personal autonomy has changed their attitudes toward authority and traditional institutions.

3.1.2 Shifts in Community Values

Some researchers suggest that citizens interact with each other differently than they did before the 1970's. Citizens are now much more individualistic, don't trust each other as much and have fewer ties to their communities.

3.1.3 Growing Cynicism

Many observers argue that the decline in voter turnout is a result of citizens losing confidence in their political leaders and becoming cynical about political processes. The decline in deference and shift in community values contribute to this cynicism but researchers also point to how media cover politics and elections. The media's focus on the "game" of politics, rather than on its substance, directly causes an erosion of citizen interest and, ultimately, participation.

3.2 Uninteresting Elections

A 2001 Centre for Research and Information on Canada (CRIC) report states that:

"People are more likely to vote when they think their vote counts and they are more likely to think their vote counts when the election is hotly contested, or when there are major issues at stake (...) Political scientists who have studied voter turnouts in many democratic countries have concluded that one of the factors affecting turnout is the voters' own sense of whether the election is close (in terms of the winner's margin of victory) or important (in terms of how much the outcome is deemed to matter.)"

3.3 Generational Shift

There are many interrelated arguments about why newer generations are less likely to vote. Theories include:

- Most recent generations pay less attention to politics and are less likely to believe that voting is a moral duty.
- Time spent with family has changed, lessening the amount of time families engage with each other. This has implications for the transmission of values and behaviour from one generation to the next.

- Newer generations have not experienced the hardship and failure to meet material needs that comes with times of war and economic downturn therefore they focus on “higher order” issues like environmentalism and human rights. This changes their beliefs and behaviour.
- Young Canadians are not indifferent to politics, they simply engage differently. They withdraw from traditional forms of political engagement (e.g. voting, joining political parties, etc) because of the hierarchical, long-term and relatively unsatisfying nature of such activity. Outreach aimed at youth needs to adapt to their different needs to promote voting.

3.4 Political Parties

Statistics show that having political parties at the municipal level in Canada does not necessarily result in a higher voter turnout. This contradicts a prevalent argument that having political parties at the local level would increase voter turnout because parties provide cues for electors.

A comparison of voter turnout in some of Canada’s larger municipalities from their last four elections is provided in Figure 1. This comparison does not show a great difference in voter turnout between party and non-party systems.

**Figure 1: Comparing Party and Non-Party Municipalities –
Voter Turnout from the Four Most Recent Elections**

Average	Party system			Non-party system				
	Burnaby	Vancouver	Montreal	Calgary	Edmonton	Ottawa	Toronto	Winnipeg
	28.92	43.4	43.32	39.43	34.5	39.92	54.67	50.23
	23.29	34.57	39.44	53.39	33.4	44	43.65	47.1
	23.49	30.79	34.95	32.9	27.24	54	39.3	38.2
	25.57	32.61	49.23	19.8*	41.79	33	38.32	48.7
	25.32	35.34	41.74	36.38	34.23	42.73	43.99	46.06

*Calgary experienced its first snowstorm of the season on election day, affecting voter turnout.

3.5 Administrative Barriers and Weather

3.5.1 Advance, Weekend and Mail-In Voting

A 2007 Elections Canada study analyzes how non-election day voting opportunities affect voter turnout. The study concludes that:

1. There is relatively clear evidence that when voting is more convenient, a greater proportion of the population turn out to vote.
2. Different jurisdictions have hosted election day on holidays/weekends or over a two-day voting period. Studies of these options show ambiguous results. Some show a positive

effect on voter turnout while others show no effect. The Alberta experience in some rural areas had little impact and most, if not all, returned to Mondays.

3. Overall voter turnout in Canada is increased by opening advance voting to all electors. This provision and more advance voting opportunities should thus increase overall turnout.
4. All-mail elections, where voting is done exclusively via mail (e.g. Oregon and Washington), show positive effects but these effects are minimal and restricted to certain subgroups. For example, an all-mail election increases turnout by making it easier for people who generally, but not always, cast a ballot. It does little to cause habitual non-voters to vote. More information on all-mail elections can be found in section 2.2 of Attachment 3.

The City has experienced the positive effects of non-election day voting. The City has instituted an increase in advance vote days, number of locations, alternative voting methods (ie: mail-in (special) ballot) and innovative solutions (eg: mobile vote bus) that have helped stabilize turnout and keep it higher than in most Alberta municipalities. For more information on these initiatives, see section 1.0 of Attachment 3.

3.5.2 Identification Requirements

The effect that identification restrictions have on voting has been studied extensively in the United States and to a lesser degree in Canada. Studies show that strict identification requirements negatively affect voter turnout.

In 2007, the Canadian government passed legislation requiring an elector to provide identification that proves identity and residence. Previously, if a person was not on the Electors List they were permitted to vote after having taken a prescribed oath. Follow-up analysis by Elections Canada and Senate Committees have found these identification requirements, especially the need to prove residence, has a negative effect on seniors, students, Aboriginals, the homeless and people who live in rural communities.

The Local Authorities Election Act in Alberta was amended for the 2013 general election to require proof of residence in addition to identity. The proof of residence requirement reduced the number of acceptable forms of identification from 32 in 2010 to 19 in 2013. As at the federal level, this disproportionately affects certain groups. The proof of residence requirement also disproportionately affected citizens displaced from their homes by the 2013 Calgary Flood. Some residents were unable to provide the required identification for the 2013 general election because they were unable to get their identification from their inaccessible homes.

Curtailing election fraud is the main argument behind more restrictive identification laws but there is no evidence of systemic election fraud in Canada. Marc Mayrand, Canada's Chief Electoral Officer, argues against more restrictive electoral laws stating that "it is essential to understand that the main challenge for our electoral democracy is not voter fraud, but voter participation."

3.5.2 Weather

Studies have shown a statistically significant relationship between weather and voter turnout. An American study found that one additional inch of rain decreases turnout by almost one percentage point while the effect of one additional inch of snow is almost 0.5 percentage points. Calgary experienced this effect in 2004 when the season's first snowstorm was a substantial factor in the city's lowest ever turnout of 19.8 per cent.

3.6 Immigrants and Minorities

Immigration and ethnicity in Canadian federal and provincial elections is not a major factor in voting behaviour. What is important for these communities is the same as any other voter; their socio-demographic makeup and how connected they are to the community. Because people who access the news are more likely to vote than those who do not, it is noted that ethnic media sources may be every bit as good at encouraging voter participation as mainstream news sources.

In 2011, the Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary (ECCC) and Immigration Sector Council of Calgary (ISCC) surveyed a group from the immigrant community about their experiences and understandings of municipal voting and what would encourage them to vote. They reported numerous reasons for not voting, including lack of information on candidate positions, uninteresting elections and a lack of time and/or transportation. Other important reasons were:

- A lack of knowledge about the election process, where and how to vote, the name of their community and ward number and the role of the municipality; and
- A lack of election information and media coverage in diverse languages.

The City provides a copy of the Instructions to Elector and Statement of Elector in nineteen languages at every voting station; going above and beyond what any other municipality does in Alberta. Advertising about the election is also done in the local Chinese language newspaper.