



Turnout and Reasons for Not Voting During the 42nd General Election: Results from the Labour Force Survey

Policy and Research¹

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Based on the questions asked by Elections Canada in the [Labour Force Survey](#) (LFS) following the 2015 general election, Statistics Canada released a [communiqué](#) on February 22, 2016, focusing on turnout and the reasons for not voting. The present note refers to key results mentioned in the communiqué and expands on the reasons for not voting related to the electoral process. Where possible, comparisons are made with 2011.

Methodology

For the second time since 2011, Elections Canada collaborated with Statistics Canada to include questions on voter participation in the LFS following a general election. As with the 41st general election, Canadian citizens were asked whether they voted and the reasons why they did not vote. This time, to better assess to what extent voter participation may have been impacted by the identification requirements, the categories of main reasons for not voting were refined.² As well, a question was added to evaluate, among those who indicated that they did not vote because they could not prove their identity or address, the proportion who went to a polling station.³

The LFS is administered by Statistics Canada on a monthly basis to collect labour market information for approximately 100,000 individuals based on a sample of approximately 56,000 households.⁴ Participation in the LFS is mandatory, but answering Elections Canada's questions in the November 2015 survey was voluntary. The response rate to Elections Canada's filter question on citizenship was 96.7%. The fact that almost all LFS participants volunteered to answer Elections Canada's questions significantly reduces the selection bias usually observed in traditional political or electoral surveys. Compared to other surveys – where the sample size is usually between 1,500 and 3,500 respondents – the LFS, with its very large sample, allows for more meaningful statistical analysis.⁵ This represents an advantage in studying small groups or more marginal aspects of a subject.

Elections Canada undertook further analysis of the results based on aggregated data⁶ from supplemental tables provided by Statistics Canada. Various confidentiality rules were applied to these tables to prevent the publication or disclosure of any information deemed confidential. Based on direction from

¹ Elections Canada wishes to thank Statistics Canada for their comments.

² The categories of main reasons for not voting were refined for two purposes: 1) to better capture reasons related to the electoral process, including the identification requirements; and 2) to minimize answers falling under the "other reasons" category, which were mentioned by 11% of respondents in 2011. Because of those changes, and because respondents were allowed to mention more than one reason for not voting in 2015, data for 2011 and 2015 are not directly comparable.

³ Another question was also added to examine the characteristics of those who used the online registration service. However, this question is not analyzed in the context of this note.

⁴ In each dwelling, information about all household members is usually obtained from one knowledgeable household member.

⁵ That being said, the LFS remains a survey. As such, its estimates are subject to both sampling and non-sampling errors, including under- or over-coverage, non-response and coding errors.

⁶ Data are weighted and adjusted to the Canadian population.

Statistics Canada, Elections Canada conducted further tests to determine the reliability of the estimates and whether observed differences can be considered statistically significant.⁷

Turnout

- A higher proportion of Canadians reported that they had voted in the 2015 federal election (77.0%),⁸ compared with 2011 (70.0%).
- Young voters accounted for a large part of that increase. Among people aged 18 to 24, the reported voter turnout rate increased by 12.3 percentage points between 2011 and 2015 (from 54.6% to 66.9%). Among those aged 25 to 34, reported turnout increased by 11.1 percentage points over the same period (from 58.7% to 69.8%).
- The reported turnout rate of immigrant Canadians who had been in Canada for 10 years or less went from 55.7% to 70.1%. This represents an increase of 14.4 percentage points.
- The reported turnout rate in 2015 for Aboriginal electors living off-reserve⁹ was lower than for non-Aboriginal electors, at 68.1% and 77.2%, respectively. A comparison with 2011 is not available.

Reasons for not voting

- Reasons for not voting have been regrouped under four main categories: everyday life or health reasons (47.9%), political reasons (39.5%), electoral process-related reasons (7.6%) and all other reasons (5.1%).¹⁰
- Among the 23.0% of eligible Canadians who reported that they did not vote in the October 2015 federal general election, which represents approximately 6 million electors, the most common reason reported for not voting was not being interested in politics (31.8%), followed by being too busy (23.5%). Together, these two reasons account for over half (55.3%) of the reasons mentioned for not voting. Other frequently mentioned reasons were an illness or disability (12.5%) and being out of town (11.9%).

⁷ The method recommended by Statistics Canada and applied by Elections Canada is considered a “rule of thumb” method and is not as accurate as complex computer-intensive variance estimation methods. The method also doesn’t take into account the covariation between the estimates.

⁸ Previous studies and post-election surveys have consistently shown that voter turnout rates reported in those studies are higher than official voter turnout rates. The estimate for the voter turnout rate from the 2015 LFS (77.0%) is 8.7 percentage points higher than the official figure published by Elections Canada (68.3%) following the October 19, 2015, federal general election. In 2011, the turnout rate from the LFS was 70.0%, 8.9 percentage points higher than the official figure (61.1%).

⁹ The LFS does not cover persons living on reserves and on other Aboriginal settlements in the provinces. Although the LFS covers people in the territories, Elections Canada’s questions were asked only in the provinces.

¹⁰ The survey allowed for the collection of more than one reason. Therefore, results reflect multiple mentions.

Table 1. Reasons for not voting, all non-voters, youth and Aboriginal people living off-reserve, 2015 federal election (%)

Reasons for not voting	All non-voters	Youth (18–24)	Aboriginals living off-reserve
Everyday life or health reasons	47.9	46.6	41.4
Too busy	23.5	28.4	20.9
Out of town	11.9	13.0	9.9
Illness or disability	12.5	5.1	10.7
Political reasons	39.5	37.6	43.4
Not interested in politics	31.8	32.9	35.0
Lack of information about campaign issues and parties' positions	1.5	1.9 ^E	–
Did not like candidates / parties / campaign	3.1	1.1 ^E	4.1 ^E
Felt voting would not make a difference	1.4	–	2.4 ^E
Did not know who to vote for	1.7	1.1 ^E	F
Electoral process-related reasons	7.6	11.5	9.4
Could not prove identity or address	2.7	4.6	4.6 ^E
Not on voters list	0.9	2.3 ^E	–
Transportation problem / polling station too far	1.4	1.1 ^E	1.3 ^E
Lack of information about the voting process (e.g. when/where to vote)	1.3	2.3 ^E	1.7 ^E
Lineups were too long	0.3 ^E	–	–
Issues with the voter information card	0.9	0.9 ^E	–
All other reasons	5.0	4.3	5.8^E
Forgot to vote	0.8	0.7 ^E	–
Religious or other beliefs	1.2	1.0 ^E	–
Other reason	3.0	2.7 ^E	3.5 ^E

Source: Labour Force Survey, November 2015.

Notes: Based on multiple mentions.

Base: Non-voters in the 2015 general election.

The LFS does not cover persons living on reserves and on other Aboriginal settlements in the provinces. Although the LFS covers people in the territories, Elections Canada's questions were asked only in the provinces.

– Value is either zero or has been suppressed for confidentiality reasons.

^E Figure to be used with caution.

F Figure is unreliable.

Reasons related to the electoral process

- Among the reasons Canadians reported for not voting, 7.6% were related to the electoral process. Those aged 18 to 24 were more likely to report not voting for these particular reasons (11.5%).
- The proportion of reasons related to the electoral process varied from 6.0% in Newfoundland and Labrador to 12.3% in New Brunswick.
- Within the electoral process category, the key reasons for not voting were as follows: could not prove identity or address (2.7%, which represents approximately 172,700 electors)¹¹; transportation problems or the polling station being too far (1.4%); and a lack of information about the voting process

¹¹ Approximately 98,400 of the 172,700 electors were aged 18 to 34. This represents about 57% of all Canadians who said that they did not vote because they were not able to prove their identity or address. These figures, however, should be interpreted with caution.

(1.3%). Other electoral process-related reasons included the following: issues with the voter information card (0.9%), not being on the voters list (0.9%), and lineups being too long (0.3%).¹²

- Among Canadians aged 18 to 24, the main reason for not voting that relates to the electoral process was not being able to prove their identity or address (4.6%), which is higher than the figure observed for the overall population (2.7%). Other electoral process-related reasons mentioned by young Canadians were a lack of information about the voting process (2.3%), not being on the voters list (2.3%), and transportation problems or the polling station being too far (1.1%).¹³
- Among Aboriginal electors living off-reserve, the main reason for not voting that relates to the electoral process was also not being able to prove their identity or address (4.6%).¹⁴ Other electoral-process related reasons mentioned by Aboriginal people were a lack of information about the voting process (1.7%), and transportation problems or the polling station being too far (1.3%).¹⁵

Non-voters who said they went to a polling station

- Those who said they did not vote because they were not able to prove their identity or address were also asked if they went to a polling station.
- Among all Canadians who said that they did not vote because they were not able to prove their identity or address (approximately 172,700), more than a quarter (28.7%) said they went to a polling station – which represents approximately 49,600 electors across the country.
- Of those, approximately 10,500¹⁶ were aged 18 to 24 and 8,900¹⁷ were aged 25 to 34. Together, these two age groups represent about 40%¹⁸ of all electors who said they went to a polling station, but did not vote because they were not able to prove their identity or address. In comparison, people aged 18 to 34 represent 27.6% of all electors.

Table 2. Non-voters who mentioned reasons related to the electoral process, said they could not prove their identity or address, and said they went to a polling station, 2015 federal election

Category of non-voters	Number of non-voters	Confidence interval (95%)
Among non-voters: Those who mentioned reasons related to the electoral process ¹⁹	479,500	±39,800
Among those who mentioned reasons related to the electoral process: Those who mentioned they could not prove their identity or address	172,700	±21,800
Among those who mentioned they could not prove their identity or address: Those who said they went to a polling station	49,600	±11,800

Source: Labour Force Survey, November 2015.

¹² This figure should be used with caution.

¹³ These figures should be used with caution.

¹⁴ This figure should be used with caution.

¹⁵ These figures should be used with caution.

¹⁶ This figure should be used with caution. Based on a confidence interval of 95%, it may vary by ±4,400 (from 6,100 to 14,900).

¹⁷ This figure should be used with caution. Based on a confidence interval of 95%, it may vary by ±5,400 (from 3,500 to 14,300).

¹⁸ This figure should be interpreted with caution.

¹⁹ One person may be counted more than once in the number of non-voters mentioning reasons related to the electoral process as respondents could provide more than one reason for not voting.