Study: Understanding the increase in voting rates between the 2011 and 2015 federal elections

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A higher proportion of Canadians reported that they had voted in the 2015 federal election (77%) compared with the 2011 federal election (70%). Notable increases were recorded among youth, Aboriginal people (namely, First Nations living off reserve, Métis and Inuit) and recent immigrants.

The voting rate is defined as the proportion of Canadian citizens aged 18 and older who reported that they had voted in the federal election.

These results come from the new study, "Understanding the increase in voting rates between the 2011 and 2015 federal elections."

The study is based on data from additional questions that were added to the Labour Force Survey (LFS) following the last two federal elections to examine the voting patterns of Canadian citizens. While the LFS provides voting rate estimates that are higher than official turnout rates, LFS data can be used to examine factors associated with voting and changes over time (see note to readers).

Increase in the voting rates of youth

In both the 2011 and 2015 federal elections, proportionally fewer younger individuals voted compared with older Canadians.

In 2015, for instance, 67% of individuals aged 18 to 24 reported that they had voted, compared with 75% among those aged 35 to 44 and 86% among those aged 65 to 74.

From 2011 to 2015, however, the voting rates of younger Canadians increased at a faster pace than that of older Canadians.

The voting rate increased by 12 percentage points among 18- to 24-year-olds, by 11 percentage points among 25- to 34-year-olds, and by 10 percentage points among 35- to 44-year-olds. By comparison, the rate was stable among people aged 65 and older.

Voting rates increased significantly for each educational attainment group. However, a gap remained between the least-educated Canadians and most-educated Canadians, particularly among young voters.

For example, among people aged 25 to 34 in 2015, the difference in voting rates between those with at least a bachelor's degree and those with less than a high school education was 42 percentage points. By comparison, among 65- to 74-year-olds, the gap was 13 percentage points.

Gain in voting rates among Aboriginal people

The LFS collects information about Aboriginal people living off reserve (namely, First Nations living off reserve, Métis and Inuit).

From 2011 to 2015, the voting rate among off-reserve Aboriginal people rose by 15 percentage points from 53% in 2011 to 68% in 2015. By comparison, the voting rate increased by 7 percentage points among non-Aboriginal people born in Canada, from 71% in 2011 to 78% in 2015.

In the 2015 federal election, First Nations living off reserve, Métis and Inuit together accounted for 2.4% of all voters.

Increase in voting rates of immigrants

Immigrants who hold Canadian citizenship accounted for 20.0% of all voters in the 2015 federal election.

From 2011 to 2015, the voting rate among immigrants increased by a margin similar to that of the overall population.

There were differences between recent immigrants and established immigrants. Recent immigrants are defined as those who immigrated in the 10 years preceding the survey.

From 2011 to 2015, the voting rate of recent immigrants rose by 14 percentage points, from 56% to 70%.

Among recent immigrants, those from Africa (+25 percentage points) and West Central Asia and the Middle East (+22 percentage points) recorded the largest increase in voting rates.

The increase was smaller among established immigrants, from 71% in 2011 to 76% in 2015.

Note to readers

This study examines the factors associated with voting in the May 2, 2011, and October 19, 2015, federal elections. Data were derived from three questions that were added to the Labour Force Survey (LFS) in the weeks following the election, commissioned by Elections Canada, to determine the main reasons some Canadians did not vote in the election. These voluntary questions were: Are you a Canadian citizen? Did you vote in the recent federal election? What is the main reason you did not vote? (The third question was asked if the respondent answered that he/she had not voted).

Studies examining voting participation have found that voting rates derived from surveys are typically higher than official turnout rates, and the LFS is no exception. Existing research has shown that one reason for this difference is that non-voters are less likely to answer survey questions on voting. However, the difference in voting rates as calculated according to LFS data and as posted by Elections Canada was almost the same in both 2011 and 2015—70.0% versus 61.1% in 2011 and 77.0% versus 68.3% in 2015—with both sources reporting a 7 percentage point increase in voting rates from 2011 to 2015. The results described in this release are thus expressed in differences, not in levels.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number 3701.

The article, "Understanding the increase in voting rates between the 2011 and 2015 federal elections," is now available in *Insights on Canadian Society* (**75-006-X**), from the *Browse by key resource* module of our website, under *Publications*.

For more information, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; **STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca**).

To enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact Sharanjit Uppal (613-854-3482; **sharanjit.uppal@canada.ca**).

For more information on *Insights on Canadian Society*, contact Sébastien LaRochelle-Côté (613-951-0803; **sebastien.larochelle-cote@canada.ca**).