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

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- ^r revised
- X suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*
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- * significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

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

by Sharanjit Uppal and Sébastien LaRochelle-Côté

Overview of the study

This study examines the changes in the voting rates of Canadian citizens between the 2011 and 2015 federal elections, on the basis of supplementary questions that were added to the Labour Force Survey (LFS) shortly after these elections. The focus is on population groups who saw the largest increases in voting rates over the period.

- Between the 2011 and 2015 federal elections, the voting rate increased by 7 percentage points. The rates increased faster among younger individuals than among older Canadians.
- Young people with a higher level of education are particularly more likely to vote than their less-educated counterparts. Among individuals aged 25 to 34 in 2015, the participation rate of those who had a university degree was 42 percentage points higher than those who had not completed high school.
- Between 2011 and 2015, the voting rate increased by 15 percentage points among Aboriginal people (i.e. First Nations living off reserve, Métis and Inuit). This compared with a 7 percentage point increase for the Canadian-born non-Aboriginal population, and a 6 percentage point increase among immigrants who had Canadian citizenship.
- Between 2011 and 2015, recent immigrants (who were Canadian citizens) from Africa and from West Central Asia and the Middle East increased their voting rates by 25 and 22 percentage points, respectively.
- In 2015, about 20% of overall voters were immigrants who had Canadian citizenship, and slightly more than 2% of voters reported an Aboriginal identity (First Nations living off-reserve, Métis or Inuit).

Introduction

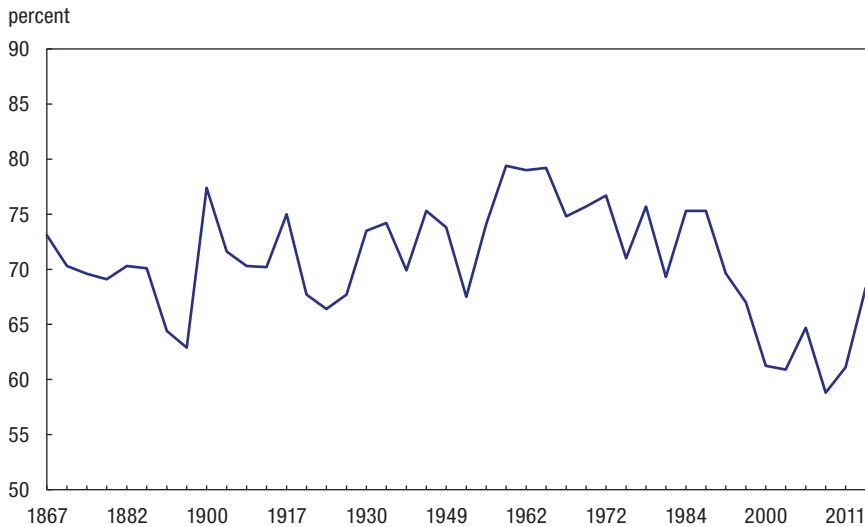
It is often said, notably among political scientists, that political participation is the foundation of democracy.¹ Voting is the most common and easily measured indicator of political participation by citizens in a democracy. Political participation can influence public policy; hence, the lower voting rates of some population groups could result in policies that do not necessarily represent their views or preferences.

Canadian studies on voter turnout have used both survey and administrative data to study the phenomena of voting patterns.² Most of these studies have shown that certain groups—including the young, the less-educated, immigrants and the less-wealthy—consistently vote at a lower rate than others.

After each federal election, Elections Canada calculates the official turnout rate as the number of ballots cast divided by the total registered population. Between 1867 and 1988, the turnout rate was 70% or higher in more than three-quarters of the elections.³ The voting rate declined in subsequent years⁴ and reached a record low in 2008, registering just below 59%. Between 2011 and 2015, the turnout rate jumped from 61.1% to 68.3%, one of the largest changes over two consecutive elections since Confederation (Chart 1).

Other studies have examined the decline in turnout rate during the 1990s. According to one study, the vast majority of the decline can be explained by recent cohorts of younger people not voting as much as older

Chart 1
Voting rates in Canadian federal elections, 1867 to 2015



Source: Elections Canada, 1867 to 2015.

people did when they were the same age, a phenomenon referred to as a generational effect.⁵ Lack of interest in politics, lack of trust and confidence in institutions, changing perceptions of government relevance, and little influence of youth on government policy changes are some of the hypotheses put forward to explain the decline in voting among young Canadians during the 1990s.⁶ Furthermore, it can be argued that the overall decline would have been larger had it not been for notable increases in the proportion of individuals with higher levels of educational attainment, and a growing proportion of older people—two groups that are typically more likely to vote.

The recent increase in voter turnout between the 2011 and 2015 federal elections represented a break from the declines of the 1990s and 2000s. Which groups contributed to the sudden reversal in electoral participation rates? In this study,

the question is investigated using data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS). In both 2011 and 2015, a few questions on voting were included as a supplement to the LFS in the month following the federal election (see *Data sources, methods and definitions*). Respondents who were eligible to vote were asked whether they voted in the federal election, and those who did not vote were asked about their reasons for not voting.⁷ The large sample size of the LFS, together with the wide range of socio-demographic information available in the survey, provides a good opportunity to relate voting to various individual characteristics and to examine which groups had the largest increase in their turnout rate. This study discusses factors associated with voting in the 2015 election, as well as the population groups that drove the increase between the 2011 and 2015 elections.

How to calculate voter turnout with survey data

Voter turnout can be defined in different ways. Elections Canada calculates turnout rate as the proportion of the total population eligible to vote (on the electoral list) that has cast a vote. However, information on the population registered to vote is not available in the LFS. Hence, the turnout rate is calculated as the proportion of Canadian citizens aged 18 years and above who stated that they voted in the election.

Studies dealing with voting participation have found that voting rates derived from surveys are typically higher than the official turnout rates, and the LFS is no exception. Existing research has shown that one reason for this result is that non-voters are less likely to answer survey questions on voting.⁸ In other words, there is likely a strong association between survey non-response and voting behaviour.

The correlation between non-response and non-participation likely explains some—but not all—of the difference in turnout rates between survey data and the official results from Elections Canada.⁹ This suggests that there are other factors at play.^{10,11}

In the sections that follow, the results from the LFS are used to discuss differences in voting participation between groups of Canadian citizens. Differences from the previous federal election are also examined. The difference in voting rates as calculated from the LFS 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 between 2011 and 2015.¹²

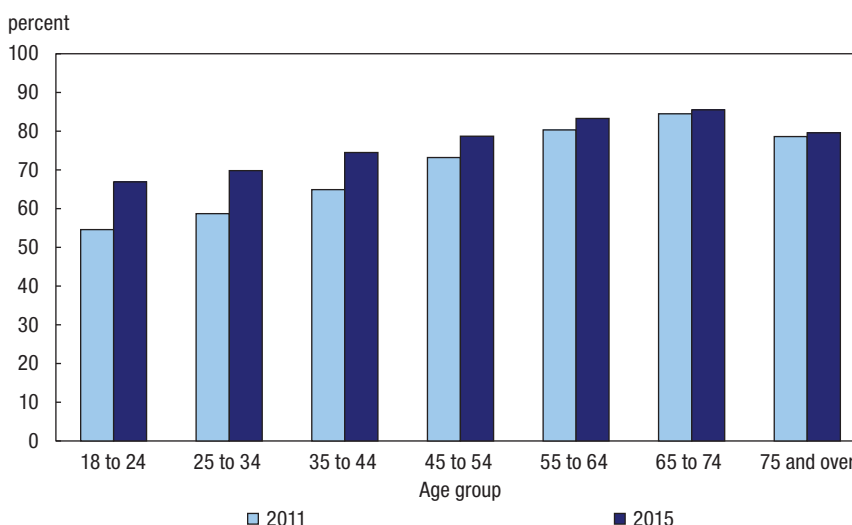
Younger people in all educational categories increased their voting rates

Older people are more likely to vote compared with their younger counterparts. According to the LFS, the turnout rate was 67% among people aged 18 to 24 in 2015, and it was marginally higher among the 25- to 34-year-olds, at 70%. In contrast, older people were more likely to vote, with turnout rates increasing from 75% among those aged 35 to 44 to a peak of 86% among the 65- to 74-year-olds. The turnout rate drops after age 74, often as a result of health-related factors. One-half of the non-voters in this age group cited illness or disability as a reason for not voting.

Younger individuals saw the largest increase in their voting rates between 2011 and 2015 (Chart 2). For instance, the turnout rate increased by 12 percentage points among people aged 18 to 24 (from 55% to 67%). Individuals aged 25 to 34 and 35 to 44 also saw a notable increase in their voting rates (11 percentage points and 10 percentage points, respectively). The increase was minimal for older age groups, with the turnout rate increasing by 1 percentage point for people aged 65 and above. The small increase in the voting rate among older groups can be attributed to the fact that their voting rate was already high in 2011 (for example, 84% for the 65- to 74-year-olds compared with 55% for the 18- to 24-year-olds).¹³

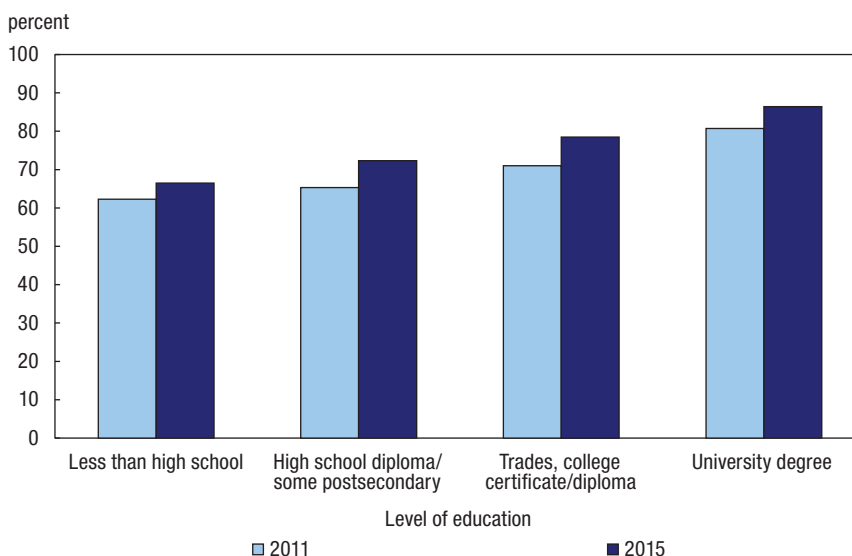
The association between education and voting has long been a feature of voting participation.¹⁴ In the 2015 federal election, 86% of individuals

Chart 2
Voting rates in federal elections by age group, 2011 and 2015



Note: Rates for 2015 are significantly different from the reference category (2011) ($p < 0.05$), except for persons 65 and over.
Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 2011 and 2015.

Chart 3
Voting rates in federal elections by highest level of education, 2011 and 2015



Note: Rates for 2015 are significantly different from the reference category (2011) ($p < 0.05$), except for persons 65 and over.
Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 2011 and 2015.

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

with a university degree reported casting a ballot, compared with 67% among those who did not have a high school diploma—a difference of nearly 20 percentage points.

The relationship between education and voting is particularly evident among younger individuals. In all age groups under the age of 45, the difference in voting rates between those who had a university degree and those who did not complete high school was at least 30 percentage points. More particularly, among those aged 25 to 34 in 2015, there was a 42 percentage point difference in participation rates between those who had a university degree and those who had not completed high school. The difference between the less and more highly educated was smaller among older individuals.

Young adults who attend postsecondary institutions are more likely than non-students to be politically active, for instance by expressing political views, participating in a demonstration or signing a petition.¹⁵ In 2015, 72% of Canadians aged 18 to 24 who were students reported casting a ballot, compared with 62% among non-students in the same age group. Among those aged 25 to 34, the voting rate was 76% among students and 69% among non-students.¹⁶

Between 2011 and 2015, the voting rates significantly increased in every educational attainment group. The magnitude of the change was slightly more pronounced among those who had a high school diploma or some postsecondary education, and among those who had a trades or non-university certificate or diploma (Chart 3).

In all educational categories, the voting rates increased faster among younger adults (Table 1). Among

Table 1
Voting rates in federal elections by age and highest level of education, 2011 and 2015

	2011	2015	Change
	percent		percentage point
Less than high school			
18 to 24	40.9	49.7*	8.8
25 to 34	35.4	40.5	5.1
35 to 44	41.9	53.7*	11.8
45 to 54	56.0	60.7	4.7
55 to 64	70.2	71.9	1.7
65 to 74	78.3	77.7	-0.6
75 and over	73.1	73.5	0.4
High school diploma/some postsecondary			
18 to 24	55.6	66.1*	10.5
25 to 34	49.5	61.3*	11.8
35 to 44	58.1	66.9*	8.8
45 to 54	69.6	74.3*	4.7
55 to 64	78.5	80.3	1.8
65 to 74	84.6	84.2	-0.4
75 and over	80.1	80.5	0.4
Trades, college certificate/diploma			
18 to 24	55.6	70.9*	15.3
25 to 34	56.6	69.6*	13.0
35 to 44	64.7	73.2*	8.5
45 to 54	76.1	80.0*	3.9
55 to 64	81.4	85.6*	4.2
65 to 74	87.1	89.3	2.2
75 and over	85.6	85.5	-0.1
University degree			
18 to 24	70.9	80.5*	9.6
25 to 34	75.1	82.3*	7.2
35 to 44	76.3	84.6*	8.3
45 to 54	82.3	87.2*	4.9
55 to 64	88.7	91.0	2.3
65 to 74	90.8	91.0	0.2
75 and over	85.9	90.0	4.1

* significantly different from the reference category (2011) ($p < 0.05$)

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 2011 and 2015.

those who had less than a high school diploma, for instance, significant increases were seen among those aged 18 to 24 (9 percentage points) and among those aged 35 to 44 (12 percentage points). Among those who had a high school diploma or a college-level education, increases in voting rates ranging between 9 and 12 percentage points were seen among those aged under 45. Even among those who had a university degree, who generally tend to vote more than others, younger people increased their participation by significant margins.

In contrast, the voting rates of older individuals (aged 55 and above) remained relatively constant in most categories of educational attainment.

Voting rates were lower among Canadians who were unemployed

With the LFS, voting rates can also be examined by labour force status. In 2015, employed individuals were more likely to vote than were the unemployed (78% compared with 70%). At 77%, the voting rate of those who were not in the

labour force was close to that of the employed population.¹⁷ This is because the majority of those not in the labour force are older individuals (i.e. retired), who have a higher tendency to vote.¹⁸

Between 2011 and 2015, the voting rate increased the least for those not in the labour force (4 percentage points). For the employed and the unemployed, the rate increased by 8 and 9 percentage points, respectively. Again, the slower increase among those not in the labour force likely reflects the fact that many people in this group are older.

Voting rates varied by family type

Voting rates also vary by family type. In 2015, individuals who were in a couple were generally more likely to vote than those who were single. The voting rate was highest among couples who had children aged 5 and above and among couples who did not have children (82% in both cases). The voting rate was 75% among couples who had young children under the age of 5.

Voting rates were lower among single people, particularly those who had at least one child under the age of 5; i.e., lone parents of young children. Within this group, the voting rate was 50%. In comparison, the rate was higher among singles who did not have children (71%) and lone parents of older children (70%). The lower rate for single parents of young children may reflect the challenge of juggling family responsibilities and electoral participation, but it may also reflect compositional effects, as these families are more likely to be headed by younger and less-educated adults, who tend to vote less.¹⁹

Between 2011 and 2015, however, the voting rate increased in all family categories. The largest increase took place among couple parents with young children under the age of 5 (from 63% in 2011 to 75% in 2015). Among lone parents of young children, the rate increased from 43% to 50% over the same period.

Increases in voting rates of immigrants and Aboriginal people

Existing research suggests that immigrants who are eligible to vote tend to vote less than non-immigrants.²⁰ Some of the explanations put forward to explain the lower participation of immigrants include the lack of democratic traditions in some regions of the world, the lack of trust in institutions, or differences in political culture.²¹

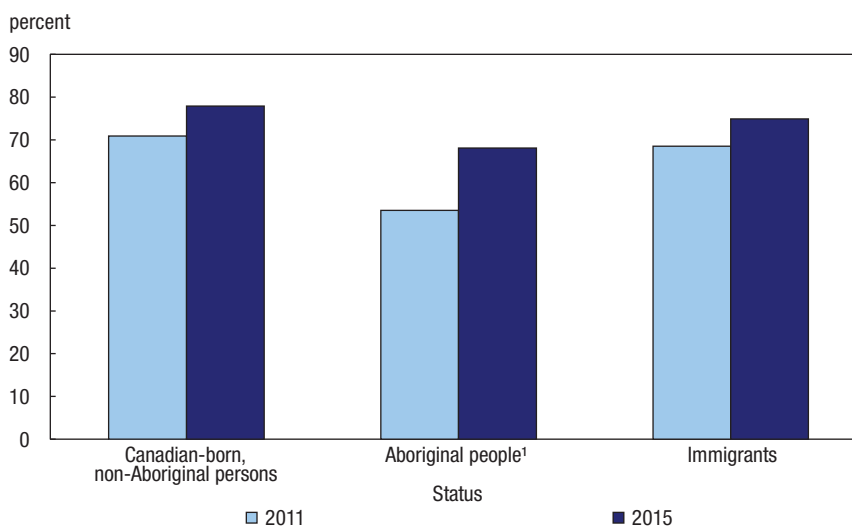
Aboriginal people also have lower voting rates than the non-Aboriginal population. According to a report

released by Elections Canada, in 2015 the voting rate of individuals living on reserves (excluding special ballots) was about 5 percentage points lower than that for the overall Canadian population.²² The same report, however, also noted a significant increase in the on-reserve turnout between the 2011 and 2015 elections (14 percentage points), which reduced the gap in the voting rate between individuals living on reserves and the rest of the population.

The LFS is not conducted on reserves, but it collects information about First Nations living off reserve, Métis and Inuit. In 2011, this population (hereby referred to as “Aboriginal people”) accounted for roughly three-quarters of persons who reported an Aboriginal identity.²³

Between 2011 and 2015, the turnout rate among immigrants and Aboriginal people rose, albeit by different margins. The participation

Chart 4
Voting rates in federal elections by immigration status and Aboriginal identity status, 2011 and 2015



1. Aboriginal people refer to First Nations living off reserve, Métis, and Inuit.
Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 2011 and 2015.

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

rate increased by 6 percentage points among eligible immigrants and by 15 points among Aboriginal people. This compared with a 7 percentage point increase among Canadian-born non-Aboriginal persons (Chart 4).²⁴

Immigrants from West Central Asian and Middle Eastern countries increased their voting rates

Among immigrants eligible to vote, turnout rates can vary considerably across regions of birth (Table 2). In 2015, immigrants from “Anglosphere” countries (United States, United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand) had the highest turnout rate (84%), followed by Western/Northern Europe (excluding United Kingdom and Ireland) (83%) and South Asia (81%). By contrast, immigrants from some other regions had turnout rates that were significantly lower than the Canadian-born. Examples of such regions include Eastern Europe (70%) and East Asia (64%).

Between 2011 and 2015, the voting rate of immigrants from West Central Asia and the Middle East increased by 16 percentage points (from 57% in 2011 to 73% in 2015), the largest change of all regions. This is a significant development, given that this group had the lowest voting rate of all regions in 2011. Immigrants from Africa also saw a significant increase in their voting rate (11 percentage points), as did immigrants from Southeast Asia (10 percentage points).

By contrast, immigrants whose region of birth was East Asia, Eastern Europe or Western/Northern Europe (except United Kingdom and Ireland) recorded minimal increases (not statistically significant), and the voting rate remained unchanged among immigrants from Southern Europe.

The increases in turnout rates across regions of birth were not necessarily the same for men and women. The highest increase was among women from West Central Asia and the Middle East (19 percentage

points), followed by women from Africa (17 percentage points), men from West Central Asia and the Middle East (14 percentage points), and women from Southeast Asia (12 percentage points).

Voting rate increased more among recent immigrants than among established immigrants

Established immigrants, defined as those in the country for at least 10 years²⁵, tend to vote more than recent immigrants in federal elections. The year 2015 was no exception, as the rates were 76% for established immigrants and 70% for recent immigrants (Table 3). Between 2011 and 2015, however, the voting rate increased faster among recent immigrants (14 percentage points) than among established immigrants (5 percentage points). This change narrowed the gap in participation between recent and established immigrants from 15 percentage points in 2011 to 6 percentage points in 2015.

Table 2
Voting rates in federal elections by country or region of birth and by sex, 2011 and 2015

Country/region of birth	All			Men			Women		
	2011	2015	Change	2011	2015	Change	2011	2015	Change
	percent		percentage point	percent		percentage point	percent		percentage point
United States, United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand	78.6	84.3*	5.7	77.4	85.1*	7.7	79.6	83.6	4.0
Caribbean, Central/South America	65.1	72.5*	7.4	65.4	73.0*	7.6	64.7	72.2	7.5
Western/Northern Europe ¹	79.3	82.6	3.3	81.5	84.0	2.5	77.1	81.3	4.2
Southern Europe	73.1	72.5	-0.6	74.2	73.6	-0.6	72.1	71.4	-0.7
Eastern Europe	66.7	69.7	3.0	66.7	70.6	3.9	66.7	68.9	2.2
South Asia	72.4	80.5*	8.1	73.7	79.5	5.8	71.1	81.5*	10.4
Southeast Asia	64.5	74.6*	10.1	66.1	74.1	8.0	63.3	75.0*	11.7
East Asia	59.8	64.1	4.3	60.3	65.4	5.1	59.3	62.9	3.6
West Central Asia and Middle East	56.7	73.2*	16.5	56.0	69.9*	13.9	57.6	76.5*	18.9
Africa	67.1	78.4*	11.3	72.7	79.4	6.7	60.4	77.3*	16.9

* significantly different from the reference category (2011) ($p < 0.05$)

1. Excluding United Kingdom and Ireland.

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 2011 and 2015.

Table 3
Voting rates in federal elections by region of birth of recent and established immigrants, 2011 and 2015

	Recent immigrants			Established immigrants		
	2011	2015	Change	2011	2015	Change
	percent		percentage point	percent		percentage point
Country/region of birth						
All	55.7	70.1*	14.4	70.7	75.9*	5.2
United States, United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand	x	x	...	78.9	84.5*	5.6
Caribbean, Central/South America	59.2	73.6	14.4	66.1	72.3	6.2
Western/Northern Europe ¹	x	x	...	79.5	83.7	4.2
Southern Europe	x	x	...	x	x	...
Eastern Europe	51.8	66.5	14.7	69.7	70.2	0.5
South Asia	63.9	77.1	13.2	75.1	81.8	6.7
Southeast Asia	53.5	68.9	15.4	66.6	76.2*	9.6
East Asia	52.2	53.7	1.5	61.2	65.9	4.7
West Central Asia and Middle East	42.6	64.2*	21.6	61.2	76.5*	15.3
Africa	51.4	76.8*	25.4	73.5	79.0	5.5

... not applicable

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* significantly different from the reference category (2011) ($p < 0.05$)

1. Excluding United Kingdom and Ireland.

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 2011 and 2015.

The increase has been higher among certain categories of recent immigrants. The voting rate of recent immigrants from Africa, in particular, increased by 25 percentage points. Similarly, the rate for recent immigrants from West Central Asia and the Middle East increased by 22 percentage points. The increases were generally lower among established immigrants, but two categories of established immigrants recorded significant increases: those who were from West Central Asia and the Middle East (15 percentage points), and from Southeast Asia (10 percentage points).

Modelling the probability of voting

Some of the variables described above are likely to be related to each other, such as age, education and labour force status. In this section, results from a probit model are presented in the form of predicted probabilities of voting (Table 4).

While the model confirmed most of the results described above, a few differences are worth mentioning.

For example, in the descriptive results, individuals aged 18 to 24 were the least likely to vote, both in 2011 and 2015. Students in this age group were more likely to vote than non-students (by a margin of 10 percentage points). The student effect was even stronger in the model. After accounting for other factors, including level of education, the probability of voting was 0.80 among students aged 18 to 24. This suggests that, all else being equal, the students aged 18 to 24 had a higher probability of voting than people aged 45 to 54 in 2015, whose probability of voting was 0.77.

By contrast, non-student individuals in younger age groups were significantly less likely to vote than those who were aged 45 to 54—even after accounting for differences in level of education. Such results

have important implications, because they suggest that school attendance is also an important factor in the electoral participation of younger people.

Other results were confirmed by the model, including the higher rates for Aboriginal people and some groups of immigrants observed in 2015. Over the last two elections, the probability of voting increased among immigrants from West Central Asia and the Middle East, from 0.55 in 2011 to 0.73 in 2015. The probability of voting also increased for immigrants from Africa, from 0.65 to 0.78. Lastly, the probability increased for Aboriginal people, from 0.65 to 0.77.

Little change in the proportions of immigrant voters and Aboriginal voters

In 2015, more than 20 million citizens reported having voted in the federal election, compared with about 17.4 million in 2011—an increase of 2.6 million between 2011 and 2015 (Table 5).

Both Aboriginal people and immigrants contributed to the overall increase in the number of voters. However, since the number of non-Aboriginal and non-immigrant voters also rose, the share of immigrant and Aboriginal voters changed little.

Between 2011 and 2015, the number of voters who reported an Aboriginal identity increased from 323,200 to 490,300. The share of voters who reported an Aboriginal identity increased by half a percentage point over the period, from 1.9% to 2.4%.

Similarly, the number of immigrant voters also increased between the two elections, from 3.3 million in 2011 to 4.0 million in 2015.

Table 4
Predicted probabilities from a probit model of voting in the federal election, 2011 and 2015

	2011	2015
	predicted probability	
Sex		
Male	0.71*	0.78*
Female (ref.)	0.72	0.80
Age group and student status		
18 to 24 - student	0.67	0.80*
18 to 24 - not a student	0.57*	0.67*
25 to 34 - student	0.59*	0.76
25 to 34 - not a student	0.55*	0.67*
35 to 44	0.61*	0.71*
45 to 54 (ref.)	0.72	0.77
55 to 64	0.81*	0.84*
65 to 74	0.88*	0.89*
75 and over	0.87*	0.88*
Education		
Less than high school	0.57*	0.64*
High school/some postsecondary (ref.)	0.68	0.74
Trades certificate/diploma	0.72*	0.79*
University degree	0.83*	0.88*
Labour force status		
Employed (ref.)	0.74	0.81
Unemployed	0.71*	0.78*
Not in the labour force	0.67*	0.75*
Family type¹		
Couple with no children (ref.)	0.74	0.81
Couple with children 5 years or over	0.75	0.83*
Couple with at least one child under 5	0.72*	0.81
Single with no children	0.68*	0.75*
Single with children 5 years or over	0.63*	0.71*
Single with at least one child under 5	0.58*	0.63*
Country/region of birth		
Canada - non-Aboriginal persons (ref.)	0.73	0.80
Canada - Aboriginal people ²	0.65*	0.77*
Outside Canada - non-immigrants ³	0.70	0.80
United States, United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand	0.71	0.80
Caribbean, Central/South America	0.66*	0.73*
Western/Northern Europe ⁴	0.71	0.78
Southern Europe	0.69*	0.73*
Eastern Europe	0.60*	0.64*
South Asia	0.71	0.79
Southeast Asia	0.64*	0.73*
East Asia	0.55*	0.58*
West Central Asia and Middle East	0.55*	0.73*
Africa	0.65*	0.78
Province		
Newfoundland and Labrador	0.58*	0.68*
Prince Edward Island	0.81*	0.86*
Nova Scotia	0.70	0.78
New Brunswick	0.74*	0.82*
Quebec	0.75*	0.79*
Ontario (ref.)	0.71	0.78
Manitoba	0.68*	0.78
Saskatchewan	0.71	0.79*
Alberta	0.69*	0.79
British Columbia	0.72	0.81*

* significantly different from the reference category (ref.) (p < 0.05)

1. Couple includes married and common-law. Single includes single (never married), separated, divorced, widowed.

2. Aboriginal people refer to First Nations living off reserve, Métis, and Inuit.

3. This group refers to those who were born outside of Canada and obtained their Canadian citizenship through their parents.

4. Excluding United Kingdom and Ireland.

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 2011 and 2015.

Immigrants accounted for 20% of all voters in 2015—up slightly from 19% in 2011. The number of Canadian-born non-Aboriginal voters also increased (by 1.8 million), so their share of voters remained relatively steady over the period (from 78% in 2011 to 77% in 2015).

While the increase in participation rates was an important reason for the increase in the number of voters between 2011 and 2015, increases in the number of citizens eligible to vote also played a role.

Of the 167,000 increase in the number of Aboriginal voters, for instance, about two-thirds (63%) was due to rising participation rates, while the other third was due to an increase in the number of persons who reported an Aboriginal identity (Chart 5).

Of the 700,000 increase in the number of immigrant voters, about half was due to increases in the participation rates, while the other half was due to the fact that immigrants increased their share of the population over the period.

Lastly, among non-Aboriginal individuals who were born in Canada, the number of voters increased by 1.8 million over the period. The vast majority (78%) of the increase was because of rising participation rates, while 22% could be attributed to an increase in the population of those eligible to vote.

Conclusion

After exhibiting a downward trend through most of the 1990s and 2000s, the voting rate in federal elections jumped from 61.1% to 68.3% between 2011 and 2015. This increase was one of the largest between two consecutive elections since Confederation. This article used data from the

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

Table 5
Number of voters and number of persons eligible to vote in the 2011 and 2015 federal elections

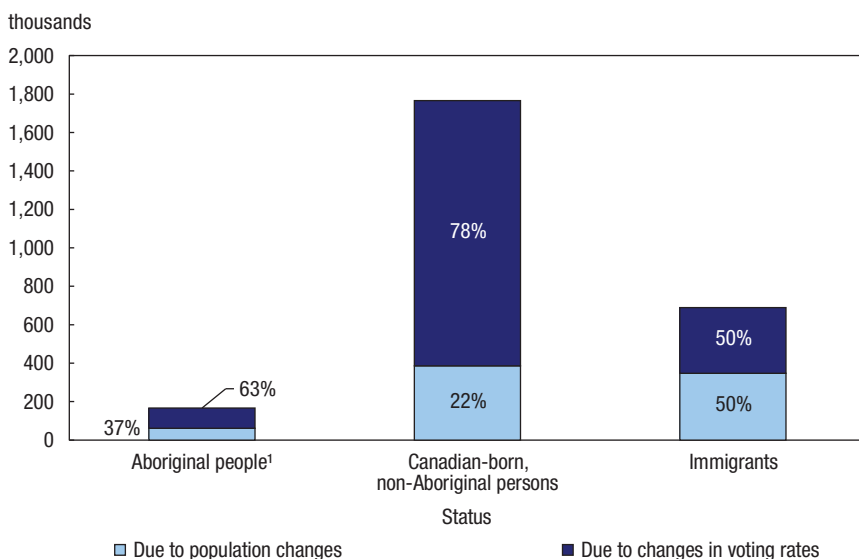
	2011		2015	
	thousands	percentage	thousands	percentage
Persons eligible to vote	24,919.2	100.0	26,079.4	100.0
Aboriginal people ¹	604.3	2.4	719.6	2.8
Canadian-born, non-Aboriginal persons	19,288.0	77.4	19,832.1	76.0
Immigrants	4,859.3	19.5	5,366.5	20.6
Born outside Canada, non-immigrants ²	167.7	0.7	161.3	0.6
Voters	17,445.1	100.0	20,080.8	100.0
Aboriginal people ¹	323.2	1.9	490.3	2.4
Canadian-born, non-Aboriginal persons	13,677.8	78.4	15,443.6	76.9
Immigrants	3,329.9	19.1	4,019.4	20.0
Born outside Canada, non-immigrants ²	114.1	0.7	127.7	0.6

1. Aboriginal people refer to First Nations living off reserve, Métis, and Inuit.

2. This group refers to those who were born outside of Canada and obtained their Canadian citizenship through their parents.

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 2011 and 2015.

Chart 5
Increase in the number of voters in Canadian federal elections, by immigration status and Aboriginal identity status, 2011 to 2015



1. Aboriginal people refer to First Nations living off reserve, Métis, and Inuit.

Note: For any given group, the "population effect" can be separated from the "voting rate" effect by calculating how many people would have voted if the participation rate had not changed.

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 2011 and 2015.

May 2011 and November 2015 cycles of the Labour Force Survey to study factors associated with voting and to examine which socio-demographic groups witnessed the

largest increases in voting rates. These cycles asked respondents whether they had voted in the federal election.

Between 2011 and 2015, the voting rates of younger individuals increased the most. Younger citizens increased their voting rates in all educational categories. In contrast, the voting rates of older individuals (aged 55 and above) remained relatively constant. As a result, the reduction in the gap in electoral participation of younger and older voters has been a defining feature of the last federal election. Among young individuals, however, a significant gap in voting participation remained between the most educated and the least educated.

Another feature of the last election has been the increase in the voting rate of Aboriginal people and of some groups of immigrants. This was particularly the case among recent immigrants who came from Africa and from West Central Asia and the Middle East, for whom the participation rate increased by more than 20 percentage points.

Between 2011 and 2015, the number of voters in federal elections increased by 2.6 million. Both immigrant voters and off-reserve Aboriginal voters contributed to the increase, and their respective shares (expressed as a proportion of overall voters) moved up slightly over the period. Canadians who are neither immigrants nor Aboriginal people, however, continue to represent the vast majority of voters in federal elections. As in 2011, this population accounted for more than three-quarters of the overall number of voters in 2015.

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Data sources, methods and definitions

Data sources

This study uses data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS). The LFS is conducted monthly to collect information about the labour market activities of Canadians 15 years of age and above, excluding residents of collective dwellings, persons living on reserves and other Aboriginal settlements, and full-time members of the Canadian Armed Forces. The monthly LFS sample size is about 56,000 households, leading to the collection of information for approximately 100,000 individuals.

In May 2011, at the request of Elections Canada, the LFS added additional questions on voting that could be answered on a voluntary basis. Questions on voting were also asked in November 2015, following the October 2015 federal election. The first of these questions asked respondents whether they were Canadian citizens. If respondents stated that they were citizens, respondents were then asked if they voted in the recent federal election. Reasons for not voting were also asked of those who stated that they did not vote.

Definitions

Voting or turnout rate in this paper is defined as the proportion of the citizen population 18 years of age and above who stated that they had voted in the federal election.

Aboriginal people are defined as individuals who reported an Aboriginal identity (i.e. First Nations, Métis or Inuit, or multiple identities). Because the LFS is not conducted on reserves, this population excludes Aboriginal people living on reserve. In 2015, off-reserve First Nations, Métis and Inuit represented approximately 3% of the population eligible to vote.

The other population groups examined are Canadian-born non-Aboriginal persons (76% of the eligible population), immigrants who obtained Canadian citizenship (21%) and foreign-born Canadian citizens (less than 1%). The latter group includes persons who were born elsewhere but whose Canadian citizenship was passed on to them through their parents.

Notes

1. See Nakhaie (2006).
2. Examples include Uppal and LaRochelle-Côté (2012), Bevelander and Pendakur (2007), Blais et al. (2004), Adsett (2003).
3. Caution should be exercised when comparing rates over time, because of certain legislative changes. Examples include: (1) Most women had the same voting rights as men starting in 1918 only; (2) In 1920, native people everywhere in Canada were enfranchised, but Status Indians had to give up their treaty rights and registered Indian status to do so—that condition was removed from election legislation in 1960; (3) In 1970, the voting age was lowered from 21 to 18 years; (4) In 1993, for the first time, qualified voters living outside Canada were allowed to vote by mail in their home riding; (5) In the 2000 federal election, for the first time, homeless people were able to vote; and (6) Incarcerated electors serving less than two years were allowed to vote for the first time in 1993, and those serving two years or more were able to vote in 2002, following Supreme Court rulings in *Sauvé v. Canada (Attorney General)*.
4. The decline in turnout rates is not unique to Canada and has been experienced by most established democracies (Gray and Caul, 2000).
5. See Blais et al. (2004).
6. See Blais et al. (2004), Blais and Rubenson (2013), Archer (2003), Adsett (2003) and Howe (2008).
7. The reasons for not voting are discussed in Statistics Canada (2016).
8. See Bauman and Julian (2010).
9. See Uppal and LaRochelle-Côté (2012).
10. One of these could be “social desirability” or the tendency of respondents to answer questions in a manner that will be viewed favourably by others. In other words, some non-voters might state that they voted, since voting is viewed as more socially acceptable (Holbrook and Krosnick, 2010).
11. In addition to the aforementioned, other reasons for differences in survey and official turnout rates might include recollection issues by survey respondents, and the extent of questions answered by proxy among groups less likely to vote (e.g., parents answering for their children). Also, the Labour Force Survey did not cover the territories, reserves and military personnel; some of these regions or groups might have lower turnout rates compared with the national average. For example, the turnout rate on reserves was 61.5% in 2015 (Elections Canada, 2016).

12. All results for 2011 discussed in this article should not be compared with those included in Uppal and LaRochelle-Côté (2012). The latter included rates that adjusted for the fact that non-participants are more likely to be non-voters. To be consistent with a recent release (Statistics Canada, 2016), the current study does not make that adjustment. Not making the adjustment is unlikely to have any significant effect on the conclusions of this study, given that there were no wide variations between the adjusted and unadjusted data across various characteristics such as age, education and country of birth.
13. This “age effect” was similar for both men and women. In the 2011 and 2015 federal elections, women were slightly more likely to vote than men (by a margin of 2 percentage points). Both men and women increased their participation rate over the period by a similar magnitude, from 69% to 76% among men, and from 71% to 78% among women.
14. See Blais et al. (2004) and U.S. Census Bureau (2010).
15. See Turcotte (2015).
16. In 2015, nearly half (48%) of individuals aged 18 to 24 were students. Among those aged 25 to 34, the proportion of students was 9%.
17. Within the employed population, turnout rates were relatively higher for those working in the public sector (85%) and those with unionized jobs (80%). However, this result could be because public sector workers are more likely to be highly educated than other workers. Among public sector workers, for example, 46% had a university degree, compared with 23% among private sector workers.
18. Among those aged 18 to 64 who were not in the labour force, the participation rate was 70%. The rate was 82% among those aged 65 and above who were not in the labour force.
19. In 2015, 72% of lone parents with a child under the age of 5 were 18 to 34 years old, compared with 52% of couple parents with a child under the age of 5. About 12% of the former had a university degree, compared with 37% of the latter.
20. See Uppal and LaRochelle-Côté (2012), U.S. Census Bureau (2010) and Milan (2005).
21. See Bevelander and Pendakur (2007 and 2009).
22. See Elections Canada (2016).
23. According to the National Household Survey (NHS), 1.4 million Canadians reported an Aboriginal identity in 2011. Of these, about 1.1 million lived outside reserves. The vast majority of those who lived on reserves were First Nations individuals. That said, of those who reported First Nations as a single Aboriginal identity, 62% lived off reserve.
24. The turnout rate also increased among Canadians who were born outside the country but were not immigrants. These foreign-born non-immigrants are the children of Canadian parents who were abroad at the time of their birth, and represent a small portion (less than 1%) of the overall citizen population. Between 2011 and 2015, turnout among this specific population increased by 11 percentage points, from 68% to 79%.
25. Established immigrants are defined as Canadian citizens who immigrated more than 10 years before the survey reference year, while recent immigrants are Canadian citizens who immigrated in the 10 years preceding the survey.

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