

Aboriginal Electoral Participation in Canada

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November 2011

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Note to the Reader

This paper was prepared by Patrick Fournier, Université de Montréal, and Peter John Loewen, University of Toronto, for Elections Canada. The observations and conclusions are those of the authors.

Executive Summary

Voter turnout among Aboriginal Canadians is lower than among non-Aboriginal Canadians. Using surveys conducted with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal electors following the 2004, 2006, 2008 and 2011 Canadian federal elections, this report explores the reasons for this gap in turnout.

We examine the existing literature on voter turnout to identify the determinants of electoral participation generally, as well as specifically among Aboriginal people. Next, we empirically examine the effect of these determinants on voter turnout among Aboriginals, both on and off First Nations reserves, and among non-Aboriginals. We find that these groups exhibit common patterns in regard to the determinants of turnout.

Our analyses show that Aboriginal turnout increases among those with more education and more income. This is likewise true for non-Aboriginals. We also find that Aboriginal turnout increases with age, as it does for non-Aboriginals. Finally, we find that Aboriginals, like non-Aboriginals, are more likely to vote when they have more political resources (i.e. political knowledge and information) and a greater sense of civic duty. These are the same factors that drive electoral participation among non-Aboriginals. Taken together, this suggests that Aboriginals vote or do not vote for the same reasons as non-Aboriginals.

Our report also examines the determinants of voter registration among Aboriginal electors. The evidence suggests that the same factors underlie rates of registration among both Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals. As we found that political resources and sense of civic duty are the most influential factors in the decision to participate in elections, we empirically examine the determinants of these two factors. Once again, socio-demographic variables are centrally important.

The key implication of these findings is that the gap in turnout between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal electors can be completely accounted for by residence on or off a reserve, age, education, income, political resources and civic duty. Were it not for the lower rate of registration, fewer political resources, weaker sense of civic duty, younger average age and poorer socio-economic footing of Aboriginals, they could be expected to vote in federal elections at the same rate as non-Aboriginals. Our findings suggest that turnout among Aboriginals would increase by 20 percentage points if their profile on these determinants matched that of non-Aboriginals, completely closing the gap between them.

The report concludes with five policy recommendations for increasing Aboriginal voter turnout. Aboriginals living on reserves should be the focus of special effort. Likewise, young Aboriginals should be targeted. Programs that promote political resources and civic duty should be developed and tested. Registration efforts should be expanded. Finally, we recommend that Elections Canada study those Aboriginal communities with higher and lower than average rates of participation.

Introduction

Canadian society is confronted by a persistent though not total inequality between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.¹ On countless metrics, Aboriginal Canadians trail their non-Aboriginal counterparts. The average income of Aboriginals lags behind, while more negative indicators such as childhood mortality and suicide outpace those of non-Aboriginals. To acknowledge this is not to deny progress, nor the potential for greater equality. Electoral participation is another metric on which Aboriginals lag non-Aboriginal Canadians. That citizens in perhaps the greatest need are less likely to avail themselves of democratic opportunities for influence should be a matter of concern.

Electoral participation is the litmus test for the vitality of democratic systems. Consequently, the decline in voter turnout that is being observed in many countries is considered a syndrome of growing democratic malaise. The overall turnout of the Canadian population has been studied extensively. The lower participation rate of various segments of the public have also begun to be investigated. Most notably, youth turnout is the subject of increasing attention. However, the participation of Aboriginal people, especially those residing off reserves, is much less understood. In large part, this is due to the fact that a survey of a representative sample of the Canadian population will yield few Aboriginal electors. Even a large sample such as the 4,000-respondent Canadian Election Study will only result in a few dozen interviews with Aboriginal people.

This report draws upon a previously untapped source of information to increase our knowledge about Aboriginal turnout in Canada. In each federal election since 2004, Elections Canada has conducted post-election surveys containing “oversamples” of more than 500 Aboriginal electors, about half living on reserves and half living off reserves. These surveys offer a tremendous opportunity to shed light on the factors that explain participation and on the ways to stimulate turnout among Aboriginal people. This report takes advantage of the 2004, 2006, 2008 and 2011 surveys to answer five related questions:

1. What does past work suggest are the general determinants of voter turnout, and how are these thought to differ, if at all, for Aboriginal Canadians?
2. According to the data collected by Elections Canada, what are the key factors underlying Aboriginal voter turnout?
3. What are the key factors underlying the registration of Aboriginal electors?
4. What are the key factors underlying Aboriginal political resources and sense of civic duty?
5. What policies can Elections Canada pursue to increase voter turnout among Aboriginals?

¹ In this report, we use the term “Aboriginal” to refer to First Nations, Métis and Inuit people.

Our report begins by reviewing literature on voter turnout generally, and then Aboriginal turnout in particular. While comparatively little work has been undertaken in the latter area, we draw out an important question – namely, whether the determinants of Aboriginal turnout differ substantively from those underlying the turnout of non-Aboriginals. In the analyses that follow, we demonstrate that the models which can explain the decision to vote among non-Aboriginals can explain Aboriginal turnout with equal felicity. We demonstrate that this holds for Aboriginal electors both on and off First Nations reserves. Next, we show that the determinants of registration are essentially indistinguishable from those of voter turnout, a finding whose implications we revisit in our policy recommendations. We then briefly consider what drives the two key determinants of Aboriginal turnout: political resources and sense of civic duty. Finally, we advance policy recommendations aimed at increasing voter turnout among Aboriginal Canadians.

1. Literature Review

Our literature review poses and then offers answers to two questions. First, what are the factors that explain variations in electoral participation? In other words, what systematically causes turnout to increase, and what causes it to decrease? Second, what do we know about the sources of electoral participation among Aboriginal citizens? To undertake this review, we first present a simple, stylized model of voter turnout. This necessarily involves an abstraction of the complex decision of whether to vote. However, it does allow us to identify the “moving parts” of the decision to vote and to consider the effects of each individually. This review will highlight the factors thought to be important for the decision to vote. Afterward, we ask what existing work on Aboriginal participation tells us about the determinants of turnout in the Aboriginal context.

1.1 *The Model*

A simple model of the decision to vote is presented by Riker and Ordeshook (1968). In their abstraction, just four factors influence the decision to vote. The first is **C**, or the cost of voting. All else held equal, voters are less likely to vote as the cost of doing so increases. The second factor is **B**, the marginal benefits that an individual will receive if their preferred party wins the election. The third factor is **P**, the probability of casting a decisive vote. The final factor, **D**, is an individual’s sense of civic duty or obligation.

This decision model takes the simple form of:

$$PB+D>C,$$

meaning that if the utility an individual derives from fulfilling their duty to vote plus the *expected* benefits of the election (that is, benefits discounted by the probability of being decisive) is greater than the cost of voting, then an individual will vote. If these benefits do not exceed the cost of voting, then an individual will not vote.

We note two things about this model before proceeding. First, the probability of casting the deciding vote in an election is very small, so the marginal benefits to be realized by one’s preferred party winning government are steeply discounted (i.e. **PB** probably equals something close to 0). It becomes quickly apparent that duty is doing the most work on the left-hand side of the equation. Second, this is obviously a very crude simplification of the decision to participate. Nonetheless, it serves the purpose of organizing a discussion of the decision to vote, to which we now turn.

Benefits

Elections convey three types of benefits: first, benefits to the voter; second, benefits to other citizens or groups; and third, benefits to society as a whole.

To illustrate benefits to a voter, imagine that an elector who works in the public service is asked to vote in an election in which one party, Party A, is promising to maintain public service jobs while the other, Party B, is promising to eliminate the very type of job this elector holds. For this elector, the benefits of the election can be thought of as the difference in their material well-being if Party A wins over Party B. Such a conception can be extended with felicity to any number of other programmatic differences between parties, be they differences in tax policy,

disagreements over levels of government spending, conflict over the distribution of government spending, etc. The important point is that, for many electors, one party is better for them materially than another party. Accordingly, the larger the difference in potential benefits if an elector's preferred party wins, the more likely an individual is to cast a ballot.

Existing evidence suggests that this is very much the case, with electors demonstrating a greater likelihood of voting in elections for more consequential offices (such as national elections) versus less consequential offices (such as local aldermanic races). The other implication is that electors who have more at stake in government policy may be more likely to vote. For example, those who pay more in taxes and are more integrated into the economy will be more likely to vote (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). This has been extended as one explanation of why youth are less likely to vote than older citizens (Blais and Loewen 2009; Goerres 2007; Wattenberg 2007; Rubenson et al. 2004; Blais et al. 2004; Wass 2007; Blais et al. 2007).

Benefits to others work much the same way as benefits to oneself. The distinction is that some voters will cast ballots because they have "social preferences," and thus care about the outcome of an election not only for themselves but for others as well (Loewen 2010; Dawes, Loewen and Fowler, forthcoming; Fowler and Kam 2007; Uhlaner 1989a, 1989b). For example, individuals might be motivated to vote for a party advocating for tuition decreases because they have grandchildren in university. In a less focused manner, some might vote for Party A over Party B because they feel that this party is better for the "average person." Likewise, others might be motivated to vote because doing so confers a benefit on their preferred party (though evidence of this, in the Canadian context, is scant; see Loewen and Blais 2006, 2011). An obvious implication of these findings, for both Aboriginal turnout and the turnout of new Canadians, is that electors with social preferences are only more likely to vote if they feel integrated into the political community and feel that voting confers benefits on those for whom they are concerned (see White et al. 2006 for a review of the turnout behaviour of immigrants).

Regardless of whether individual electors are preoccupied by benefits to themselves or benefits to others, the implications are the same: turnout will increase the greater the differences between parties, and turnout will also increase the more electors feel that at least one party offers policies that will improve their own lot or the lots of others.

The third type of benefits are those to society as a whole. Such benefits do not refer exclusively or even principally to particular policy benefits. Instead, they refer to the general benefits accrued to citizens living in a democracy. To the extent that individuals believe democracy confers benefits on all citizens, they will be more likely to vote (see Blais 2000 for a review).

As a final addition, current research demonstrates that the time horizon of benefits also appears to matter, such that benefits expected in the more distant future are less likely to motivate electors than those which are immediate. Similarly, at an individual level, it has been shown that those who are more impulsive are less likely to participate in elections, since they more steeply discount any benefits derived from voting (Fowler and Kam 2006).²

² This work is part of a growing body of literature on the relationship between personality or individual differences and voter turnout (Fowler et al., forthcoming; Mondak et al. 2010; Fowler and Dawes 2008). This work does not

Probability of being decisive

How likely is an individual to be decisive in an election? And how does the probability of being decisive affect the likelihood of an individual participating in an election? Empirical and theoretical work suggests that the probability of casting a decisive vote is approximately equal to $1/N$, where N is the number of electors in a voter's district (Gelman, Katz and Bafumi 2004). In other words, the probability is exceedingly small. Put another way, it is very unlikely that a single person's vote will determine an election outcome.

Despite this, individuals vote. This suggests, perhaps, that the probability of being decisive does not matter in an absolute sense, but instead exercises an effect at the margin. The literature supports this view. First, as elections become more closely contested, we witness a marginal increase in the rate of participation (Blais 2006). However unlikely, individuals do appear to respond positively to an increased probability of being decisive.

Second, there is emerging evidence that the competitiveness of elections, especially early in an elector's political experience, has a long-term effect on the probability that an individual votes. Both Franklin (2004) and Johnston, Matthews and Bittner (2007) provide evidence that those whose first election is a closely fought affair are more likely to develop a habit of voting. Loewen and Rubenson (2011) also provide experimental evidence suggesting that democratic competition increases voter turnout. The logic here seems to be that in more closely fought elections voters are more likely to believe they can make a difference, and are thus more likely to vote. If voting is habit forming (Plutzer 2002), then early experiences of voting can inculcate a tendency toward regular participation. Contrarily, while Blais and Rubenson (forthcoming) do not dispute the relationship between competition and turnout, they find little supporting evidence that a change in the nature of elections is driving turnout decline.

Third, survey research has demonstrated a negative correlation between turnout and the belief that one's vote does not make a difference. While this may, for the most part, reflect a more general belief that party policies do not differ and thus there are no differences in expected benefits, it is also consonant with the view that electors are less likely to vote when they feel they are not likely to be decisive (Blais 2000).

Fourth, and finally, research in psychology has shown that: a) individuals are poor at calculating probabilities; and b) individuals routinely overestimate their own ability to be decisive in an event (Langer 1975).

While **P** may rarely matter in the strictest terms, electors do respond to changes in the probability of being decisive in a manner congruent with the model of voter turnout. The lesson to be drawn from this, in the most general sense, is that electoral systems which feature frequent close races are more likely to exhibit higher turnout than those with few close races and many disproportionate or lopsided results.

integrate easily into the proposed framework and cannot be easily tested in an Aboriginal context, given the data that follow. Accordingly, we merely highlight it here.

Duty

As Blais (2000) notes, the notion of voting as a duty encompasses several different but related ideas. For example, **D** may represent the psychological benefit one incurs from voting. It may also be a well-developed sense that voting is a moral obligation, a promise that one keeps to oneself. It may also be a sense of obligation to others, inculcated early in life via parents and school (Campbell 2006). Such a sense would rely on the belief that others were counting on your vote. Indeed, when electors are reminded of this, their probability of participation increases measurably (Rosenstone and Hansen 2003; Putnam 2000; Green, Gerber and Nickerson 2003).

Sense of duty may also be conceived as a personality trait, encapsulating not only a feeling of obligation to vote but a more general feeling of social obligation, including actions such as serving on a jury, giving money to charity, and paying taxes to help others (Loewen and Dawes, forthcoming; Fowler, Baker and Dawes 2008).

Finally, one may feel a sense of duty to honour democracy and the sacrifices made by forbearers to maintain democracy. Such a feeling does not rely on whether the individual's vote will actually maintain democracy, as Blais points out (2000, 93).

What these conceptions share is, first, that duty is non-instrumental. It does not rely on the benefits of the election. Instead, it is a stable belief that voting is important. Second, these conceptions assume that voters see voting as a good and right action within one's community. Duty takes on a moral dimension, whereby one votes merely because it is the right thing to do. Likewise, voters may cast ballots because they do not wish to be seen in a bad light by their fellow citizens (Gerber, Green and Larimer 2008).

Costs

The final component of this turnout model is the cost involved in voting. As cost increases, the probability of voting decreases. We can identify two broad types of costs. The first are those involved in making a decision about whether and for whom to vote. The second are those involved in the actual act of voting.

Beginning with the costs of making a decision, it is important to recognize that the political world is confusing for many citizens. Differences between parties are not always readily apparent. Federalism only increases this confusion. For citizens who are not politically attentive or informed, the psychological costs of choosing between parties can be marked. Accordingly, those who have lower levels of interest and attention will be less likely to cast ballots (Gidengil et al. 2003, 2004a; Pammett and LeDuc 2003; Blais and Loewen 2009). More generally, citizens who lack the resources that aid in making a political decision – whether in time, education or social networks – will be less likely to vote (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995).

The second set of costs is imposed in a more straightforward fashion. The more effort required in going to the polls, the less likely individuals are to cast a ballot. If registration is at the initiative of the elector, turnout will be lower (Highton 1997). If information about polling station locations is not easily obtained, individuals will be less likely to vote. The farther polling stations are from individuals, the less likely they will be to cast a ballot (Brady and McNulty 2007). Indeed, even in situations of increased but minor inconvenience, such as when it rains, individuals will be less likely to vote (Gomez, Hansford and Krause 2007). The converse is that

when voting is made less costly, individuals will be more likely to cast ballots. For example, online and mail-in ballots can be expected to increase turnout (Southwell and Burchett 2000; Canada-Europe Transatlantic Dialogue 2010). Likewise, offering advance voting opportunities can have a positive if modest effect on voter turnout (Blais, Dobrzynska and Loewen 2007).

Finally, we note that in addition to costs depressing turnout, costs can also increase turnout if they are imposed on non-voters, namely through compulsory voting coupled with fines for abstention. While making voting compulsory does not likely improve the quality of citizen engagement and knowledge (Loewen, Milner and Hicks 2008; Milner, Loewen and Hicks 2007), it certainly does increase voter turnout (Blais 2000; Blais, Dobrzynska and Massicotte 2003).

Taken together, these four elements – benefits, probability of being decisive, duty and costs – give us a good understanding of the decision to vote. Indeed, they have been the foundation of decades of research into voter turnout. We next examine the current understanding of the determinants of Aboriginal turnout.

1.2 Findings on Aboriginal Turnout

Over the last two decades, concern over Aboriginal turnout in Canadian elections has emerged and increased. It has resulted in a small but burgeoning literature. A common observation throughout this work is that voter turnout in federal elections tends to be lower among Aboriginals than non-Aboriginals. This conclusion has been uncovered both by studies that tabulate official election results for polling stations located entirely or principally within First Nations reserves (Bedford and Pobihushchy 1996; Bedford 2003; Gu erin 2003; Dalton 2007), and by studies that draw upon reported turnout in public opinion surveys (Dalton 2007; Harell, Panagos and Matthews 2009; Howe and Bedford 2009). The pattern, however, is not consistent across space. In some provinces and regions, Aboriginal turnout is markedly lower than non-Aboriginal turnout, while the gap is much smaller in other locations (Bedford and Pobihushchy 1996; Bedford 2003; Gu erin 2003; Harell, Panagos and Matthews 2009). Time-wise, there are indications that Aboriginal turnout has declined in federal elections since the franchise was extended to all First Nations people in 1960, though again some places buck this trend (Bedford and Pobihushchy 1996; Bedford 2003).

Various potential explanations have been proposed to account for the weaker participation of Aboriginal electors in federal elections in Canada. The first explanations put forward were decidedly not Aboriginal-specific; they stressed factors that explain turnout among the general population. For instance, Bedford and Pobihushchy (1996) suggested that the socio-demographic conditions of Aboriginals could be the key. In fact, the 1991 Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing had pointed to the lower socio-economic and educational levels along with the geographic dispersion of Aboriginals as the source of their lower participation rate. The younger age profile of Aboriginals could also be critical, as the youth vote substantially less (Gu erin 2003). Another “conventional” approach is to insist on socio-psychological dispositions generally correlated to turnout, notably sense of civic duty, political efficacy and political apathy (Bedford and Pobihushchy 1996).

The first uniquely Aboriginal explanation was offered 15 years ago by Bedford and Pobihushchy (1996), and is often labelled the “nationalist” explanation (see also Schouls 1996). According to these authors, a change in consciousness is taking place among Aboriginal people. As Aboriginals go through a process of decolonization from a historically oppressive society, they come to see themselves decreasingly as Canadians and increasingly as members of a separate nation. Consequently, many refuse to participate in an electoral process that is not their own, that is fundamentally alien or irrelevant. As Aboriginal self-identification climbs, Aboriginal organizations become the central locus of authority and legitimacy. In a similar vein, turnout in federal elections can be considered as incompatible with the desire for autonomy and self-governance (Cairns 2003; Guérin 2003).

A second contending explanation is the “alienation” thesis. This alienation refers to a sense of social and political exclusion. Aboriginals feel excluded from the democratic and representation process in Canada (Cairns 2003; Ladner 2003; Dalton 2007). The existing institutions are seen as defending the interests of non-Aboriginal people and as the instruments of Aboriginal oppression. A major obstacle to Aboriginal participation would thus be lack of trust in the Canadian political system.

The final explanation deals with the failing political efforts and opportunities dedicated to Aboriginal electoral mobilization (Ladner 2003; Silver, Keeper and MacKenzie 2005). The argument is that dominant political forces simply do not strive to foster participation among Aboriginal communities. In this light, turnout might be higher if political parties gave more attention to Aboriginal concerns in their platforms, nominated more Aboriginal candidates, campaigned more on Aboriginal issues, and did more to energize Aboriginal electors.

The number of studies assessing the empirical validity of competing explanations, however, is extremely limited (Ladner and McCrossan 2007). Research relying on official voting results from First Nations reserves can provide some information about the aggregate level of turnout, but it cannot offer insight into the factors that push some Aboriginals to cast a ballot and others not to. Only individual survey data (or experimental designs) could deliver in this regard.

Yet only two studies of this type have ever been conducted in Canada, both sponsored by Elections Canada. One used the Equality, Security and Community survey, which contains an oversample in 2004 of about 600 Aboriginals from Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan (Harell, Panagos and Matthews 2009). The other employed the large General Social Survey, which reached approximately 700 Aboriginals from across the country (Howe and Bedford 2009).

Both studies uncovered that several socio-demographic factors were correlated to reported Aboriginal turnout: age, education, income and urban versus rural residence. Electoral participation tended to be higher among older, more educated and more prosperous individuals, and people in rural areas. However, the relationships did not always remain statistically significant once other control variables were taken into account.

The two studies also found that attachment to Canada, trust in the federal government or Parliament, and confidence in Canadian institutions were all associated with higher voter turnout. The impact of these predictors is compatible with interpretations based on the political exclusion and alienation thesis.

As well, each study identified significant variables that the other study could not consider (because they were not present in the data). Harell, Panagos and Matthews (2009) confirm that participation in organizations – particularly Aboriginal organizations – stimulates voter turnout. Howe and Bedford (2009) conclude that participation is less widespread when respondents are residentially mobile, single (especially single parents) and lack social trust.

Some variables were found to be inconsequential as determinants of turnout once all controls were inserted into the model: living on or off a reserve, Aboriginal identity (of the nationalist hypothesis), satisfaction with the federal government's responses to Aboriginal issues (Harell, Panagos and Matthews 2009) and health status (Howe and Bedford 2009). In the case of news consumption, the evidence was mixed across the two surveys.

While these two studies have considerably improved our understanding of Aboriginal electoral participation, much remains to be learned. One study had to rely on data, for its main dependent variable, that referred to behaviour in a federal election held several years before; the other's Aboriginal sample spanned only three Prairie provinces; and both were necessarily limited to the questions asked in their respective surveys. This paper intends to extend the analysis to further increase the understanding of Aboriginal participation.

2. Data and Methods

Our study relies on post-election surveys conducted by Elections Canada in 2004, 2006, 2008 and 2011. The surveys used random samples of adults in the Canadian population, with an oversample of Aboriginals.³ The total number of respondents was 2,822, 3,013, 3,348 and 3,570, respectively. Of these, 660, 637, 520 and 528 were Aboriginal people. All four surveys saw a mix of on-reserve and off-reserve respondents; on average, First Nations people living on reserves accounted for 41% of Aboriginal interviewees. Aboriginal respondents are well distributed across age groups and gender. Likewise, First Nations, Métis and Inuit respondents from all parts of Canada are included in the sample. One limitation, however, is that the sample includes a comparatively smaller number of Métis and Inuit respondents. We thus limit our analysis to Aboriginal respondents generally, while noting that future research should explore these different groups in more detail.⁴

Each survey included common demographic questions and a battery of common questions on political attitudes and beliefs. Each survey also included useful questions on registration and voter turnout. We take full advantage of all of these questions, wherever possible. While the surveys do not always include exactly the same questions, there is a sufficient common core of questions to directly compare the determinants of turnout across time.⁵

Our analyses employ standard methods from the social sciences, namely bivariate comparison and then multiple regression. We begin by comparing rates of turnout across a single dividing variable. We then perform multiple regressions to consider the independent effects of a variable on some outcome, while controlling for the effects of other variables. Multiple regression is a statistical technique that examines the relationship between a dependent variable (for example, height) and a number of independent variables (for example, parents' height, diet, exercise and gender). Rather than comparing the relationship between height and all of its possible causes separately, multiple regression considers all of these causes at the same time and determines the independent effect of each.

The estimated effect of each factor is represented by a regression coefficient. Coefficients tell us how strongly an independent variable is related to the dependent variable. Coefficients are accompanied by a p-value that tells us how sure we can be that the relationship between the two variables is not due to chance. Therefore, the larger the regression coefficient, the more important its effect. The smaller the p-value, the more certain we can be that the relationship is real and not due to chance. We say that a relationship that is not due to chance is statistically significant.

³ The survey response rates were 28%, 32%, 26% and 25%, respectively.

⁴ Full sample details are available upon request.

⁵ Full surveys are likewise available upon request.

3. Bivariate Analysis: The Determinants of Aboriginal Turnout

Our investigation of the differences between Aboriginal voters and non-voters begins in this section by comparing the bivariate differences between these individuals. In other words, we consider, one by one, the factors that may explain why some Aboriginal electors choose to vote and others do not. We consider the independent effects of many of these factors in our next section.

3.1 2004 Federal Election

For the 2004 federal election, the bivariate relationships between a number of independent variables and mean reported levels of turnout among Aboriginal electors are demonstrated below (see Figure 1). The survey estimates an average turnout rate in this election of 60.4% among Aboriginal respondents.⁶ When this is broken down, we find self-reported turnout rates of 55.9% among First Nations respondents, 72.7% among Inuit respondents and 68.4% among Métis respondents.

Each line in the figure represents one variable, while two points represent the average turnout rate for respondents according to their classification on the variable. The difference between these two points is the gap in turnout attributable to this variable. The graph organizes the variables according to the size of this gap, with the largest gaps at the top and the smallest at the bottom.

Beginning at the top of the graph, the largest difference in turnout exists between those who have or lack political resources, which we calculate by combining measures of political attention, knowledge and interest whenever available.⁷ The results suggest that such resources have large effects, as those with more resources report voting at a higher rate (78%) than those who lack political resources (38%).⁸ The next largest effect is attributable to the belief that voting is a duty. We also find that those who believe their vote does not matter are measurably less likely to vote. These variables, which can be classified as measures of political belief or engagement, are then followed by a suite of demographic variables.

In keeping with mainstream literature on turnout, we find that older and wealthier individuals are more likely to report turning out. Aboriginals in British Columbia are also more likely to report voting. However, those who live on First Nations reserves anywhere in the country report a lower turnout than those who live off reserves. We next find that those with more education are more likely to report voting. Those Aboriginal citizens living in Quebec and Atlantic Canada exhibit lower turnout than other Aboriginals, though these differences do not reach conventional levels of statistical significance.

⁶ It is common for voter turnout to be overestimated in survey self-reports.

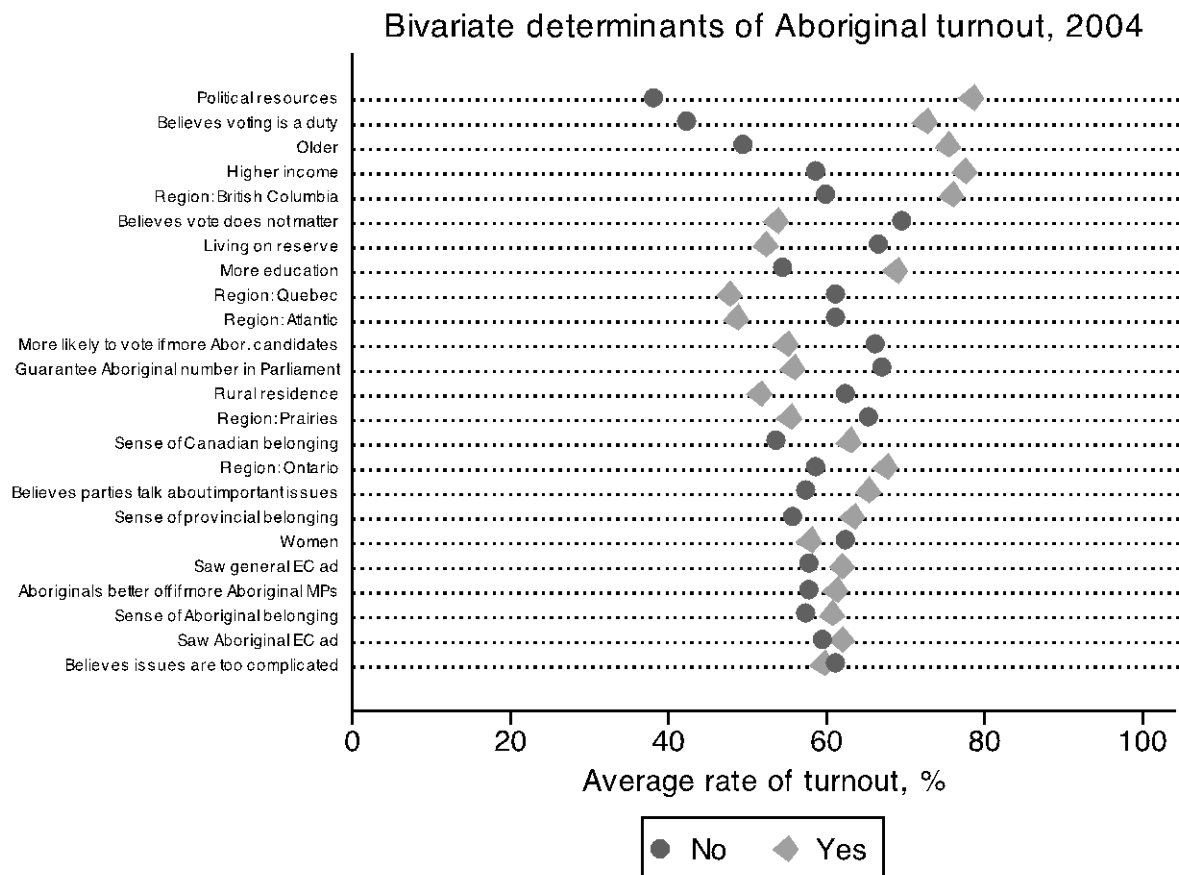
⁷ The surveys included measures of attention and knowledge in 2004; attention, knowledge and interest in 2006; and, attention and interest in 2008 and 2011. Full variable details are available in Appendix 1.

⁸ For ease of interpretation, all of our bivariate analyses are based on dichotomous transformations of the independent variable. Where the variable is categorical or continuous, we use a median split.

The next two largest effects are attributable to beliefs about the political system. Among those who believe that there should be a guaranteed number of Aboriginals in Parliament, reported turnout is lower. Those who say they would be more likely to vote if there were more Aboriginal candidates likewise report lower current voter turnout. Both of these findings suggest that at least some Aboriginal electors do not vote because of a dearth of sufficiently representative or similar candidates. We also find lower turnout among those who believe that parties do not address important issues.

Additionally, our analysis shows that geography matters: those who live in rural areas reported lower turnout in 2004. A sense of belonging matters as well: those with a higher sense of Canadian belonging and/or a higher sense of provincial belonging are more likely to have reported voting in the federal election. In keeping with earlier findings, feeling that one is part of a larger community is a sufficient condition for casting a ballot. We note, however, that having a sense of Aboriginal belonging has a statistically insignificant effect on the decision to vote. Likewise, near the bottom of the graph, gender is shown to be unrelated to voting, as is exposure to an Elections Canada ad. Similarly, believing that issues are too complicated has no effect on the turnout decision.

Figure 1 – Bivariate Determinants of Aboriginal Turnout, 2004

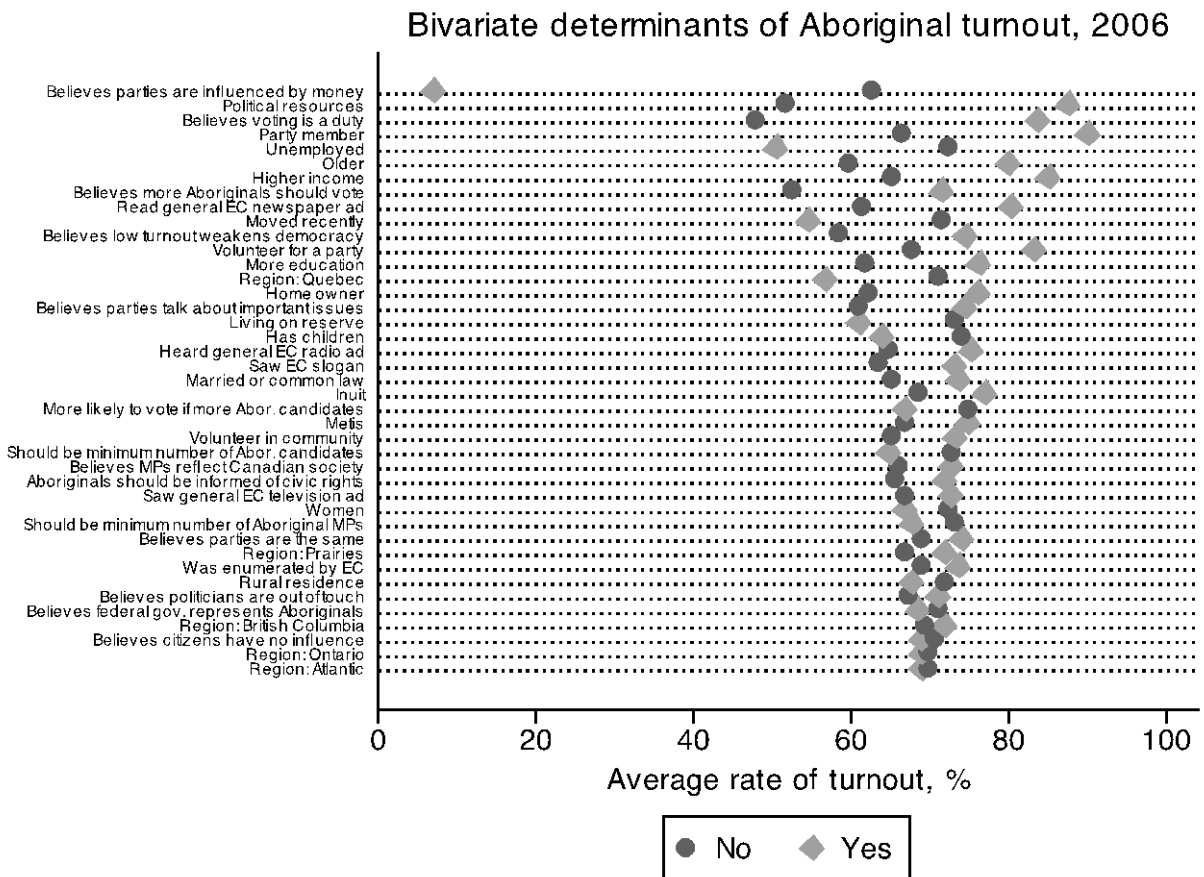


3.2 2006 Federal Election

For the 2006 federal election, the survey estimates an average turnout rate of 69.8% among Aboriginal respondents. When this is broken down, we find self-reported turnout rates of 65.2% among First Nations respondents, 77.1% among Inuit respondents and 75% among Métis respondents.

The determinants of turnout in 2006 (see Figure 2) appear very similar to those in 2004. There is a striking effect for the belief that political parties are too influenced by those with money.⁹ The average turnout rate of those who agree with this sentiment is 55 percentage points lower than those who disagree. Four other attitudinal variables round out the top 10 predictors. Once again, political resources and the belief that voting is a duty exercise large effects. So do the beliefs that more Aboriginals should vote to promote their own views and that low turnout weakens democracy. We also find that turnout is measurably higher among those who are members of a political party.

Figure 2 – Bivariate Determinants of Aboriginal Turnout, 2006



⁹ This belief was only measured for the 2006 election.

The only demographic variables that begin to rival these are age, income and education, which once again exercise large effects. Being unemployed or having moved in the last year are negative predictors of electoral participation, while home ownership is a positive predictor. Other significant bivariate predictors of turnout are residence in Quebec (which has a negative effect in 2006), parenthood, being married or living common law, and residence on a reserve (which again depresses turnout).

The remaining significant variables that increase turnout are: disagreement with the statement that one would be more likely to vote if there were more Aboriginal candidates; agreement that parties talk about important issues; disagreement with there being a minimum number of Aboriginal candidates; and self-reported exposure to Elections Canada's newspaper ads, radio ads or slogan. Finally, community volunteerism is associated with an increased level of turnout.

3.3 2008 Federal Election

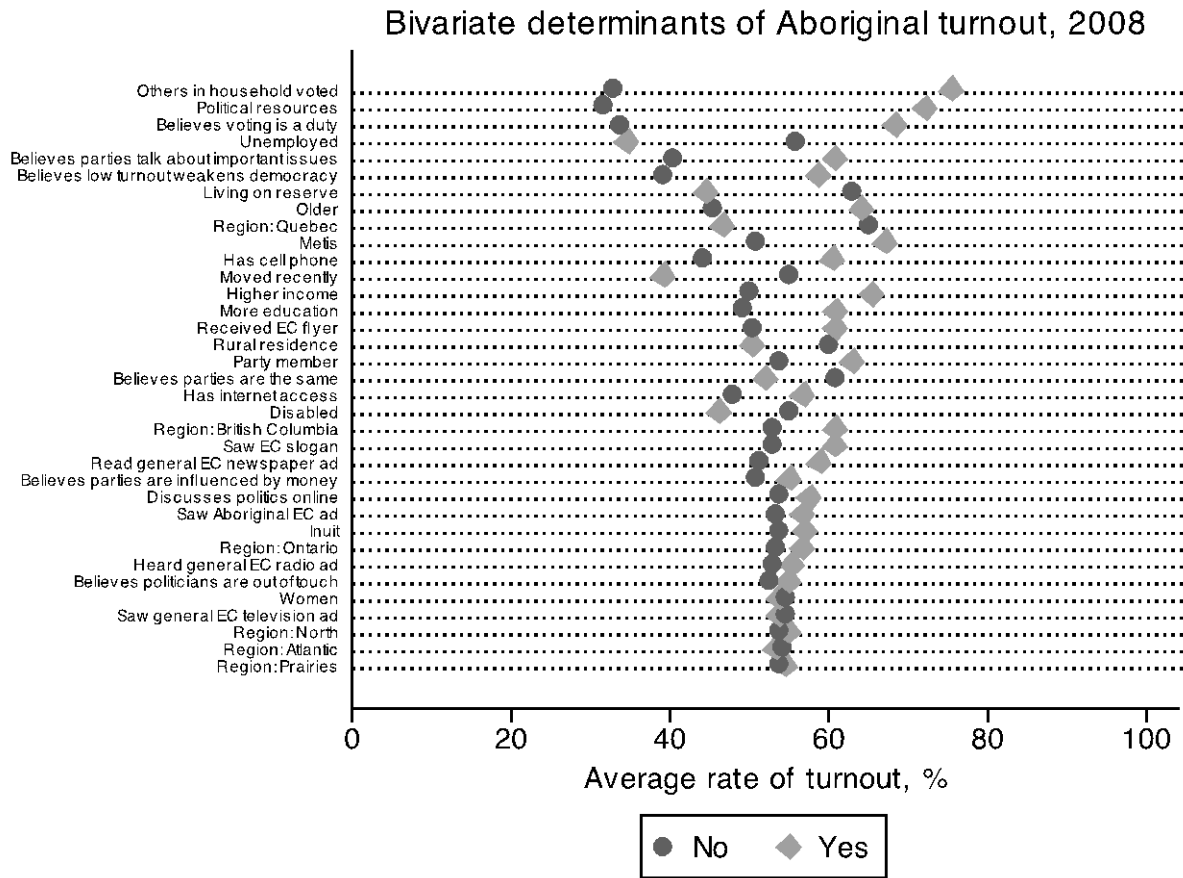
For the 2008 federal election, the survey estimates an average turnout rate of 54.2% among Aboriginal respondents. When this is broken down, we find self-reported turnout rates of 50.1% among First Nations respondents, 57.1% among Inuit respondents and 67.3% among Métis respondents.

The results from the 2008 election (see Figure 3) largely resemble those from the previous two elections. The largest gap is predicted by living in a household in which others also voted, confirming a well-known empirical regularity in political science (Nickerson 2008). Once again, we find that political resources and the belief that voting is a duty exercise very large effects on turnout, followed closely by a belief that parties talk about important issues and that low turnout weakens democracy.

These four attitudinal variables are accompanied by eight demographic predictors. Unemployment, living on a reserve, and having moved in the last year all depress turnout. Meanwhile, being older and identifying as Métis are associated with higher turnout. Likewise, cell phone ownership, a higher income and more education are linked to greater turnout.

While the difference in turnout attributable to residence in Quebec is large, it is not statistically significant. Living in a rural area, however, does predict lower turnout. We find that membership in a political party predicts higher turnout. Finally, those who report receiving an Elections Canada flyer are more likely to have reported voting.

Figure 3 – Bivariate Determinants of Aboriginal Turnout, 2008



3.4 2011 Federal Election

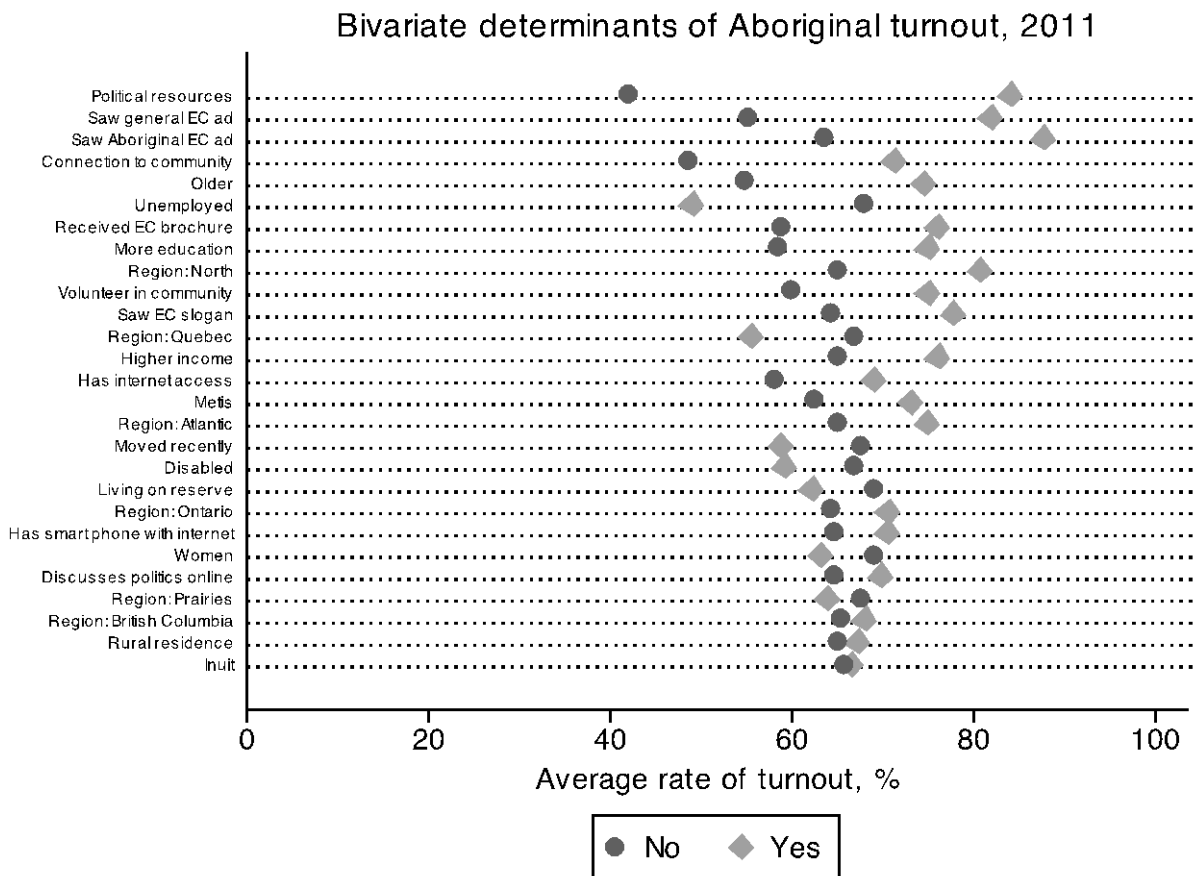
In the most recent federal election, the survey estimates an average turnout rate of 65.9% among Aboriginal respondents. When broken down by subgroups, we find self-reported turnout rates of 62.3% among First Nations respondents, 66.7% among Inuit respondents and 73.2% among Métis respondents.

The results from the 2011 election (see Figure 4) tell a similar story to the other elections. Once again, political resources exercise a significantly large effect. An expressed connection to one’s community, which is likely exercising a substantively similar effect to that of living in a house where others voted, predicts a large difference in the rate of participation. We find that older respondents are more likely to vote, while unemployed respondents are less likely to vote. Those with more education and those who volunteer in the community are also more inclined to turn out. Likewise, higher income is correlated with greater participation. Internet access predicts

higher turnout, as does identifying as Métis. While some geographic factors appear to matter (i.e. living on a reserve, in Quebec or in the North¹⁰), they do not reach conventional levels of statistical significance.

We note, finally, that exposure to Elections Canada’s various advertisements in this election appears related to higher rates of participation. Those who report seeing two different Elections Canada ads (general and targeted to Aboriginal electors), recalling its slogan, and/or receiving its brochure are all more likely to report participating in this election.

Figure 4 – Bivariate Determinants of Aboriginal Turnout, 2011



¹⁰ In this paper, we use the term “the North” to refer to Canada’s three northern territories.

3.5 Common Findings

In the bivariate analyses above, three common findings are of note. First, political resources and a sense of civic duty both consistently exercise large effects on the decision to vote among Aboriginal Canadians. In this regard, Aboriginal electors do not differ noticeably from their non-Aboriginal counterparts, for whom these variables have long been identified among the most influential predictors in most accounts of turnout. Returning to our theoretical account of turnout, political resources are likely related strongly to turnout because they have an effect across several parts of the decision to vote. Those with greater resources will find elections less costly, as the cognitive costs of calculating the differences in policies between parties, of making a decision and of figuring out how to vote will be lower. Moreover, the cognitive benefits experienced in voting are higher among those who are more resourceful. Likewise, those who have a higher sense of civic duty will feel more obligated to vote.

Second, the same suite of demographic predictors that explain non-Aboriginal turnout, especially age, income and education, explain the turnout of Aboriginals. Theoretically, these variables increase turnout by increasing the benefits of voting, as older electors will arguably have more materially at stake in elections. Moreover, those who are older (to a certain limit), wealthier and more educated will find the costs of voting lower than those without the material resources to get to the polls.

Finally, a belief that parties address important issues in campaigns – which is another way of saying that elections and politics *matter* – also consistently drives a large gap in turnout. This directly relates to the benefits factor in the turnout calculus. The greater the belief of individual electors that parties will address issues which matter to them, the greater the benefits for themselves and others electors expect from voting.

Taken together, the determinants of Aboriginal turnout do not appear to differ appreciably from the well-known determinants of voting among non-Aboriginals. In the next section, we present multivariate models to examine systematically whether the factors influencing Aboriginal turnout exercise the same independent effects as demonstrated for non-Aboriginals. To do so, we also estimate models for non-Aboriginals.

4. Multivariate Results: The Determinants of Aboriginal Turnout

In order to ascertain the relative and specific impacts attributable to each determinant of voter turnout, we performed logistic regression analyses.¹¹ There are two sets of “pooled” models containing multiple surveys. The first includes all variables that were present in all four data sets (2004–2011). As the 2011 study did not include a measure of civic duty, this important factor is absent. Accordingly, we present a second set of analyses with all variables present in the first three studies (2004–2008), including sense of civic duty.

The resulting pooled models cover the largest number of Aboriginal respondents ever analyzed in Canada (over 1,900 respondents in the first set and close to 1,500 in the second). Such samples allow us to draw precise estimates of each variable’s contribution to Aboriginal voting behaviour. To draw explicit comparisons with the turnout determinants of non-Aboriginal electors, models for this group are presented alongside.

4.1 Pooled Models

Table 1 presents four sets of results on the determinants of voter turnout among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal electors. The first two columns deal with the 2004, 2006 and 2008 elections. We then reproduce these results, in the third and fourth columns, with the 2011 election included. This second set of results is required because the 2011 survey did not include questions about sense of civic duty.

Beginning with the results from 2004–2008, the table shows that being registered for the election is a significant predictor of Aboriginal turnout. But far and away, the two driving attitudes among Aboriginal voters are political resources and sense of civic duty. Aboriginal electors who say they are interested in politics, follow politics closely and are familiar with the party platforms are 39 percentage points more likely to vote, even when controlling for all other variables. In the case of civic duty, there is a 27 percentage-point turnout gap between those who feel strongly that voting is a duty and those who do not. The only socio-demographic factor that can compete with these two attitudes is age: older Aboriginals are much more likely to head to the polls on election day than Aboriginal youth.

Two typical but less central socio-demographic predictors also appear: income and education. Aboriginal electors who make less than \$20,000 per year are 11 percentage points less likely to vote than those making over \$100,000. Individuals with a university education are 7 percentage points more inclined to turn out than Aboriginals who did not graduate from high school. One geographic factor matters as well: lower turnout is associated with residence on a First Nations reserve (a gap of 7 percentage points). The two previous empirical studies of Canadian Aboriginal turnout did not uncover such a finding (Harell et al. 2009, Howe and Bedford 2009).

¹¹ A logistic model is appropriate when the dependent variable is dichotomous, which is the case for turnout.

Table 1 – Pooled Regression Models, Voter Turnout

	Aboriginals (2004–2008)	Non- Aboriginals (2004–2008)	Aboriginals (2004–2011)	Non- Aboriginals (2004–2011)
Registered	.20** (.02)	.13** (.01)	.22** (.02)	.14** (.01)
Living on reserve	-.07** (.02)	– –	-.08** (.02)	– –
Women	-.02 (.02)	-.01 (.01)	-.03 (.02)	.01 (.01)
Age	.26** (.03)	.09** (.01)	.25** (.03)	.11** (.01)
Education	.07** (.03)	.03* (.01)	.08** (.03)	.03** (.01)
Income	.11** (.04)	.02 (.01)	.09** (.03)	.04** (.01)
Rural residence	-.03 (.02)	.02** (.01)	-.02 (.02)	.02** (.01)
Region: British Columbia	.03 (.03)	.01 (.02)	.05* (.03)	-.01 (.01)
Region: Ontario	.04 (.03)	.00 (.01)	.05* (.03)	.00 (.01)
Region: Quebec	-.06* (.03)	.01 (.01)	-.03 (.03)	.03** (.01)
Region: Atlantic	-.05 (.04)	.01 (.02)	-.03 (.04)	.01 (.01)
Region: North	.06 (.04)	.07** (.03)	.10** (.04)	.06* (.03)
Political resources	.39** (.04)	.33** (.02)	.46** (.03)	.39** (.01)
Civic duty to vote	.27** (.03)	.26** (.02)	– –	– –
Parties talk about impor. issues	.03 (.03)	.03** (.01)	– –	– –
Saw general EC ad	-.02 (.02)	.00 (.01)	-.01 (.02)	.00 (.01)
Saw Aboriginal EC ad	.02 (.02)	– –	.02 (.02)	– –
Number of cases	1473	6043	1918	8596
Pseudo R-squared	.30	.25	.28	.21

Cells contain marginal effects of logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. All variables range from 0 to 1. **significant at .05; *significant at .10

Many other variables come out as irrelevant in the multivariate analysis. The turnout of men and women is similar. The same can be said for rural and urban residents. Aboriginals from all regions exhibit comparable levels of turnout, though it appears to be slightly lower in Quebec. Believing that political parties address the issues that are personally important to an elector has no effect on the probability of participating. Finally, seeing either a general Elections Canada ad about electoral participation or an ad that specifically targeted Aboriginals to encourage them to vote did not have an impact on Aboriginal turnout. Participation was identical whether people saw one or not.

As can be seen from the second column in Table 1, the determinants of turnout among non-Aboriginal electors are largely the same. Political resources and sense of civic duty are doing most of the heavy lifting, while demographic factors like education are also important. One notable difference, however, is the much greater effect of age on Aboriginal turnout than on non-Aboriginal turnout. Given the noted difficulty in motivating non-Aboriginal youth to vote, this very large effect suggests just how much greater may be the challenge of increasing turnout among Aboriginal youth.

When we consider the models that include the 2011 election (third and fourth columns), the results change little. The effect of political resources increases slightly, but this is likely capturing some of the unmeasured effect from sense of civic duty, as these two concepts are weakly related. Once again, age is pivotal – and starkly more so for Aboriginals than non-Aboriginals. Registration likewise exercises a large effect. Education and income are again relevant. Finally, we note that some regional effects emerge, though they are not substantively remarkable in their size.

To summarize the preceding findings, Chart 1 illustrates the profile of the average Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal voter and non-voter in relation to the key determinants of participation in federal elections.¹² Focusing first on Aboriginal electors, the chart shows that just half of abstainers recall receiving a voter information card, while this is the case for 87% of Aboriginal voters. Non-voters reside about evenly on and off reserves, but the majority of voters do not live on a reserve. On average, those who vote are 10 years older than those who do not. The typical Aboriginal abstainer has not finished high school, whereas voters have usually obtained their high school diploma. The income of those who turn out is approximately one \$20,000-bracket higher than the income of their non-participating counterparts. Just a quarter of Aboriginal non-voters have a level of political resources higher than the scale's midpoint, but close to two thirds of voters surpass that mark. Finally, the belief that voting in elections is a civic duty is shared by 90% of Aboriginals who turn out, much more than the two thirds supporting that idea among Aboriginals who do not exercise their right to vote.

¹² For age, education and income, the chart reports the average category among each of the four groups.

Chart 1 – Profile of Average Voters and Non-Voters (2004–2011)

	Non-Aboriginal Non-Voters	Non-Aboriginal Voters	Aboriginal Non-Voters	Aboriginal Voters
Registered	69%	93%	49%	87%
Living on reserve	–	–	52%	37%
Age	35–44	45–54	35–44	45–54
Education	College	College	Some high school	Completed high school
Income	\$40K–\$60K	\$60K–\$80K	\$20K–\$40K	\$40K–\$60K
Political resources (> midpoint)	33%	73%	24%	64%
Voting is a duty (agree)	74%	96%	68%	90%

When we consider the profiles of non-Aboriginal voters and non-voters, the same patterns emerge. Compared to non-Aboriginal abstainers, non-Aboriginal voters are more likely to be registered, older, more educated, wealthier, more concerned by a sense of civic duty, and more interested in, more attentive to and more knowledgeable about politics.¹³ What we see, in sum, is that differences between voters and non-voters among both populations are manifested in each of these key determinants.

A second observation is that when we draw a comparison between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals in the aggregate (see Table A6 in Appendix 2), the latter group scores higher on every key determinant. On average, non-Aboriginals are more likely to be registered, older, more educated, wealthier, possessing of greater political resources, and slightly more likely to consider voting a duty.

In fact, the gap in turnout between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians can be entirely explained by differences in their aggregate profiles. If we simulate the likelihood of Aboriginal turnout when socio-demographic characteristics and attitudinal indicators are equal to those of non-Aboriginals on average (e.g. using Table A6), we find the same predicted rate of electoral participation. This estimate suggests that turnout among Aboriginals would increase by 20 percentage points if their profile on the key determinants matched that of non-Aboriginals, completely closing the gap between them. In short, this turnout gap exists because of substantial differences between the average footing of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal electors.

¹³ There is a gap in the precise education scores of voters and non-voters, even though the summary chart indicates that both groups have the same average education category (college).

4.2 On Reserve vs. Off Reserve

It has been shown that Aboriginals who live on First Nations reserves tend to vote less than those who reside off reserves. But do the two groups have different determinants of turnout? To investigate this possibility, tables A1a and A1b in Appendix 2 present split-sample analyses that consider differences between Aboriginals living on and off reserves. Table A1a presents the results for the 2004–2008 elections, while Table A1b presents results that include the 2011 election.

We focus on the 2004–2008 results, while noting that those including 2011 do not change appreciably. The main picture is one of consistency. The four major determinants of turnout in the analysis of subsection 4.1 – registration, civic duty, political resources and age – have similar effects for both off-reserve and on-reserve Aboriginals, though civic duty appears more important for those living on reserves. That said, there were some slight differences between Aboriginals residing in each of the two settings. While education has a more decisive impact on reserves, income is more critical off reserves. Participation in Quebec diverges according to residence: it is lower than elsewhere on reserves, and it is higher than elsewhere off reserves. Finally, seeing a general Elections Canada ad was only associated with slightly lower turnout on reserves.

4.3 Rural vs. Urban

Could the level of density and economic development be a key cleavage for the structure of Aboriginal turnout determinants? To answer this question, we replicated the models with a second split-sample: whether the respondent's area of residence is urban (third column in tables A1a and A1b) or rural (fourth column in tables A1a and A1b).

Looking at the seven most important determinants of Aboriginal turnout, the nature of the residential area does not play a mediating role. In both rural and urban settings, political resources, civic duty, age, registration, income, education and living on a reserve influence electoral participation in federal elections to an equivalent extent. The only caveat is that the impact of income in rural areas does not attain statistical significance.

Nevertheless, two minor factors do deviate: region and advertising. Turnout was higher in the North, but only in urban localities. Aboriginal electors in rural Ontario and Quebec also behaved differently. Finally, seeing a general Elections Canada ad created a small negative impact, but it was limited to rural settings.

When the 2011 data are included, these effects are essentially unchanged (with the exception that civic duty is not measured).

4.4 Election Differences?

The pooled models of Table 1 could be masking distinct dynamics across the four elections. To verify whether this is the case or not, separate models containing the same variables were conducted for 2004, 2006, 2008 and 2011. These results are presented in Table A2 (Appendix 2).

The four main determinants in the analysis of subsection 4.1 – registration, political resources, civic duty and age – all have similar significant effects in the four models (except for civic duty, which does not appear in 2011). The next trio – living on a reserve, education and income – again show similar impacts, though they often do not reach statistical significance due to the small number of cases in these separate election models.

The Elections Canada ads do not have a significant impact in any of the four elections. Only five of the many variables that did not matter in the pooled models emerge as significant in separate models. Four are regional indicators (British Columbia and Ontario in 2004, and the North in 2006 and 2011), and the other is an attitudinal indicator (“parties talked about important issues” in 2008).

Thus, the patterns observed in the pooled models are essentially consistent across the four elections, and therefore consistent across time.

4.5 The Aboriginal-Specific Explanations

Some may wonder whether our pooled models are losing the Aboriginal aspect of the turnout explanation by retaining only those variables that are common to all four data sets. The separate election models are the perfect place to insert and examine those uncommon variables. In reality, they rarely make a significant contribution above and beyond the central predictors of turnout. These results are demonstrated in Table A3 (Appendix 2).

In 2004, only two of the other variables introduced in bivariate Figure 1 and not included in the pooled models were significant predictors in the multivariate setup: the belief that there should be a guaranteed number of Aboriginals in Parliament and a sense of belonging to Canada. Both tend to suppress Aboriginal turnout. None of the other variables are relevant: neither a sense of belonging to one’s Aboriginal group, the desire for more Aboriginal candidates or representation, nor the belief that “my vote does not matter.”

In 2006, of the more than 20 extra variables that we can add to the specification, only a handful results in a significant effect. Those who saw the Elections Canada slogan, those who are employed, those who do not have children aged 18 or under, party members, those who do not believe “parties are too influenced by money,” those who believe “low turnout weakens

democracy,” and those who think “more Aboriginal people should vote” were more likely to turn out on election day.¹⁴ But the top contributors remain age, political resources and sense of civic duty.

In 2008, we can add upwards of 14 other variables. Still, only two matter: Aboriginal respondents tend to participate more when other people in their household voted, and when they do not have a disability.¹⁵

When we add in the other variables in 2011, the few that have a significant impact are: a sense of connection with one’s community, having a disability, employment, and volunteering in one’s community.

Thus, these supplementary checks and results clearly indicate that the account of turnout identified in the pooled models is a robust and valid explanation of electoral participation among Aboriginal Canadians.

¹⁴ The Elections Canada general newspaper ad variable also had a significant positive effect on turnout in 2006, though this was not an additional variable as it was already part of the pooled model (where the medium-specific ad variables of 2006 and 2008 were coded together to match the question format used in 2004 and 2011).

¹⁵ The Elections Canada general television ad variable also had a significant negative effect on turnout in 2008, but it was not a supplementary variable (see the previous footnote).

5. The Determinants of Aboriginal Voter Registration

In the previous section, our analyses showed that being registered for the election is a significant driver of turnout among Aboriginals. In this section, we examine the determinants of voter registration. It should be noted that this study does not measure the presence of the respondent's name on the register of electors. Instead, it relies on answers to a question asking respondents whether they recalled receiving a voter information card addressed to them personally.¹⁶ The results of the pooled logistic regressions are listed in Table 2. Once again, we present our results for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal electors, and specify separate models for 2004–2008 and 2004–2011.

We focus first on the results for 2004–2008, as these include measures of civic duty to vote. To a substantial degree, Aboriginal registration is driven by the same factors as Aboriginal turnout. Five key variables of the preceding section are again relevant here. The older the respondent, the higher the likelihood of registration. Aboriginal electors who are interested in, who pay attention to and are knowledgeable about politics have a greater tendency to be registered (a gap of 25 percentage points). Civic duty and income also have a small positive impact, and Aboriginals living on reserves exhibit slightly lower levels of registration. The second column exhibits comparable findings among non-Aboriginal electors, though the effect of political resources is substantially larger for Aboriginals than for non-Aboriginals.

One factor does not follow the same pattern: education predicts turnout, but it does not affect registration among Aboriginals, while it does matter among non-Aboriginals. Another factor shows the reverse: gender has no bearing on turnout, but women more so than men tend to remember receiving a voter information card with their name on it – though only among Aboriginal electors.

These results are essentially unchanged when we include the 2011 election (columns three and four).

The determinants of voter registration are rather stable across the four separate elections (see Table A4 in Appendix 2). The main ones – political resources and age – have positive and significant effects in all four cases. Civic duty possesses a positive coefficient that reaches significance in two of the three elections. Gender and income have impacts in the same direction throughout; however, they often fail to turn up as significant in these 500-respondent models. As for the effect of living on a First Nations reserve, shown in the pooled setup, it appears to have been driven by the 2008 data.

¹⁶ With perfect recall, this would be a perfect measure of registration, since voter information cards are sent to every eligible voter whose name appears on the preliminary lists of electors. However, survey recall is never perfect. Both false positives and false negatives are possible in the existing data.

Table 2 – Pooled Regression Models, Voter Registration

	Aboriginals (2004–2008)	Non- Aboriginals (2004–2008)	Aboriginals (2004–2011)	Non- Aboriginals (2004–2011)
Living on reserve	-.05* (.03)	– –	-.04* (.02)	– –
Women	.07** (.02)	.01 (.01)	.06** (.02)	.01* (.01)
Age	.31** (.04)	.22** (.01)	.31** (.03)	.23** (.01)
Education	-.01 (.03)	.06** (.01)	.01 (.03)	.06** (.01)
Income	.10** (.04)	.05** (.01)	.09** (.03)	.05** (.01)
Rural residence	.04 (.03)	.01 (.01)	.02 (.02)	.02* (.01)
Region: British Columbia	.01 (.03)	.02 (.01)	.03 (.03)	.02 (.01)
Region: Ontario	.04 (.03)	.00 (.01)	.06** (.03)	.00 (.01)
Region: Quebec	.05 (.04)	.08** (.01)	.05* (.03)	.08** (.01)
Region: Atlantic	.07 (.05)	.03* (.02)	.08** (.04)	.02 (.01)
Region: North	.06 (.04)	-.07** (.02)	.07* (.04)	-.07** (.02)
Political resources	.25** (.04)	.05** (.02)	.29** (.03)	.09** (.01)
Civic duty to vote	.08** (.04)	.10** (.01)	– –	– –
Parties talk about impor. issues	.01 (.04)	.03** (.01)	– –	– –
Saw general EC ad	.03 (.02)	.03** (.01)	.05** (.02)	.03** (.01)
Saw Aboriginal EC ad	.01 (.03)	– –	.00 (.02)	– –
Number of cases	1477	6046	1922	8599
Pseudo R-squared	.10	.13	.11	.13

Cells contain marginal effects of logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. All variables range from 0 to 1. **significant at .05; *significant at .10

Tables A5a and A5b in Appendix 2 present the results for 2004–2008 and 2004–2011, respectively, according to residence on or off reserves and in urban or rural areas. Political resources exercise a consistently positive effect. Similarly, age is regularly correlated with registration. The impacts of income are less consistent, and likewise the effects of gender. Unlike in the explanation of turnout, sense of civic duty exercises an inconsistent effect on registration.

Finally, recall of Elections Canada’s general advertisement is found to be positively and sometimes significantly related to registration, suggesting that these advertisements are effective at reminding electors of the registration process.

6. The Determinants of Political Resources and Civic Duty Among Aboriginals

Since the two principal drivers of Aboriginal voter registration and turnout in Canada are political resources and civic duty, it makes sense to examine the socio-demographic characteristics of individuals who do and do not possess political resources and/or a belief that voting is a duty. Table 3 presents the results of ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions for two pooled models, one for each of these indicators.

What kind of Aboriginal respondents hold greater political resources? The first column of Table 3 indicates that male, older, more educated and wealthier individuals tend to exhibit more political interest, attention and knowledge. This is exactly the pattern observed among the non-Aboriginal population in the second column (see also Fournier 2002, Gidengil et al. 2004b). Living on a reserve is also associated with slightly lower levels of political resources (with a gap of about 2 percentage points). As well, Aboriginal residents in Quebec are less likely to possess political interest, attention and knowledge.

The third column of this table reveals that a sense of civic duty is less pronounced among four key Aboriginal groups. The young, those with less education, those with lower incomes, and residents of reserves all trail behind on this feeling of civic obligation. Non-Aboriginal electors who share these characteristics, apart from residence on a reserve, also have a weaker sense of civic duty (see the last column).

In terms of the resources and values that critically foster electoral participation, those with a weaker economic and social footing, particularly young people, again seem to be at a disadvantage.

Table 3 – Pooled Regression Models, Political Resources and Civic Duty

	Political resources (2004–2011)		Civic duty to vote (2004–2008)	
	Aboriginals	Non-Aboriginals	Aboriginals	Non-Aboriginals
Living on reserve	-.02* (.01)	– –	-.05** (.02)	– –
Women	-.08** (.01)	-.08** (.01)	.00 (.01)	.03** (.01)
Age	.21** (.02)	.18** (.01)	.12** (.03)	.13** (.01)
Education	.17** (.02)	.16** (.01)	.06** (.02)	.06** (.01)
Income	.12** (.02)	.06** (.01)	.05* (.03)	.04** (.01)
Rural residence	-.01 (.01)	-.01** (.01)	-.01 (.02)	.01 (.01)
Region: British Columbia	.03 (.02)	.01 (.01)	.03 (.02)	-.02** (.01)
Region: Ontario	.00 (.02)	.02** (.01)	-.01 (.02)	.00 (.01)
Region: Quebec	-.08** (.02)	-.05** (.01)	-.01 (.02)	.01 (.01)
Region: Atlantic	-.03 (.03)	-.01 (.01)	-.05 (.03)	-.02** (.01)
Region: North	.03 (.02)	.02 (.02)	.04 (.03)	-.01 (.02)
Number of cases	1931	8623	1486	6070
R-squared	.16	.15	.04	.05

Cells contain OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. All variables range from 0 to 1.

**significant at .05; *significant at .10

7. Recommendations

Elections Canada's stated objectives for 2008–2013 are to maintain trust in the electoral process, increase its accessibility, and strengthen the engagement of key stakeholders. In light of our findings, we offer five policy recommendations aimed at increasing the accessibility of the electoral process for Aboriginal people. The recommendations, which could lead to a higher rate of participation among Aboriginal Canadians, are as follows:

1. Target Aboriginals living on reserves
2. Focus on young Aboriginals
3. Develop and promote programs that increase political resources and sense of civic duty
4. Expand voter registration efforts
5. Study outlier cases

Below, we identify the logic of each recommendation and point toward actionable means by which it could be implemented.

1. Target Aboriginals living on reserves

According to our estimates, the effect of living on a First Nations reserve is a decrease of 7–8 percentage points in the probability of casting a ballot, holding all else equal. This effect grows to 9–10 percentage points for those Aboriginals living on rural reserves. There are at least three reasons why Aboriginal electors would benefit from a focus on increasing the participation of on-reserve Aboriginals. First, our findings suggest that an important predictor of whether an individual votes is whether others in their household have voted, which we think is evidence of a more general network effect (see Christakis and Fowler 2009). This provides an important opportunity for mobilization. By targeting mobilization efforts to geographically concentrated populations, Elections Canada can aim to harness these network effects. Leveraging such effects can decrease the costs of voting, as electors share information on the voting process. It can also increase the sense of civic duty and social obligation, as the electoral participation of one individual acts as an impetus for the participation of others.

Second, by working closely with band leaders, Elections Canada's mobilization programs can harness local traditions and knowledge to increase effectiveness. In implementing voter education programs and registration initiatives, context unquestionably matters. By focusing first on populations living on reserves in close co-operation with local leaders, Elections Canada can tailor programs to meet identifiable local needs. This is almost certainly more difficult among off-reserve populations, which are often dispersed. Elections Canada should engage in survey research and focused discussions with Aboriginal electors to appreciate how their understanding of community obligation and commitment does or does not involve an obligation toward participation in federal elections. For example, Elections Canada could ask a battery of questions on various senses of obligation to understand if electoral participation differs from obligation towards family, community and other forms of participation.

Finally, because turnout is lower on reserves, there is more potential for growth. Full participation in any geographic unit is unlikely, but it does stand to reason that where turnout is lower there is more potential for marginal growth.

2. Focus on young Aboriginals

Young Aboriginals participate at a rate far below their elders. According to our estimates, an Aboriginal elector aged 25 or under has a 25–26 percentage point lower probability of voting than an Aboriginal in the oldest age category (65 or over). This, we note, is already controlling for the effects of the lower than average income of Aboriginal youth. As with on-reserve Aboriginals, there is great potential for growth.

Since our next recommendation focuses on the importance of political resources, we concentrate here on how Elections Canada can better target youth. First, Elections Canada should reconsider its advertising targeting Aboriginal youth. While it is important to laud all efforts to increase voter turnout, it seems clear from our estimates that Elections Canada's advertising aimed at Aboriginal electors has not been effective, particularly among young people.

Elections provide a limited opportunity for learning which mobilization techniques work and which do not. Because voting only occurs at the end of an electoral campaign, it is hard to know until that time whether a particular advertising campaign has been effective. Accordingly, if Elections Canada wishes to maximize its outreach and mobilization efforts among youth during elections, we recommend that it consider mid-campaign surveys, paired with field experimental rollouts of advertisements to gauge their usefulness.

We likewise recommend experimentation among the full suite of available persuasion tools during by-elections. Indeed, by-elections in geographically dispersed electoral districts – which are most likely to involve on-reserve electors – are an ideal place to test several mobilization techniques within one electoral district, during one election.

In sum, we recommend rigorously testing a wide schedule of approaches. As research in the United States has shown, such testing is the most effective way to identify the right tools for mobilization.

3. Develop and promote programs that increase political resources and sense of civic duty

No two single factors exercise as much impact on the decision to vote as political resources and a belief that voting is a duty. Alarming, both of these are exhibiting a steep decline across Canada, particularly among younger Canadians. Those wishing to increase voter participation need to identify how to halt this decline. There are, unfortunately, no easy answers, as the decline appears attributable to a long-term and large-scale values shift among younger generations (Blais and Rubenson, forthcoming; Howe 2010).

While we cannot point to precise solutions, we do recommend two specific policies going forward. First, Elections Canada should act as a clearinghouse and funding source for the best in civic education. Key to such a role would be piloting or funding the piloting of educational tools that increase the political interest and knowledge of young people (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) in a manner that equips them for voting. This in turn requires our knowing

exactly what resources young citizens need. While we suspect it has much more to do with being interested and knowledgeable about the differences between parties and the consequences of voting, rather than the formal functioning of our political system, this is merely a hypothesis.

What we propose is that Elections Canada and partner organizations design and field a number of such civic education programs over a three- to five-year time horizon, both on reserves and in high schools with large numbers of Aboriginal students. By pitting different approaches against each other and then comparing their effects on targeted electors over one or two election cycles, we can gain a systematic understanding of what could increase political resources and sense of civic duty among Aboriginal Canadians.

Such an experimental program of civic education could likewise be adapted to Aboriginal people of all ages. Elections Canada should explore the effects of different community-based civic education programs. Such programs could be run inside or outside of an election cycle, and could be administered by local citizens. If these programs are rolled out and tested in a systematic fashion, we can identify which programs increased political resources and sense of civic duty in a local area, and then had positive downstream effects on voter turnout.

We wish to stress that such programs need not be developed by Elections Canada. Central to acting as a clearinghouse and funding source is a willingness to support locally developed initiatives, provided they are subject to proper program evaluation.

4. Expand voter registration efforts

As our results show, registration exercises a strong and independent effect on the decision to vote, even after controlling for key demographic drivers and the influence of political resources and civic duty. Indeed, the average effect of being registered and recalling receiving a voter information card is a 20 percentage-point increase in the probability of voting. We have two recommendations for increasing registration.

First, Elections Canada should expand its Community Relations Officer Program. This program has been in place since the 38th general election in 2004. It provides important registration and voting information, and also aids in the targeted revision of the National Register of Electors. Where possible, greater resources should be committed to these efforts.

Second, Elections Canada should consider other means of allowing electors to register to vote, whether online or using their telephone. Other jurisdictions have moved in this direction, and we recommend that Elections Canada take preliminary steps to do the same. We likewise urge necessary changes in the legal framework required for such opportunities to be made swiftly. As many rural areas in Canada still lag in access to broadband Internet, we do add a caveat that such a move should also carefully monitor how this policy may have differential benefits according to Internet access.

5. Study outlier cases

Finally, we recommend that Elections Canada commission a series of case studies on locations in which Aboriginal voter turnout is either far above or far below the average. In some cases, these polling divisions will border one another or be in the same electoral district.

Survey research can identify the principal factors across which turnout varies, but it cannot shed similar light upon the on-the-ground differences between places where turnout is high and low. Accordingly, a series of in-depth case studies could identify the crucial factors that lead to unusually high or unusually low turnout. Intuitively, potential candidates would include mobilization by local political and community elites, the professionalism of polling station operations, visits by local candidates, and visits by community relations officers. These are just a few among many possible explanations, and further research is undoubtedly needed.

Conclusion

The voter turnout of Aboriginal Canadians lags that of their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Electoral participation stands at the forefront of other participatory activities. Indeed, many view it as the principal act of citizenship in a democratic society. That participation trails markedly among an entire subset of the Canadian population is a matter of great concern.

In this report, we have strived to identify what explains the variation in Aboriginal turnout and what might remedy this disparity. We have concluded that the determinants of Aboriginal turnout do not markedly differ from those of turnout among non-Aboriginals. The decision to participate turns on a sense of civic duty and a minimum level of political resources, it is made easier for those who are registered, and it is more likely to occur among those who have the educational and material resources that make navigating the political world easier.

We wish to highlight that these results sometimes contrast with previous accounts of the determinants of electoral participation among Aboriginals. First, previous individual-level accounts did not include measures of either political resources or sense of civic duty. As our results show, these are central to the decision to vote among Aboriginals (as they are for non-Aboriginals). Second, our results highlight the negative effect on participation of living on a reserve. Previous studies have failed to uncover this effect. Our finding is likely a result of the improved and expanded sample on which our study is based. Third, while our bivariate results suggest that certain beliefs about the nature of Canada's democratic system may be related to the decision to vote, they generally do not exercise effects independent of political resources and civic duty.

More importantly, our account casts a bright light on the sources of lower turnout among Aboriginal Canadians. The gap in turnout between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal electors can be completely accounted for by residence on or off a First Nations reserve, age, education, income, political resources and civic duty. Were it not for the lower rate of registration, fewer political resources, weaker sense of civic duty, younger average age and poorer socio-economic footing of Aboriginals, they would vote to the same extent as non-Aboriginals.

Based on these findings, we have advanced a number of policy recommendations, notably that Elections Canada should focus efforts on Aboriginals living on a reserve and younger Aboriginals; that efforts should be made to develop and rigorously evaluate programs aimed at increasing political interest, knowledge and civic duty; and that registration should be made easier. None of these tasks are simple, and all require material resources and focused effort. The upside of success, however, cannot be overemphasized. Aboriginal communities are, on average, much younger than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Accordingly, programs that successfully increase electoral participation among young Aboriginals will equip one of Canada's fastest growing populations for much greater political influence in the future. This is a most laudable objective.

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Appendix 1 – Construction of Variables

Variables from main models (Tables 1 to 3). All variables range from 0 to 1:

Voted (EC04_Q4 / EC06_Q15 / EC08_Q3 / EC11_Q3); 1 if voted in the last federal election, 0 if did not vote.

Registered (EC04_Q20 / EC06_Q1 / EC08_Q6 / EC11_Q9); 1 if recall receiving a voter information card addressed to them personally, 0 if do not recall.

Living on reserve (EC04_on_off / EC06_q69 / EC08_q63 / EC11_qx7); 1 if live on a reserve, 0 if do not live on a reserve.

Women (EC04_sex / EC06_gender / EC08_q91 / EC11_gend); 1 if women, 0 if men.

Age (EC04_age_grps / EC06_age_grps / EC08_age_mj / EC11_age2); 0 if under 25, .2 if 25–34, .4 if 35–44, .6 if 45–54, .8 if 55–64, 1 if 65 and over.

Education (EC04_Q40 / EC06_Q99 / EC08_Q88 / EC11_qs11); 0 if less than high school, .33 if completed high school, .67 if college, 1 if university.

Income (EC04_Q41 / EC06_Q100 / EC08_Q89 / EC11_qs12); 0 if under \$20,000, .2 if \$20,000–\$40,000, .4 if \$40,000–\$60,000, .6 if \$60,000–\$80,000, .8 if \$80,000–\$100,000, 1 if \$100,000 and over.

Rural residence (EC04_areatype / EC06_urban / EC08_q94 / EC11_qx5); 0 if urban, 1 if rural.

Region: British Columbia (EC04_region / EC06_region / EC08_q93 / EC11_reg); 1 if British Columbia, 0 otherwise.

Region: Ontario (EC04_region / EC06_region / EC08_q93 / EC11_reg); 1 if Ontario, 0 otherwise.

Region: Quebec (EC04_region / EC06_region / EC08_q93 / EC11_reg); 1 if Quebec, 0 otherwise.

Region: Atlantic (EC04_region / EC06_region / EC08_q93 / EC11_reg); 1 if Newfoundland or Prince Edward Island or Nova Scotia or New Brunswick, 0 otherwise.

Region: North (EC04_region / EC06_region / EC08_q93 / EC11_reg); 1 if Yukon or Northwest Territories or Nunavut, 0 otherwise.

Political resources (EC04_Q1, EC04_Q3 / EC06_Q61, EC06_Q62, EC06_Q63 / EC08_Q56, EC08_Q57 / EC11_Q60, EC11_Q61); 1 if high election attention and election knowledge (2004), 1 if high election attention, election knowledge and political interest (2006), 1 if high election attention and political interest (2008 and 2011).

Civic duty to vote (EC04_Q31b / EC06_Q60a / EC08_Q55a); 1 if strongly agree that it is the duty of citizens to vote in elections, .67 if somewhat agree, .33 if somewhat disagree, 0 if strongly disagree.

Parties talked about important issues (EC04_Q31d / EC06_Q60g / EC08_Q55e); 1 if strongly agree that the parties talked about issues that are important, .67 if somewhat agree, .33 if somewhat disagree, 0 if strongly disagree.

Saw general EC ad (EC04_Q10, EC04_Q14 / EC06_Q54, EC06_Q55, EC06_Q56 / EC08_Q46, EC08_Q48, EC08_Q50 / EC11_Q49); 1 if saw Elections Canada's general turnout advertisement, 0 otherwise.

Saw Aboriginal EC ad (EC04_Q44 / EC06_Q73 / EC08_Q66 / EC11_qa5); 1 if saw Elections Canada's Aboriginal turnout advertisement, 0 otherwise.

Variables from supplementary models (Table A3). All variables range from 0 to 1:

Saw general EC television ad (EC06_Q54 / EC08_Q50); 1 if saw Elections Canada's general turnout advertisement on television, 0 otherwise.

Heard general EC radio ad (EC06_Q55 / EC08_Q48); 1 if heard Elections Canada's general turnout advertisement on the radio, 0 otherwise.

Read general EC newspaper ad (EC06_Q56 / EC08_Q46); 1 if read Elections Canada's general turnout advertisement in the newspaper, 0 otherwise.

Saw EC slogan (EC06_Q57 / EC08_Q52 / EC11_Q52); 1 if saw Elections Canada's turnout slogan, 0 otherwise.

Was enumerated by EC (EC06_Q13); 1 if Elections Canada revising agents came to home to check registration, 0 otherwise.

Received EC flyer (EC08_Q40.1, EC08_Q40.2, EC08_Q40.3, EC08_Q41); 1 if recalls receiving an Elections Canada flyer, 0 otherwise.

Received EC brochure (EC11_Q56); 1 if recalls receiving an Elections Canada brochure, 0 otherwise.

Home owner (EC06_Q90); 1 if home is owned, 0 if rented.

Moved recently (EC06_Q91 / EC08_Q86 / EC11_QS14); 1 if has moved since September 2005 / July 2008 / May 2009, 0 otherwise.

Unemployed (EC06_Q92 / EC08_Q87 / EC11_QS7); 1 if unemployed, 0 otherwise.

Married or common law (EC06_Q97); 1 if married or living with common-law partner, 0 otherwise.

Has children (EC06_Q98); 1 if has children aged 18 or younger, 0 otherwise.

Has disability (EC08_Q87 / EC11_QS9); 1 if has a disability, 0 otherwise.

Has Internet access (EC08_Q58 / EC11_Q64); 1 if has Internet access at home, 0 otherwise.

Has cell phone (EC08_Q59.4); 1 if has a cell phone, 0 otherwise.

Has smart phone with Internet (EC11_Q65c); 1 if has a smart phone with Internet access, 0 otherwise.

Discusses politics online (EC08_Q61 / EC11_Q67); 1 if discusses politics online often, .5 if sometimes, 0 if never.

Others in household voted (EC08_Q85, EC08_Q85a); 1 if other people in the household voted, 0 otherwise.

Volunteer for a party (EC06_Q83); 1 if has ever volunteered for a federal political party, 0 otherwise.

Volunteer in community (EC06_Q85 / EC11_QS6); 1 if has ever volunteered / currently volunteers for a community group, 0 otherwise.

Party member (EC06_Q87 / EC08_Q82); 1 if has ever been / is currently a member of a federal political party, 0 otherwise.

Vote does not matter (EC04_Q31a); 1 if strongly agree that my vote doesn't really matter, .75 if somewhat agree, .5 if neither agree nor disagree, .25 if somewhat disagree, 0 if strongly disagree.

Issues are too complicated (EC04_Q31c); 1 if strongly agree that the major issues of the day are too complicated for most voters, .75 if somewhat agree, .5 if neither agree nor disagree, .25 if somewhat disagree, 0 if strongly disagree.

Aboriginals better off if more Aboriginal MPs (EC04_Q43a); 1 if strongly agree that Aboriginal people in Canada would be better off if more Aboriginal people were elected to Parliament, .75 if somewhat agree, .5 if neither agree nor disagree, .25 if somewhat disagree, 0 if strongly disagree.

Vote if more Aboriginal candidates (EC04_Q43b); 1 if strongly agree that I would be more likely to vote if there were more Aboriginal candidates in federal elections, .75 if somewhat agree, .5 if neither agree nor disagree, .25 if somewhat disagree, 0 if strongly disagree.

Guarantee Aboriginal number in Parliament (EC04_Q43c); 1 if strongly agree that there should be a guaranteed number of Aboriginal people in Parliament, .75 if somewhat agree, .5 if neither agree nor disagree, .25 if somewhat disagree, 0 if strongly disagree.

Sense of Aboriginal belonging (EC04_Q46b); 1 if very strong sense of belonging to First Nations people / Métis people / Inuit people, 0 if not at all strong.

Sense of provincial belonging (EC04_Q46c); 1 if very strong sense of belonging to province or territory, 0 if not at all strong.

Sense of Canadian belonging (EC04_Q46d); 1 if very strong sense of belonging to Canada, 0 if not at all strong.

Politicians are out of touch (EC06_Q60b / EC08_Q55b); 1 if totally agree that elected representatives are not in touch with citizens, .67 if somewhat agree, .33 if somewhat disagree, 0 if totally disagree.

Citizens have no influence (EC06_Q60c); 1 if totally agree that citizens have no real influence on the actions of the government, .67 if somewhat agree, .33 if somewhat disagree, 0 if totally disagree.

MPs reflect Canadian society (EC06_Q60d); 1 if totally agree that the federal MPs are a good reflection of Canadian society, .67 if somewhat agree, .33 if somewhat disagree, 0 if totally disagree.

Parties are the same (EC06_Q60e / EC08_Q55c); 1 if totally agree that all federal political parties are similar, .67 if somewhat agree, .33 if somewhat disagree, 0 if totally disagree.

Parties are influenced by money (EC06_Q60f / EC08_Q55d); 1 if totally agree that political parties are too influenced by people who have a lot of money, .67 if somewhat agree, .33 if somewhat disagree, 0 if totally disagree.

Low turnout weakens democracy (EC06_Q60h / EC08_Q55f); 1 if totally agree that the decline in voter turnout in Canada weakens Canadian democracy, .67 if somewhat agree, .33 if somewhat disagree, 0 if totally disagree.

Vote if more Aboriginal candidates (EC06_Q72a); 1 if totally agree that you would be more likely to vote in federal elections if there were more Aboriginal candidates, .67 if somewhat agree, .33 if somewhat disagree, 0 if totally disagree.

Minimum number of Aboriginal MPs (EC06_Q72b); 1 if totally agree that there should be a minimum number of Aboriginal MPs, .67 if somewhat agree, .33 if somewhat disagree, 0 if totally disagree.

Minimum number of Aboriginal candidates (EC06_Q72c); 1 if totally agree that political parties should be required to run a minimum number of Aboriginal candidates, .67 if somewhat agree, .33 if somewhat disagree, 0 if totally disagree.

Federal government represents Aboriginals (EC06_Q72d); 1 if totally agree that the federal government does a good job of representing your interests as an Aboriginal person, .67 if somewhat agree, .33 if somewhat disagree, 0 if totally disagree.

More Aboriginals should vote (EC06_Q72e); 1 if totally agree that more Aboriginal people should vote in federal elections to promote their points of view, .67 if somewhat agree, .33 if somewhat disagree, 0 if totally disagree.

Aboriginals should be informed of civic rights (EC06_Q72f); 1 if totally agree that more efforts should be made to inform Aboriginals about their civic rights, .67 if somewhat agree, .33 if somewhat disagree, 0 if totally disagree.

Connection to community (EC11_Q69); 1 if very strong connection to the community, .67 if somewhat strong, .33 if somewhat weak, 0 if very weak.

Appendix 2 – Supplementary Tables

Table A1a – Pooled Regression Models, Voter Turnout Among Subgroups

	Aboriginals off reserve (2004–2008)	Aboriginals on reserve (2004–2008)	Urban Aboriginals (2004–2008)	Rural Aboriginals (2004–2008)
Registered	.19** (.03)	.21** (.03)	.18** (.03)	.20** (.03)
Living on reserve	– –	– –	-.08** (.04)	-.09** (.03)
Women	-.03 (.03)	.00 (.03)	-.04 (.03)	.01 (.03)
Age	.24** (.05)	.28** (.05)	.27** (.05)	.24** (.05)
Education	.04 (.04)	.14** (.04)	.07* (.04)	.10** (.04)
Income	.14** (.05)	.08 (.07)	.17** (.06)	.07 (.06)
Rural residence	-.04 (.03)	-.03 (.05)	– –	– –
Region: British Columbia	.04 (.04)	.01 (.05)	.03 (.04)	.04 (.05)
Region: Ontario	.02 (.04)	.05 (.04)	-.04 (.04)	.09** (.04)
Region: Quebec	.05 (.04)	-.17** (.05)	.02 (.04)	-.12** (.04)
Region: Atlantic	-.06 (.05)	-.03 (.06)	-.02 (.06)	-.07 (.06)
Region: North	.08* (.05)	.03 (.08)	.24* (.14)	.02 (.05)
Political resources	.39** (.05)	.37** (.06)	.36** (.05)	.41** (.05)
Civic duty to vote	.22** (.04)	.33** (.05)	.28** (.05)	.26** (.05)
Parties talk about impor. issues	.04 (.04)	.03 (.05)	-.01 (.05)	.08* (.04)
Saw general EC ad	.02 (.03)	-.07* (.04)	.03 (.03)	-.06* (.03)
Saw Aboriginal EC ad	.00 (.03)	.04 (.04)	.02 (.04)	.02 (.03)
Number of cases	831	642	648	825
Pseudo R-squared	.31	.30	.37	.27

Cells contain marginal effects of logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. All variables range from 0 to 1. **significant at .05; *significant at .10

Table A1b – Pooled Regression Models, Voter Turnout Among Subgroups

	Aboriginals off reserve (2004–2011)	Aboriginals on reserve (2004–2011)	Urban Aboriginals (2004–2011)	Rural Aboriginals (2004–2011)
Registered	.21** (.02)	.23** (.03)	.21** (.02)	.22** (.03)
Living on reserve	– –	– –	-.07** (.03)	-.10** (.03)
Women	-.04 (.02)	-.01 (.03)	-.06** (.03)	.01 (.03)
Age	.24** (.04)	.27** (.05)	.26** (.04)	.24** (.05)
Education	.07** (.03)	.11** (.04)	.08** (.04)	.09** (.04)
Income	.10** (.04)	.08 (.06)	.12** (.04)	.04 (.05)
Rural residence	-.02 (.03)	-.02 (.03)	– –	– –
Region: British Columbia	.04 (.04)	.06 (.04)	.05 (.04)	.05 (.05)
Region: Ontario	.02 (.04)	.06* (.04)	.02 (.04)	.07* (.04)
Region: Quebec	.06 (.04)	-.13** (.04)	.01 (.04)	-.07* (.04)
Region: Atlantic	-.03 (.04)	-.02 (.06)	-.01 (.05)	-.04 (.05)
Region: North	.11** (.04)	.07 (.07)	.25** (.09)	.06 (.05)
Political resources	.44** (.04)	.46** (.05)	.42** (.04)	.50** (.04)
Civic duty to vote	– –	– –	– –	– –
Parties talk about impor. issues	– –	– –	– –	– –
Saw general EC ad	.03 (.02)	-.05* (.03)	.03 (.03)	-.05* (.03)
Saw Aboriginal EC ad	.00 (.03)	.04 (.03)	.02 (.03)	.03 (.03)
Number of cases	1067	851	927	991
Pseudo R-squared	.29	.26	.32	.23

Cells contain marginal effects of logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. All variables range from 0 to 1. **significant at .05; *significant at .10

Table A2 – Separate Regression Models, Voter Turnout (Pooled Version)

	2004	2006	2008	2011
Registered	.20** (.03)	.16** (.03)	.24** (.04)	.24** (.03)
Living on reserve	-.07 (.07)	-.06 (.04)	-.12** (.04)	-.04 (.04)
Women	-.05 (.04)	-.03 (.03)	.04 (.04)	-.05 (.04)
Age	.18** (.07)	.36** (.05)	.26** (.06)	.15** (.07)
Education	.04 (.05)	.05 (.04)	.12** (.05)	.05 (.06)
Income	.16* (.08)	.10* (.06)	.13* (.07)	.02 (.06)
Rural residence	.01 (.07)	-.04 (.04)	-.03 (.04)	.04 (.04)
Region: British Columbia	.16** (.05)	-.05 (.05)	.02 (.06)	.07 (.06)
Region: Ontario	.15** (.05)	-.03 (.05)	.04 (.06)	.05 (.05)
Region: Quebec	-.06 (.07)	-.06 (.05)	-.03 (.05)	.02 (.06)
Region: Atlantic	.00 (.08)	-.01 (.06)	-.08 (.07)	.04 (.07)
Region: North	.24 (.20)	.10* (.05)	-.05 (.08)	.33** (.11)
Political resources	.50** (.06)	.37** (.06)	.34** (.07)	.43** (.06)
Civic duty to vote	.27** (.06)	.23** (.05)	.28** (.06)	– –
Parties talk about impor. issues	.00 (.06)	.02 (.05)	.16** (.06)	– –
Saw general EC ad	.00 (.04)	.03 (.04)	-.03 (.05)	.02 (.04)
Saw Aboriginal EC ad	.04 (.04)	.01 (.04)	.00 (.05)	.02 (.07)
Number of cases	449	554	470	445
Pseudo R-squared	.35	.35	.30	.34

Cells contain marginal effects of logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. All variables range from 0 to 1. **significant at .05; *significant at .10

Table A3 – Separate Regression Models, Voter Turnout (Complete Version)

	2004	2006	2008	2011
Registered	.21** (.03)	.17** (.03)	.24** (.04)	.23** (.04)
Living on reserve	-.08 (.07)	-.05 (.04)	-.10* (.05)	-.07* (.04)
Métis	– –	-.06 (.04)	-.06 (.06)	.02 (.04)
Inuit	– –	.06 (.06)	.01 (.07)	.00 (.10)
Women	-.02 (.04)	-.02 (.03)	.02 (.04)	-.04 (.04)
Age	.19** (.07)	.30** (.06)	.31** (.07)	.20** (.08)
Education	.03 (.06)	.04 (.05)	.05 (.05)	.05 (.06)
Income	.15* (.09)	.11* (.06)	.03 (.07)	-.02 (.06)
Rural residence	.02 (.07)	-.07* (.04)	-.05 (.04)	.02 (.04)
Region: British Columbia	.13** (.06)	-.07 (.05)	.00 (.06)	.06 (.06)
Region: Ontario	.13** (.05)	-.03 (.05)	.01 (.06)	.07 (.05)
Region: Quebec	-.07 (.08)	-.04 (.05)	-.03 (.05)	.02 (.06)
Region: Atlantic	.00 (.08)	.01 (.07)	-.06 (.07)	.06 (.07)
Region: North	.19 (.21)	.08 (.06)	-.07 (.08)	.31** (.12)
Political resources	.51** (.06)	.26** (.07)	.25** (.07)	.40** (.06)
Civic duty to vote	.28** (.06)	.23** (.06)	.17** (.06)	– –
Parties talk about impor. issues	.01 (.06)	-.01 (.06)	.12** (.06)	– –
Saw general EC ad	-.01 (.04)	– –	– –	.00 (.04)
Saw Aboriginal EC ad	.03 (.04)	.00 (.04)	.00 (.05)	.04 (.07)
Saw general EC television ad	– –	-.05 (.03)	-.06* (.04)	– –
Heard general EC radio ad	– –	.02 (.03)	-.02 (.04)	– –
Read general EC newspaper ad	– –	.07** (.03)	.00 (.04)	– –

Saw EC slogan	–	.06*	.00	-.01
	–	(.03)	(.05)	(.06)
Was enumerated by EC	–	-.01	–	–
	–	(.05)	–	–
Received EC flyer	–	–	.00	–
	–	–	(.04)	–
Received EC brochure	–	–	–	.03
	–	–	–	(.04)
Homeowner	–	-.01	–	–
	–	(.03)	–	–
Moved recently	–	.02	-.03	.01
	–	(.05)	(.07)	(.05)
Unemployed	–	-.08*	-.06	.10*
	–	(.04)	(.06)	(.06)
Married or common law	–	-.04	–	–
	–	(.03)	–	–
Has children	–	-.07**	–	–
	–	(.03)	–	–
Has disability	–	–	-.16**	-.10**
	–	–	(.06)	(.05)
Has Internet access	–	–	.01	.01
	–	–	(.05)	(.04)
Has cell phone	–	–	.00	–
	–	–	(.04)	–
Has smart phone with Internet	–	–	–	.03
	–	–	–	(.05)
Discusses politics online	–	–	-.04	-.07
	–	–	(.06)	(.08)
Others in household voted	–	–	.26**	–
	–	–	(.03)	–
Volunteer for a party	–	.05	–	–
	–	(.06)	–	–
Volunteer in community	–	-.02	–	.08**
	–	(.03)	–	(.04)
Party member	–	.10*	-.02	–
	–	(.06)	(.09)	–
Vote does not matter	-.06	–	–	–
	(.05)	–	–	–
Issues are too complicated	.06	–	–	–
	(.06)	–	–	–
Aboriginals better off if more Abor. MPs	-.01	–	–	–
	(.08)	–	–	–
Vote if more Aboriginal candidates	.01	–	–	–
	(.08)	–	–	–
Guarantee Abor. number in Parliament	-.14*	–	–	–
	(.08)	–	–	–
Sense of Aboriginal belonging	.07	–	–	–
	(.07)	–	–	–

Sense of provincial belonging	.10	–	–	–
	(.08)	–	–	–
Sense of Canadian belonging	-.16*	–	–	–
	(.08)	–	–	–
Politicians are out of touch	–	.00	.00	–
	–	(.06)	(.06)	–
Citizens have no influence	–	-.06	–	–
	–	(.05)	–	–
MPs reflect Canadian society	–	.01	–	–
	–	(.06)	–	–
Parties are the same	–	-.02	-.08	–
	–	(.05)	(.06)	–
Parties are influenced by money	–	-.12**	.02	–
	–	(.06)	(.06)	–
Low turnout weakens democracy	–	.18**	.05	–
	–	(.06)	(.07)	–
Vote if more Aboriginal candidates	–	-.01	–	–
	–	(.06)	–	–
Minimum number of Aboriginal MPs	–	.05	–	–
	–	(.05)	–	–
Minimum number of Abor. candidates	–	-.07	–	–
	–	(.06)	–	–
Federal govern. represents Aboriginals	–	-.05	–	–
	–	(.05)	–	–
More Aboriginals should vote	–	.18**	–	–
	–	(.07)	–	–
Abor. should be informed of civic rights	–	-.07	–	–
	–	(.06)	–	–
Connection to community	–	–	–	.12**
	–	–	–	(.06)
Number of cases	434	553	470	445
Pseudo R-squared	.36	.42	.39	.37

Cells contain marginal effects of logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. All variables range from 0 to 1. **significant at .05; *significant at .10

Table A4 – Separate Regression Models, Voter Registration

	2004	2006	2008	2011
Living on reserve	.01 (.08)	.03 (.04)	-.11** (.04)	-.05 (.04)
Women	.06 (.04)	.06 (.03)	.09** (.04)	.01 (.04)
Age	.30** (.08)	.25** (.06)	.35** (.06)	.24** (.07)
Education	-.04 (.06)	-.01 (.05)	.01 (.06)	.11* (.06)
Income	.16* (.09)	.04 (.06)	.07 (.07)	.02 (.06)
Rural residence	.03 (.07)	-.02 (.04)	.07* (.04)	-.01 (.04)
Region: British Columbia	.04 (.06)	.02 (.06)	-.04 (.06)	.09 (.06)
Region: Ontario	.05 (.06)	.07 (.06)	-.01 (.06)	.10* (.05)
Region: Quebec	-.04 (.08)	.03 (.06)	.05 (.05)	.05 (.06)
Region: Atlantic	.07 (.10)	.05 (.07)	.04 (.08)	.14* (.08)
Region: North	.26 (.24)	.08 (.05)	-.07 (.07)	.11 (.09)
Political resources	.26** (.07)	.27** (.07)	.19** (.07)	.31** (.06)
Civic duty to vote	.14** (.07)	.02 (.06)	.11* (.06)	– –
Parties talk about impor. issues	.02 (.07)	.03 (.06)	-.05 (.07)	– –
Saw general EC ad	-.01 (.04)	.04 (.04)	.03 (.05)	.13** (.05)
Saw Aboriginal EC ad	.01 (.05)	.00 (.04)	.00 (.05)	-.05 (.08)
Number of cases	452	555	470	445
Pseudo R-squared	.09	.09	.12	.20

Cells contain marginal effects of logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. All variables range from 0 to 1. **significant at .05; *significant at .10

Table A5a – Pooled Regression Models, Voter Registration Among Subgroups

	Aboriginals off reserve (2004–2008)	Aboriginals on reserve (2004–2008)	Urban Aboriginals (2004–2008)	Rural Aboriginals (2004–2008)
Living on reserve	–	–	-.08*	-.05
	–	–	(.04)	(.03)
Women	.05*	.10**	.02	.12**
	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)
Age	.35**	.28**	.37**	.27**
	(.05)	(.06)	(.05)	(.05)
Education	-.01	.02	-.04	.02
	(.04)	(.05)	(.05)	(.04)
Income	.17**	.01	.18**	.02
	(.05)	(.07)	(.06)	(.06)
Rural residence	.03	.04	–	–
	(.03)	(.05)	–	–
Region: British Columbia	.05	-.04	.02	-.01
	(.04)	(.05)	(.04)	(.05)
Region: Ontario	.07	.00	.04	.03
	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)	(.04)
Region: Quebec	.05	.05	.05	.04
	(.05)	(.05)	(.06)	(.05)
Region: Atlantic	.08	.07	.09	.07
	(.06)	(.07)	(.07)	(.06)
Region: North	.02	.22**	-.02	.08
	(.05)	(.11)	(.09)	(.05)
Political resources	.24**	.26**	.32**	.18**
	(.05)	(.07)	(.06)	(.06)
Civic duty to vote	.08	.07	.12**	.05
	(.05)	(.06)	(.06)	(.05)
Parties talk about impor. issues	.00	.00	.06	-.04
	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)
Saw general EC ad	.06*	.00	.04	.03
	(.03)	(.04)	(.03)	(.03)
Saw Aboriginal EC ad	-.01	.02	.00	.00
	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.03)
Number of cases	832	645	650	827
Pseudo R-squared	.13	.08	.16	.08

Cells contain marginal effects of logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. All variables range from 0 to 1. **significant at .05; *significant at .10

Table A5b – Pooled Regression Models, Voter Registration Among Subgroups

	Aboriginals off reserve (2004–2011)	Aboriginals on reserve (2004–2011)	Urban Aboriginals (2004–2011)	Rural Aboriginals (2004–2011)
Living on reserve	–	–	-.04	-.06*
	–	–	(.03)	(.03)
Women	.04	.10**	.02	.10**
	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)
Age	.34**	.27**	.34**	.28**
	(.04)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)
Education	.02	.01	.01	.02
	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)
Income	.12**	.06	.17**	.01
	(.04)	(.06)	(.05)	(.05)
Rural residence	.03	.00	–	–
	(.03)	(.03)	–	–
Region: British Columbia	.07*	-.02	.03	.01
	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.05)
Region: Ontario	.09**	.03	.07*	.04
	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)
Region: Quebec	.04	.06	.06	.05
	(.04)	(.05)	(.04)	(.04)
Region: Atlantic	.10*	.06	.09	.09
	(.05)	(.06)	(.06)	(.06)
Region: North	.04	.18**	.04	.07
	(.04)	(.09)	(.07)	(.05)
Political resources	.29**	.29**	.35**	.23**
	(.04)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)
Civic duty to vote	–	–	–	–
	–	–	–	–
Parties talk about impor. issues	–	–	–	–
	–	–	–	–
Saw general EC ad	.08**	.02	.05*	.05
	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)
Saw Aboriginal EC ad	-.02	.03	.01	.00
	(.03)	(.04)	(.04)	(.03)
Number of cases	1068	854	929	993
Pseudo R-squared	.14	.09	.15	.09

Cells contain marginal effects of logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. All variables range from 0 to 1. **significant at .05; *significant at .10

Table A6 – Profile of Average Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Electors (2004–2011)

	Non-Aboriginals	Aboriginals
Voted	83%	63%
Registered	89%	73%
Living on reserve	–	42%
Age	45–54	35–44
Education	College	Completed high school
Income	\$60K–\$80K	\$40K–\$60K
Political resources (> midpoint)	67%	50%
Voting is a duty (agree)	92%	82%
