

# Turnout and Reasons for Not Voting: October 21, 2019, Federal Election

## Results from the Labour Force Survey Supplement

---

Under an agreement with Elections Canada, Statistics Canada conducted a supplement to the November 2019 Labour Force Survey that asked respondents about voting in the October 21, 2019, federal election. High-level results were released to the public through Statistics Canada's daily news release ("The Daily") on Wednesday, February 26, 2020. This report provides additional detail on those results, with a particular focus on demographic groups of interest and those who reported problems with the electoral process as the reason for not voting. Comparisons with results from the 2011 and 2015 federal elections are provided, where possible.

### Methodology

The data reported in this study were derived from five questions added to the November 2019 Labour Force Survey (LFS):

1. Are you a Canadian citizen?
2. Did you vote in the recent federal election?
3. Why did you not vote?
4. Did you go to a polling station and try to vote? (if the survey respondent answered "could not prove identity or address" to question 3)
5. In the past 12 months, did you use Elections Canada's online service to check, update or complete your voter registration?

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is a monthly survey of approximately 56,000 households. A sample of this size allows for analysis of a variety of sub-populations. Responding to the main LFS content is mandatory, while responding to supplementary questions (such as the November 2019 election questions) is voluntary. The response rate for the initial filter question on Canadian citizenship was 97.0% (among those who responded to the LFS), indicating a fairly low level of selection bias.

The LFS excludes persons living on reserves and in other Aboriginal settlements, full-time members of the Canadian Armed Forces, persons living in institutions, and households in extremely remote areas with very low population density. These exclusions are estimated to represent approximately 2% of the population. In addition, the supplementary election questions were not asked of LFS respondents in the territories. These exclusions may partly explain why voter turnout rates from similar post-election surveys have consistently been higher than the official voter turnout rates released by Elections Canada.

As with all sample surveys, LFS estimates are subject to some degree of variation due to potential sampling and non-sampling errors. Standard Statistics Canada criteria related to data quality have been applied to all estimates presented in this report. In addition, suppression rules related to respondent confidentiality have been applied. All differences between groups or changes over time discussed in the analysis are considered statistically significant at a 95% confidence level.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Significance testing was conducted using a common approximation formula that does not account for covariation between estimates.

## Voter turnout

- Just over three-quarters (77.1%) of Canadians reported voting in the 2019 federal election, virtually unchanged from the 2015 election (77.0%).
- In particular, following notable increases of more than 10 percentage points between the 2011 and 2015 elections, voter turnout among younger people aged 18 to 24 (68.4%), and 25 to 34 (71.0%), remained at similar levels in 2019.
- There was little change in voter turnout by citizenship status in 2019. As in 2015, naturalized citizens who had been in Canada for 10 years or less continued to have a lower turnout rate (71.8%) than those who had arrived more than 10 years earlier (75.3%) and Canadian citizens by birth (77.8%).
- There was also little change in turnout among Aboriginal electors living off-reserve (66.4%), which remained lower than that of non-Aboriginal electors (77.5%) in the 2019 federal election.

## Reasons for not voting

- Among the 22.9% of Canadians who did not vote in 2019 (representing approximately 6.2 million electors), the main reasons for not voting were very similar to those reported after the 2015 federal election. For analysis purposes, the 18 different reasons collected were grouped into four categories:
  - Everyday life reasons (45.9%)
  - Political reasons (41.9%)
  - Electoral process reasons (5.4%)
  - All other reasons (6.8%)
- As in 2015, two reasons together accounted for more than half of all the reasons mentioned for not voting: not interested in politics (34.6%) and being too busy (21.6%). The other most common reasons were having an illness or disability (13.0%) and being out of town (11.3%).
- Female non-voters (47.6%) were more likely than their male counterparts (44.3%) to cite one of the “everyday life reasons” as the reason for not voting, most notably having an illness or disability (16.4% versus 9.8%). This is partly related to the fact that a higher proportion of women were in the older age groups compared with men. Just over one in ten female non-voters was aged 75 and older. In contrast, men were more likely to report not being interested in politics (37.0%) compared with women (32.1%).

## *Reasons related to the electoral process*

- Electoral process reasons accounted for 5.4% of the reasons reported by non-voters in the 2019 federal election, a decrease of 2.1 percentage points from 2015.
- In the category of electoral process reasons, the most common specific reasons were: could not prove identity or address (1.6%), transportation problem/polling station too far (1.1%), lack of

information about the voting process (1.1%), and issues with voter information card (1.1%). Other electoral process reasons cited were: not on the voters list (0.4%) and lineups too long (0.1%)<sup>2</sup>.

- Non-voters aged 75 and older were among the most likely to report reasons related to the electoral process (8.8%), primarily due to those citing transportation problems/polling station too far (5.4%).

**Table 1: Reasons for not voting, all non-voters, youth and Aboriginal people living off-reserve, 2019 federal election (%)**

Reason for not voting	All non-voters	Youth (18-24)	Aboriginals living off-reserve
<b>Everyday life reasons</b>	<b>45.9</b>	<b>45.7</b>	<b>40.8</b>
Too busy	21.6	25.5	19.0
Out of town	11.3	14.7	9.8
Illness or disability	13.0	5.6	12.0
<b>Political reasons</b>	<b>41.9</b>	<b>39.1</b>	<b>47.6</b>
Not interested in politics	34.6	35.0	39.1
Lack of information about campaign issues and parties' positions	0.7	0.8 <sup>E</sup>	0.9 <sup>E</sup>
Did not like candidates/parties/campaign	3.9	1.3 <sup>E</sup>	5.0 <sup>E</sup>
Felt voting would not make a difference	0.9	-	-
Did not know who to vote for	1.8	1.5 <sup>E</sup>	-
<b>Electoral process reasons</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>8.2</b>	<b>6.9</b>
Could not prove identity or address	1.6	2.8	2.8 <sup>E</sup>
Not on voters list	0.4	1.1 <sup>E</sup>	-
Transportation problem/polling station too far	1.1	0.5 <sup>E</sup>	1.1 <sup>E</sup>
Lack of information about the voting process (e.g. when/where to vote)	1.1	1.8 <sup>E</sup>	-
Lineups were too long	0.1 <sup>E</sup>	-	-
Issues with the voter information card	1.1	1.9 <sup>E</sup>	0.5 <sup>E</sup>
<b>All other reasons</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>4.8</b>
Forgot to vote	1.2	1.6 <sup>E</sup>	1.0 <sup>E</sup>
Religious or other beliefs	1.3	0.7 <sup>E</sup>	-
Weather conditions	0.1 <sup>E</sup>	-	-
Other reasons	4.2	4.6	2.7 <sup>E</sup>

<sup>E</sup>: Figure should be used with caution. Coefficient of variation (CV) higher than 16.5%.

-: Figure has been suppressed for confidentiality and/or data quality reasons.

Note: Values may not sum to 100 or to sub-totals due to rounding.

Source: Labour Force Survey Supplement, November 2019.

- Among non-voters aged 18 to 24, 8.2% of the reported reasons were related to the electoral process, a decline of 3.3 percentage points compared with the 2015 election. The most common

<sup>2</sup> This figure should be used with caution.

reasons related to the electoral process for youth in 2019 were: could not prove identity or address (2.8%), issues with the voter information card (1.9%<sup>3</sup>), and a lack of information about the voting process (1.8%<sup>4</sup>).

- Across the provinces, the prevalence of electoral process reasons for not voting ranged from 4.2% in Newfoundland and Labrador to 7.0% in Saskatchewan.
- There was little difference in the overall prevalence of electoral process reasons between Aboriginal non-voters living off-reserve (6.9%) and non-Aboriginal non-voters (5.4%). However, within this group of reasons, not being able to prove identity or address was more commonly cited by Aboriginals (2.8%<sup>5</sup>) than non-Aboriginals (1.6%).

*Non-voters who said they went to a polling station*

- Those who said they did not vote because they were not able to prove their identity or address were also asked if they went to a polling station.
- Among the approximately 104,100 non-voting electors who reported not being able to prove their identity or address, one in five (20.2% or approximately 21,000) said they went to a polling station.
- Within this group who did not vote because of difficulty proving identity or address, but did go to a polling station, approximately 4,300<sup>6</sup> (20.5%) were aged between 18 and 24 years old. In contrast, this age group represented 10.4% of all electors in the 2019 federal election.

---

**Table 2: Non-voters who mentioned reasons related to the electoral process, said they could not prove their identity or address, and said they went to a polling station, 2019 federal election**

	Number	Confidence interval (95%)
Total number of mentions of electoral process reasons for not voting (respondents can report more than one reason)	349,700	±30,400
Number of non-voters who reported not being able to prove identity or address as a reason for not voting	104,100	±16,500
Number of non-voters who reported not being able to prove identity or address as a reason for not voting AND who went to a polling station	21,000	±6,700

**Source:** Labour Force Survey Supplement, November 2019

---

<sup>3</sup> This figure should be used with caution.

<sup>4</sup> This figure should be used with caution.

<sup>5</sup> This figure should be used with caution.

<sup>6</sup> This figure should be used with caution.