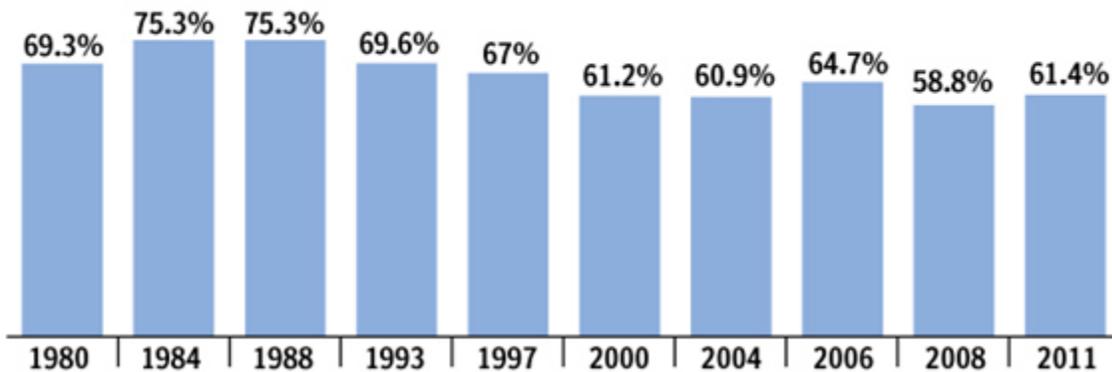


Canadian election turnout estimated at 61.4%

(Article retrieved from the [National Post](#) on July 23, 2013.)

VOTER TURNOUT UP SLIGHTLY

CANADA VOTER TURNOUT BY FEDERAL ELECTION



SOURCE: ELECTIONS CANADA

ANDREW BARR / NATIONAL POST

OTTAWA — Despite the metamorphosis in Canada’s political scene and a slight bump up from the previous election, some 40% of eligible voters stayed away from the ballot box for this week’s landmark election.

Preliminary results put voter turnout at 61.4% nationally, Elections Canada said Tuesday.

According to the federal agency, 14,720,580 out of 23,971,740 registered electors cast their ballots in this election.

In 2008, voter turnout ran at 58.8%. Estimates for 2006 and 2004 were 64.7% and 60.9%, respectively.

The fact that there was even a small upward trend in voter turnout is encouraging, says University of Western Ontario political science professor Paul Nesbitt-Larking, given the substantial “negativity and destructiveness and narrow partisanship” that marred the campaign. “Notwithstanding that, we’ve had an increase, and that’s got to be encouraging.”

But the future of the Canadian party system is with that 40% of the electorate who didn't show up on election day, says Paul Adams, an associate professor of journalism and communication at Ottawa's Carleton University.

"When you have roughly 40% of the electorate not bothering to vote, there's a huge number of votes out there," he says. "The parties have not aggressively gone after them and I think that's a mistake."

Turnout in American elections has been growing substantially over the last decade, Adams says. Both George W. Bush and Barack Obama won their victories, in part, "by getting folks who were not in the habit of voting to come out and vote for them."

Instead, the Canadian parties have primarily been aiming their message at "baby boomers, like me," Adams says. "They talk about pensions, they talk about care for the aged."

When they talk about education at all, he says, it's mostly from the perspective of parents with university-aged offspring facing skyrocketing tuition.

There are essentially two kinds of non-voters, Adams says. One is the person who follows what's going on in the political world and understands it, but is "turned off by it — sickened by the partisanship in Parliament." The other is the purely disengaged.

"(But) the disengaged can be engaged," Adams says.

He again points to the American experience: In the last election, the Democrats focused not only on getting out traditional supporters, such as union members, "but also other groups like blacks, Hispanics and young people." The Republicans, meanwhile, pulled in Evangelicals and other fundamentalist Christians.

"Canadian parties, for the most part, fight over that 60% of Canadians who are engaged enough to go to the polls," Adams says. "They don't do much to engage the 40% who are turned off. The political future belongs to the party that understands they have to draw more Canadians into the electorate."

But there are signs that the parties are making some headway with the youth vote.

Four students from Montreal's McGill University — three current students and a recent graduate, all of them NDP candidates — were voted into the House of Commons in Monday's election. All four beat out incumbent Bloc Quebecois candidates.

Grassroots groups, such as Leadnow.ca and Openmedia.ca, also appealed to younger Canadians to get involved, with vote mobs springing up at several universities.

“We have been working over this campaign to make voting a more social, a more collective experience, with more people getting involved in their democracy,” says Jamie Biggar, executive director of Leadnow.ca.

Meanwhile, 77 women were elected Monday, up 10 from the previous Parliament.

Women now make up one-quarter of MPs, a slight increase from the 22% of women who made up the previous House of Commons, according to Equal Voice, a multi-partisan organization promoting the election of more women in politics.

“This is the largest percentage increase that we’ve seen in over a decade,” said executive director Nancy Peckford.

The New Democratic Party leads with 40 women elected — or 39% of its successful candidates.

Of the four seats won by the Bloc Quebecois, one went to a woman; 29 women were elected for the Conservatives; six for the Liberals; and one — leader Elizabeth May — for the Green party.

“Ninety years after the first female MP was elected, I think it’s everyone’s expectation that women, being half the population, should certainly be a significant force in the House of Commons,” Peckford said. “We are at the highest number and percentage of women of any Parliament in Canada’s history, and the NDP did make history in electing the highest number of women to their caucus.”

Provincially, voter turnout ranged from a high of 74% in Prince Edward Island, to a low of 48.5 in Nunavut, according to early estimates.

Among major centres, 71% of registered electors in Ottawa cast ballots — the highest turnout of 18 major centres — followed by Victoria, at 69.9%.

Windsor, Ont., had the lowest turnout of the major urban centres, at 53.8%.

- With files from Greg Markey