

Turnout and Reasons for Not Voting: September 20, 2021, Federal Election Results from the Labour Force Survey Supplement

In collaboration with Elections Canada, Statistics Canada conducted a supplement to the October 2021 Labour Force Survey, which asked respondents about voting in the September 20, 2021 federal election. High-level results were released to the public through Statistics Canada's daily news release ("*The Daily*")¹ on Wednesday, February 16, 2022. This report provides additional detail on those results, with a particular focus on demographic groups of interest, and people who reported problems with the electoral process as a reason for not voting. Comparisons with results from the 2011, 2015 and 2019 federal elections are provided, where possible.

Methodology

The data in this report are derived from four questions added to the October 2021 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)

The LFS is a monthly survey of approximately 56,000 households. A sample of this size allows for analysis of a variety of sub-populations. Participation in the main LFS content is mandatory, while responding to supplementary questions (such as the October 2021 election questions) is voluntary. The response rate for the initial filter question on Canadian citizenship was 97.4% (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 Indigenous 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 variability. Standard Statistics Canada criteria related to data quality have been applied to all estimates presented in this report. Suppression rules related to respondent confidentiality have also been applied. All differences between groups or changes over time discussed in the analysis are considered statistically significant at a 95% confidence level.²

¹ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220216/dq220216d-eng.htm>

² Significance testing was conducted using a common approximation formula that does not account for covariation between estimates.

Voter turnout

- Just over three-quarters (75.6%) of Canadians reported voting in the 2021 federal election, a decline of 1.5 percentage points from 2019 (77.1%).
- The drop in voter turnout (compared to 2019) was led by seniors aged 65 to 74 (-2.5 percentage points to 82.8%) and 45-to-54 year-olds (-2.3 percentage points to 75.8%).
- Among youth aged 18 to 24, 65.8% reported voting in the 2021 federal election, which remained well above the rate observed in 2011 (54.6%).
- Turn-out among immigrant electors (70.5%) dropped 4.4 percentage points from 2019, while Canadian-born citizens (77.0%) reported voting at rates similar to the 2019 and 2015 elections.
- Compared with the 2019 federal election, turn-out among Indigenous electors living off-reserve held steady at 67.4%, but remained lower than that of non-Indigenous electors (77.3%) in 2021.

Reasons for not voting

- Among the 24.4% of Canadians who reported that they did not vote in 2021 (representing approximately 6.6 million electors), the main reasons for not voting were very similar to those reported after the 2019 federal election. For analysis purposes, the 22 different reasons collected were grouped into five categories:
 - Everyday life reasons (43.3%)
 - Political reasons (39.1%)
 - Electoral process reasons (7.1%)
 - Reasons related to COVID-19 (2.2%)
 - All other reasons (8.3%)
- Similar to 2019, two reasons together accounted for more than half of all reasons cited for not voting: not interested in politics (32.1%) and being too busy (23.6%). The other most common reasons were having an illness or disability (11.0%) and being out of town (8.7%).
- The COVID-19 pandemic accounted for 2.2% of all reported reasons for not voting in the 2021 federal election. Among COVID-19-related reasons cited by non-voters, approximately two-thirds were related to being worried about contracting the virus. In the context of public health restrictions, most jurisdictions were in the final or near final stages of their re-opening plans leading up to the 2021 federal election. Some provinces paused re-opening, or re-introduced capacity limits in non-essential indoor settings amid rising COVID-19 cases.
- Female non-voters (13.5%) were more likely than their male counterparts (8.7%) to report having an illness or disability as a reason for not voting in the 2021 federal election. This is in part, due to women making up a larger proportion of older age-groups compared with men. In contrast, men (41.2%) were more likely to cite political reasons compared to women (37.0%), most notably not being interested in politics (33.7% versus 30.3%).
- Indigenous non-voters living off-reserve were as likely as non-Indigenous non-voters to report political reasons (41.7% versus 41.2%) as a reason for not voting in the 2021 federal election.

Reasons related to the electoral process

- Electoral process reasons accounted for 7.1% of the reasons reported by non-voters in the 2021 federal election, an increase of 1.7 percentage points from 2019.
- Within the electoral process reasons category, the most common specific reasons were: lack of information about the voting process (1.7%), unable to prove identity or address (1.6%), transportation problem/polling station was too far (1.5%), and lines were too long (1.2%). Other electoral process reasons cited were: not being on the voters list (0.7%) and issues with the voter information card (0.4%³).
- Electoral process issues were most common among youth (aged 18 to 24), accounting for 12.2% of all reasons cited by non-voters in this age-group.⁴
- Among naturalized Canadians who were admitted to Canada within the last decade, not voting due to electoral process issues accounted for 16.5%⁵ of reasons submitted. In contrast, these issues were less prevalent among Canadian-born electors (6.6% of reasons cited) and landed immigrants who were admitted to Canada more than 10 years ago (6.9% of reasons cited).
- Provincially, not voting due to electoral process issues ranged from 4.7% in Manitoba to 8.2% in Quebec.
- Indigenous non-voters living off-reserve were equally likely to cite electoral process issues as a reason for not voting (6.3% of reasons cited) compared with non-Indigenous non-voters (6.6%).

³ This figure should be used with caution

⁴ Statistically similar to the proportion of electoral process reasons reported by people aged 75 and older (7.6% of total reasons reported for not voting) at 95% confidence level.

⁵ This figure should be used with caution.

Table 1: Reasons for not voting, all non-voters, youth, immigrant (more than 10 years and 10 years or less since admission to Canada) non-voters, and Indigenous non-voters living off reserve, 2021 federal election (%)

<i>Reason for not voting</i>	<i>Total Non-Voters</i>	<i>Youth, aged 18-24</i>	<i>Immigrant, more than 10 years</i>	<i>Immigrant, 10 years or less</i>	<i>Indigenous living off reserve</i>
<i>Everyday life reasons</i>	43.3%	42.1%	48.6%	44.7%	38.4%
<i>Too busy</i>	23.6%	24.9%	28.5%	28.7%	21.1%
<i>Out of town</i>	8.7%	12.8%	8.2%	10.6% ^E	7.1%
<i>Illness or disability</i>	11.0%	4.4%	11.9%	5.4% ^E	10.2%
<i>Political reasons</i>	39.1%	36.3%	34.5%	22.4%	41.7%
<i>Not interested in politics</i>	32.1%	33.1%	28.1%	19.5%	35.2%
<i>Lack of information about campaign issues and parties' positions</i>	0.8%	-	1.0% ^E	-	-
<i>Did not like candidates / parties / campaign</i>	3.5%	1.2% ^E	3.2%	-	3.8% ^E
<i>Felt voting would not make a difference</i>	1.2%	-	0.5% ^E	-	-
<i>Did not know who to vote for</i>	1.5%	-	1.7% ^E	-	-
<i>Electoral process reasons</i>	7.1%	12.2%	6.9%	16.5%^E	6.3%^E
<i>Could not prove identity or address</i>	1.6%	4.1%	1.3% ^E	3.4% ^E	2.7% ^E
<i>Not on voters list</i>	0.7%	2.4% ^E	-	-	-
<i>Transportation problem / polling station too far</i>	1.5%	-	1.3% ^E	-	1.2% ^E
<i>Lack of information about the voting process (e.g. when/where to vote)</i>	1.7%	2.9% ^E	1.8% ^E	-	1.6% ^E
<i>Lines were too long</i>	1.2%	1.1% ^E	1.5% ^E	-	-
<i>Issues with the voter information card</i>	0.4% ^E	1.0% ^E	-	-	-
<i>Reasons related to COVID-19</i>	2.2%	0.8%^E	3.1%	-	-
<i>Being sick with COVID-19/quarantining/isolating</i>	0.3% ^E	-	-	-	-
<i>Fear of contracting COVID-19</i>	1.5%	-	2.5% ^E	-	-
<i>Dissatisfied with handling of pandemic / election due to pandemic</i>	0.2% ^E	-	-	-	-
<i>Dissatisfied with voting rules</i>	0.1% ^E	-	-	-	-
<i>All other reasons</i>	8.3%	8.6%	6.8%	13.2%^E	11.3%
<i>Forgot to vote</i>	1.5%	1.5% ^E	1.1% ^E	-	3.5% ^E
<i>Religious or other beliefs</i>	0.9%	-	-	-	-
<i>Weather conditions</i>	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Other reason</i>	5.8%	6.7%	5.1%	11.8% ^E	7.3%

^E: 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, October 2021

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 estimated 113,100 non-voters who reported not being able to prove their identity or address, almost one in four (24.0% or an estimated 27,100) said they went to a polling station, little changed from 2019.
- Within this group who did not vote because they were unable to prove their identity or address, but did go to a polling station, an estimated 10,900⁶ (40.2%) were aged 18 to 24. By comparison, this age group represented 10.3% of all electors in the 2021 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, 2021 federal election

	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>Confidence interval (95%)</i>
<i>Total number of mentions of electoral process reasons for not voting (respondents can report more than one reason)</i>	498,100	±50,200
<i>Number of non-voters who reported not being able to prove identity or address as a reason for not voting</i>	113,100	±20,400
<i>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</i>	27,100	±8,600

Source: Labour Force Survey Supplement, October 2021

⁶ This figure should be used with caution.