The Contemporary Voter: Would an Online Voting System Increase Voter Turnout in Federal Elections?

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Will be completed once I have the final page count

Abstract

To be completed once I have the final recommendations and interviews done.

1. **Introduction**

The word democracy comes from the Greek *demos* (the people) and *kratos (*power or rule). In the traditional interpretation it means, “Rule by the people”. (citation?) The central corner stone of any democracy is the principle that the voters, through their votes, issue a mandate to a small number of people whom they entrust to make decisions on their behalf. This is very simple but enormously important concept is the corner stone of Canadian society. When voters exercise their franchise, they vote in a rational way for the party who they feel best represents their needs and values. (CITE) The support of the citizen base gives the government mandate to rule and acts as an important check on the legislative body. When citizens are given the franchise, governments become more liberal, responsive and honest. In order to have a government that encompasses and addresses the needs of all sections of a society, it is important that the people cast their votes. When large portions of the population do not exercise their franchise, they run the risk that the ruling party will not address their needs. This, in turn, can create both distrust and a feeling of resentment towards the government. The party in power will provide more support to those who vote for them and who they can count on to re-elect them. Therefore, a low voter turnout can be detrimental to a liberal democratic society.

In the 2015 election, only 68.5% of Canadians voted. (Elections Canada) This number has decreased from a record high in 1958, and has not risen above 70% since 1993. (Elections Canada) *Figure 1* provides a view of voter turnout since the first Canadian election:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Date of election/**  **referendum** | **Population** | **Number of**  **Electors on lists** | **Total**  **ballots cast** | **Voter turnout**  **(%)** |
| 7 August - 20 September 1867 **Footnote 1** | 3,230,000 | 361,028 | 268,387 | 73.1 |
| 20 July - 12 October 1872 | 3,689,000 | 426,974 | 318,329 | 70.3 |
| 22 January 1874 | 3,689,000 | 432,410 | 324,006 | 69.6 |
| 17 September 1878 | 3,689,000 | 715,279 | 534,029 | 69.1 |
| 20 June 1882 | 4,325,000 | 663,873 | 508,496 | 70.3 |
| 22 February 1887 | 4,325,000 | 948,222 | 724,517 | 70.1 |
| 5 March 1891 | 4,833,000 | 1,113,140 | 778,495 | 64.4 |
| 23 June 1896 | 4,833,000 | 1,358,328 | 912,992 | 62.9 |
| 29 September 1898 **Footnote 2** | 4,833,000 | 1,236,419 | 551,405 | 44.6 |
| 7 November 1900 | 4,833,000 | 1,167,402 | 958,497 | 77.4 |
| 3 November 1904 | 5,371,000 | 1,385,440 | 1,036,878 | 71.6 |
| 26 October 1908 | 5,371,000 | 1,463,591 | 1,180,820 | 70.3 |
| 21 September 1911 | 7,204,527 | 1,820,742 | 1,314,953 | 70.2 |
| 17 December 1917 | 7,591,971 | 2,093,799 | 1,892,741 | 75.0 |
| 6 December 1921 | 8,760,211 | 4,435,310 | 3,139,306 | 67.7 |
| 29 October 1925 | 8,776,352 | 4,608,636 | 3,168,412 | 66.4 |
| 14 September 1926 | 8,887,952 | 4,665,381 | 3,273,062 | 67.7 |
| 28 July 1930 | 8,887,952 | 5,153,971 | 3,922,481 | 73.5 |
| 14 October 1935 | 10,367,063 | 5,918,207 | 4,452,675 | 74.2 |
| 26 March 1940 | 10,429,169 | 6,588,888 | 4,672,531 | 69.9 |
| 27 April 1942 **Footnote 2** | 11,494,627 | 6,502,234 | 4,638,847 | 71.3 |
| 11 June 1945 | 11,494,627 | 6,952,445 | 5,305,193 | 75.3 |
| 27 June 1949 | 11,823,649 | 7,893,629 | 5,903,572 | 73.8 |
| 10 August 1953 | 14,003,704 | 8,401,691 | 5,701,963 | 67.5 |
| 10 June 1957 | 16,073,970 | 8,902,125 | 6,680,690 | 74.1 |
| 31 March 1958 | 16,073,970 | 9,131,200 | 7,357,139 | 79.4 |
| 18 June 1962 | 18,238,247 | 9,700,325 | 7,772,656 | 79.0 |
| 8 April 1963 | 18,238,247 | 9,910,757 | 7,958,636 | 79.2 |
| 8 November 1965 | 18,238,247 | 10,274,904 | 7,796,728 | 74.8 |
| 25 June 1968 | 20,014,880 | 10,860,888 | 8,217,916 | 75.7 |
| 30 October 1972 | 21,568,311 | 13,000,778 | 9,974,661 | 76.7 |
| 8 July 1974 | 21,568,311 | 13,620,353 | 9,671,002 | 71.0 |
| 22 May 1979 | 22,992,604 | 15,233,653 | 11,541,000 | 75.7 |
| 18 February 1980 | 22,992,604 | 15,890,416 | 11,015,514 | 69.3 |
| 4 September 1984 | 24,343,181 | 16,774,941 | 12,638,424 | 75.3 |
| 21 November 1988 | 25,309,331 | 17,639,001 | 13,281,191 | 75.3 |
| 26 October 1992 **Footnote 2** **Footnote 3** | 20,400,896 | 13,725,966 | 9,855,978 | 71.8 |
| 25 October 1993 | 27,296,859 | 19,906,796 | 13,863,135 | 69.6**Footnote 4** |
| 2 June 1997 | 27,296,859 | 19,663,478 | 13,174,698 | 67.0 |
| 27 November 2000 | 28,846,761 | 21,243,473 | 12,997,185 | 61.2**Footnote 5** |
| 28 June 2004 | 30,007,094 | 22,466,621 | 13,683,570 | 60.9 |
| 23 January 2006 | 30,007,094 | 23,054,615 | 14,908,703 | 64.7 |
| 14 October 2008 | 31,612,897 | 23,677,639 | 13,929,093 | 58.8 |
| 2 May 2011 | 33,476,688 | 24,257,592 | 14,823,408 | 61.1 |

***Figure 1:* Voter Turnout at Federal Elections and Referendums**

* Footnote 1 In early elections, polling took place over several weeks or even months.
* Footnote 2 A referendum.

 Footnote 3 Does not include Quebec, as Quebec conducted its own referendum.

* Footnote 4 This percentage rises to 70.9 when the number of electors on the lists is adjusted to account for electors who had moved or died between the enumeration for the 1992 referendum and the election of 1993, for which a separate enumeration was not carried out except in Quebec, as the 1992 electoral lists were reused.

 Footnote 5 The turnout of 61.2% in 2000 was adjusted to arrive at the final turnout of 64.1%, after our normal maintenance of the National Register of Electors to remove the names of deceased electors and duplicates arising from moves. The Chief Electoral Officer of Canada explained the adjustment during his appearance before the Subcommittee on Electoral Boundaries Readjustment on October 6, 2003, and his appearance to discuss the 2004 Main Estimates before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs on March 5, 2004.

As per *Figure 1*, at least 30% of the Canadian population is not exercising their franchise in our federal elections. There are many reasons why people don’t vote such as: apathy or cynicism towards the political process or a lack of information about the candidates. However, one of the most commonly cited reasons for not voting is lack of time and available voting outlets. The purpose of this report is to examine the feasibility and potential improvement in voting numbers of an online voting system. One possible solution to the issue of availability is to introduce online voting. The proposed voting would become available on the day that advanced voting is allowed and remain open until the day of the election. This would allow candidates sufficient time after during the writ period to campaign. It would allow members of society to vote when it is convenient for them, without the expense of having additional polling stations. This would create an environment where even the most remote areas of the country could vote with ease.

The methods of inquiry in this report are surveys done throughout the community, as well as consultations with security experts and financial planners. The two limitations of this study are the length of time required and the problems that arise from carrying out the surveys in remote communities.

The scope of inquiry for this study will examine four areas:

* What are the reasons that voters neglect to vote
* What would be the security considerations of an online voting system?
* What would the cost of the voting system be?
* Would there be an increase in voter turnout if an online voting system were introduced?

To arrive at answers to these questions this report will analyze a study issued to individuals and will make use of interviews with individuals within the fields of finance, politics and security.

1. **Data and Analysis**
2. Reasons for Not Voting

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Did you vote in the 2015 Election | Respond Percentage |
| Yes | 56% |
| No | 44% |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Reasons for Not Voting | Respond Percentage |
| Not Enough Time | 65% |
| Did not know enough about the candidates | 14% |
| Uncertain where to go | 1% |
| Not interested | 17% |
| Do not trust politicians | 1% |
| High cost of voting | 2% |

The survey question asked Canadians whether they voted in the 2015 election. If participants selected “no”, the survey then asked the reason for not voting. The results were surprising as there were a significant number of people who responded that they did not have the time to vote. The other areas of the survey that were significant were lack of knowledge and interest. However, no result came close to lack of time. The other answers were within the margin of error. These results indicate that an online voting system may be a valuable resource in allowing all citizens to vote.

1. Interest in an Online Voting System

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Would an Online Voting System make you more likely to vote in future elections? | Respondent Percentage |
| Yes | 74% |
| No | 26% |

There appears to be a significant interest in an online voting system. There were a large number of respondents who indicated they would make use of the system. However it should be noted that those who lacked interest or trust in politicians all voted no. The solution to regaining their vote, appears to be rooted in something more fundamental and does not appear to be related to an online voting system.

1. Voter Concerns with Online Voting Systems – Make indication of less likely/more likely as needed?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| What is your primary concern with and OVS | Respondent Percentage |
| Security | 56% |
| Lack of Technological knowledge | 6% |
| Financial/Tax/Cost | 34% |
| Other | 4% |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| If these concerns were adequately addressed, would you be open to using an OVS |  |
| Yes | 86% |
| No | 14% |

Voters appear most concerned with the potential security and cost implications of an OVS. Security appears to be the biggest concern followed by financial and tax increase issues. There appears to be little concern with lack of technical knowledge, this may be due to the fact that younger people seem keener to use the system and traditionally they are more technologically savvy. Due to the high levels of concern, this report realized the need to address these concerns and see if it was possible to create a cost effective, secure system. This will be addressed in the next section.

1. Cost

Discussion of cost with P.Chua, to determine cost will occur on March 16.

1. Security

Discussion of security issues with Dr. Jessica Singh will occur on March 17.

1. **Conclusion**

**Summary and Interpretation of Findings**

Based on voter turnout in the 2015 election, there is a need to implement some form of tool to increase the numbers. Voters who are increasingly pressed for time are letting their franchise fall by the wayside. The results of the survey show that there is a want to vote, but when other time commitments arise, it takes a backseat. The results also show that an online voting system has the potential to increase voter participation. If the concerns of voters are adequately addressed, they appear to be very open to the idea of online voting. The rest of this conclusion and recommendations will be completed after my interviews with Singh and Chua. Unfortunately, the recommendations depend on the feasibility and I cannot determine the feasibility until I speak to them.