

# The Case for Mandatory Voting in Canada



By **Senator Mac Harb**, *Last updated: 2015-05-07*

The decline in voter turnout over the last several elections is of great concern to everyone interested in politics and parliamentary government. Many ideas have been put forth about how to address this problem including a recent Bill that would provide for a system of compulsory voting similar to that used in several other countries. The following article is based on the speech at second reading by the sponsor of Bill S-22.

Our democracy depends upon the active participation of its citizens, and, while voting is only one element of political engagement, it remains the very foundation of our democracy. Reinforcing this foundation is the goal of Bill S-22, which will establish mandatory voting in Canada.

This legislation is a direct response to a rising electoral crisis. Voter turnout has been on the decline in Canada since the 1960s, reaching a record low of just 60.9 per cent in the 2004 election. Other Western democracies are also experiencing the same dramatic drop. Only 55.3 per cent of Americans voted in the 2004 presidential election, and the 2001 British general election recorded a turnout of just 57.6 per cent.

Only one in four Canadians under the age of 25 bothered to vote in the last election. Research shows that these young people, as they age, may not re-engage in the system as their parents and grandparents did. Canadian researchers tell us that this generational shift represents a cultural change that could shake the very foundation of our democratic institutions.

Research gathered by the Association for Canadian Studies also indicates that the low turnout rate effectively disenfranchises a large number of Canadians. A study done after the last election found voter turnout ranged from 62.7 per cent to 75.4 per cent in the nine ridings with the highest average income in the country. The nine ridings with the lowest average income experienced a turnout rate from 45.1 per cent to 61.5 per cent. Whose voices are being heard? Perhaps, more importantly, whose voices are not being heard?

(Source : <http://www.revparl.ca/english/>)