

The past election may change everything for elders

Pete Aarssen - October 2021

I have been present, volunteered on behalf of a candidate at one of the larger polling stations in Lambton County, each of the past 3 Federal elections. While that is only an elapsed time of 6 years (elections of 2015, 2019 and the ridiculously early election call of 2021) something quite unusual seems to have occurred; other than volunteers and voters wearing masks and face shields! I can attest to a dramatic shift in who it was that showed up! Canadian elders have always taken their civic duty seriously but in this election, I saw way more baby carriages, being pushed by young mothers and fathers while they waited in line, young men and women of all ages for that matter (many voting for the first time), more than I have seen in the previous two elections. Nationally, voter turnout was awful, just 59%; while voter turnout varies a great deal, the Canadian average is 73.1%. Some seniors may have chosen, understandably, the security of their own home in order to avoid the worrying consequences of a 4th wave of Covid. Yet from my experience, this might even be a trend; younger voters becoming more engaged in politics, which is both good and bad news. It is good news for Canada to have each of her constituents, young and old alike, actively expressing their political will. The bad news? Today, seniors comprise the largest percentage of voters. This enables them to punch a bit above their weight in terms of influencing the results of an election due to their cohort's numerical superiority within society. With so many acute elder issues confronting Canadians today, from healthcare, elder care, travel restrictions related to vaccine passports, the future of assisted suicide (to name a few), seniors have been the kingmakers to political victors here for decades. Now it appears this privilege, significant demographic influence, is shifting to the millennials. Not entirely of course, but increasingly and picking up speed. As an elder and being not too distant from becoming a senior myself, I worry about the declining, electoral influence of seniors who need a variety of support from their government as they age and instead, might see their needs pushed to the curb of a government's political priorities. That would be bad news for seniors. In an election, political parties of all stripes measure the mathematical voting density by cohort of the electorate (and what are their wants) before determining and developing proposed policies and priorities. If the shift in voter influence trends toward millennials, that may spell bad news for seniors. Canadians have long cherished their historical past. Now, with the reckless impact of those committed to pursuing cancel culture, the tendency for our political leaders to implement social and fiscal policies that respect the contributors to our nation's past (AKA seniors, veterans, older Canadians) could be in jeopardy. With the results we experienced on Sept 20, there may still be time! Parliament 2.0 is much the same in representation by Party for the distribution of influence as it was in 2019. No Party has a majority within the House of Commons and no Party can alone, make reckless social or fiscal policy decisions, without significant challenge or edits to legislation proposed by the opposition. Mind you, with what the Liberals and NDPs combined to approve in spending over the past two years, that statement may be debatable! As the future unfolds one day at a time for all of us, let us hope that the welcome, increased interest in politics by our younger generation is matched by a renewed commitment in all seniors to also cast their ballots. Afterall, we deserve the outcomes of the government we elect. Let's all make sure that it is way more than 59% of us choosing the government that will impact all of us, in the very next election and beyond.