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## **Who's not voting in Alberta and why?**

New report shows lack of time and inhibiting structural factors are important elements

EDMONTON – A new study released this morning, on the second anniversary of the 2012 Alberta election, reports that Albertans cite a lack of time and inhibiting structural factors as key reasons for their failure to vote, and recommends increased advocacy and education efforts emphasizing voting as a responsibility of citizenship.

The report, written for the Parkland Institute by Sociology Professors Trevor Harrison (U of L) and Harvey Krahn (U of A), is based on public opinion data collected by the Population Research Laboratory at the U of A in 2008 and 2012.

Alberta's record low voter turnout in the 2008 election (40.6 percent) raised considerable concern about the state of democracy in the province. Although turnout rose to 54.4 percent in 2012, over the long-term, voting in Alberta is on a downward trend.

“Many reasons Albertans give for not voting broadly confirm previous research that has pointed to apathy towards politics in general,” says Harrison, who is also the Institute's director. “We also found, however, one aspect particularly pronounced in Alberta: a high level of alienation among those who do not support the governing party.”

The demographic characteristics of non-voters in Alberta are similar to those of non-voters elsewhere, with age, education, and home-ownership all playing a significant role in whether Albertans vote or not. Voting rates increase with age and education, and homeowners are much more likely to vote than renters. It is notable however, that in Alberta, unlike in other jurisdictions, high household income is not a good predictor of voting.

The authors state that efforts to advocate and educate about the importance of voting cannot be left to political parties, given their vested interest in suppressing support for other parties. Instead, they recommend that this responsibility should fall to the media, civil society organizations, and non-partisan institutions such as Elections Alberta and its federal counterpart.

“Given our findings,” says Harrison, “the last things we need are to throw up more barriers to voting and prohibit election authorities from promoting voting.”

The Parkland Institute is a non-partisan public policy research institute in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Alberta. The publication *Less Exclusion, More Engagement* is available for download on the institute's website at <http://parklandinstitute.ca>.

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