

What Do We Do About Those Pesky, Apathetic Non-Voters?

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Tuesday, June 04, 2013

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I have heard lots of people blaming the following people for why we didn't get a positive change in government in BC three weeks ago:

1. apathetic, nihilistic young people
2. apathetic people who don't follow politics
3. apathetic people who simply don't vote
4. bad people who generally don't care about a better world.

But [what really happened](#) in the election? And **why** are people not voting?

Here's the what:

	<u>NON- VOTING</u>	<u>LIB</u>	<u>NDP</u>	<u>GP</u>	<u>CP</u>	<u>LBN</u>	<u>OTHE R</u>	
Provincial Total	1,313,575	795,946	715,999	146,607	85,783	2,049	56,667	1,803,051
% of Popular Vote		44.14 %	39.71%	8.13%	4.76%	0.11%	3.14%	
% of Eligible Voters	42.15%	25.54 %	22.97%	4.70%	2.75%	0.07%	1.82%	57.85%
Eligible Voters								3,116,626

1. More people, 42.15%, didn't vote, than voted for either major party. By far.
2. The population of eligible voters in BC has increased by more than 50% since 1983, by over one million people, but voter turnout [has declined](#) from 70.50% to only 57.85% last month.

And here's the why:

1. When we blame problems on those not voting, we conveniently avoid asking them why they didn't vote.
2. There is no shortage of pressing public policy issues, filled with controversies: honesty, integrity, greed, privatizing public services, protecting the environment, getting below 400ppm of greenhouse gases, building an economy that creates more justice and a higher quality of life, etc. But parties appear incapable of articulating these issues in a way that engages people sufficiently to get them to vote enough to inspire more participation.
3. Negative politics dissuades people from voting. There are many helpful and not so helpful definitions of negative. But campaigning on avoiding a broad definition of negative seems to be a failure.
4. The electoral system is a relic of the 19th century and does not serve us well. But as long as political parties like the crap shoot, they have no motivation to change the system. The BC Liberal government was reelected to absolute power by less than 26% of eligible voters. How is that any kind of incentive for them or any other party to change the electoral system to risk sharing more than 0% of their absolute power of a majority government? It's not. Catch-22?
5. Political parties will spend some time in the coming months reviewing what worked and what didn't. If the review just focuses on how the party could have campaigned differently, it will be a useless, window-dressing exercise, with more obsessions with gimmicks and [now, obviously] unreliable polling to form platforms.
6. If parties ask why they couldn't get 20% of the non-voting British Columbians to vote for them; if they ask what is wrong with their relationship with human being voters; if they ask why people don't see their party as a meaningful vehicle for political, social, economic, or environmental change; if they even check to see if people know what the party even stands for, then...then, they will get a sense of how to make democracy work next time.

Because, frankly, democracy hasn't been working.

And it's unclear if anyone cares.

And I'm not talking about those scapegoated apathetic voters/youth/whatever.