

# Election2004

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## Pundits predicting a record-low voter turnout

*Kieron Lang, CTV.ca News Staff*

All the ingredients seem to be in place for an interesting federal election campaign -- from a brand new party to hot-button issues like

the federal sponsorship program. And yet, pundits are already predicting a record-low voter turnout.

With the unveiling of draft party policies, campaign ads and offices, many voters are refusing to take notice.

In fact, some are so steadfast in their apathy, they've already declared they won't be casting a ballot. When CTV's Ottawa affiliate took to the streets of the capital, potential voters recited a long list of reasons why they're opting out.

"I'm too busy to vote," one harried Ottawa resident said, while another said politics simply isn't her thing.

"No one is better than the other," another woman said, explaining that was reason enough for her to avoid the process altogether.

In the 2000 election, only 61 per cent of eligible voters cast a ballot. And when those numbers were broken down by age group, one group led all others in political abstinence.

Whereas more than 80 per cent of Canadians 60 years and older cast their vote, less than 23 per cent of 18 to 20 year-olds bothered.

According to Carleton University professor Jon Pammett, young voters are ignoring politics in greater numbers than ever before.

In a study released in March of 2003, Explaining the Turnout Decline in Canadian Federal Elections: A New Survey of Non-voters, Pammett found that the reasons for voter apathy are many.



**Carleton University  
Professor Jon Pammett**



**SES Research President  
Nikita Nanos**

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"People are less likely to cast a ballot if they feel they have no influence over government actions, do not feel voting is an essential civic act, or do not feel the election is competitive enough to make their votes matter to the outcome," he concluded.

More than a year later, with the federal election looming on the horizon, Pammett expects the problem will only get worse. Especially, he says, as politicians gear their messages for audiences they believe will actually be receptive.

"Issues of health, and pensions, for example, these are not things that young people are interested in," Pammett told CJOH News. "And the politicians know that the people who are more likely to vote are interested in those things."

According to one pollster, it's not ignorance of the Canadian politics that's keeping people from getting involved.

In fact, SES Research president Nikita Nanos believes the opposite may be true.

"What it's done is remind voters of all the things about politicians they don't like," he told CTV, noting "Influence peddling, breaking the rules, and really, a lot of high-level, highly-charged personal attacks.

"So, it's turned people off," he said.

But, as CJOH reporter Catherine Lathem discovered, not all Canadians have written off their part in the political process.

"I'm just one person, but if everybody's passive, then it doesn't work," one eager voter told CJOH, explaining there's little that will keep her from the ballot box on election day.

In an effort to encourage that kind of enthusiasm in the wider population, two days after the writ is dropped, Elections Canada plans to unleash its own campaign aimed at convincing voters they need to get out and exercise their franchise.

Based on the findings of Pammett's 2003 voter turnout study, the campaign will be focused on giving voters reasons to believe their votes count.

*With a report from Catherine Lathem of CJOH News.*

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