

Are you happy you voted—or didn't?

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After people vote, do they think they made the right choice? When they abstain, do they regret not voting?

New research by Université de Montréal political scientist André Blais and PhD students Fernando Feitosa and Semra Sevi answers those questions for the first time - and finds that in general, people who vote are very happy with their [choice](#) and those who abstain doubt they did the right thing.

In a study published in *Party Politics*, the researchers looked at 22 election-period surveys done in Canada, France, Germany, Spain and Switzerland between 2011 and 2015. Of the nearly 20,000 people polled, the vast majority (97%) who voted were glad they did, while only 60 per cent of non-voters were glad they abstained.

"This is an encouraging result for those who are concerned with the recent turnout decline that has been observed in most western democracies," Blais and his students say in their study.

"This is consistent with the presence of a social norm according to which citizens have a moral duty to participate in elections; at least some of those who do not follow the norm have doubts about the wisdom of their choice."

The study also shows that people who are interested in politics, who feel that they have a moral duty to vote in elections, and who feel close to a party are more prone to be satisfied with their decision to vote and to be

dissatisfied if they chose to abstain. Older voters, especially, are happy they cast their ballot.

"At every [election](#), people must decide whether to [vote](#) or not," the researchers write. "It is fair to assume that some people are uncertain about whether they should participate or not. It is not surprising to see that, ex post, some people, especially non-voters, believe that they may have made the wrong choice.

"This raises the very important question of whether that judgment is durable and, consequently, whether it has an impact on the decisions that citizens make in the following elections. The fact that older respondents feel more positive about their [decision](#) suggests that there is indeed a learning effect, and that people correct the mistakes that they possibly made in the first elections ... And this may very well be one of the reasons why turnout increases over the life cycle."

More information: André Blais et al, Was my decision to vote (or abstain) the right one?, *Party Politics* (2017). [DOI: 10.1177/1354068817722058](#)

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