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# THE IMPACT OF CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS ON ELECTION TURNOUTS

Research Report

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## ABOUT THIS STUDY:

These are the findings of an Innovative Research Group, Inc. (INNOVATIVE) telephone survey conducted among 924 randomly-selected British Columbia residents, 18 years or older, between April 11<sup>th</sup> and April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2013.

The surveys were conducted in English (608), as well as oversamples in Cantonese (104), Mandarin (107) and Punjabi (105).

The sample has been weighted using Statistics Canada's 2011 Census data to reflect the actual demographic breakdown of the British Columbia population, based on age, gender, region, mother tongue (English, Chinese, Punjabi) and income.

Language of Interview	Interviews (n)	Weighted (n)	Margin of Error (percentage points)
English	608	511	±4.0
Cantonese	104	26	±9.5
Mandarin	107	30	±9.5
Punjabi	105	34	±9.5
Total	924	601	±4.0

An unweighted simple random sample of this size (600) has a margin of sampling error of ±4.0 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

The margin of error will be larger within each sub-grouping of the sample.

## **INTRODUCTION:**

In a democracy, power is given to those who show up. Elections are the one moment where politicians are absolutely accountable to the electorate. Yet despite the undeniable impact provincial governments have on every aspect of our lives, here in BC there has been a steady decline in turnout over the past 20 years to the point where almost half the eligible electorate failed to vote in the 2009 election.

Not voting has consequences. In elections, parties are completely focused on one question – what can they say or do to mobilize a plurality of voters in a majority of seats. If parties don't count your votes, they don't count your opinions. That might not matter if every group was equally likely to vote, but unfortunately non-voting is concentrated in particular groups.

Previous research shows that values such as viewing voting as a duty rather than a choice have an impact on voting. It is possible that the changing demographics of BC may be driving value changes that, in turn, means turnout is doomed to an irreversible decline for the foreseeable future.

As part of an omnibus telephone survey of randomly selected landlines, INNOVATIVE asked 600 members of the general public in a survey conducted in English, 200 Chinese-speaking BC voters and 100 Punjabi-speaking BC voters how likely they are to vote in the upcoming election and whether they feel voting is a duty or an individual choice. It is important to note we are not trying to predict actual turnout. That would be a more involved task. We simply wanted to document differences in likelihood to vote and explore how much of those differences might be accounted for by differences in a basic value orientation that has been shown to have a powerful impact in previous studies.

To measure likelihood to vote, we asked the following questions:

As you may have heard, a provincial election will be held in BC on May 14th. Many people end up not voting in elections. How likely do you think it is that you will vote in this election?

- Definitely Voting
- Very Likely
- Somewhat Likely
- Not Very Likely
- Definitely NOT Voting

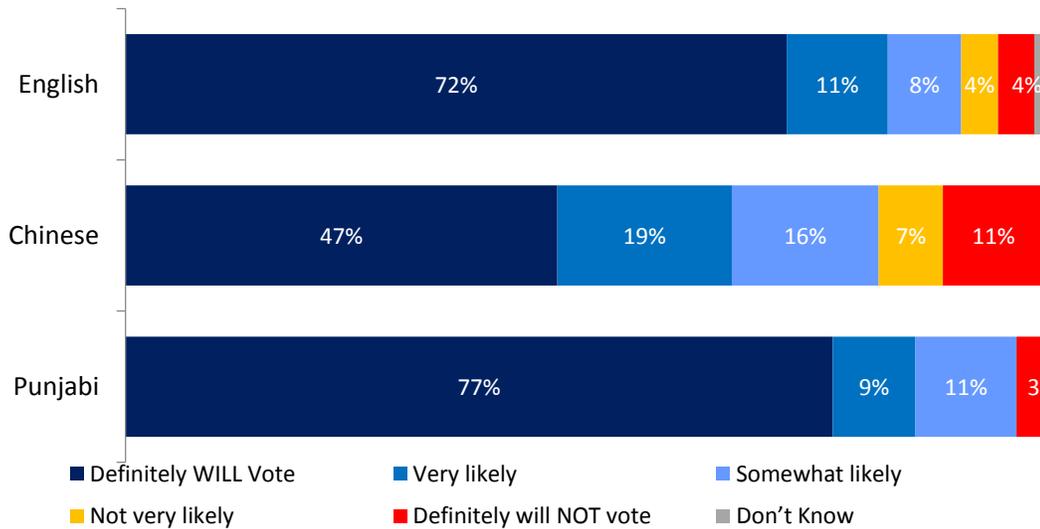
To measure the duty vs. choice value orientation, we asked:

Different people feel differently about voting. For some, voting is a DUTY. They feel they should vote in every election regardless of how they feel about candidates and parties. For some, voting is a CHOICE. They feel free to vote or not vote in an election depending on how they feel about the candidates and parties. For you personally, is voting FIRST and FOREMOST a (ROTATE) DUTY or a CHOICE?

**FINDINGS:**

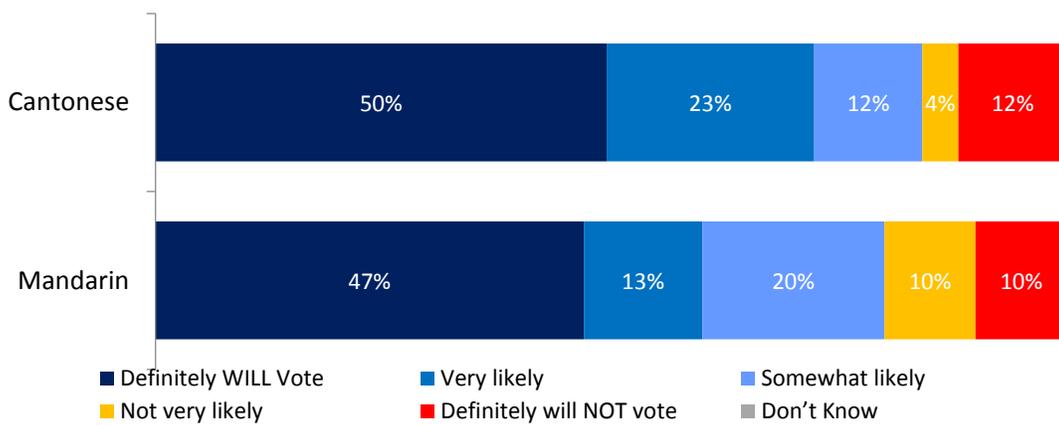
While Chinese-speaking BCers are significantly less likely to intend to vote than average in the upcoming BC election, Punjabi-speaking voters appear more likely to turnout.

As you may have heard, a provincial election will be held in BC on May 16th. Many people end up not voting in elections. How likely do you think it is that you will vote in this election? BY MOTHER TONGUE [unweighted: English n=608 Chinese n=211 Punjabi n=105 ]



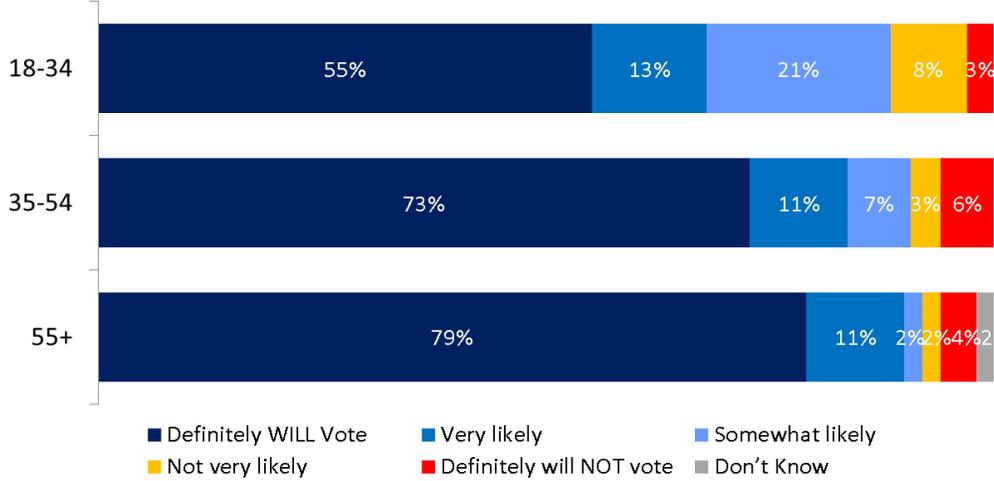
Mandarin-speakers more certain in their likelihood NOT to vote than Cantonese-speakers.

As you may have heard, a provincial election will be held in BC on May 16th. Many people end up not voting in elections. How likely do you think it is that you will vote in this election? BY MANDERIN VS CANTONESE LANGUAGE OF INTERVIEW [unweighted: Cantonese n=104 Mandarin n=107 ]



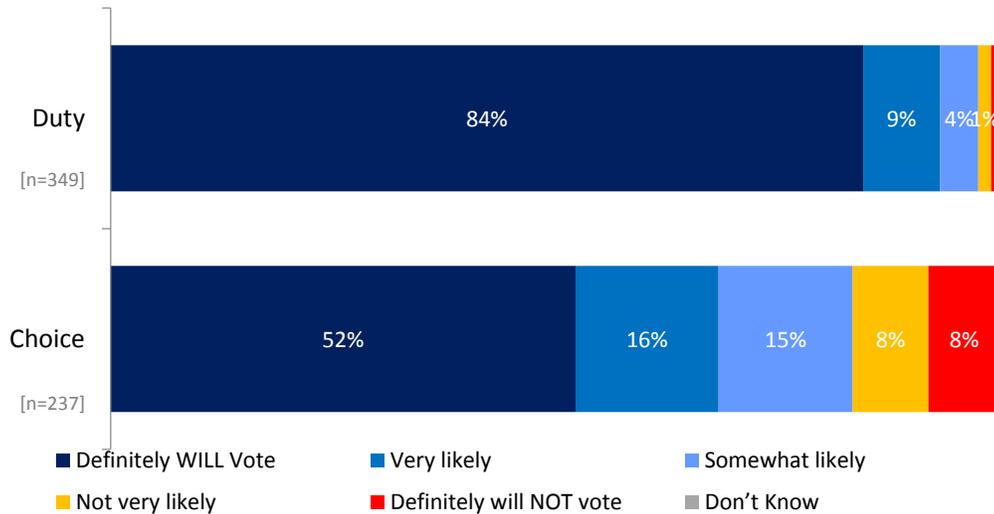
Younger people are also lower in their likelihood of voting.

As you may have heard, a provincial election will be held in BC on May 16<sup>th</sup>. Many people end up not voting in elections. How likely do you think it is that you will vote in this election. BY AGE COHORT



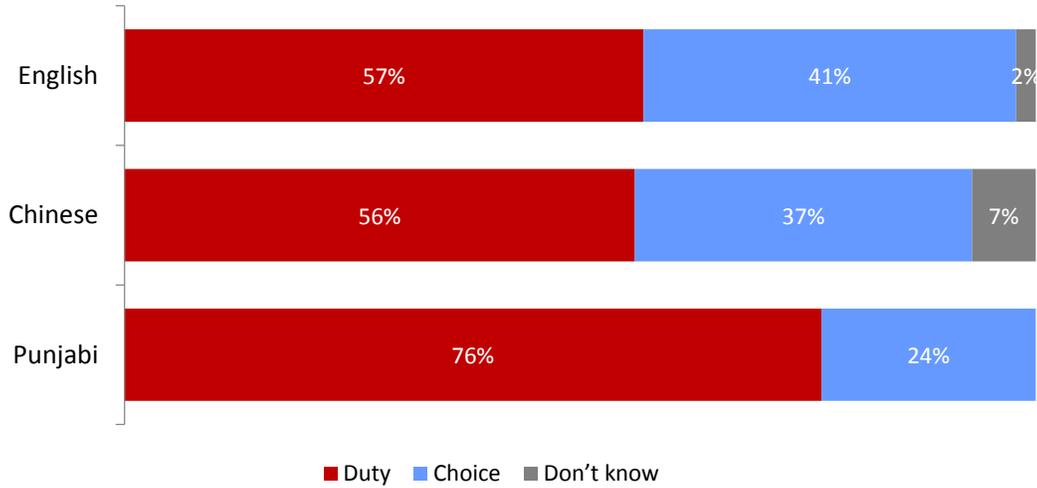
As previous research shows, people who feel voting is a duty are MUCH more likely to plan on voting than those who feel it is a choice.

As you may have heard, a provincial election will be held in BC on May 16<sup>th</sup>. Many people end up not voting in elections. How likely do you think it is that you will vote in this election? BY VALUE ORIENTATION



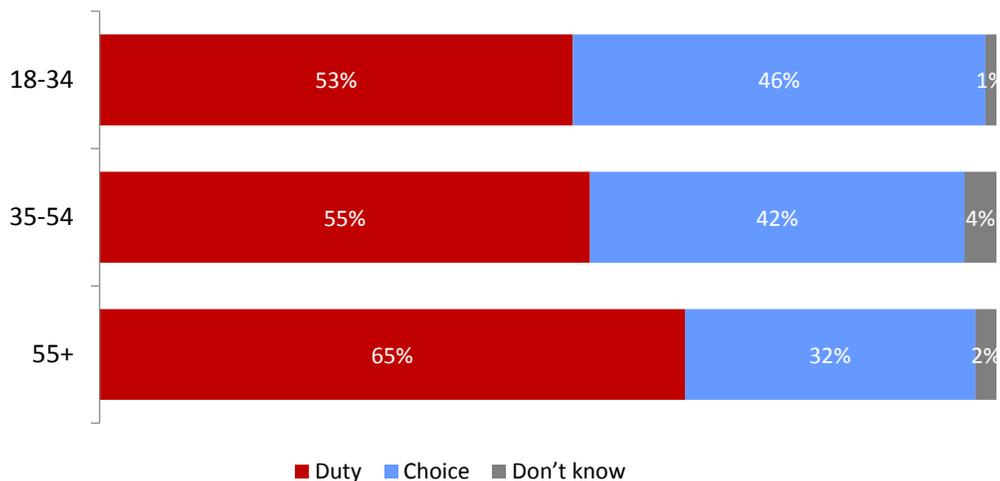
While a sense of duty appears to underpin the high intentions among Punjabi-speakers and low intentions among Chinese speakers, the general public appears to be likely to vote despite their values.

Different people feel differently about voting. For some, voting is a DUTY. They feel they should vote in every election regardless of how they feel about candidates and parties. For some, voting is a CHOICE. They feel free to vote or not vote in an election depending on how they feel about the candidates and parties. For you personally, is voting FIRST and FOREMOST a: BY MOTHER TONGUE [unweighted: English n=608 Chinese n=211 Punjabi n=105 ]



We also see mixed results by age. The young are the lowest and the oldest are the highest on duty, but drop off in duty among the middle age group is much greater than the drop off in their likelihood to vote.

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**SUMMARY:**

Chinese and younger voters in BC are making their opinions count for less in BC politics because they are not as likely to vote compared to people of other ethnicities and ages. Some of that story appears to be due to values – Chinese and younger voters are less likely to see voting as a duty than other voters.

However, the general public and the middle age cohort share the voting is a choice views of Chinese voters and the younger cohort yet intend to vote at the higher levels of Punjabi voters and the oldest cohort. That finding suggests that while changing values away from voting as a duty to voting as a choice does creates a challenge, it is a challenge that can be overcome.

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