

Canada: The 2011 Voter Suppression Fraud Instigated by Harper Conservatives, Gravely Underreported

Part II

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Global Research, October 10, 2015

[Rabble.ca](#) 9 September 2015

Region: [Canada](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

Next week, October 19, Canadians go the polls. It is important for Canadian voters be fully aware of what is known and documented, namely that Conservative Party and the outgoing Prime minister of Canada Stephen Harper were involved in a carefully engineered rigging of the 2011 parliamentary elections.

In the [first essay in this series](#), I implied that the failure of Maclean's political editor Paul Wells to mention the 2011 electoral fraud in his book on Stephen Harper qualified him for inclusion among "Harper's Helpers." Wells has himself confirmed the point.

When he suggested on Twitter (the same day) that journalists "might just want to ask other questions" rather than digging into government scandals, singer-songwriter Raffi Cavoukian [replied](#): "It's the Harper #elxn42 [2015 election] run that ought to be in question — a lawless, rogue [prime minister] running again — that's the issue." Raffi [added](#) that the Harper Conservatives were "convicted of wrongdoing in each of last [three] elections. That's a huge issue." Wells [responded, Tweeting](#), "The Governor General, Elections Canada and the Constitution disagree with you, you flatulent crank."

But the person, the agency and the abstraction cited by Wells are as irrelevant to the underlying facts as his schoolyard name-calling. It's no stretch to call a PM who has twice been found in contempt of Parliament a lawless rogue and the electoral wrongdoing is proven and acknowledged — witness the ["In and Out" scandal](#), the edifying spectacle of Harper's ethics spokesman, Dean Del Mastro, being led off to prison in chains and the resignation of Peter Penashue [*who is once again standing as the Conservative candidate for Labrador -Ed.*].

Wells is not alone in wanting to ignore Harperite electoral fraud scandals. When for several weeks in early 2012 the 2011 "robocalls" vote suppression scandal was front page news, Michael Coren of Sun Media scoffed at people getting excited over ["a few silly phone calls,"](#) while *The Globe and Mail's* Margaret Wenthe found it ["ridiculous to think there was some massive cheating scheme engineered by higher-ups"](#) in our "boring little democracy."

But Canada is less boring and less of a democracy than Wenthe thought — silly or not, there were more than a few fraudulent calls. Two polls conducted in the spring of 2012 give an indication of the scale of telephone fraud in the 2011 election. Ipsos Reid, sampling over 3,000 voters primarily in Ontario, found that four per cent of respondents (which would

mean about a million voters nationwide) reported having received calls giving false information about the location of their polling station.

Ekos Research, with a larger sample of nearly 4,800 voters drawn from 113 ridings across Canada, found that in six intensely robocalled ridings, an average of 3.8 per cent of voters had received misinformation calls, while across the country an average of 2.3 per cent — or in round terms, 550,000 people — had received calls of this type. (This seems a more reliable conclusion, though the Ipsos Reid survey would suggest that the fraud was more intense in Ontario.)

However, two distinct kinds of telephone fraud were practised nationwide during our 2011 election. On April 19, 2011, *The Toronto Star*, *CBC News*, and *Maclean's* reported that over the preceding week late-night calls supposedly from Liberal Party campaigns had been infuriating voters in at least ten Ontario ridings, as well as elsewhere. Questions in Parliament ensued — in response to which Harper indignantly denied his party's involvement, while Del Mastro suggested the calls were simply evidence of Liberal incompetence.

The harassment calls were seriously underreported. But when Elections Canada's final tally of substantiated complaints was made public in Yves Côté's Summary Investigation Report on Robocalls in April 2014, the figures were surprising. Of a total of 2,448 complaints, 1,241 (51 per cent) were about harassment calls, and 1,207 (49 per cent) about misinformation or misdirection calls. If we can take this as an indication that there were nearly equal numbers of the two kinds of calls, it would follow, given Ekos's findings about misinformation calls, that the total number of fraudulent calls must have exceeded 1.1 million — and that harassment calls must have been made in most of the 261 ridings in which telephone fraud occurred.

It's hard to judge the impact of these harassment calls. But it would appear that for every person who recognized them as fraudulent, many others were deceived. Anthony Rota, a network specialist and university administrator as well as former Liberal MP whose hair's-breadth defeat in Nipissing-Temiskaming can be ascribed to telephone fraud, has told me he initially thought the late-night calls were by some appalling mistake being sent into his riding by Liberal headquarters in Ottawa. Rota was quickly undeceived — but most voters who were awakened at 2 a.m. by calls claiming to be from the local Liberal campaign and arrogantly suggesting, as one recipient has said, "that my support for them was a given," were simply angry.

It may not be coincidental that after a week of the telephone harassment campaign, Liberal support in Ontario dipped for the first time in the campaign to below 30 per cent, and on the national level began a steady decline in the polls from the upper to the lower 20s, ending finally at 18.9 per cent of the vote on election day.

Other factors were also in play: Michael Ignatieff's workmanlike but not stellar performance in the TV debates on April 12 and 13, Liberal passivity in the face of unrelenting Conservative attacks and smears and the inspiring campaigning of Jack Layton. Nonetheless, it seems clear that the more than half a million harassment calls contributed to the Liberals' decline.

Whatever the precise interplay of causes may have been, the Liberal ship took on water during the last two weeks of the campaign, and on election day, May 2, came close to going

down with all hands. But would the appropriate comparison be to the Lusitania rather than the Titanic? To what extent was the disaster due to the captain's poor judgment, and to what extent to the impact of torpedoes hitting below the water-line?

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