

## **598 Management Report**

# **Addressing Young Voter Turnout: An Analysis of High School Students' Political Awareness and Attitudes**

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# Executive Summary

## Objectives

This study was prepared for James Moore MP, in the federal electoral district of Port Moody-Westwood-Port Coquitlam, on the subject of young voter turnout. Voter turnout in federal elections, in general, has been declining over the last fifteen years. As political participation continues to fall, concerns mount as to whether youth entering the electorate will follow the trend, contributing to a further decline in voter turnout. The consequences of this phenomenon are uncertain but there is fear that Canadian democracy will be less effective as a result of low voter turnout. Moreover, the legitimacy of a government that is elected by a small percentage of eligible voters becomes questionable.

The objectives of this study are to answer three specific related questions: *What are the political attitudes and level of awareness of high school students? How are political engagement dimensions linked to students' propensity to vote?* and *What strategies do high school students feel would be successful in informing and motivating new cohorts of voters?*

## Summary of Method

This study used multiple data collection methods and sources of data. First, a comprehensive survey of the literature was conducted to provide a concrete foundation upon which to base the research. Based on the literature, two major lines of inquiry were developed: a survey and focus groups. In addition, observations from several discussion sessions involving students and MPs supplemented the analysis.

The survey aimed to collect data on the political knowledge and awareness of 16-year-old high school students. In addition, it captured attitudinal data through close-

ended and open-ended questions. The surveys were administered to approximately 500 students in the city of Port Coquitlam, BC.

Using preliminary data from the first 200 surveys, the design for focus groups was created. Approximately 200 students participated in eight – one hour and twenty minute sessions aimed at probing further into some of the key findings of the preliminary survey data. These sessions also addressed voter encouragement campaigns.

Finally, over 500 students participated in discussion sessions with one of two Members of Parliament (James Moore or Paul Forseth). These sessions provided students with an opportunity to meet a Member of Parliament and engage in a discussion on various government and political topics. During these sessions, the students' level of engagement and participation was observed and noted.

## **Results and Analysis**

The students who participated in this study come from average middle class families in the eastern suburbs of Vancouver, British Columbia. The age of survey respondents ranged from 15 to 19 years of age, with the average being 16 years of age. The vast majority of students at the time of the survey were 16 years old (74 percent) and in grade 11 (95 percent). Male students slightly outnumbered female students in the sample, 56 percent and 44 percent respectively. Approximately 80 percent of students were born in Canada while almost 34 percent of respondents noted that at least one parent was born outside of Canada. Over 94 percent of survey respondents indicated that their parents completed high school. In general, the majority of parents had completed at least some form of post secondary education, either college or university.

The first research question addressed the nature of high school students' political awareness and attitudes through knowledge and opinion questions. The surveys found that students are relatively knowledgeable but some sub groups scored higher than

others. In total, 18 knowledge questions were asked and the entire sample averaged just over 50 percent correct. The survey revealed that certain groups of students were more knowledgeable than others. Male students scored higher than female students, a finding determined to be statistically significant. Also found to be statistically significant was the observation that private school students scored higher than public school students and that Canadian born students scored higher than immigrant students. Survey data would appear to indicate that students whose parents have a university degree were more politically aware. This finding can be related to studies indicating a relationship between education, political interest and voter turnout.

An individual's political awareness is, in part, dependent on the information he or she consults. Students were asked to identify sources of information from which they obtain information on politics and current events. These sources were television, newspapers, Internet, teachers, radio, family members and magazines. Investigation revealed that the number and source of information impacted students' levels of awareness. Students who consulted fewer than two of the seven sources listed scored the lowest. In general, students who used any source of information scored higher than students who did not. Moreover, it was observed that in general, the greater the number of information sources consulted, the higher the level of knowledge and awareness. A notable impact was observed for two sources of information: television news and newspapers. Students who watched television news scored nearly 2 points higher than those who did not (out of a maximum of 18 points). Similarly, students who read newspapers scored almost 1 point higher than the students who did not.

Since some of the survey questions used were also included in the Canadian Election Survey, it is possible to compare the results of that survey and those of this study's sample. Comparing the knowledge levels of the students surveyed provides mixed results. The students sampled were relatively on par in regards to awareness of

the current prime minister and were slightly more knowledgeable about the party leaders compared to the young people surveyed in the 2000 Canadian Election Study. On the subject of provincial awareness, the level of knowledge of the students surveyed was 6 points lower than the youngest age group surveyed in the 2000 Canadian Election Study. Students were weakest in their ability to identify their local Member of Parliament (15 percent) and Member of the Legislative Assembly (16 percent). Most shocking of all was the difference of 39 points when it came to awareness of the federal finance minister compared to the youngest group surveyed in the 2000 Canadian Election Study.

At the time of the study, 288 students had completed the government component of the Socials Studies 11 curriculum while 208 students had not. It was therefore possible to make a comparison of knowledge levels of students with and without having learned the government component. Students who learned the government section of the Socials Studies 11 curriculum scored marginally higher than students who had not yet learned the component. This difference is not statistically significant. The impact was even smaller when the public school sample was isolated and the same comparison was made. Public school students' awareness and attitudes are barely impacted by the education.

Attitude was measured through 16 opinion statements, with which students could agree or disagree to various extents. High school students surveyed expressed a general interest in politics, government and voting. Those students who felt that politics affects them, who are interested in the results of elections or are interested in politics tended to demonstrate higher political knowledge levels. A large proportion of students (60.9 percent) expressed a belief that voting is a duty and that they want to have some say in how the country is run. The students however, overwhelmingly felt hindered by a lack of knowledge, which they feel would ultimately prevent them from voting. Fewer

than 10 percent of students stated cynical reasons for not voting. As well, fewer than 10 percent indicated a complete disinterest in politics and voting.

The second research question asked how political engagement dimensions are linked to students' propensity to vote. Using three of the attitude statements in the survey, students' attitudes towards voting could be gauged. Several groups of students were more likely than others to feel very strongly about exercising their right to vote. A statistically significant finding was that although male students were found to have higher levels of knowledge, female students reported a greater inclination to vote. Similarly, another statistically significant observation was that even though Canadian born students were more knowledgeable than immigrant students, the immigrant students were more inclined to vote than the Canadian born students. Private school students and students of parents with university degrees also demonstrated a higher propensity to vote. Students' propensity to vote was also unaffected by the introduction of the government section of the curriculum. As with awareness levels, students who consulted any information source were also more inclined to vote.

The third research question aimed to identify strategies that students feel would be successful in informing and motivating new cohorts of voters. The focus groups and data from the open-ended revealed many interesting and innovative methods through which awareness can be heightened and turnout can be increased. Some examples of these include new or improved forms of educating young people, changes to advertising campaigns and implementing early strategies to foster interest among young people.

## **Recommendations**

For years, various government organizations such as Elections Canada, and provincial electoral bodies as well as groups such as Student Vote and Rush the Vote, have been trying to develop a political interest in young people. Perhaps the approach

has been ineffective. The students consulted in this study felt that for the most part, interest needed to be fostered at a younger age. They felt that through innovative education and advertising, interest in politics and voting would grow over time but that an approach aimed at inculcating youth would be misguided and ineffectual.

The literature review, survey data collected, the discussions with students and class observations have all contributed to a set of recommendations aimed at improving young voter turnout. No one recommendation however is a panacea. The recommendations stemming from this study can be grouped under three headings: education, communicating politics and voter encouragement activities and programs.

## **Education**

Since the number one reason young people would not vote is a feeling of lack of knowledge, more must be done to ensure that students are properly equipped with the necessary political knowledge. Students must also be taught how to access information, analyze it and make an informed decision. These skills can be developed through improvements in the current social studies curriculum and through the implementation of civic studies.

One of the goals of civic and social studies should be to teach analytical skills to enable students to understand and evaluate current events and politics. Additionally, these courses should incorporate more content on current affairs and politics. The Internet is a convenient source of political information and current affairs and yet, is underutilized by young people for that purpose. The use of the Internet should be encouraged and made a part of civic studies and social studies curricula.

Both students and teachers agree that the educational tools currently available on government and politics are not adequate enough to generate interest and

understanding. Educational tools such as videos should be produced using simple language and visual aids to facilitate student learning.

### **Communicating Politics**

One reason for the lack of interest among students is insufficient and/or ineffective communication of politics. The responsibility lies with political parties, politicians, families and schools. As evidenced by Member of Parliament visits in the high schools sampled, students engage in political discussion when given the opportunity. To foster and encourage the interest, students should be given more opportunities to have political discussions, in school and at home.

Guest speakers provide young people with an opportunity to engage in political discussions. One way to foster interest in politics is to create a forum in which students can have political discussions and have their political questions addressed. The most convenient forum for these discussions would be in the classroom and would best benefit students if both presenters and teachers jointly developed the outlines and agendas.

### **Voter encouragement activities and programs**

Marketing was one of the main suggestions to increase awareness. Students recommended that information in various forms, such as trivia questions, be placed on products that young people are in the daily habit of using. Students felt that information about government should be made available to students at an earlier age and should be a natural part of their lives.

The use of television advertising should be enhanced to properly reach target audiences. Survey results revealed that television is the most consulted source of information on politics and current affairs. Focus groups confirmed this finding and also revealed that television should be used to reach young people. Most young people

consulted felt that television was the best medium through which to convey the information and advertising.

Students, on average, did not feel that the voting process required reforms. They did feel that access could be increased for groups of voters that might find it difficult to vote. The use of mobile polls could be enhanced to reach post-secondary students and isolated or remote work groups.

This study was successful at examining the nature of young people's political awareness and attitudes. Although they lack some important political knowledge, they are generally intent on participating politically. Through this study, several issues were uncovered or expressed by students, which once addressed, should lead to greater political participation and increased awareness among youth.

**“The right to vote is only meaningful when you use it.”**

**- Jean-Pierre Kingsley, Chief Electoral Officer of Canada**

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Since the 1988 federal election, voter turnout has been steadily decreasing. From the Second World War to 1988, turnout averaged around 75 percent (see Appendix I). In the 1993 federal election, turnout fell to 70 percent, declined even further to 67 percent in 1997 and fell to slightly more than 61 percent in 2000. Voter turnout in the 2004 federal general election was lower than in any national election since Confederation in 1867 at 60.9 percent. An investigation of these trends revealed that turnout decline since 1988 is not among the electorate at large but mostly among Canadians born after 1970 (Blais et al. 2002). Electoral participation studies have confirmed that young people vote at a lower rate than older citizens (Gidengil et al. 2004). Similarly, in British Columbian provincial elections, a steady decline in voter turnout has also been observed. Over the past 12 years, turnout has fallen some 15 points (see Appendix I).

Surveys conducted during federal elections from 1968 to 2000 identified a tendency for Canadians to vote more in the later stages of life (Howe 2003). The lower turnout among youth is often attributed to the “life cycle” effect: young people’s propensity to vote was found to increase as they aged (Howe 2003, pg. 2). Recent studies have indicated that the life-cycle effect does not explain decreased voter turnout in Canadian politics. Evidence shows that although the normal life changes should result in increased voting rates and that voting rates should also rise with levels of education, these increases occur at a much slower pace than they have in the past.

This slower pace is in part due to many younger voters are entering the electorate at a much higher average age (Pammett and LeDuc 2003).<sup>1</sup>

Over the years, numerous studies have identified reasons why young voters are reluctant to cast their vote. The findings highlight causes such as a lack of political and civic knowledge, a lack of trust and confidence and a lack of interest (IDEA 1999 and Haid 2003). Studies indicate that there appears to be an initial period of time after turning 18 when a young person is less likely to participate. Miller and Shanks (1996) argue that the initial voting trends of a particular generation have long-term consequences for overall turnout. A low turnout trend for 18 to 20 year olds suggests the importance of determining the factors that influence the younger generation's political behaviour. Mark Franklin suggests that a "change in turnout most often comes from a new cohort of voters turning out at a rate that is different from the turnout rate among the previous cohorts when they were new" (Franklin 2004, pg. 60). Further, "in order to understand why young people are withdrawing from conventional forms of political participation, there is a need to investigate how young people themselves conceive of and experience the political" (O'Toole et al., pg. 350).

These studies indicate a need to consult young people to identify ways to engage and inform youth and to develop policies and programs to address Canadians' decreasing willingness to participate in the democratic process and to increase participation and interest at a younger age. If there is no life-cycle effect, perhaps then there is a generational effect, meaning that the rates of abstention will remain higher than those of previous generations (Blais et al. 2002). Therefore, if today's young voters

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<sup>1</sup> This is evidenced by an analysis of data from the Canadian National Election Studies collected over the past 30 years. This was also conducted by Pammett, LeDuc, Thiessen and Bilodeau in "Canadian Voting Turnout in Comparative Perspective," an unpublished report prepared for Elections Canada 2001, pg. 71-74, 78-79. Each generation of newly eligible voters participates at lower rates and begins to enter the active electorate at a higher average age.

continue to be political non-participants, the tradition of relying on the older generation to cast votes in large number will cease to continue.

Research in the field of voter turnout indicates that the challenge in addressing young voter turnout is to first develop an interest in politics and elections among the current generation of young voters and then foster the interest among the future generations of young voters (O'Neill 2003). The problem is often touted as motivational: young Canadians do not vote and do not know much about politics because they are not interested in politics (Howe 2003). If the root of the problem is a lack of motivation, then the solution lies in understanding what would foster interest in politics and elections among younger generations of voters.

On the motivation of this study, it is assumed that turnout decline is a trend that will continue if not addressed and that it poses a hazard to democracy. While there is no evidence to the contrary, it is possible that this tendency is only temporary. Should the trend reverse unassisted, the premise for this research would no longer exist. However, since there is no indication of a reversal of the trend (see Appendix I), we must consider that it will likely continue and thus endanger our democratic health.

## **1.1 Objectives and Limitation**

This study will attempt to answer the following three related questions:

1. *What are the political attitudes and level of awareness of high school students?*
2. *How are political engagement dimensions linked to students' propensity to vote?*
3. *What strategies do high school students consider to be successful in motivating and informing new cohorts of voters?*

By addressing these questions, this study will be able to draw a detailed picture of the state of political engagement for high school students and conclude with some recommendations for encouraging higher electoral participation among youth. At the

same time, this research will make a contribution to the expanding body of literature on political participation and to the relatively small literature investigating motivation and attitudes of youth under the age of 18.

It is important that this study be conducted because previous research addressing low and declining young voter turnout tends to involve eligible voters (18 years and older) and rarely examines the reasons why young people vote or do not vote *before they are eligible to vote*. There is a need to consult with youth before they are eligible to vote to gain an understanding of their electoral process awareness and willingness to participate. The results of the analysis, in conjunction with previous studies, should facilitate the development and/or improvement of policies and programs designed to address (young) voter turnout.

Although it is hoped that this research makes an important contribution to the literature, there is one limitation to this study that must be highlighted. The analysis is based on a large sample from a suburban, ethnically diverse, middle-class city in Greater Vancouver. As such, the findings may not represent all high school students across Canada. However, as shown in section 3.1, the sample socio-demographic indicators are largely aligned to the ones of the Canadian population. Third, there may be larger sociological trends that have contributed to the decline in young voter turnout. The impact of these changes extends beyond the scope of this research and requires a time-series analysis and as such, has not been addressed by this study.

In order to meet the above-noted objectives and to provide a strong foundation for analysis set out in this study, a comprehensive literature review was conducted and is presented in the next section.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

Voter turnout in Canadian federal elections has dropped steadily since 1988 (see Appendix I). Turnout is measured as the percentage of registered electors who cast a ballot. In the 1993 federal election turnout fell to 70 percent of registered voters, 67 percent in the 1997 election and just over 61 percent in the 2000 election.<sup>2</sup> In the recent federal election in 2004, the national voter turnout rate of 60.9 percent represents a fall in turnout from the previous election and the lowest voter turnout in Canadian history. Although this decrease is not uncommon in many democracies, it is of great concern to the Chief Electoral Officer, Jean-Pierre Kingsley<sup>3</sup>, as well as to government and individuals.

Studies show that young people are disengaged from the political process. Most studies use 18 to 24 year olds, those already eligible to vote, to investigate attitudes towards voting (Blais et al. 2002, Gidengil et al. 2004, Pammett and Leduc 2003). Few studies, seek to examine the attitudes and perspectives of youth less than 18 years of age. A better understanding of the attitudes and behaviours of young people is needed in order to reach them before their voting behaviour becomes entrenched. Political participation in young people has been studied for decades yet the problem of low young voter turnout still exists, and as a result of declining turnout, is worsening. If research has been conducted to identify the causes and symptoms of the problem, why has the gamut of solutions not been effective?

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<sup>2</sup> All federal general election turnout rates are from Elections Canada.

<sup>3</sup> Part of the Chief Electoral Officer's mandate is to help maintain the health of the nation's democracy (Elections Canada 2004).

## Canada's Electoral System

The *Constitution Act 1867* specifies that Canada is to have a constitution similar in principle to that of the United Kingdom. In addition to adopting a similar constitution, Canada has also adopted a similar electoral system and parliamentary system. The Canadian federal parliamentary system includes the following levels:

1. a sovereign (the Governor General),
2. the Senate (members of which are appointed by the Governor General upon recommendation by the Prime Minister) and
3. the House of Commons (members of which are elected by the citizens of Canada).

As in Great Britain, Canada has an electoral system referred to as the single-member plurality system. A winning candidate is elected by a plurality of votes rather than a majority and will often have less than 50 percent of the votes cast in the district (Malcolmson and Myers 2002). For this reason, the system is often referred to as first-past-the-post. Membership in the House of Commons is based on geographical divisions called electoral districts, constituencies or ridings (Elections Canada 2004). Currently, there are 308 such districts represented by 308 Members of Parliament (MPs).

For any eligible person to be able to vote, his or her name must be entered on the voters list. In Canada, until the 2000 election, Elections Canada created a new voters list for each election. Enumerators visited every household to obtain the names of eligible voters. In the 2000 election, a permanent voters list replaced door-to-door enumeration. To ensure the list is up to date, Elections Canada receives information electronically from various federal and provincial government agencies.<sup>4</sup> In Canada, there are several ways to vote. The most common way is at an ordinary poll on election

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<sup>4</sup> Federal income tax forms include a box that filers can check to indicate their authorization for Canada Revenue Agency to provide their information (name, address and date of birth) to Elections Canada for the National Register of Electors.

day. Alternatively, voters can cast their ballots at an advance poll or at a mobile poll, which serves the infirm, the elderly and the disabled. Voters can also vote by a special ballot, either at the office of the returning officer or through the mail.

Herman Bakvis, in the preface of *Voter Turnout in Canada*, states, “the act of voting in an election is perhaps the single most important form of political participation in modern democracies. It remains the most direct means available to citizens of signaling their interests and preferences to government and of controlling those who seek to govern them” (Bakvis 1991). Exercising the right to vote is often seen as an indicator of the health of a democracy (Bakvis 1991, The Electoral Commission of the United Kingdom 2002 and Walks 2004). As Patrick Dobel states, “all individuals possess the power to vote, but many choose not to use it. This results in skewed participation rates and a loss of power to the poor and less well educated, who vote at lower rates” (Dobel 1999, pg. 132).

One of the defining characteristics of a representative democracy is the right to vote in free and open elections (Gidengil et al. 2004). The struggle for many citizens to establish free and fair voting continues to this day. Often citizens of established democracies forget that people around the world have laid down their lives to gain this right. This is perhaps partly evidenced by the recent decline in Canadian voter turnout.

## **Voter Turnout**

A low level of voter turnout and/or declining turnout indicates political alienation of a sizeable proportion of the electorate and as a result, elected leaders may not seem legitimate. Higher levels of voter turnout can be considered to be proof that there is a high level of commitment to the political process and that citizens are interested in the direction of their country (Bakvis 1991).

Voter turnout can be defined as the number or percentage of registered voters who cast a ballot during an election. The turnout percentage includes all rejected ballots. However, the percentage of rejected ballots is small: 0.9 percent in the 2004 general election. Elections Canada estimates that more than 95 percent of electors were on the preliminary lists of electors used for the 2004 general election and that 83 percent (plus or minus 2 percent) of those electors were at the correct address.

Voter turnout in Canadian federal elections has been steadily decreasing since 1988 (see Appendix I). The historic low level of voter turnout of the 2004 federal election illustrates that social and political trends are extending beyond the context of a particular election (LeDuc and Pammett 2003). That is to say that although there is a tendency to attribute turnout decline to the dominant position of the governing party, the Liberal Party of Canada, it is imperative to probe deeper into the causes of this precipitous decline (LeDuc and Pammett 2003).

Voter turnout has also been declining in other industrialized countries and the decline is occurring in different electoral systems, party configurations and electoral environments (LeDuc and Pammett 2003). However, Canada's voter turnout is below the average for industrialized countries. There appear to be two explanations for this (Blais and Dobryznska 1998; Gidengil et al. 2004). First, Canada has a single-member plurality electoral system where turnout tends to be about 3 points lower on average than in systems with proportional representation (Gidengil et al. 2004). Farrell (2001) shows that in the recent election in 39 democracies, voter turnout averaged 68.2 percent in non-proportional systems and 70.8 percent in proportional systems (The Electoral Commission of the United Kingdom 2002). Second, turnout tends to be lower in large, thinly populated countries such as Canada (Gidengil et al. 2004).

There are two voter turnout problems that need to be addressed: low voter turnout and declining voter turnout. In general, voter turnout in Canada is low and

declining. Low voter turnout, as will be discussed in the following sections, is worrisome because of its effect on democracy. Legitimacy of government and its ability to represent citizens is questionable if it is elected by a small percentage of the eligible electorate. It is important to note that the youngest cohorts of voters often have the lowest turnout rates among eligible voters. Declining voter turnout is also of concern because falling rates of participation exacerbate the already complicated problem of low voter turnout. Turnout decline is most evident among the youngest groups of voters. In regards to young voter turnout, it is clear that the trends of declining turnout and low turnout need to be addressed and reversed.

### **Impact of Voter Turnout**

Effective democracies need citizens to be active and engaged (Gidengil et al. 2004). For the political system, participation is important as it results in the selection of competing candidates and ideas (Archer 2003). As such, political participation affects the policies and issues that are addressed by the government. Individuals who choose to participate less will obviously have less impact on the policies and issues that government pursue and advance and as a result, government outcomes and outputs will be less reflective of the preferences and priorities of the electorate (Archer 2003). On an individual level, political participation fosters a sense of political community; it legitimizes the electoral process and their roles as members of the community (Archer 2003).

Rates of turnout or rates of abstention are significant because of their effect on electoral outcomes. A British study indicates that in electoral systems such as first-past-the-post, high-levels of abstention can distort the election result (Johnston et al. 2001 as cited in Gidengil et al. 2004, pg. 15). "The geography of abstentions . . . is crucial to the election outcome. By reducing the number of votes necessary for victory in a

constituency, abstention can make it easier for one party rather than another to win seats” (Johnston et al. 2001, pg. 47).

Perhaps the most troublesome issue is the question of the legitimacy of a government that is elected by a small percentage of eligible voters. There are two recent examples that highlight situations where majority governments were elected by a small percentage of eligible voters. In the 2000 federal election, of the 61.2 percent of eligible voters who cast a vote, only 40.8 percent voted for the Liberal Party, the party that formed the government with a majority of seats in the House of Commons. This translates into 25 percent of the eligible electorate actually voting to elect a majority government (Elections Canada). In such a government, it is possible that the creation of policy or legislation caters to a small group of voters. As Ruy A. Teixeira warns in his 1992 work *The Disappearing American Voter*.

“As fewer and fewer citizens participate in elections, the extent to which government truly rests on the consent of the governed may be called into question. As a result elites may feel they do not have sufficient legitimacy among citizens to pursue desired policy objectives, and citizens may feel the government is not legitimate enough for them to support these elites and their policy objectives (pg. 101).”

If this is true, it is even more imperative that low and declining voter turnout, and in particular, young voter turnout, be watched and addressed.

## **Young Voter Turnout**

Much of the literature on young voter turnout found that low turnout was result of a “life cycle” effect (Elections Canada 2003 and Howe 2003). The “life cycle” effect affirms that as a person ages, their propensity to vote increases. This is a logical explanation for why voter turnout tends to be higher in older age cohorts. As people age, they are faced with more responsibilities, they get married, buy a house, have children. They begin to feel the relevance of government policies on their lives. This school of thought does not see a problem with lower levels of involvement of young

people because it considers political socialization to be a life-long process (Pammett 2001). However, recent studies show that the life cycle effect is perhaps no longer the only explanation (Elections Canada 2003). “An analysis of data from the Canadian National Election Studies, collected over the past 30 years, which was also conducted by the authors for Elections Canada, shows clearly that each generation of newly eligible voters participates at lower rates and begins to enter the active electorate at a higher average age (Pammett and LeDuc 2003, pg. 8).” Young people are participating less, i.e. not participating to the same degree as previous generations, and their willingness to participate is not increasing over time (Elections Canada).

Low and declining youth turnout is not a unique problem to Canada. André Blais conducted a study that examined voter turnout in nine countries in 1996-97 and concurred with the well-established finding that young people are voting at rates that are significantly lower than those of older generations both in Canada and abroad (Haid 2003).

Why should we worry about low and declining young voter turnout? A variety of compelling reasons have been discussed in political literature. The least compelling supports the idea that policy outcomes would be different if youth participated at higher rates (Gibbins 2003). It is not clear however, that young voters support different policy preferences and political values. If young voter turnout declined to zero, it is not certain that the policy mandate of the election would differ.

Another reason for worrying about low and declining young voter turnout is that it weakens the democratic representation of Canada’s urban areas (Gibbins 2003). Since young people have a tendency to reside in urban areas, reduced political participation may lead to an under representation of their political values, preferences and interests. An even more compelling reason to view low and declining rates of youth participation as a problem originates from the theory that electoral participation becomes a foundation

for further participation in democracy, i.e. more meaningful forms of political participation (Gibbins 2003). Voters have a tendency to follow politics, to be involved in the community and perhaps even run for a political office. If this theory proves correct, low and decreasing young voter turnout will have an impact on democratic participation. The looming negative impact substantiates a compelling rationale for further study into young voter motivation.

A very troubling reason for concern is the possibility that low young voter turnout is linked to political apathy and a conscious withdrawal from political participation. Apathy, an overall lack of interest in voting, is one of the most widely believed reasons for low young voter turnout. However, there is little substantive evidence to show that low young voter turnout can be attributed to apathy alone. Further investigations are necessary to confirm or dispel the widely held “apathy theory”.

Young voters have been considered to be “our canaries in the democratic mine shaft” (Gibbins 2003, pg. 3). Their lack of participation may be indicative of deep-rooted frustration in democratic politics that may extend beyond youth. If this is true, the problem does not lie with the voters but with the process and the only way to know if youth are frustrated with democratic politics is to simply ask them.

A decrease in the levels of political interest and knowledge has been linked to the low rates in young voter turnout and the electoral abstention among youth. The literature is not clear, however, why the lack of knowledge and stifled interest are more pronounced today than ever before. Studies show that young people are also less likely to vote because they lack the tools to understand the political system; it seems remote and complex (Haid 2003). The question is why young Canadians now find the system more complex than young Canadians did 10 years ago (Haid 2003). It has been said that limited attention has been devoted to the question in Canadian research (O’Neill

2003).<sup>5</sup> “There is a lack of reliable and compelling survey evidence regarding the turnout of young people and what would improve it (The Electoral Commission of the United Kingdom 2002, pg. 8).”

## **Not Voting**

It is equally important to understand who votes and why they vote as it is to understand who does not vote and why they do not vote. In a study commissioned by Elections Canada following the 37<sup>th</sup> general election, Jon H. Pammett and Lawrence LeDuc (2003) examined voter participation. Their research shows that low and declining turnout is severe among youth. In the 2000 federal election, almost half of all nonvoters were under thirty years of age (LeDuc and Pammett 2003). In a survey of nonvoters, a majority expressed little interest in politics (LeDuc and Pammett 2003). Nonvoters also felt that the act of voting was not as important compared to voters and they did not feel a strong sense of civic duty in regards to voting.

When we examine voters and nonvoters, two questions need to be addressed (Blais 2000). First, are the same people voting or abstaining in every election or do people move back and forth between voting and abstaining? Second, what are the main socioeconomic characteristics of those who vote? Research findings indicate that the groups with the lowest levels of political participation include those with the lowest economic means, young people, members of the Aboriginal community and newly eligible electors (Archer 2003). It is also important to gain an understanding of the motivations of non-voters by consulting ineligible voters i.e. those who have not reached 18 years of age, in order to find a solution to the issues of low young voter turnout and declining voter turnout.

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<sup>5</sup> One exception is Paul Howe's "Name That Premier: The Political Knowledge of Canadians Past and Present," paper presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, Toronto, May 29-31, 2002.

Many young Canadians avoid the polls because of political apathy rather than cynicism. They choose not to vote because they see politics and elections as unimportant as opposed to a belief that politicians are not addressing issues that are important to them (O'Neill 2003). For the new cohort of voters, those who are not yet 18 years old, it is debatable as to whether this holds true. More analysis is needed to determine if political apathy is indeed the reason young people will avoid voting.

Young people lack a connection to the political system, which is supported by the suggestion that young people do not have enough political information (Pammett and LeDuc 2003). The lack of knowledge includes all aspects of politics such as the candidates, parties and issues and it also involves a lack of knowledge of how politics affect their daily lives (Pammett and LeDuc 2003).

A majority of Canadians believe that the overall turnout decline can be linked to the negative public attitudes toward the performance of the politicians and the political institutions involved in federal politics (Pammett and LeDuc 2003). Canada is not the only industrialized country to experience lower levels of voter turnout. In French parliamentary elections, turnout has fallen to levels similar to those in Canada and in the United Kingdom, turnout has fallen even lower (Pammett and LeDuc 2003). These international examples demonstrate that Canada is not alone in facing this problem but should not reduce the concern for the issue.

Less affluent Canadians tend to be less interested in politics. Political interest is often depressed by living at the economic margin (Gidengil et al. 2004). When people have to struggle to make ends meet, they have less time and energy to actively follow politics. Another explanation is that they are perhaps less motivated because they believe the political system does not work for them (Gidengil et al. 2004).

## Voting

A sense of duty is a feeling that there is a norm that voting is right and not voting is wrong (Blais 2000). Someone who votes out of a sense of duty is doing so because their conscience and ethical judgment urge them to vote, they would feel guilty if they did not vote. Sense of duty can also be characterized as a reciprocal relationship whereby citizens agree to vote in return for government-provided benefits (O'Neill 2003). Some research indicates that young people have a weaker sense of civic duty than older citizens. In the 2000 Canadian Election Survey, the respondents were asked to evaluate the statement "If I did not vote, I would feel guilty". Only 18 percent of the youngest cohort agreed while 34 percent of the oldest age group agreed (Elections Canada 2003). The 2004 Canadian Democratic Audit confirms the finding that young Canadians have a diminished sense of duty illustrating that fewer than 20 percent of people under 35 years of age expressed a sense of duty compared to a third of those people born before 1945.

Political interest and political knowledge are the two greatest predictors of voter participation: both enhance people's motivation to vote (Gidengil et al. 2004). Some relate young voter turnout decline to a lack of political knowledge (Elections Canada 2003). Several studies have found that the youngest generation is more poorly informed than older generations (Blais et al. 2002, Howe 2003, Milner 2001). In 1990, the findings of a Royal Commission survey found that 5 percent of Canadians could not name the Prime Minister. In the same year, survey findings revealed that 56 percent of 18 to 29 year olds were able to answer at most one of three political knowledge questions correctly (Who is the PM? Who is the Liberal leader? Who is the NDP leader?) (Howe 2001).

Political knowledge can be categorized as general knowledge of politics or campaign –specific knowledge, lack of either however, has the same effect (Blais et al. 2002). Paul Howe supports this premise, "two trends have joined together to help

produce a sharp decline in turnout among those born in the 1960s and 1970s” resulting in poorer knowledge having a greater impact as to whether or not they vote (Howe 2001, pg. 3). Specifically in Canada, Henry Milner finds the level of civic literacy, the knowledge to be effective citizens, to be relatively low in comparison with other Western democracies despite Canada’s high levels of educational attainment (Elections Canada 2003). Knowledge makes knowing who the leaders are and about where the parties stand easier. It also makes it easier to decide which party to vote for and ultimately, knowledge makes the whole act of voting easier (Gidengil et al. 2004).

An examination of the 1976 to 1982 cohort in the 2000 election results in a simple conclusion. There are two dynamics that drive young voter turnout down: lower levels of knowledge and the escalating impact of knowledge on participation (Howe 2003). “The net result of that political knowledge is a critical factor – perhaps the critical factor – *underlying* cohort differences in voter turnout (Howe 2003, pg.3).”

Political interest is what motivates people to acquire information about politics, information that is essential for democratic participation. “Political information is to democratic politics what money is to economics; it is the currency of citizenship” (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, pg. 8). In Annick Percheron’s 1974 work *L’univers politique des enfants*, she contends that one constant persists: young people develop political interest through an indirect process which involves socialization, apprenticeship, discussions with parents and friends, reading newspapers, watching news programs on the television etc. (Percheron 1974). “An interest in politics never ‘just develops’ nor is it sustained by one particular age group (Renshon as cited in Megyery 1991, pg. 33).”

If effective democracies require active and engaged citizens, then a crucial prerequisite is interest in politics. Blais (2000) posits that it is interest and a ‘dose of civic duty’ that drives people to spend time and energy on actively keeping informed about politics. In light of the changes that have occurred in mass communications

technology, an interest in politics is becoming increasingly important (Gidengil et al. 2004). “Before the advent of cable and satellite dishes, Canadian television viewers had a choice of only two television channels. Viewers could hardly avoid coming across at least some news or political programming in the course of their evening’s viewing. But in today’s multi-channel universe, viewers have the option of watching only specialty channels; they can easily avoid news about politics altogether (Gidengil et al. 2004, pg. 18).”

The 2000 Canadian Election Study data indicate that turnout in the youngest cohort was 50 points higher among university graduates than those who left school with a high school diploma (Gidengil et al. 2004). Turnout decline is touted as being confined to those with less than a university education whereas turnout has remained steady among young graduates (Gidengil et al. 2004). “Since the 1993 federal election, turnout has dropped over 30 points among those with less than high school education and 15 points or more among those who have completed high school or some post-secondary education (Gidengil et al. 2004, pg. 111).” Why then are younger, less educated Canadians so much less likely to vote?

Often the question is phrased as “are they turned off or tuned out?” (O’Neill 2001). O’Neill 2001 states “Canadians born since 1970 are no more disaffected with politics than older Canadians,” therefore it can be logically concluded that it seems that young Canadians are just tuned out.

## **Cost Benefit Analysis of Voting**

André Blais, in his book *To Vote or Not to Vote The Merits and Limits of Rational Choice Theory*, discusses the calculus of voting. He describes rational voting theory when a citizen decides whether to vote or not by weighing the benefits of voting against the costs (Blais 2000). Voters must then be able to estimate the benefits of voting by

assessing what could be gained by voting rather than not voting. They must assess the chance that their preferred candidate will win or lose. In cases where the candidate is sure to win, there is little benefit from voting. Similarly, if the candidate is sure to lose, the benefit from voting for this candidate is close nil. A rational voter must consider the probability that their vote will determine whether the candidate will win or lose (Blais 2000).

The costs are different for every voter and these are opportunity costs. Individuals must take the time to ensure that they are registered, go to the polling station and mark the ballot. These activities place minimal impact on the individual. The real cost is the time required to become informed. The individual must seek the necessary information about the parties and candidates and digest it in order to make a decision as to which candidate they prefer (Blais 2000). By not voting, the individual can use that time for something else.

Application of this model leads to the conclusion that rational people decide not to vote. The costs of voting are small but the benefits are even smaller for just about everyone save a small number whose vote is decisive. It has also been said that the expected utility of voting is close to zero and that given the costs, the rational citizen should abstain from voting (Blais and Young 1999). As Blais describes, herein lies the paradox in voting: despite the theory, many people do vote (Blais 2000).

For young citizens faced with their first election, the costs of voting are magnified. They have never experienced the voting process, ensured they are registered, received a voter card and located their polling station. They may not have developed a good grasp of party differences and key issues. Most significant of all is that their social circle is made up almost entirely of other non-voters, so their friends are not in a position to share voting experiences, to say whether they felt voting was easy, difficult or satisfying (Plutzer 2002).

## Do Young Voters Matter?

If youth turned out in droves, would it make a difference? Governor Jesse Ventura might answer with a resounding yes. In 1999, Jesse Ventura, a former professional wrestler, ran as an independent and was elected governor of Minnesota. He succeeded in attracting more than 50 percent of the youth vote (Parello 1999). A turnout rate of 50 percent for youth is substantial in an American context because in general, American turnout rates of eligible citizens of voting age tend to hover around 50 percent.<sup>6</sup> In comparison, in the 2000 and 1996 Presidential elections, approximately 30 percent of youth voted.

It is important not to forget the sheer number of young voters. In 2001, there were approximately 2,125,900 Canadians between the ages of 15 and 19 (Statistics Canada 2001). During the last federal election (June 2004), these two million Canadians would have been more or less between the ages of 18 and 22 and eligible to vote. In addition there were over two million young Canadians between the ages of 20 and 24 in 2001. In total, in the June 2004 general election, nearly 4.5 million Canadians between the ages of 18 and 27 were eligible to vote (Statistics Canada).

Young people do vote. Elections Canada reports a turnout of over 38 percent among voters aged 18 to 21 in the 2004 general election. This is marked increase from the 25 percent turnout in the 2000 election.<sup>7</sup> The increase can be partly attributed to the significant efforts made by Elections Canada to encourage young people to vote. One key activity was the mailing of letters to over 1.1 million young Canadians who had turned 18 years old since the 2000 election, reminding them of their right to vote and of registration procedures. Although historically, young people vote at lower rates than

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<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that in the United States of America, eligible voters must be register themselves with a party in order to be registered to vote. This explains the between the official turnout rate which calculates the percentage of registered votes cast and the percentage of eligible votes cast.

<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that there have been methodological changes in calculating young voter turnout between the 2000 and 2004 elections and Elections Canada indicates that these changes make it difficult to compare the turnout rates.

older citizens and this rate is not nearly that of the national average or that of other cohorts, they do in fact participate. In the 2004 election, 13,489,359 registered people voted (Elections Canada 2004). In the last election only 38.7 percent of young people voted, well below that of the national average of 60 percent. Any significant improvements to young voter turnout rates would most likely contribute to an overall increase in voter turnout.

Young voters are highly independent. Many are not committed to one candidate or one political party and therefore their votes are up for grabs. Imagine that 4.5 million young voters are eligible to vote in the next election. Candidates and parties would be imprudent to ignore the significance of the youth vote. One study has found that winning candidates are more likely to have a strong understanding of young people's political and social attitudes than losing candidates (Harvard University, Institute of Politics 2004). Further successful candidates were also found to have invested time and energy in reaching out to young voters by visiting more high schools, colleges, sporting events and churches and other places of worship.

Political parties need loyal members and campaigns need volunteers. If parties and candidates reach out to young people today, parties will help ensure political allegiance in future elections and candidates can access an underutilized resource. Both membership and volunteerism contribute to long-term political engagement and is posited to strengthen the health of democracy in Canada. Campaign workers are often older, retired, loyal party members (Gidengil et al. 2004). Young people are an untapped source of campaign support. Young people, when put to task, have the energy and time to devote to campaign. They also have the exuberance often needed in campaigns.

## **2.2 Encouraging Participation**

### **Campaigns and Programs**

In an effort to combat low and decreasing voter turnout, many organizations, notably Elections Canada, have invested in awareness and motivational activities to entice non-voters and young voters to participate in elections. Voter encouragement campaigns take on a variety of forms, including direct advertising and voter awareness and education programs.

Prior to the 38<sup>th</sup> general election, in February 2004, Elections Canada wrote to approximately 1.1 million young Canadians who had turned 18 years of age since the last election. The letters reminded them of their right to vote and that they should register to vote in the upcoming federal elections. Of the group of young people who received these reminders, 300,000 were not previously registered and were also sent a registration kit. Approximately 50,000 of these recipients responded and consented to be added to the Register. Elections Canada followed up with the remaining 250,000 youth to encourage them to register to vote by contacting their local returning officer.

During the 38<sup>th</sup> general election, using the experience of the 37<sup>th</sup> general election, Elections Canada planned an advertising campaign “featuring clear, easily understood messages that informed Canadians on how to register and vote, and that encouraged them to participate in the electoral process” (Elections Canada 2004, pg. 11). Elections Canada also endeavored to raise awareness by hosting the 2003 Symposium on Electoral Participation in Canada at Carleton University, the 2003 National Forum on Youth Voting in Calgary, the 2003 Roundtable on Youth Voting at the University of British Columbia and the 2004 Roundtable on Aboriginal Youth and the Federal Electoral Process at Carleton University.

Reports indicate that voter turnout has increased by 50 percent in Bangladesh following the implementation of voter awareness and education programs (The Electoral

Commission of the United Kingdom). The Department of Mass Communication and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) supported the innovative campaigns. The UNDP's long-term electoral assistance project "Strengthening the Bangladesh Election Commission for Improvement in the Electoral Process" aims to assist the Government of Bangladesh to strengthen the democratic process. The focus was on women and included education rallies where participants could discuss voting rights and responsibilities and learn about overcoming obstructions to voting. This project cost \$10 million dollars and resulted in the highest voter turnout ever with 74 percent of the eligible vote in the 2001 general election in Bangladesh (UN 2001). Even more remarkable, is that the number of eligible women who voted doubled from the number in 1991 to over 80 percent of the eligible female vote.

Although efforts have been made in Canada and worldwide to encourage people to vote and to participate politically, an assessment of these efforts might contribute important information to the complex problem of low and declining voter turnout and participation.

## **Information and Media**

Political ignorance and political illiteracy lies deep in Canadian society. The Canadian Democratic Audit found that over 40 percent of Canadians were unable to name the leaders of the federal political parties when they were interviewed just after an election (Gidengil et al. 2004, pg. 67). In terms of party issues, a full 30 percent could not associate one single promise with the party making it (Gidengil et al. 2004, pg. 67).

CBC news anchor Peter Mansbridge had the following to say:

"Let's not fool ourselves. Most people get news from TV, and that's always bothered me. Sometimes their only source is TV. I know what they're getting. They're not getting enough. We [at the CBC] like to think we take it beyond the headlines because we do documentaries, we go for an hour, we do analysis. But if you take [the script of] an hour-long

newscast. . . you couldn't fill the front page of your paper (Mansbridge 2002 as cited in Gidengil et al. 2004, pg. 28).

Peter Mansbridge's point coincides with Henry Milner's belief that civic literacy comes from newspaper reading. It is also Milner's contention that there is a relationship between civic literacy and political participation. He argues that increased civic literacy will lead to greater political participation. He also states that decreased newspaper reading and increased television viewing is responsible for the decline in civic literacy (Milner 2001).

## **2.3 Solving Low Voter Turnout**

When examining solutions to the problem of low and decreasing young voter turnout, we must not only ask *what should* we do, but also *what can* we do to increase voter participation rates of young people. Policy options are limited in addressing the issue; they may not have the reach required to achieve results. Electoral reform will likely not affect young voters who are not sufficiently informed to understand the current system. Therefore, how can such policy changes incite young people to vote?

The issue of young voter turnout is puzzling. The factors that lead to the current state of low and declining turnout cannot all be addressed in the same manner. As a result of Canada's vast territory and diversity, there can be no one-size fits all solution. Efforts that may increase turnout in rural Saskatchewan may not work in downtown Toronto. "The challenge is thus twofold: to develop an interest in politics and elections among the current generation of young voters and, second, to commit to fostering just such an interest among the next generation of voters, to arrest any further decline in voter turnout levels" (O'Neill 2003, pg. 5). The following section reviews some of the proposed solutions discussed in the literature. These include education, behaviour changes, political party responsibilities and voting process reform.

## Education

Education is a widely cited factor that is expected to counteract disengagement (Gidengil et al. 2004; Pammett and LeDuc 2003; Pammett 2001; Blais et al. 2004). “Education affects general knowledge about politics for a number of reasons” (Gidengil et al. 2004, pg. 15).<sup>8</sup> The democratic process is complex and takes time and effort to comprehend. In order to meaningfully participate, people must have some understanding of how democracy works. They must be able to sort through the massive amount of information on issues that are often remote from their daily concerns. They have to sift through this information and then decipher fact from fiction. Education is the tool that helps people, both young and old, to meet these challenges.

Civics education can be effective but as some argue, it depends on the context (Niemi and Junn 1998; Galston 2001). For example, Ken Osborne (1988, pg. 228) posits that what is needed is “a genuinely political education, if the schools are to produce informed, participating citizens”. Students effectively need to learn how to understand, assess and critique political differences. This enhanced ability will foster their appreciation and facilitate their participation in the political process. Both Ontario and Quebec have introduced new citizenship courses in their high schools. The new Ontario Grade 10 civics curriculum segment requires students to ‘participate effectively in a civil action or project of interest to them and of importance to the community’ (Ontario Ministry of Education). Participation includes attending public hearings, planning religious or cultural events or joining special interest groups and writing letters to an editor.

The political attitudes that people have as adults begin to be defined while they are in high school (MORI Institute 2003). If by the time youth reach 18 years old, they

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<sup>8</sup> The level of formal education is an indicator of a person’s general propensity to acquire information. Education enhances cognitive abilities, which makes it easier to acquire and interpret information. (Gidengil et al. 2004)

feel that political parties do not have any ideas that interest them or they have negative attitudes towards politicians, they will be less in tune with what parties and politicians are expressing. As a result, it will be very difficult to change their attitude.

Butler and Stokes proved, forty years ago, that voting intentions are very much inherited from parents (Butler and Stokes 1974). They found that children are very likely to share their parents' party preferences and this observation holds true as evidenced by current surveys showing a correlation between parents' and child's voting intention (MORI Institute 2003). Consider a child who grows up in a home where both parents routinely applaud the Green Party and make a point of letting the child know that they have voted for the Green Party. The child has two revered models who behave in a similar fashion (Jennings and Niemi 1974). Today, the issue of concern is that the intention not to vote is also inherited, further corroding participative democracy.

One of the concerns of political education is the risk of indoctrination. However, as Stradling (1977) puts it: "A political education which sought to inculcate a particular set of political beliefs and opinions would be misguided, but a political education which sought to provide young people with transferable skills, a framework of knowledge and concepts, and procedures for assessing the validity of political information, beliefs and values would contribute greatly to both the development of the individual's potential and the development of the democratic process" (Stradling 1977 as cited in Denver and Hands, pg. 264).

A counter-argument to education is that although it is known that the better-educated are more likely to vote than the less-educated, the overall level of education attainment has increased over time yet voter turnout has not (Blais et al. 2004). In fact, the opposite is being observed; voter turnout is decreasing. One possible explanation is that the impact of education has decreased over time, as the level of education

attainment has increased. This issue can be examined by assessing youth knowledge and awareness of politics and voting against their interest in voting and politics.

## **Behaviour Change**

Young people today have grown up in a media saturated environment. As a result, they have become selective about advertising. Selling electoral participation or political participation requires new and innovative tactics given their unique frame of reference. For youth, it is about reaching their hearts, not their minds. They know and understand the right to vote but they choose not to exercise it. They feel a sense of duty and often want to vote; yet they continue not to vote. Therefore, small incremental steps will not be sufficient to address the problem of low and decreasing young voter turnout; large-scale nationwide behaviour change is needed. The act of voting is seen as a form of participating in democracy but it must be learned. For young Canadians it must become a habit or way of life.

The change in behaviour will not occur because young people understand more about politics, elections and government, but because they will see themselves differently in relation to these. Recycling is a great example of this type of behaviour change. Canadians started recycling in the late 1980s and early 1990s not because they fully supported the objectives and understood the impact of reduced waste. A social dynamic was born through the Blue Box program and the box became the honour badge of the responsible citizen (Haid 2003). Recycling made people feel good about their positive contribution to the environment and people often took to the program so that they were not the only ones in the neighbourhood not recycling. This feeling of inclusion needs to be fostered in order for participatory democracy to take root. A shift in behaviour must occur so that young people feel their vote is a positive contribution to democracy and also feel that electoral participation is the norm.

## Political Reach Out

Political parties and candidates generally cater to the politically savvy and engaged. In between elections, only those with an interest in politics will actively seek information on political parties and issues.<sup>9</sup> It is often only during election campaigns that the politically less informed or disengaged are solicited for political participation. For a minimum of thirty-six days, these marginal political participants are expected to access, absorb, digest and decipher all the necessary information customarily required to vote.

First-time voters need extra attention from political parties and candidates in order to minimize the start-up costs of voting that can often deter young people from voting for the first time. “Interest is a two-way street: the less effort political parties and their candidates make to mobilize voters, the less likely they are to vote (Gidengil et al. 2004, pg. 112).” It was found that during the 2000 election campaign that if people were contacted by any of the parties, their chance of voting increased significantly (Gidengil et al. 2004). Young Canadians were the least likely to be contacted during the 2000 election campaign.<sup>10</sup> Fewer than one in three reported any contact, compared to half the baby boomers and pre-baby boomers (Gidengil et al. 2004, pg. 112). One explanation for this could be that young people are more difficult to reach because they are mobile (Gidengil et al. 2004). This data is crucial to increasing voter turnout and young voter turnout. Young Canadians are among those who are least likely to vote and they are also least likely to be contacted by a political party or candidate. Yet, contact with parties and candidates drives voter turnout.

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<sup>9</sup> As noted earlier and in many studies (Gidengil et al. 2004; Blais et al. 2004; Blais 2000), an interest in politics is highly correlated with voting.

<sup>10</sup> It is important to note that although young Canadians were least likely to be contacted, the 2000 election was the first time that enumeration was not conducted because of the implementation of the National Register of Electors. The National Register of Electors is a permanent list of Canadians who are eligible to vote. This list was established by Elections Canada in an effort to improve the quality of voter lists.

Mark Holland, MP Ajax-Pickering, recently tabled a Private Member's Bill (C-261), *An Act to Amend the Elections Canada Act* to lower the voting age to 16. During the first reading in the House of Commons, Mr. Holland stated, "maybe one of the reasons they are not engaged is because we are not speaking to them. We are not taking to them about the kinds of issues that really have an impact in their lives. If they had the opportunity in a general education environment, when they are 16 and 17, before they go to wherever they have to go and it is hard to get a hold of them, to actually engage in debate and discussion with candidates, we would have a renewed opportunity to say back to politicians, 'You have to listen to us, We are a group now that must be reckoned with'" (Parliament of Canada 2005).

A recent study in the United States points to the importance of getting young people to vote for the first time. After young people pay the "start-up costs of voting," they are more likely to continue to vote (Plutzer 2002). Start-up costs can be hefty for the first-time voter considering the whole electoral process is unfamiliar; information is abundant yet complex and the benefits are not clear or guaranteed. Herein lies the role of political parties. They must make an effort to mobilize citizens to encourage them to vote. Too often during election campaigns, political parties push their respective platforms only targeting those who already have political interest. Young non-voters could reduce their start-up costs and benefit more from concerted political contact, which in turn could help increase the low rate of young voter turnout (Gidengil et al. 2004).

A Harvard guide to reaching young voters lists 7 key points for interactions with young voters (Harvard University, Institute of Politics 2004).

<p><b>1. Keep it simple:</b> Political parties, politicians and candidates just need to keep it simple and the young voters will be theirs. Young people are smart, sharp and inquisitive. They pay attention to what is being said as long as they are not being alienated by the use of insider jargon, acronyms or obscure historical</p>	<p><b>5. Ask young people to participate:</b> Shaming young people will not get them to the polls. Using the argument of civic duty will not convince them to vote. The message needs to be catered for young people. They need to know what participation means and how it affects change. They need to know how</p>
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references. Plain and simple language will get the message across and youth will appreciate it.	important their contribution is to campaigns.
<b>2. Keep it positive:</b> Young voters also dislike candidates who make personal attacks, candidates will fair better if they make clear that they are willing to compromise across ideological and party lines to get things done.	<b>6. Respect personal values:</b> This does not specifically refer to young people's values but the values of the candidates themselves. Young people need and want someone to respect and admire. They want honest leaders who stand up for their personal beliefs.
<b>3. Keep it relevant:</b> Young people are more likely to be engaged in political discussion if the issues discussed are relevant to them. Talking about issues related to senior citizens will turn them off, while addressing the rising cost of post-secondary tuition will peak their interest.	<b>7. Keep it real:</b> Young people are intuitive and can sense when someone is trying to sell them something. They do not need or want a detailed resume but they are most likely interested in life experiences. It is also really important to show that as a candidate and a human that not all the answers are known; it is only human to have weaknesses.
<b>4. Leave the script at home:</b> Young people have a lot to say. They want to interact with candidates and politicians not just hear a speech.	

## Reforming the Voting Process

Voting could be made easier and more accessible. According to the MORI data, young non-voters were likely to favour voting process reforms that would increase access to voting, such as Internet voting (The Electoral Commission of the United Kingdom 2002). However, process reform is not an issue that has been addressed adequately by the existing literature. It is possible that further research into this area could reveal a possible solution to low and decreasing young voter turnout.

### 2.4 Conclusion

After surveying the extensive body of literature on political participation and young voter turnout, the need to further investigate youth attitudes becomes more obvious. Specifically, 16 and 17 year old grade 11 students are an interesting target group because even researchers on the subject of voter turnout have stated that a change in the trend of low and decreasing voter turnout will only come about when a change occurs among the new cohort of voters. Therefore, in order to incite the change youth must be consulted to determine how they view politics. Because of its diverse background (as shown later in the description of the sample) and because of the specific

interest of the client of this 598, the city of Port Coquitlam, British Columbia was selected. The electoral district includes the entire city of Port Coquitlam, a section of the City of Coquitlam, a section of the City of Port Moody and the Villages of Anmore and Belcarra. Only the city of Port Coquitlam was used in the study because the whole city could be incorporated which allowed for better representation.

This study of high school students, in the last few years before they become old enough to vote, discovers how they view politics and elections and is therefore exploring a subject of significant importance and one which is rarely researched. The study comes at a time prior to the introduction of a new elective civics studies curriculum in to the British Columbian education system. The findings will act as a benchmark from which future progress can be judged and is also an indication of the challenges that will be faced.

## Chapter 3: Results and Analysis

To investigate the issue of young voter turnout, this paper set out to address three questions. The following sections will attempt to answer those related questions.

### 3.1 Sample and Region Description

The study used a cross-sectional design of three high schools in the Vancouver region. The federal electoral district of Port Moody-Westwood-Port Coquitlam was chosen as the region of study (See Appendix II for a riding map). Specifically, the City of Port Coquitlam was selected as the focus of the study. Collecting data from the Port Coquitlam high schools was identified as being a better benchmark for future comparison and study than collecting data from the entire riding because only a part of the other cities in the riding fall within the riding whereas the entire city of Port Coquitlam falls within the constituency.

**Table 1:** Comparison of socio-demographic data

Characteristics	Port Coquitlam	British Columbia	Canada
Total population 2001 Census data	51,260	3,907,740	30,007,095
Unemployment rate	6.4%	8.5%	7.4%
Visible minority population	11,335 (22%)	836,410 (21%)	3,983,845 (13%)
Employment: trades, transport and equipment and related occupations	5,100 (18%)	288,940 (14%)	2,294,620 (14%)
Average family income	\$69,005	\$64,821	\$66,160
Education: Trades certificate or diploma	5,585 (14.6%)	373,245 (11.8%)	2,598,925 (10.9%)
Education: College certificate or diploma	8,035 (21%)	484,930 (15%)	3,578,400 (15%)
Education: University certificate, diploma or degree	5,880 (15.4%)	606,455 (19.2%)	4,289,070 (17.9%)

The population of Port Coquitlam, as of the 2001 Census, was 51,260, roughly half of the population of the constituency (109,394).<sup>11</sup> Data from the 38<sup>th</sup> General

<sup>11</sup> All population, employment and income statistics are from the 2001 Canadian Census conducted by Statistics Canada.

Election indicates that Port Coquitlam forms the largest municipal group of voters within the constituency, totaling just under half (47%) of the registered electors.

Port Coquitlam has two public high schools. The study included three high schools: two public and one private. The private school was added to increase the representation of the sample. Students from these high schools live in an average British Columbian city. Approximately 22% of Port Coquitlam residents are members of visible minorities in a province where 21% of residents are members of visible minorities, while in Canada this figure is 13%. At the time of the 2001 Census, Port Coquitlam had a lower unemployment rate (6.4%) than the province (8.5%) and the country (7.4%). Comparatively though, a higher percentage of Port Coquitlam residents are employed in trades, transport and equipment operations and related occupations (18%) than British Columbia (14%) and Canada (14%). But the other employed residents occupy positions in a similar breakdown as in the province and the country. The average family income in Port Coquitlam was slightly higher (\$69,005) than in British Columbia (\$64,821) and in Canada (\$66,160).

The main sources of data for this study include a survey of approximately 500 high school students, eight focus groups (n=200) and observations from classroom discussion sessions with James Moore MP, Port Moody-Westwood-Port Coquitlam (n=350) or Paul Forseth MP, New Westminster-Coquitlam (n=100).

### **3.2 Overview of Results**

The survey instrument (See Appendix III for survey) collected various types of data from approximately 500 students in three high schools in Port Coquitlam. The survey collected demographic, knowledge and attitudinal data from the respondents. The knowledge questions and attitudinal statements were selected from or based on published studies using similar research approaches. The knowledge and awareness

questions were based on survey questions in recent studies such as the Canadian Election Survey conducted in concert with federal general elections. Attitudinal statements were largely based on the study conducted by the MORI Institute entitled “Young People’s Attitudes towards Politics” and the United Kingdom’s Electoral Commission’s study entitled “Political engagement among young people: an update”.

The age of survey respondents ranged from 15 to 19 years of age, with the average being 16 years of age. The majority of students at the time of the survey were 16 years old (74 percent) and in grade 11 (95 percent). Male students slightly outnumbered female students in the sample, with 56 percent and 44 percent respectively. The following table shows the sample distribution.

**Table 2:** Survey sample distribution

	<b>Public school</b>	<b>Private school</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Male</b>	237 / 58.5%	39 / 44.8%	276 / 56.1%
<b>Female</b>	168 / 41.5%	48 / 55.2%	216 / 43.9%
<b>Total</b>	405	87	492

The survey was administered in two ways. One group of students (n=288) completed the survey after having learned the government section of the Socials Studies 11 curriculum. The government portion of the curriculum covered various topics such as the parliamentary system, the political parties and key government and political players. The other group (n=208) completed the survey prior to learning the government section. Students were asked several demographic questions, eighteen knowledge questions and asked to evaluate sixteen attitude statements.

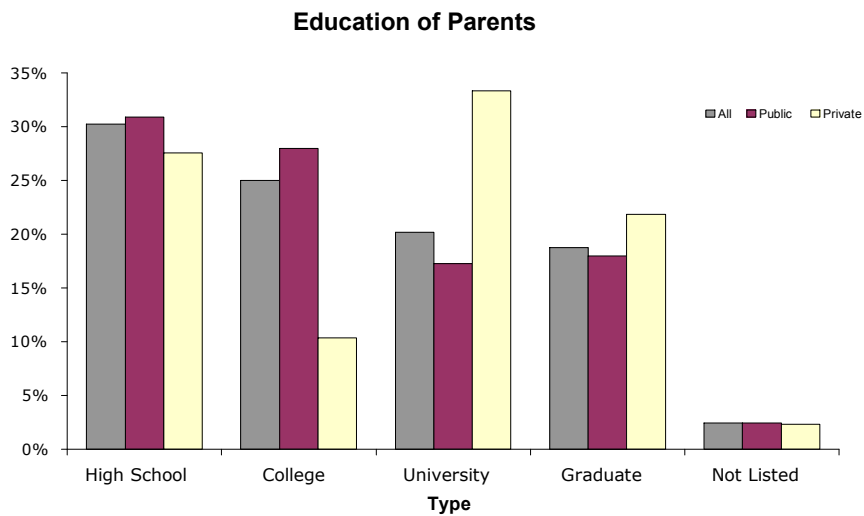
Approximately 80 percent of students were born in Canada while almost 32 percent of respondents noted that neither one of their parents was born in Canada. Over 94 percent of survey respondents indicated that their parents completed high school.

In general, the majority of parents had completed at least some form of post secondary education. The level of education of the parents of private school students is

higher than that of the public school students. When comparing private school parents to public school parents, public school parents were more likely to have completed college whereas private school parents were more likely to have an undergraduate or graduate degree.

The following figure outlines the highest level of parental education as reported by the students.

**FIGURE 1: PARENTS' HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION**



It is difficult to judge whether the political awareness of this group of students is better or worse than that of adult respondents in other surveys. Comparing 16 year-olds to adults illustrates the difference in knowledge levels but may also create an expectation that students should be as knowledgeable as adults. It is more appropriate to compare knowledge levels of younger cohorts to those of the sample; however, data on younger cohorts is not abundant. The reality of an average high school student is different than that of an average adult. For many students, politics and current events receive little or no attention. However, the survey results can be seen as a benchmark upon which future changes can be assessed.

### 3.3 Students' Awareness and Attitudes

The first question posed in this research is "*What are the political attitudes and level of awareness of high school students?*" Based on the survey findings, the following section will respond to this question.

In total, the survey asked eighteen political knowledge questions. The average number of correct responses was 9.6. Of the sample of 496 students, only 57 percent would have received a passing grade of 9 out of 18 correct, if the knowledge portion of the survey had been an actual exam with 50 percent as a passing grade. The students were asked some of the same questions that were asked in the Canadian Election Survey.

The survey asked students to name the current Prime Minister, the last Prime Minister and the Premier of British Columbia (see Appendix V for full survey results). These were all questions asked in the Canadian Election Survey. Most students could name Paul Martin as the current Prime Minister (80%) and Jean Chrétien as the former Prime Minister (79%). Fewer students were able to name Gordon Campbell as Premier of British Columbia (62%). Students were also asked to identify the leaders of the four major political parties. In the whole sample of high school survey respondents, approximately 49 percent of students could correctly identify all four leaders. Students were least able to identify their local Member of Parliament (15%), their local Member of the Legislative Assembly (16%) and the Federal Finance and Foreign Affairs Ministers (less than 1%).

How does high schools students' level of awareness fare against that of average Canadian adults and other young cohorts? Where only 49 percent of survey respondents could correctly identify the names of the four major party leaders, in the 2000 Canadian Election Survey 56 percent of respondents could do the same. Blais et al. (2002) reported that among those born since 1970, only 39 percent could name all

four party leaders. And among those born after 1960 or before 1945, 60 percent of respondents could name all four party leaders. The literature suggests that knowledge levels of young people are low (Blais et al. 2001). However evidence from the present study provides mixed results because students surveyed appear to be knowledge deficient in some areas yet comparatively knowledgeable in others.

The findings of the survey revealed that 80 percent of students could identify Paul Martin as the current prime minister. In a survey conducted in conjunction with the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing (the Lortie Commission 1990), nearly 95 percent of respondents were able to correctly identify the Prime Minister of Canada. An Institute for Research on Public Policy survey conducted in early 2000 found that 10 percent of respondents could not name the current Prime Minister, suggesting that awareness levels may be declining. The present study results are consistent with the findings of Blais et al. (2002) that 19 percent of respondents in the youngest cohort could not name the prime minister.

Apart from the prime minister, the finance minister holds a very prominent place in the federal cabinet. In the study sample, a dismal fewer than 1 percent of students were able to identify Ralph Goodale as federal Minister of Finance, the person responsible for leading the country's fiscal and monetary policy. However, it should be noted that the ability of a person to name the finance minister likely depends on the length of tenure. For example, when interviewed after the 1997 federal election, fewer than 40 percent of Canadians could name the federal finance minister while in the 2000 Canadian Election Study, more than three quarters (77 percent) of older respondents could name Paul Martin as finance minister and 40 percent of the youngest age group could identify the federal finance minister.

The students sampled were relatively on par in regards to awareness of the prime minister and were slightly more knowledgeable about the party leaders compared

to the young people surveyed in the 2000 Canadian Election Study. On the subject of provincial awareness, the level of knowledge of the students surveyed was 6 points lower than the youngest age group surveyed in the 2000 Canadian Election Study. Most shocking of all was the difference of 39 points when it came to awareness of the federal finance minister.

Given the limited exposure to politics, students proved themselves to be somewhat as knowledgeable as respondents in the Canadian Election Survey. Perhaps then, the issue requires a change in educational, motivational and policy strategies aimed at increasing young voter turnout. Paul Howe points out that there are two dynamics working together to drive turnout down in the younger cohorts. He posits that lower levels of knowledge are exacerbated by the increasing impact of knowledge on participation. As a result, political knowledge becomes a critical factor, and as he states “perhaps **the** critical factor – underlying cohort differences in voter turnout (emphasis added)” (Howe 2003, pg. 3). However, Howe is also clear that there is perhaps a deeper problem, that the lack of knowledge is but a symptom of a larger issue, that young Canadians are disengaged from politics. With this view in mind, the problem is then most likely motivational.

In order to evaluate the means of various groups, *t*-tests were conducted to assess whether the means of two groups are statistically different from each other. For more information on *t*-tests, see Appendix IV. If it is determined that the difference is statistically significant, then it is unlikely that the difference observed is due to a coincidence. It can be concluded that the two groups have different means. A result that is not statistically significant indicates that there is no reason to conclude that the overall means differ.

In general, male students scored slightly higher on the 18 knowledge questions than female students. This finding is consistent with previous studies that indicate that

men, on average, are more politically knowledgeable than women (Gidengil et al., 2004). Male students scored an average of 55 percent whereas female students scored an average of 52 percent. Since the observed difference is statistically significant, the difference in percentage points can be attributed to the gender of the respondents.

**Table 3:** Score by gender

<b>Gender*</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Male	276	9.9	3.474
Female	216	9.3	2.986

Women’s level of political knowledge has historically been low regardless of education. “Women typically know less than men. . . [and] although education enhances knowledge about politics, it does not close these knowledge gaps” (Gidengil et al. 2004, pg. 69). In fact the gap in political knowledge cannot even be explained by differences in political interest or in attention to the news. Men with little or no interest in politics managed to answer just as many questions as women with a middling amount of interest (Gidengil et al. 2004).

When the data from the public and private schools are isolated, the results are extremely interesting. In general, private school students scored significantly higher than public school students. In the public school sample, 45 percent of respondents were able to correctly identify the four major party leaders. In comparison, 67 percent of the private school students identified the leaders correctly. The private school results are exceptional in comparison with adult survey responses following the 2000 federal election in the Canadian Election Survey where only 56 percent of respondents correctly identified the leaders.

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\* Statistically significant difference

**Table 4:** Score by type of school

Type*	n	Score	Standard Deviation
Private	87	10.5	2.860
Public	409	9.4	3.383

## Sources of Information

The students were then asked several government and politics knowledge questions similar to those posed to age groups 18 years and older in various other studies. First, in order to gain an understanding of where the students get information on current events and politics, they were asked to select from a list all the sources that they consult. From a list of seven sources, including television news, newspapers, radio, family members, Internet, teachers and magazines, the average number of sources consulted was 3.5. The most widely consulted source of information on current events and politics was television news. Sources were consulted with the following frequencies:

- Television news (84.9%)
- Newspapers (61.5%)
- Teachers (58.7%)
- Family members (51.4%)
- Radio (46.2%)
- Internet (33.9%)
- Magazines (11.9%)

In both this study and a recent British study, a large percentage of young people obtained information from television. In 2003, the MORI Institute in Great Britain conducted a survey of 914 young people aged 11 – 18; television news was the most cited source of information (83%). However, that was the only similarity in responses. Only 33 percent of the high school students in this survey responded that they used the Internet to access information on current affairs and politics, whereas 48 percent of the respondents in the British study used the Internet for that purpose.

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\* Statistically significant difference

On average, students who accessed any of the seven source of information scored higher than students who did not use that source. The most notable differences were observed for watching television news and reading newspapers. Students who consulted television news scored much higher than those who did not and students who read the newspaper also scored higher than students who did not.

**Table 5:** Sources of information

Source	N		Score		Standard Deviation	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Television*	421	69	9.9	8.0	3.192	3.229
Newspaper*	305	185	10.0	9.0	3.104	3.439
Radio	229	261	9.8	9.4	3.232	3.284
Family	255	235	9.9	9.4	3.209	3.310
Internet	168	322	9.7	9.6	3.422	3.180
Teachers	291	199	9.6	9.7	3.270	3.260
Magazines	59	431	9.9	9.6	3.110	3.286

As the number of information sources a student consulted increased, so did the average number of correct responses. Students who only consulted one or two sources, scored the lowest, on average. Students who consulted more than two sources of information were more interested in politics and in discussing politics than students who accessed fewer than two sources. These students also felt that there were political parties who had ideas and policies that they liked. They were also more likely to know the difference between political parties and candidates. And finally, students who accessed two or more sources of information felt more strongly that they knew where to find information, that they should learn about government and politics in school and that they were interested in knowing more about government and politics.

The present study found that students who did watch television to access information on politics and current affairs averaged nearly two points more than students who did not, a difference that is statistically significant. Some research indicates that

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\* Statistically significant difference

reading newspapers, not television, is what increases knowledge and awareness, however, the students who said they read newspapers to get information on politics and current affairs averaged less than one point more than those who did not. The difference in knowledge of students who read newspapers and those who do not is also statistically significant. It appears that for this particular group of young people, television has a greater informative impact than newspapers, contrary to what Milner (2002) posits. Howe suggests that in order to raise young people's general political knowledge, a strategy should be to shift their viewing patterns as to pay greater attention to politics on television (Howe 2001). However, to reiterate a statement made by Peter Mansbridge, "if you take [the script of] an hour-long newscast. . . you couldn't fill the front page of your paper" (Mansbridge 2002 as cited in Gidengil et al. 2004, pg. 28). An alternative approach would be incorporate political programming into education, in either social studies or civic studies classes.

The 2000 Canadian Election Study reports the level of political knowledge in different age groups is a function of people's attention to the federal election campaign on television (as cited in Howe 2001, pg. 5). On a scale of 0 to 100, for people under the age of thirty, there was a dramatic 33-point difference in political knowledge between those with lower television viewing than those with higher television viewing. Although newspaper readings were noted to have a large impact on political knowledge across all groups, the most notable impact was on respondents aged between 18 and 39 years. However, some political scientists argue that increased television watching is associated with low levels of political knowledge (Milner 2002).

Based on the survey findings, most young people appear to get political information from the media, specifically from television. Young people are more likely to take to new media for political information such as the Internet but are more likely than the rest of the electorate to eschew the traditional forms of information such as

newspapers and radio. Newspapers tend to provide more information than television news programs and since they are in print form, this allows the reader to spend more time analyzing an issue before moving on to the next. With television news, the audience has as long as the segment to consider the issue before being exposed to the next.

## Parents' Education

The single most important characteristic distinguishing between the knowledgeable and the less knowledgeable is education (Gidengil et al. 2004). With the survey sample, all respondents had the same level of education and as such, the analysis cannot be based on that factor. However, students were asked to indicate the highest level of education of their parents. From this data, it is possible to examine whether students with parents with a high school education were more or less knowledgeable than students with parents with a graduate school education. In general, students whose parents have an undergraduate university education had the highest average of correct responses to the knowledge portion of the survey.

**Table 6:** Knowledge by parents' education

Parents' Education	N	Score	Standard Deviation
High school	150	9.8	3.129
College	124	9.3	3.074
University (undergraduate)	100	10.6	2.999
University (graduate)	93	9.0	3.715

Although we would expect children of more educated parents to score better, the relationship between students scores and their parents education is not monotonic, and it also does not support this expectation. Children of parents with undergraduate degree scored best, followed by children of parents with high school. Children of parents with a graduate degree had the worst scores. Among female students, the average score was fairly constant across parental education levels although the female children of

undergraduate degree holders scored slightly higher (9.9) than those of high school diploma holders (9.5). Among male students, the differences across parental educational levels were more noticeable. Male children of undergraduate degree holders averaged 11.3 correct responses whereas those of high school diplomas averaged 10.1 and those of college graduates averaged 9.4.

A question one might ask is why students of college graduates score lower than those of high school graduates but not anywhere near as high as the students of university graduates. Even more puzzling is the observation that students of Masters or PhD level graduates were the least able to respond to the knowledge questions. It is important to note a significantly higher standard deviation for the knowledge score of these students. Since the average of correct responses is constant for female students regardless of parents' education and that of male students, in general, rises with parents' education, perhaps then, parental education is not the only factor at play. It may be that although the literature suggests that education is correlated with higher levels of knowledge, that knowledge may not be shared with the children in this study.

## **Place of Birth**

Do students who are born in Canada have different attitudes and knowledge than students who are born abroad? Students born in Canada answered, on average a greater number of correct knowledge questions than foreign-born students. The difference was most noticeable between Canadian born males and foreign-born males. Canadian born male students scored on average 2.5 points higher than foreign-born males. The general observation in regards to birthplace is that Canadian born students score slightly higher, on average 1.5 points higher, than foreign-born students, a statistically significant difference.

**Table 7:** Knowledge by students' place of birth

<b>Place of Birth*</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Canada	397	10.0	3.110
Not Canada	88	8.4	3.685

Gidengil et al. (2004), using the Canadian Democratic Audit's sample, found that being a citizen by birth or by other means makes little difference as to how knowledgeable they are about Canadian politics (Gidengil et al., 2004, pg. 55).

However, the findings from this survey reveal differences in political knowledge by birthplace. It is possible that age and time since immigration reduce the knowledge gap. The students are only 16 years old and the Canadian Democratic Audit's sample included adults. Further, the Audit indicated that people who immigrated less than 10 years ago were less knowledgeable than non-immigrants, but that the knowledge gap between less recent immigrants and non-immigrants was smaller. If this is true, it is encouraging to know that as the immigrant students get older, their political knowledge gap will decrease.

The survey found that students were not likely to use the Internet to access information on politics and current affairs. Among those who did use the Internet for that purpose, Canadian born students scored nearly two points higher than those who did not use the Internet and foreign-born students regardless of Internet use,.

## **Public versus Private School**

One week prior to administering a large batch of surveys to the public schools, the teachers presented the government section of the curriculum during which some of the survey questions were addressed in class. Another batch of surveys was administered to private school students who had learned about government several months prior to completing the survey. A comparison of the results reveals differences

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\* Statistically significant difference

in the levels of awareness and interest and highlights the impact of education. Out of a total of 18 knowledge questions, the average number of correct responses is summarized in Table 8.

**Table 8:** Knowledge with education by school type

Type*	n	Score	Standard Deviation
Private	87	10.5	2.860
Public	201	9.5	3.665

It appears that for students in public school, even after learning the government curriculum, they have less political knowledge than their private school counterparts.

Table 9 illustrates the relatively small impact that learning the government section has on the knowledge levels of students surveyed. Further, the observed difference is not statistically significant.

**Table 9:** Knowledge by education

Learned government section?	n	Score	Standard Deviation
Yes	288	9.8	3.465
No	208	9.3	3.093

Although, there may be little difference between students' pre-education and post-education levels of knowledge, as illustrated in Table 8, there is a difference between post-education levels of public and private school students. Based on the survey data available, there are several possible factors that contribute to students' knowledge difference. A greater percentage of private school parents (33 percent) held a bachelor's degree than public school parents (17 percent). Private school students consulted, on average, slightly more sources of information (3.9) than public school students (3.4). Students themselves said that they would not vote if they did not feel knowledgeable enough and most said that they currently do not feel they know enough. Their comments are echoed by the survey results and should be addressed.

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\* Statistically significant difference

A comparison of the impact of education for public school students was facilitated because the surveys were administered to groups before and after learning the government section of the curriculum. Table 10 shows the average score for these two groups. In all but a few questions, there was virtually no difference in the percentage of correct responses between students who had completed the government section and students who had not completed the government section. While the value of the government curriculum in the public schools appears limited, no evidence on the quality of that curriculum is available for private school students, as all private school students in the survey had already completed the government section curriculum.

**Table 10:** Public school knowledge by education

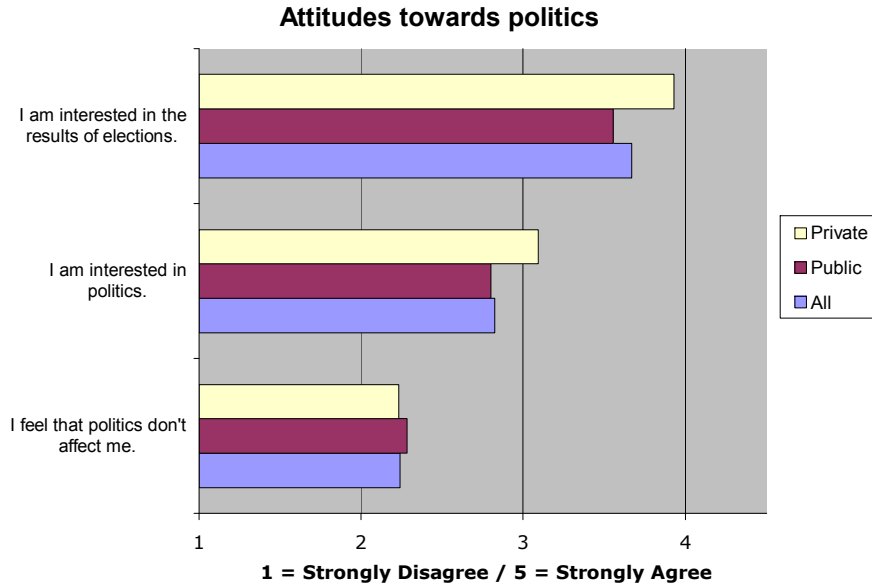
Type	Females	Males	Total
Public school without teaching	9.1	9.6	9.308
Public school with teaching	9.3	9.7	9.493

The post education correct response rate grew dramatically in regards to identifying the local Member of Parliament was (6% to 25%) and the local Member of the Legislative Assembly (8.6% to 22%), and knowing the eligible voting age (64% to 78%). Since the level of general awareness does not change on major knowledge areas, the students appear to be developing government knowledge and awareness from sources other than the social studies 11 curriculum.

## Attitudes

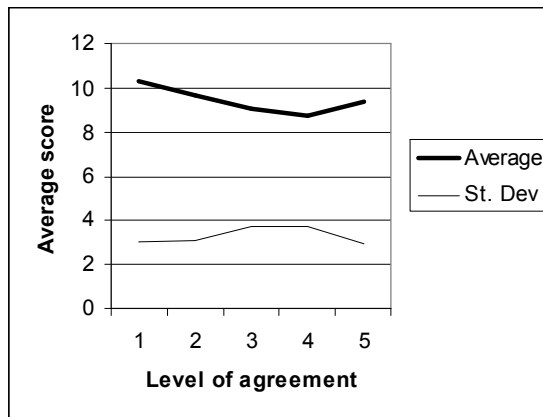
To further explore students' political knowledge and attitudes, several key attitudinal statements were examined against knowledge levels. These statements graphically illustrated in Figure 2.

**FIGURE 2: ATTITUDES TOWARDS POLITICS**



Some of the positive findings include students' general belief that politics affects them and that their vote would make a difference. These results are countered by the strong belief that feeling their lack of knowledge would prevent them from voting.

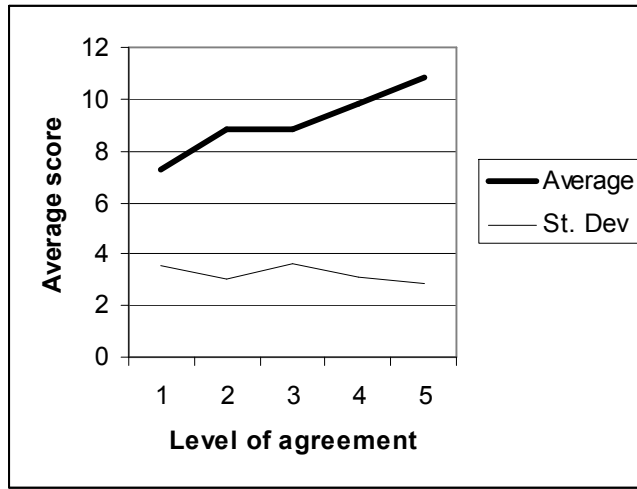
**Table 11:** I feel that politics don't affect me.



I feel that politics don't affect me.	N	Score	Standard Deviation
Strongly disagree	130	10.3	3.008
Disagree	201	9.7	3.083
Neither agree nor disagree	92	9.1	3.712
Agree	48	8.7	3.706
Strongly agree	20	9.4	2.925

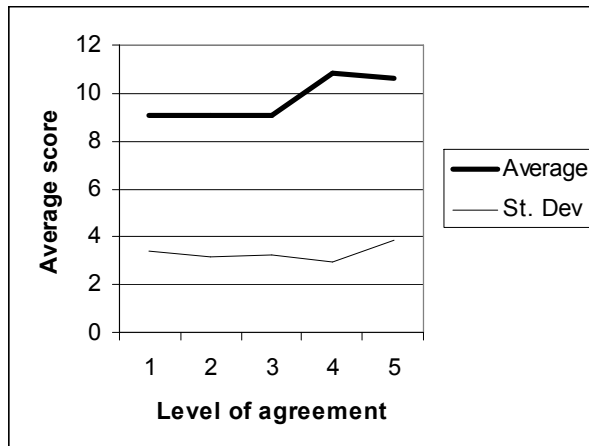
Table 11 shows that students who felt that politics don't affect them scored lower than students who disagreed with the statement. Perhaps an understanding of the personal impact of politics partly motivates students to seek information on the subject. Tables 12 and 13 support the notion that an interest is correlated to knowledge and awareness because as interest increases, so does the average number of correct answers.

**Table 12:** I am interested in the results of elections.



I am interested in the results of elections.	N	Score	Standard Deviation
Strongly Disagree	20	7.5	3.552
Disagree	50	8.8	2.988
Neither agree nor disagree	108	8.9	3.637
Agree	210	9.8	3.131
Strongly Agree	104	10.8	2.846

**Table 13:** I am interested in politics.



<b>I am interested in politics.</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Strongly disagree	63	9.1	3.432
Disagree	142	9.0	3.179
Neither agree nor disagree	133	9.1	3.265
Agree	129	10.8	2.922
Strongly Agree	26	10.6	3.859

Male students were, on average, more interested in politics than female students.

This gender gap is not a new phenomenon. Numerous studies have reported this finding (Nadeau, Niemi and Levine 1993; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996) as well as the fact that a political knowledge gap also mirrors a gap in political interest. Male students were also more likely to identify with political parties' policies and ideas and to see the difference between political parties and candidates. Verba et al., suggest that both the gap in political knowledge and interest are both "a reflection of the fact that politics has been traditionally, and continues to be, dominated by men" (Verba et al. 1997, pg. 1053).

Students indicating an interest in politics scored a higher average of correct knowledge responses. However, this observation holds largely for male students who also scored higher than female students. Interest does not seem to be linked to awareness for female students. Female students who indicated a disinterest in politics scored just as high as female students who strongly agreed or agreed with the statement "I am interested in politics". Female students on average consulted more sources of political information than the male students, yet did not have the same level of interest. Further, despite consulting more sources of political information, the female students' average knowledge score was lower than that of the male students. Male students demonstrated a different trend, showing that the average of correct responses increases with interest in politics. Male students who indicated a disinterest or ambivalence

scored, on average, as least two points lower than the male students who stated an interest in politics\*.

An examination of the attitudes of the students also showed an intriguing tendency. Private school students were, on average, more interested in discussing politics, more interested in politics itself and more interested in the results of elections. As noted above, private school students scored on average higher than public school students even when both groups learned about government.

The literature notes that higher education is strongly correlated with voting. Survey data would appear to indicate that students whose parents have a university degree were also the most likely to be interested in politics and in discussing politics. Further, they were most likely to feel that voting is a duty and that it will be their duty to vote when they are old enough. These findings may indicate some political socialization.

Students were asked how they felt towards the statement “Discussing politics is not fun”. Students disagreeing with that statement scored the highest average of correct responses. Again, male students scored higher than female students. Female and male students with the most awareness were also more likely to feel that discussing politics is fun. The general theory has been that the higher the level of interest and knowledge the greater the propensity to vote. The correlation of interest and knowledge appears to be only valid for male students. For female students, something other than interest and awareness must factor in.

From data collected during the focus groups, the desire to acquire the knowledge is present in the public school students, however, that desire is not being adequately met. During several of the discussion sessions, to assist the students in identifying questions for the MPs, it was suggested that they think about some of the political topics that may be discussed around the dinner table. Comments from some of the students

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\* Statistically significant difference

appear to indicate that family dinnertime is a thing of the past and/or family discussions are antiquated. Perhaps, it is not solely the education system that is to blame but the lack of political socialization at home.

Unfortunately, research on political socialization in Canada is limited and thus there is little evidence to fully support or oppose any recommendation to increase political socialization in schools or at home. However, during the course of the discussions with the Members of Parliament, several students prefaced their questions with “My parents talk about. . .” or “I have heard my dad complain about. . .”. This indicates that at least some of the students who posed questions are politically socialized at home. Many other options have been exercised to address youth disengagement and low voter turnout to no avail. Campaigns aimed at increasing political socialization are worth pursuing.

Finally, the students were asked why they would or would not vote in a federal election. The most widely cited reason was a feeling of not having sufficient knowledge. This is confirmed by survey findings: in response to the statement, “I would not vote if I did not know enough about the parties and candidates” students were likely to agree (4.0). Reasons for voting included a sense of duty and a desire to have a say in how the country is run.

### **3.4 Students’ estimated propensity to vote**

The second question posed in this research is “*How are political engagement dimensions linked to students’ propensity to vote?*”. Students were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with sixteen statements. These responses ranged from 1= Strongly Disagree to 5= Strongly Agree. Three of the sixteen statements can be used to estimate students’ inclination to vote. These include: “*It is every citizen’s duty to vote in federal elections,*” “*I feel it will be my duty to vote when I*

*am old enough,*” and *“Voting should be mandatory”*. The scores on these three questions were added to form a propensity score ranging from 3 to 15. Higher scores reflect a higher voting inclination.

Most students felt strongly that they wanted to have a say in how the country is run; the average score on that question was 4.0. Many students felt that it will be their duty to vote when they are old enough and that it is every citizen’s duty to vote (average scores of 3.6 and 3.5 respectively).

In general, students felt a strong sense of duty towards voting and overwhelmingly felt a desire to influence the way the country is run. There were noticeable, statistically significant, differences between male and female students.

**Table 14:** Propensity to vote by gender

<b>Gender*</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Propensity</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Females	216	10.1	2.539
Males	276	9.3	3.067

Although male students were found to demonstrate higher levels of knowledge than female students, female students appear to be more inclined to vote. Female students, in general, felt a slightly greater sense of duty towards voting than male students. This finding is confirmed by previous studies. When considered in combination with the finding that women’s knowledge levels are not affected by interest, efforts to increase political participation among women may have to reflect their greater sense of duty rather than knowledge levels or interest.

The difference between the knowledge levels and propensity to vote of males and females is a bit of a paradox. Although male students have greater political knowledge stores, they indicate less of an inclination to vote. It should be noted that the statements used to estimate propensity to vote somewhat reflect a student’s sense of

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\* Statistically significant difference

duty and previous studies as well as this one, indicate that women often demonstrate greater sense of duty than men (Gidengil et al. 2004).

As shown in Table 5, when examining the relationship between awareness and information sources, it was found that the average number of correct responses was higher when students consulted sources of information. The difference however was only significant for television and newspapers. Table 15 illustrates that the students' propensity to vote was also found to be higher when students consulted information sources. Interestingly, differences in propensity to vote for each information source listed were all statistically significant meaning that there is indeed a difference in propensity to vote between those who use any of the information sources and those who do not.

**Table 15:** Propensity to vote by source of information

Source	n		Propensity		Standard Deviation	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Television*	421	69	9.8	9.1	2.879	2.459
Newspaper*	305	185	9.9	9.5	2.811	9.840
Radio*	229	261	10.0	9.4	2.852	2.791
Family*	255	235	10.1	9.3	2.747	9.234
Internet*	168	322	10	9.5	2.930	2.766
Teachers*	291	199	10.0	9.2	2.718	2.936
Magazines*	59	431	10.6	9.6	2.495	2.867

As shown in Table 16, private school students were found to be more knowledgeable than public school students and they were also more likely to indicate an interest in voting.

**Table 16:** Propensity to vote by school type

Type	n	Propensity	Standard Deviation
Private	87	10.9	2.290
Public	409	9.4	2.910

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\* Statistically significant difference

Table 17 shows that students' whose parents had higher levels of education were generally more inclined to vote. As discussed earlier, students' with parents with higher levels of education also demonstrated higher knowledge levels. However, those with parents who had obtained a graduate degree scored lower than those with parents who had obtained an undergraduate degree. Similarly, as discussed in section 3.3, students whose parents obtained a graduate degree scored lower on the knowledge questions than the students whose parents have undergraduate degrees.

**Table 17:** Propensity to vote by parents' education

<b>Parents' Education</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Propensity</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
High school	150	9.4	3.081
College	124	9.5	2.838
University (undergraduate)	100	10.4	2.385
University (graduate)	93	9.7	2.896

Table 18 shows that there was a noticeable difference in propensity to vote between Canadian born students and immigrant students. The difference is also statistically significant.

**Table 18:** Propensity to vote by place of birth

<b>Place of Birth*</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Propensity</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Canada	397	9.6	2.782
Not Canada	88	10.1	3.005

Although both Canadian born and immigrant students disagreed with the idea that their vote would not make a difference, the immigrant students indicated more disagreement (on a 1 to 5 scale). Most notably, students who were not born in Canada were more likely to feel that voting is a duty and that it will be their duty to vote when they are eligible. As discussed in section 3.3, students not born in Canada scored lower on the knowledge questions than Canadian born students, however, Foreign-born students demonstrated a higher propensity to vote, a difference that is statistically significant.

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\* Statistically significant difference

This finding also illustrates another paradox, similar to the male-female paradox discussed earlier: foreign-born students have lower political knowledge scores yet indicate a greater propensity to vote. This finding is consistent with previous research that indicates that immigrants often have a greater sense of duty and therefore, a greater propensity to vote.

The observation that immigrant students are less knowledgeable than Canadian born students holds regardless of interest in politics. When interest is examined, for students who indicate an interest in politics and were born in Canada, the observation is even stronger. Canadian born male students who strongly agreed with the statement “*I am interested in politics.*” scored an average of 4 points higher than those students born outside of Canada with the same level of interest. In the Canadian Democratic Audit, the researchers found that immigrants tended to have a somewhat higher than average level of interest in the 2000 election and in politics in general (Gidengil et al., 2004, pg. 25).

It would be logical to assume that once students learned about how government works that they might be more inclined to want to participate. However, as shown in Table 19, there was no statistically significant difference in attitudes towards voting in the groups that had learned about government and the groups that had not.

**Table 19:** Propensity to vote by education

<b>Learned government section?</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Propensity</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Yes	288	9.6	2.915
No	208	9.6	2.812

The findings of the present study provide encouraging statistics that counter recent research covered in the literature review. As noted in the literature survey, the common finding is that young people do not feel a strong moral obligation to vote. The literature survey cites evidence indicating that, in general, less than a quarter of young

people vote out of sense of duty. In response to the statement “It is every citizen’s duty to vote” nearly 58 percent of students in this survey agreed. More than 60 percent of students felt that it will be their duty to vote when they are old enough and an impressive 75 percent of students expressed a desire to have a say in how the country is run. These survey results surely dispel any belief that young people, in general, do not feel a moral obligation to vote. The question must be asked: What is different among these students and the young cohorts surveyed in the literature? There are perhaps sociological influences that counteract decreased levels of civic literacy. However, whether these students will in fact vote remains to be seen.

Consistent with most Canadians’ beliefs, many students did not support the idea of mandatory voting. In a recent study, the researchers found that the majority of respondents were clearly opposed to mandatory voting and those in the youngest age groups were the most opposed to compulsory voting (Pammett and LeDuc 2003). In the present study, although just over 50 percent of respondents confirmed Pammett and LeDuc’s 2003 findings, it should be noted that 20 percent of students agreed that voting should be mandatory.

One key part of the survey was an open-ended question that asked students to discuss why they would or wouldn’t vote in the next federal election. Of the 496 students surveyed, just over 70 percent responded to the question. Close to 10 percent of respondents provided reasons for not voting that could be categorized under cynicism, i.e. voting does not make a difference, and politicians lie. Another 10 percent made statements that indicate a lack of interest in voting and in politics. Approximately 54 percent of respondents indicated a willingness to vote based on either a sense of duty, a desire to have their voice heard or a desire to effect change. Nearly 25 percent however were clear that the main reason for not voting would be feeling they do not know enough about the political parties and candidates. Although a lack of knowledge can be

remedied, the issue is then a matter of motivating the students to seek the information and/or bringing more information to the students.

No evaluation of political participation would really be complete without assessing why people vote or not vote. The survey administered in this study asked students questions to expose the root of this issue. Although, most students who provided comments expressed a desire to vote because of a strong sense of duty or a desire to have a say or effect change, there were also students who were simply not interested in politics. There were also students who, at the young age of 16 years, felt that government was ineffective and that politicians did not act in the public good. It may be good that there is a sense of civic duty among a large number of students but there is also disinterest and cynicism. Additionally, more than a quarter of those surveyed did not even respond to the question.

The cynicism expressed by nearly 10 percent of respondents can most likely not be mitigated through civic literacy. These students distrust the process, government and politicians. Disinterest can however, be addressed because, as discussed in the focus groups, part of the disinterest stems from the lack of educational tools available to teach the subject and the curriculum's inability to meet the students' needs.

### **3.5 Motivating strategies**

After the first two hundred surveys were administered, the data was compiled and analyzed. The survey findings revealed that an overwhelming majority of students felt that they wanted to have a say in how the country is run. Many students felt that they did not know enough about government, politics and voting to actually vote. Further, many did not know where to find the necessary information and many found the information too complex for them to understand. The results of the analysis fed the

focus group design to address the survey issues and to identify options to foster interest and increase motivation among young people.

## **Focus Groups**

Eight focus group sessions of an hour and twenty minutes were conducted with approximately thirty students in each group. The sessions were divided into two parts (see Appendix V for focus group design and questions). Audio recordings and notes taken during the sessions were used to analyze the answers and discussions. Part I of the sessions probed further into three themes that emerged from the survey data. Students were placed in groups of four or five and were asked to identify and discuss ways they *would* exercise their voice. The students were also asked to discuss how they would like to see government information presented in the media and in schools as to increase their interest and understanding. The third theme asked students to consider and discuss reforms to the voting process such as Internet voting.

In terms of political participation, the students identified a gamut of mechanisms through which they could be heard. Students in general were very interested in the act of voting but felt they lacked the necessary knowledge and understanding of politics and government to actually make an informed vote. This is a common characteristic of young people and has been documented in several studies (O'Neill 2003, Elections Canada 2003 and Howe 2003).

On making information on government, politics and voting more understandable and interesting, the students rose to the occasion and provided extremely innovative and plausible ideas. A complete list can be found in Appendix V. Some of their suggestions include the following:

- Bring politicians into the classrooms for lectures;
- Make learning visual, use videos and not old textbooks;
- Start learning about government earlier in school;

- Get community youth groups involved in teaching youth about government;
- View an instructional video showing what goes on in Parliament;
- Learn more about current events in class rather than history;
- Present political information in class to make voting more understandable;

Discussions revealed that students just did not understand the information the way it was being presented in the textbooks and the curriculum. They felt that the information was needed in their lives but that it was difficult to obtain simple, clear information on government, politics and voting. They specifically identify some common sources of information as problematic for them. To the uninformed person, newspapers and television news state facts without providing sufficient context and background. Students find newspapers and television news to be difficult sources of information. To address this problem, some students suggested improving Internet sites to cater to a younger audience.

On voting process reform, students were asked to identify changes to the voting process that would make it easier for them to vote. They brainstormed over a wide variety of options and debated the advantages and disadvantages of each. Most students identified the number and location of polling stations as an area of reform. They suggest that there should be more polling stations in general and they should be placed in locations such as shopping centres and grocery stores in addition to the regular locations such as churches and schools. An increase in mobile polls was also mentioned as an option. Elections Canada currently uses mobile polling stations in institutions where seniors or persons with disabilities reside to facilitate access to voting. The students recommended that the use of mobile polls be increased to include university and college campuses and large or remote worksites.

Some other suggestions included making election day a national holiday and creating an incentive system for voting. Some students thought that there should be a

reward for voting such as a tax credit or rebate. Others felt that there should be no changes to the process because “if it’s hard for you to vote, then you should not be voting”. One fascinating point that was mentioned was “if people have the knowledge about voting and realize its importance and significance. . . .then ease would not matter because we would be more determined to vote”. This suggests that perhaps the process does not need reforming but instead awareness needs heightening.

Interestingly, although Internet voting or electronic voting was often mentioned as an option, discussions that ensued usually concluded with the conviction that there were too many risks involved. Moreover, many students felt that if a person were not inclined to vote, the method would not matter. They felt that a person who felt it was too much trouble to get to a polling station would not be more encouraged to vote if Internet voting were available. As one student put it, “if Internet voting were available, it doesn’t make it any easier to vote, [you] might as well just go to the polling station”.

The 2000 General Election was the first election of the Internet era. As the Internet becomes more and more a part of daily life, less information is presented in paper format and the expectation is that people are motivated enough to access the information via the Internet. Yet, when only a third of students of a generation that grew up with Internet uses it to access current affairs and political information, there is perhaps a need to make some changes.

During the focus groups, students suggested that there should be improvements to Internet sites to cater to a younger audience. The information could be more youth friendly and/or youth should be encouraged to access information via the Internet. Increasing the amount of electronic information will be of no benefit to students who currently do not use the Internet to access that information.

Overall, students were clear on several points. They did not feel that the current voting process is cumbersome but that there could be some improvements to the level of

access to polling stations during an election. Their general suggestions surrounded the issue of information. Traditional forms of information are not generating the interest needed to increase political awareness and to encourage political participation. The students felt that alternative forms of information and educational tools, such as videos, visual aids and guest speakers, would help to make the subject more interesting and understandable.

Part II of the sessions aimed to evaluate voter encouragement campaigns. These included television and radio advertising from Elections Canada<sup>12</sup> and print ads from Elections BC. Students were asked to critique each campaign and to provide suggestions for improvement. Finally, after having viewed and discussed current voter encouragement advertising, students were asked to design their own young voter encouragement campaign based on what they consider would foster interest in elections and voting among youth.

Young people are constantly bombarded by advertising and thus, form one of the best groups of people to solicit critical feedback. Elections Canada produced television and radio advertising for the June 2004 General Election with the objective of targeting young voters. The campaign involved one message, "Why not speak up when everyone is listening." In general, the 200 students who watched and listened to the advertisements were not impressed. They felt that the medium of television was great. As one student noted, "We love TV." Another student remarked, "The television ads caught our attention because they were visible ads and you usually pay more attention while you are watching TV than when listening to the radio." However, many students felt that the advertisements could be improved. Some remarks include:

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<sup>12</sup> "With the experience of the 37<sup>th</sup> general election, Elections Canada planned an advertising campaign featuring clear, easily understood messages that informed Canadians on how to register and vote, and that encouraged them to participate in the electoral process. (Elections Canada 2004: pg. 11)" Cossette Communication Group was tasked with identifying attitudes about the electoral process and presenting the results and proposed advertising campaign to an advisory committee of political parties. The concepts and key messages were developed and tested in 2003 and were based on a common theme.

- “Get different quotes, too repetitive”
- “The message states the wrong message”
- “Needs a better message.”

In general, the students felt that using television advertising was a good idea however; they felt that although the message was clear and simple, the advertisements did not provide the information they would have liked to have seen. Specifically several students suggested that the advertisements should simply remind people of election day and where to find information on voting and political parties.

The students were quick to note that television is an excellent medium for voter encouragement advertising. In fact, as the survey data indicates, television was the most widely cited source of information on politics and current events. Further, the students who used television as a source of information were more knowledgeable than those students who did not. These findings demonstrate that television has a significant impact on the civic literacy of young people and that young people themselves advocate better use of television to promote political participation and civic literacy.

During the June 2004 General Election, Elections Canada also launched a radio advertising campaign. The message of the radio ads was exactly the same as the television ads, “Why not speak up when everyone is listening,” followed by announcement of when the election would take place. The students’ response to the radio ads was even bleaker. Few, if any, actually thought they were effective at capturing their attention and getting the message across. Some comments include:

- “Totally ineffective, it was too fast, you couldn’t hear any of the information and it wasn’t attention grabbing. Get more to the point and slower.”
- “We think they should cut the ad and just tell us to vote.”
- “Too short, no info and hard to understand”

Essentially, students were in agreement that radio advertising needed improvement in order to reach youth.

Elections BC provided several samples of print advertising for use in the focus groups, which included large posters, brochures and bookmarks. Students can be impressively critical when given the opportunity and in this portion of the focus group, they rose to the occasion. They assessed everything aspect of the print ads, from content to font size. In regards to the information the ads provide, they mostly agreed that there was enough clear and simple information. However, they were quick to point out issues with the physical appearance of the ads:

- “The presentation is lacking.”
- “Graphics need to be changed.”
- “They are easy to understand but should add more colour.”
- “The telephone numbers should be printed bigger.”
- “The print is small.”
- “Not enough colour, need more colour.”
- “Needs to be flashier.”

The important thing to note is that the students felt that the information provided was good. But if we want them to actually read that information, the package will have to cater to their visual tastes.

### **Member of Parliament Sessions**

In cooperation with one public and private school, discussion sessions involving over 500 students were arranged. The general format for the majority of these sessions included a short presentation by the Members of Parliament covering electoral process, a brief personal biography and a presentation of the role of a Member of Parliament. Students then watched a short video presentation on Agnus McPhail, Canada’s first woman MP. Students then formed small groups and discussed issues of concern to them and identified questions for the Member of Parliament to address. Following that, they participated in a question and answer session with the Member of Parliament. During these sessions, the various issues raised by the students, the genders of students posing the questions and level of participation by the students were noted.

In general, students were engaged by the discussions led by the Members of Parliament. Students posed a broad spectrum of political questions covering such topics as:

- same-sex marriage;
- the gun registry;
- the sponsorship program;
- election strategy;
- legalization of marijuana;
- gas prices;
- softwood lumber;

Students may have a poor concept of politics because when asked to respond to the statement: "I am interested in politics", 31 percent agreed or strongly agreed while 41 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed. The average response for this statement on a 5-point scale was 2.82, indicating a tendency to dislike politics. Yet, during a class visit from a Member of Parliament, students asked questions that were clearly political in subject, addressing issues such as the sponsorship program, gas taxes and same-sex marriage.

On average, male students asked questions more frequently than female students, which confirms the survey finding that men are more interested in discussing politics than women. This observation also coincides with the survey data and is supported by previous studies because men on average have a greater interest in politics than women (Gidengil et al. 2004).

There is one particular observation that may have had an effect on the level of interest, participation and engagement of the students. At 28 years of age, one of the Members of Parliament, James Moore, is some 30 years younger than his colleague Paul Forseth. At the time of the class discussions, James Moore, who was first elected at the age of 24, was on his second term as Member of Parliament for the constituency. Based on the level of interaction with the Members of Parliament and the frequency and variety of questions, it was noted that the students were better able to identify with the

younger Member of Parliament, thus affecting their level of participation and engagement. Further, conversations with the students following the sessions tended to indicate a greater interest in Mr. Moore's sessions. This demonstrates the need to have politicians and political players who can relate to the diversity of the electorate, both young and old.

The literature notes the onus of political parties and politicians to participate in encouraging young people to be informed and to vote. The discussion sessions with the Members of Parliament partially met this obligation. Students responded well to interactions with these politicians. For the most part, their level of engagement and participation exceeded expectations. Mr. Moore, having conducted sessions with approximately 350 students, confirmed this observation. Further, Mr. Moore noted he was "pleasantly surprised" by the students' passion and depth of questions.

## **Chapter 4: Recommendations**

What, if anything, should be done to get young people interested in politics and voting? President Clinton has remarked on occasion that solutions to most public policy problems have already been found somewhere – we just have to scan the horizon for them (Wattenberg 1998). This is most likely the case for the problem of low young voter turnout. Solutions to low turnout have been proposed for decades and nothing new has emerged. The solutions are known but it is a matter of applying the right set of solutions to match each socio-demographic group. Low voter turnout and declining voter turnout are problems with multiple causes and require multi-faceted approaches to be effectively addressed.

If there is a public policy response, to whom should it be addressed? The body of literature addressing political participation has identified numerous potential solutions however; few go so far as to assign responsibility for implementing the solutions. The recommendations put forth in this paper stem from the analysis of the data collected throughout this study and are supplemented by the generalized strategies highlighted in the literature. They can be categorized under three themes: education (ensuring that teachers and students are equipped with the necessary tools and skills), communicating politics (increasing political exposure to young people) and voter encouragement activities and programs (catering to the interests and needs of young people).

### **4.1 Education**

Considering the study's findings that government education, using the current social studies 11 curriculum, did not succeed at increasing students' awareness, it may be difficult to understand why more education would be recommended. After consulting with students and reviewing the survey data, it became clear that the curriculum was not having the desired effect because it did not approach the subject in a manner that would

make a difference. As discussed in section 3.3, knowledge levels were statistically significant for those who consulted television and newspapers for information on politics and current events. Therefore, one option would be to increase the use of television and newspapers as a means to teach the material. In addition, other educational resources aimed at increasing knowledge and awareness should cater to students' interests and learning needs.

More educational resources should be created and provided to teachers to assist them in educating students on government, politics and the electoral process. Students have indicated that conventional textbooks are not sufficient enough to peak their interest. Specifically, teachers and students agreed that an educational video should be produced to visually teach students about federal government. Many teachers commented that the government section is very difficult to teach to the students because our Parliamentary system is historically tied to our British roots and is complicated by archaic terminology. Students find it difficult to first familiarize themselves with the terms and second, completely understand them. Both teachers and students agree that a visual presentation of the terms and system might garner interest and increase understanding. Organizations such as Elections Canada, the Library of Parliament and the Canadian Political Affairs Channel (CPAC) could separately or collectively produce materials to supplement the current educational tools.

There are currently many Internet resources for students and teachers to use through the websites of organizations such as Elections Canada, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Parliament of Canada and the Library of Parliament. However, as noted in the survey data, only a third of students use the Internet to obtain information on politics and current events. A concerted effort should be made to use the already available Internet resources.

In the classroom, students should be encouraged to think analytically about current events and politics. It is only through class discussions that students will learn to take an interest in politics and current affairs. It is important to consider one public opinion expert's advice:

“Whenever you read or see political material, exercise skepticism. Figure out motivations and ideologies in the newspaper, magazine, or television show you are looking at; watch for its editorial thrust and for slants in the news or information it presents. What stories are made prominent? Why? What is ignored? Who is quoted, and why? What evaluative material is slipped in? Try to read between the lines, spotting what the reporter did not say, and try to dig out obscure but important bits that contradict the main story line (Page 1996, pg. 125-6).

Ideally, these skills would be learned and applied in school as well as in the home but the reality is that fewer and fewer families make the time for family discussions. The days of everyone sitting down for the evening meal may have passed and with that, political socialization in the home went to the wayside.

At the time of the study, the BC provincial graduation program required all students to complete Socials Studies 11, which aims to cover three areas of importance to students' comprehension of their roles as citizens and of Canadian society: the Canadian Identity, Canada in the World Community, Canadian and Global Citizenship. The course focuses on historical and contemporary social, cultural, political, legal, economic, and environmental issues. From an evaluation perspective, the survey data did not show that the course made an impact on the level of knowledge of the public school students.

As denoted in the literature and as mentioned by many students who participated in the study, the importance of civics education should not be ignored. As of September 2005, students in British Columbia will have the option of taking Civic Studies 11 as one of three provincial courses available for students to complete the social studies 11 graduation program requirement. Former Minister of Education, Christy Clark headed a

review of provincial graduation requirements and at the same time, introduced the new civic studies option.

According to Ms. Clark, there was a great deal of opposition to the new course from educators. Parents and teachers alike often fear that a course that may deal with politics could inculcate or worse, indoctrinate their children. The fear is that the ideologies of the course will match those of the government in power. The resistance has been noted in the literature because an inherent part of political teaching is the possibility of bias and an opportunity for indoctrination (Denver and Hands 1990). In the BC example, the fear should be unsubstantiated since teachers were given the opportunity to provide input during course development. Concerns from local teachers surrounded the facultative nature of the course. Since students will have the option of taking the new course as opposed to the tradition Socials Studies 11 course, several teachers have expressed concerns that students will be losing valuable historical information that would normally be acquired in Socials Studies 11.

Despite these concerns, exposure to civic studies will most likely have a positive impact on students. As evidenced by the survey data, public school students' knowledge and awareness was not affected by the Socials Studies curriculum, hinting that political awareness is developed through other means. Students mentioned that newspapers and television news are difficult to understand because these sources tend to assume that the consumer is somewhat informed about the context or background to understand the information.

Civic studies may be able to help students acquire the skills and knowledge to consume important traditional sources of information such as television news and newspapers. The politics and voting related goals for Civic Studies 11 are as follows:

- Students will acquire knowledge and develop understandings that enable them to become more mindful of their connections to the civic world and of their responsibilities as members of various local and global communities.

- Students will learn to access and think critically about a range of information and viewpoints on a variety of civic issues.
- Students will learn how to become informed decision makers on matters of public concern, thereby better able to assess critically the effects of their choices on themselves and others.
- Students will learn to become active citizens and responsible agents of change. (BC Ministry of Education 2005)

Grade 11 students, through the course of this study, have shown themselves to be interested and relatively knowledgeable. They feel they are information deprived but in reality they are not so much information deprived as deprived of the skills to access and critically understand that information. The new civic studies course should meet this lack of skills. When developing the new civic studies program, the Minister of Education at the time, Christy Clark, revealed that indicators or measurement approaches were not developed to determine whether the goals of the course were indeed met. One possible method would be to conduct a follow-up to the present study and administer the same survey to students haven taken the new civic studies course to examine the difference in political knowledge and attitudes.

Extensive use of the Internet is well entrenched among younger generations, however, as evidenced by the survey data, only a third of respondents used the Internet to access information on politics and current affairs. As part of an education strategy to instill habits early, the use of the Internet should be encouraged and made a part of civic studies and socials studies curricula.

Elections Canada and provincial electoral bodies, such as Elections BC, should work with provincial ministries of education to enhance socials studies and civic studies curricula to best meet the political education needs of students. It is also incumbent upon teachers to seek assistance from expert organizations to facilitate the teaching of analytical skills and politics to students.

## 4.2 Communicating Politics

Communication Canada conducted national focus groups in 2001 and the common complaint from young people was that there is a lack of political leadership to inspire and help them believe there exists something and someone of worth to vote for (Haid 2003). This lament is perhaps related to a lack of knowledge and awareness among youth and a lack of contact with political parties and candidates. During the course of this study, over 500 high school students had the opportunity to listen to, speak with and ask questions of their Member of Parliament. Not many constituents have the same opportunity.

It was clear from student feedback that during the course of this study they learned from the Member of Parliament visits and they were engaged by the discussions. Although the survey data showed that the public school students' knowledge did not increase after learning the government section of the curriculum, it would have been interesting to conduct a similar experiment before and after the Member of Parliament visits to determine whether the sessions led to an increase in knowledge and interest in politics.

Understandably, it is not possible for every MP to visit every class in every school in their riding, however, there is an opportunity to create a network of knowledgeable, engaging guest speakers who could fulfill this role. This is perhaps a role that political parties could address. The fear that students will be indoctrinated by political ideologies will always remain. But students, in general, are no less armed with the analytical skills to decipher varying political beliefs than the average adult. We protect students from anything political yet we do not protect the average Canadian.

To mitigate the risk of indoctrination, discussion outlines should be developed to guide guest speakers during their visits. Prior to the MP visits in the schools, discussion outlines were developed with teachers to ensure that appropriate topics were being

presented and that students were given an opportunity to learn and interact with the Member of Parliament. In addition, guest speakers should be vetted to ensure that they are sufficiently knowledgeable enough to follow the discussion outlines and engage in non-partisan political discussions.

### **4.3 Voter Encouragement Activities and Programs**

The expression goes, “if you cannot bring the mountain to Mohammed, bring Mohammed to the mountain”. But in the case of political interest, bringing students to politics is much more difficult than bringing politics to students. When asked how young people’s interest in voting and politics could be increased, most students agreed that in this case, the mountain must come to Mohammed. In general, the students in this study participated actively when it came to suggesting improvements to the way young people are introduced to politics. The following recommendations are a result of their suggestions and/or discussed in the literature.

The use of television needs to be honed to better target youth. The survey and focus group findings revealed that pushing the message of civic duty is not the message young people want to hear. In fact, many students already feel that it is their duty to vote. The students’ recommendations are in some respects, similar to others in the literature; however, there are some suggestions that are distinctive. One widely supported suggestion among focus group participants was improving advertising and including a campaign aimed at parents. Parent targeted advertising already exists for many subjects including drug and alcohol use. Students suggested that parents be encouraged to teach their children about politics and to support voting as a social norm. Another widely supported suggestion was to create an advertising campaign that illustrates disadvantaged societies that do not have the right to vote. They also suggested that advertising depict a state of the country where no one voted. Students

believe that a visual presentation of the impact of not voting would provide the right message to meet the needs of the young people.

Many students believe that political education should start earlier, that knowledge and awareness should be a natural part of their lives. Marketing was one of the main suggestions to increase awareness. Students recommended that information, in the form of trivia questions, be placed on products that young people are in the daily habit of using. These include cereal boxes, milk cartons and other food products frequently consumed by young people. Students agreed that they often consumed these products while reading the packaging. They felt that if they already make the effort to read the list of ingredients, they would be better off reading about government facts instead. They also felt that this form of information was innovative and as a result, there would be increased overall government awareness.

Although numerous suggestions have been made to make the voting process easier, these innovations may only incite small increases in voter turnout and they do not address the underlying issue of disengagement that plagues young people today. The students consulted in this study proposed a few reforms to the voting process, which mainly addressed increasing access to polling stations. In order to increase voter turnout, an effort should be made to bring the polling stations to the people. For example, there should be an increase in mobile polls and that these polls should not only cater to the infirm, disabled and isolated. This would make voting easier and more accessible especially for those people who have difficulty getting to their polling station due to work or school. Mobile polls should be set up in high-density work sites and at colleges and universities. If the strategy is to encourage young people to vote, then reducing the potential obstacles, such as distance and inconvenience, is likely to have a marked impact.

To accomplish these recommendations, electoral bodies such as Elections Canada and Elections BC should be tasked with the responsibility to increase electoral awareness in between elections. These bodies should receive additional resources in order fulfill the increased responsibilities.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

As evidenced in recent elections, voter turnout is declining although largely among younger cohorts. Even though other established democracies are experiencing the same trend, low turnout is of great concern because of how it reflects the health of our democracy. In response to this issue, this study has attempted to address a component of voter turnout, specifically that of low and declining young voter turnout. To build a strong foundation upon which this study could be based, a literature survey was conducted and reported in chapter 2. The literature also highlighted concerns for decreasing political participation and the need to examine the attitudes of younger cohorts in an attempt to address a potential risk to our democratic health.

This study began with the objective of answering three questions. While trying to answer these questions, some overarching conclusions were reached. High school students, despite being ineligible to vote, are interested in voting. Although recent youth turnout evidence shows a contradicting trend, this study has been successful at pinpointing specific issues that once mitigated, should encourage and incite young people to vote. These include an increase in accessibility of information, the development of skills to access information and the analytical skills to comprehend and assess the information obtained.

### ***What are the political attitudes and level of awareness of high school students?***

High school students' awareness and attitudes are linked to many factors. Certain subgroups of students were more likely to demonstrate higher levels of knowledge. Male students, in general, scored higher than female students. In general, students whose parents completed a university education scored higher. Canadian born students scored higher than foreign-born students. The most remediable factor of political awareness was source of information. Overall, the greater the number of

sources a student consulted, the higher his or her knowledge score was. In particular, students who watched television news or read newspapers scored higher than those who did not.

The survey findings indicate that students in private school were much more likely to be interested in political participation and achieved higher knowledge levels than public school students. However, when students were given an opportunity to discuss voting, government and politics in the focus groups or with a Member of Parliament, there were virtually no observable differences between the public and private school students.

***How are political engagement dimensions linked to students' propensity to vote?***

Several factors appear to be linked to students' propensity to vote. Students who scored high on the knowledge portion of the survey were also likely to indicate an interest in politics. Although many students indicated an interest in having a say in how the country is run, the students with high levels of awareness have already overcome the number one reason cited for not voting: not being sufficiently aware of current affairs and politics. The students with high levels of political knowledge consult more sources of information and are already investing in the awareness needed to vote.

Some significant findings resulted from this study. The majority of young people surveyed indicated a sense of duty in regards to the act of voting. Some 60 percent of students felt that it would be their duty to vote when they are eligible and 75 percent expressed a desire to have their voice heard in some way. These two findings indicate the potential to reverse the trend of declining youth political participation.

If sense of duty were used as an estimator of students' desire to vote, certain subgroups of students would stand out. Private school students and immigrant students

appear to be more inclined to vote. Although less politically knowledgeable, female students, report a greater sense of duty than male students.

***What strategies do high school students feel would be successful in motivating and informing new cohorts of voters?***

Motivating young people to vote does not appear to be complicated. The focus group findings indicate the need to change the elections advertising approach. The young people consulted felt that either the message and/or the whole approach needed changing. Suggested changes included stripping down the advertisements to simply informing the audience of the election and where to obtain information. Efforts to pull at the sense of duty heartstrings of young people have been said by youth to be ineffective.

Many students agreed that Canadians needed to be reminded of the power of the right to vote. They suggested advertising depicting societies without this right, the circumstances of people who fight for this right and the advantages of exercising the right to vote. Another key suggestion was to cater advertising to parents. There is a variety of advertising that asks parents to speak to their children about drinking, drug use, smoking and safe sex but there is no advertising encouraging parents to speak to their children about voting. The students consulted through the course of this study felt it was important for parents to teach their children about the significance of voting.

This study was successful at examining the nature of young people's political awareness and attitudes. Although they lack some important political knowledge, they are generally intent on participating politically. Through this study, several issues were uncovered or expressed by students, which once addressed, should lead to greater political participation and increased awareness among youth.

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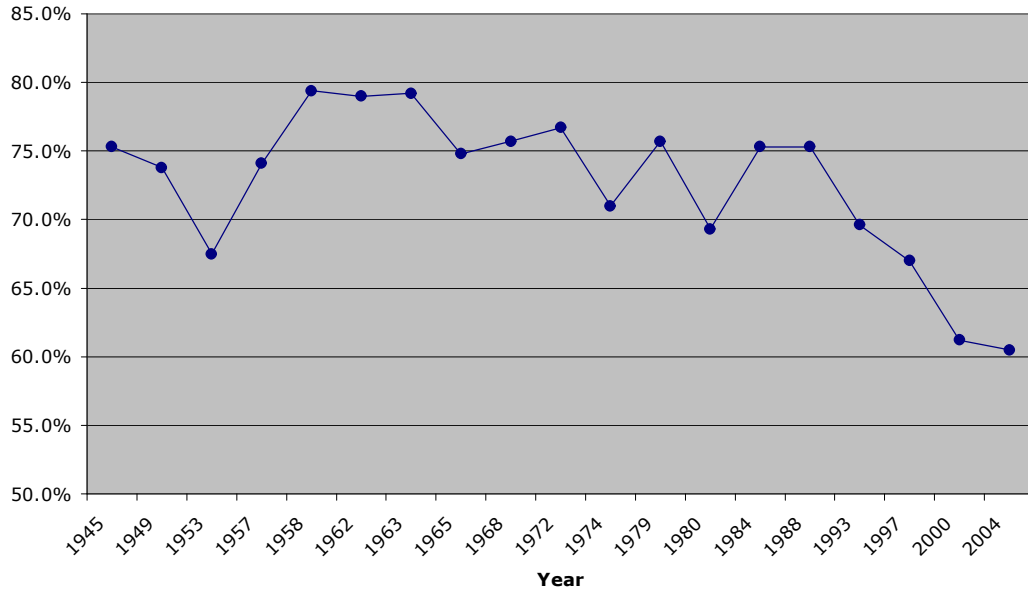
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# Appendix I: Federal and Provincial Turnout Rates

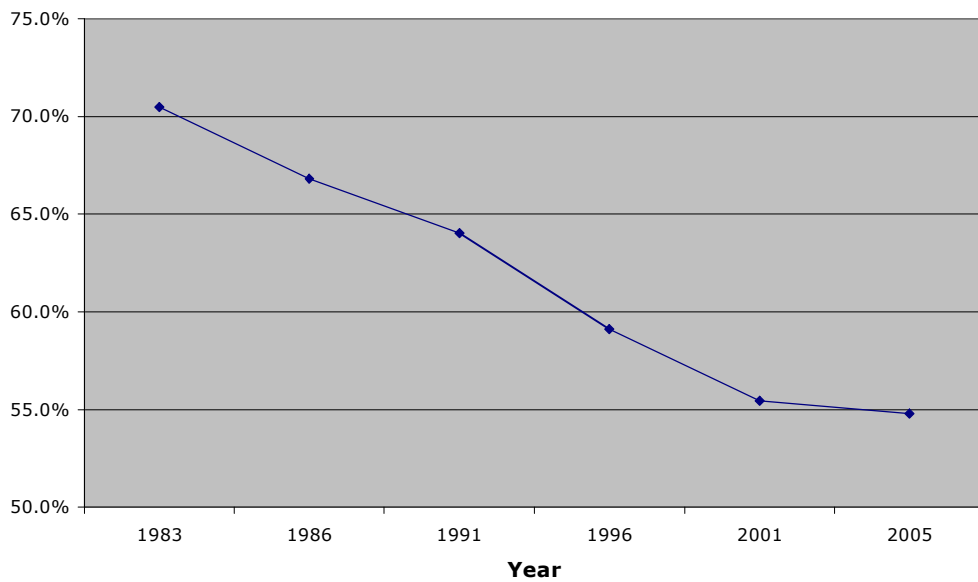
Data source: Elections Canada

### Turnout of Federal Elections 1945 to 2004

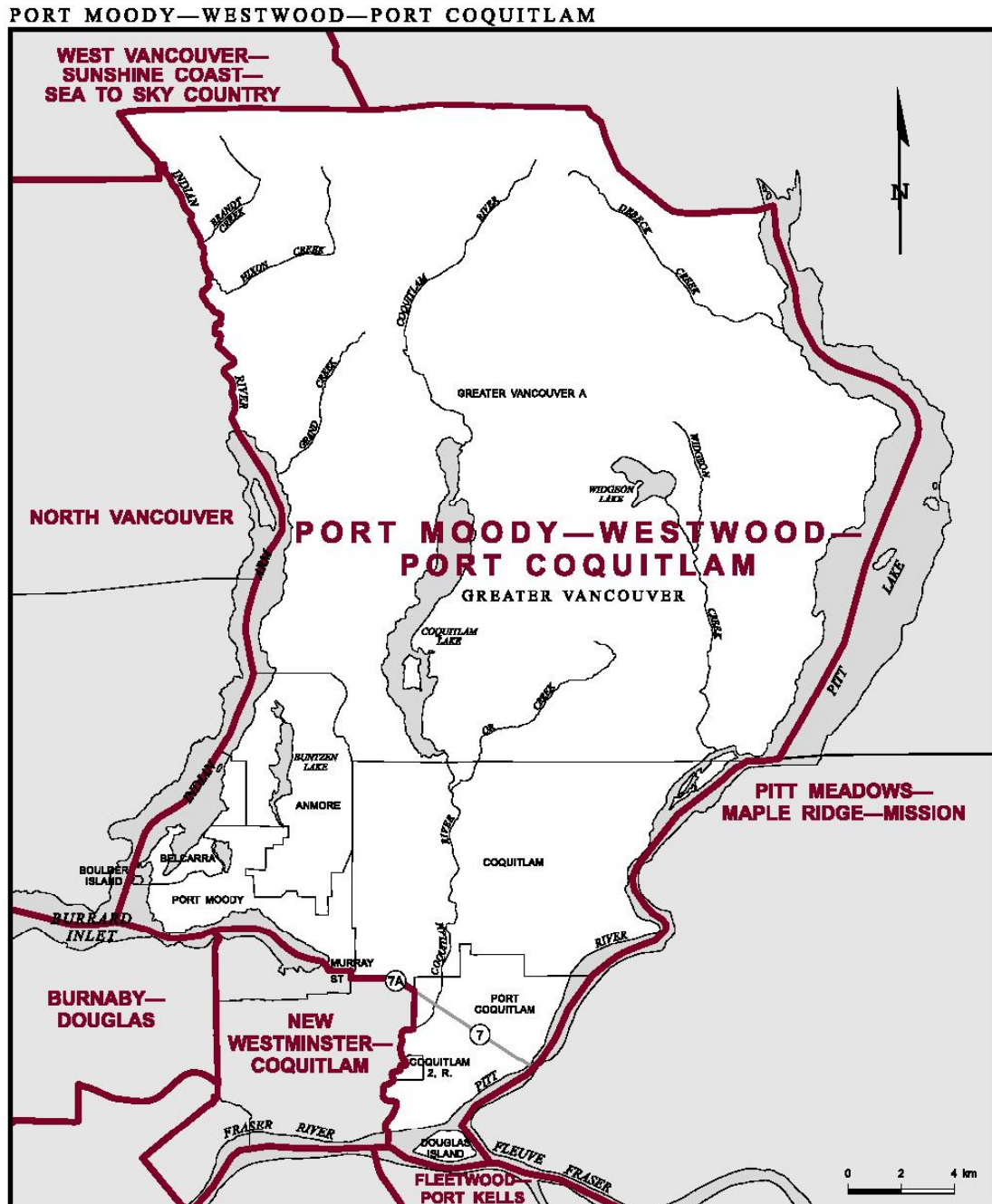


Data source: Elections BC

### BC Elections Turnout 1983 to 2005



## Appendix II: Map of Port Moody-Westwood-Port Coquitlam



Source: Elections Canada

## Appendix III: Survey Instrument

### PLEASE DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME ANYWHERE ON THIS QUESTIONNAIRE

This survey is part of a graduate report in the School of Public Administration at the University of Victoria. I am attempting to determine student awareness of and attitudes toward the electoral process. I would appreciate if you would take a few minutes to complete the questionnaire. All the information collected will be kept confidential and it will be destroyed upon the completion of the report and my oral defense. Completion and submission of the survey will be understood to be your consent to participate. Your participation is a key to the success of the project. If you have any questions please contact Sabrina Andee, BCom, MPA candidate (sandee@uvic.ca) Thank you for helping me!

### Survey of Students' Political and Voting Awareness and Attitudes

Age: _____  Grade: <input type="checkbox"/> Grade 11 <input type="checkbox"/> Grade 12  Gender: <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female	Place of birth: _____  Where were your parents born? _____  Occupation of parent(s)/guardian(s): _____	Highest level of education of parent(s)/guardian(s):  <input type="checkbox"/> High School <input type="checkbox"/> College <input type="checkbox"/> University (Undergraduate) <input type="checkbox"/> University (Graduate: Masters or PhD) <input type="checkbox"/> None of the above
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From which, if any, of the following do you get information on current events and politics:  <input type="checkbox"/> Television news <input type="checkbox"/> Newspapers <input type="checkbox"/> Radio <input type="checkbox"/> Family members <input type="checkbox"/> Internet <input type="checkbox"/> Teachers <input type="checkbox"/> Magazines <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____  Who is your local MP? _____  Who is your local MLA? _____	Who is the current Prime Minister? _____  Who was the last Prime Minister? _____  Who is the Premier of BC? _____  At what age can you vote in a federal election? <input type="checkbox"/> 16 <input type="checkbox"/> 17 <input type="checkbox"/> 18 <input type="checkbox"/> 19 <input type="checkbox"/> 20 <input type="checkbox"/> 21	Who is the Federal Finance Minister? _____  Who is the Foreign Affairs Minister? _____  What is the role of a Federal MP? A. <input type="checkbox"/> to support or oppose proposed legislation in the interests of his/her constituents B. <input type="checkbox"/> to attend community events C. <input type="checkbox"/> to help constituents with questions about anything that is the business of the federal government D. <input type="checkbox"/> A and C E. <input type="checkbox"/> all of the above
From the following, which are Provincial Government responsibilities? Check all that apply. <input type="checkbox"/> Education <input type="checkbox"/> Banks <input type="checkbox"/> Healthcare <input type="checkbox"/> Postal Service <input type="checkbox"/> Criminal Law <input type="checkbox"/> Solemnization of marriage	Match the Leaders to their Party: <b>A:</b> Jack Layton      _____ Liberal <b>B:</b> Stephen Harper      _____ Bloc Québécois <b>C:</b> Gilles Duceppe      _____ NDP <b>D:</b> Paul Martin      _____ Conservative	

You may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Associate Vice-President Research at (250) 472-4545 or ovprhe@uvic.ca

<i>Please check the appropriate box to indicate whether or not you agree with the statements listed below.</i>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
Discussing politics is not fun.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am interested in politics.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know where to get information about political parties, candidates and electoral process.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It is every citizen's duty to vote in federal elections.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I think we should learn about government, politics and the electoral process in school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Voting should be mandatory.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would like to know more about government, politics and the electoral process.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My vote would not make a difference.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would not vote if I did not feel I knew enough about the parties and candidates.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have similar political beliefs as my parents.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel that politics don't affect me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I can't see the difference between the various parties and candidates and what they stand for.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel it will be my duty to vote when I am old enough.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I want to have a say in how the country is run.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am interested in the results of elections.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
None of the political parties have policies/ideas that I like.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

In the following section, please indicate why you would or would not vote in the next federal election. Feel free to make any additional comments.

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Thank You

**PLEASE DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME ANYWHERE ON THIS QUESTIONNAIRE**

You may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Associate Vice-President Research at (250) 472-4545 or [ovprhe@uvic.ca](mailto:ovprhe@uvic.ca).

## Appendix IV: Description of *t*-Tests

The *t*-test assesses whether the means of two groups are statistically different from each other. This analysis is appropriate when one would like to compare the means of two groups.

When looking at the differences between scores for two groups, the difference between their means relative to the spread or variability of their scores must be judged. The *t*-test allows for this evaluation.

If it is determined that the result is statistically significant, then it is unlikely that the difference observed is due to a coincidence. It can be concluded that the two groups have different means. A result that is not statistically significant indicates that there is no reason to conclude that the overall means differ.

The alpha level used in the calculations was set at .05. In most social research, the “rule of thumb” is to set the alpha level at .05. This means that five times out of a hundred one find a statistically significant difference between the means even if there were none (i.e. by “chance”).

The *t*-Test is calculated as follows:

$$t = \frac{M_1 - M_2}{S_{DM}}$$

$$S_{DM} = \sqrt{\left[ \frac{(N_1 - 1)(s_1^2) + (N_2 - 1)(s_2^2)}{N_1 + N_2 - 2} \right] \left[ \frac{1}{N_1} + \frac{1}{N_2} \right]}$$

$$s = \sqrt{\frac{\sum X^2}{N}}$$

$$df = N_1 + N_2 - 2$$

Where:

M1 is the mean of the group with the higher mean

M2 is the mean of the group with the lower mean

SDM is the standard error of the difference between means

N1 is the number of cases in group 1

N2 is the number of cases in group 2

s1 is the standard deviation of group 1, which will then be squared

s2 is the standard deviation of group 2, which will then be squared

# Appendix V: Focus Group Design, Questions and Findings

## Focus Group Design:

- Present overview of session
- Review and discussion of Member of Parliament visits
- Review of preliminary survey results
- Form small workgroups to answer part I questions
- Class discussion on part I
- Present elections materials print ads, brochures, television and radio advertising
- Form small workgroups to answer part II questions
- Class discussion on part II
- Close

## Part I - Questions:

1. Identify and discuss some of the ways that you can have a say in how the country is run.

- Voting;
- Protesting;
- Letters;
- Strikes;
- Becoming an MP;
- Speaking with your MP;
- Join a party;
- Tell your MP what to vote for;
- Conduct polls in schools;
- More MP's to represent Canada's growing population;
- Polls on issues on government websites;
- Advertising;
- Surveys;
- Join a pressure group;
- Emails;
- Get people to sign petitions;
- Write a letter to the leader of the opposition;
- Complaints;
- Organize meetings;
- Volunteer for a politician;
- Make up your own organization;
- Public displays;
- Listening to the news so that you know what is going on;
- Town meetings;
- Flyers, signs;

- Try to encourage more people to vote and be informed about politics so they can vote when they are of age;
- Use an adult's vote if someone (or your parents) is planning on not voting. Discuss with them what you think about politics;
- Research;
- Phone calls;
- Give the public a chance to agree/disagree with laws;
- Make a "kids committee" or "student government" to voice concerns of Canadian citizens under 18 at the federal level;
- Internet polls;
- Creating discussion groups for people who are interested in politics;
- Fundraisers;
- Keep voting age at 18 but should have mail or internet to voice opinions before voting age.

2. What should be done to make information on government, politics and voting more understandable and interesting?

- More interactive;
- Geared towards youth;
- Include youth at a younger age on politics;
- Use easier vocabulary;
- Make simple government sites;
- TV Commercials;
- Information websites;
- Politics books/magazines;
- Politics classes in school;
- More politics taught in school;
- Learn about other countries governments and compare;
- Learn about ancient civilization governments;
- Bring politicians into classrooms for lectures;
- Make it fun (taught by young people);
- Dumb it down;
- Make it visual, not lectures;
- Fun facts on government in student planners and popular websites;
- Incorporate politics into popular shows;
- Offer information in different languages;
- Reward people for voting;
- Learn throughout school (early start);
- Cartoons;
- Mock elections;
- Political parties, i.e. in school;
- Get TV shows, media outlets to promote a better understanding of government;
- Get Don Cherry to do a show on government in his own words;
- Get community youth groups involved in teaching youth about government;
- TV shows specifically for government (i.e. Discovery Politics)
- Debates;
- Televising candidates;

- Use something we can relate to;
  - Talk to use when we are young;
  - Make funny commercials;
  - Put bits and pieces of info into interesting or popular tv shows;
  - Make a tv series about it like CSI;
  - Playing games;
  - Make it part of the curriculum;
  - Classes for people who don't understand;
  - Use more simple words that less intelligent people can understand;
  - Make an interesting video;
  - Be more in tune with today's government;
  - Don't focus so much on what happened in the past that has nothing to do with what is going on in government today;
  - Have younger politicians;
  - Answer questions, do not sound fake in already prepared answers;
  - Have the politicians write their own speeches so that it is true to them;
  - Games;
  - Give citizens quizzes to determine what party you might want to vote for, by answering a series of questions;
  - A website should be made that is easily understandable explaining government positions and other important facts about government so that the people who are interested can find what they need;
  - Get teachers to break it down;
  - Easier format on internet sites;
  - Most people do not have a university degree, write statements in simpler terms;
  - The way we are taught about politics is from a historical standpoint, but needs to be taught for today and the future;
  - Explain how everything works in a way we can understand;
  - Learn about current events in school instead of focusing so much on the past;
  - Fun activities in school;
  - Presenting political information in a classroom setting can aid in making voting more understandable;
  - Teen talk show on politics;
  - There should be an instructional video that shows what happens in Ottawa, with educational tools to teach the students, the books are not enough. There needs to be visual aids to show the kids how it all works.
  - Put information on food, i.e. milk cartons, pop;
3. What should be done to make information on government, politics and voting more accessible?
- More advertising, fun/easy websites;
  - Ads in high profile magazines;
  - Billboards;
  - Commercials;
  - Internet;
  - Advertisements;
  - More voting stations;

- Email, letters, phone call for reminders;
- Government section in the newspaper;
- Teach it in school;
- Visual displays;
- Ads at a hockey game (spend more money);
- Mail information;
- Bus ads;
- Information brochures in schools;
- Information about government on back of favourite cereal boxes;
- Talk shows;
- Info packages sent to homes;
- Internet pop-ups;
- Gas station ads;
- Classes for credit;
- Nothing, it's already accessible;
- Send an MP to schools so students understand government more;
- A special tv channel;
- A class on government;
- Come to schools and in a fun way explain what their party stands for;
- Make speeches funny and easy to listen to;
- Have some speeches that are directed towards our generation in their topics;
- Talk to parents;
- Make info come to us;
- Make internet addresses easier to remember;
- They should have some sort of system or slide show at schools or on the internet;
- More community meetings;
- Information booths;

4. What changes would make it easier for you to vote? (i.e. Internet voting, phone call reminders to vote, etc.) Identify any advantages and disadvantages to each change.

- Phone calls to inform people when to vote the locations and who is running;
- More incentive;
- Free transportation to voting booth;
- Internet voting because you don't have to leave your house;
- More voting stations closer to home but that costs more money;
- Make classes teaching people how government works, I will be more likely to vote if they know how it works but that costs more money;
- Internet voting is a bad idea;
- Soliciting;
- Set up many voting stations in popular stores;
- Mailing out ballots;
- Voting at work;
- More options;
- Voting week, not just voting day;
- Reminders on TV and radio;
- Make voting day a holiday;

- Mail ballots to houses and either fill it out and send to return address or dispose of it if you aren't interested in voted;
- Endorsements;
- Make commercials with nothing to do with government then at the end black the screen with white letters saying government;
- None, if it's hard for you to vote, then you should not be voting;
- More publicity;
- Vote over the phone;
- It's easy already;
- If Internet voting was available, it doesn't make it any easier to vote, might as well just go to the polling station;
- Have someone come by your house so you can vote;
- Tax rebate for voting;
- If people have the knowledge about voting and realize it's importance and significance in what is said, then ease would not matter because we would be more determined to vote if we knew the outcomes;
- Lower age to vote;
- Voting in more locations;
- Make more polling stations in other places besides churches and schools;

## **Part II – Questions:**

2. Discuss the print ads, the television ads and the radio ads. For each type, discuss whether they caught your attention and whether they make you feel like voting.
3. For each type of advertisement, identify what you like and dislike. What would you change? What would you keep?

## **Television Advertisement Comments:**

- They catch your attention and get the point across. However, it's easy to zone out when they are telling you the info at the end. The information at the end is boring and you tend to zone out.
- They should have ads geared towards parents to get them to teach their kids about voting.
- They should show what the consequences would be of not voting.
- They had a good message. Needs a better message, possibly showing voting in other countries.
- It's really funny and eye catching. It makes us want to vote. It's funny and interesting. Keep the whole thing.
- Good because it catches your attention. Variety of sense, but same message.
- No impact on viewer. More dramatic situations. Keep the humour in some ads.
- Throughout the duration of boring commercials a tv ad would catch your attention. Its good that the tv ads are repetitive but different scenarios because it drills it into your head.
- Caught our attention because of abrupt silence.
- Slightly catches our attention. Would keep, point of view is crossed. Straight to the point. Wouldn't change.
- It caught my attention but didn't really want to vote more. I like all of it.

- Funny, don't aim at us; they don't give us a reason to vote.
- No, videos were way too corny.
- I don't like it. Humour very good, repetitive, very bad. Message states the wrong message. Needs to portray to younger people. Boring.
- Needs more options, something that includes older people, it can't just target young people. Get different quotes.
- It catches your attention but doesn't keep it. The message is too repetitive, you tune out after a while. Silly boring, the voice is annoying, the message is too repetitive.
- The first one caught our attention. But they were boring. When the narrator at the end comes on it loses our interest. Make them different because it's the same message on all of them.
- The first one caught our attention. The other ones probably would too if they weren't all in a row. Funny but a little repetitive.
- We love TV. Have people make the advertisements because they know what they like. They didn't grab our attention though.
- Stupid, dumb, pathetic.
- Caught attention, especially the first one. Not enough ethnicity.
- The television ads caught our attention because they were visible ads and you usually pay more attention while you are watching tv then when listening to the radio. The ads are good because they catch your attention when the person stands and does not speak.

#### **Radio Advertisement Comments**

- Totally ineffective, it was too fast, you couldn't hear any of the information and it wasn't attention grabbing. Get more to the point and slower.
- We think they should cut the ad and just tell us to vote.
- Didn't really catch our attention because they sounded like the DJ. Annoying.
- They should have a different phrase for the radio. Funny but a little repetitive.
- If it came on the radio we wouldn't listen to it. Make them different.
- Use a longer pause, or a jingle.
- More pizzazz to the words, lively voice.
- Too short, no info.
- All radio commercials tend to be the same, they're always too short and that makes it hard to understand. Didn't like, short and hard to understand.
- Need more dramatic situations, keep the humor in some ads. Have familiar voices, do advertising so it's more appealing and understandable.
- Not as efficient as a visual aid.
- Boring, just another commercial. Doesn't make us want to vote. Boring. Change it all. Take is away completely.
- Not as good as the television. Needs better message.

#### **Print Advertisement Comments**

- Boring. Information on the inside of the pamphlet is good but the presentation is lacking. Put different pictures but good information.
- They caught our attention but they aren't effective.
- They didn't catch our attention. Looks kind of like golf.
- Boring, no colour, ugly.
- Doesn't make us feel like voting, graphics need to be changed.

- It has lots of information, it makes it easy to register but it doesn't really catch the eye. They are easy to understand but should add more colour and make it more interesting. The telephone numbers should be printed bigger on the ad.
  - They didn't catch our attention because they were boring and didn't have any colour, dark. The information in them is good but change the appearance, the print is small.
  - Not enough colour. Need more colour.
  - Didn't catch our attention, plain colours are negative. Need more colours.
  - There is lots of information there.
  - Font is too small, however, most persuasive of all three.
  - Funny looking, not too amusing, didn't stand out.
  - Does not catch attention, more colour. Visual good, boring, bad.
  - Did not catch our attention. Wouldn't keep these, not very attractive.
  - Make it more attractive, catching.
  - Did not catch attention. Boring.
  - People have to enjoy reading to catch a print ad. The print may be too small for the elderly people or the hard of seeing to read and will get frustrated and give up.
  - Too small, hard to see from distance.
  - No one will take the time to read. Get rid of them altogether.
  - It's eye catching but doesn't really make us want to vote. It's kind of boring but eye catching. It wouldn't matter if you kept it or not.
  - Not too good. The poster was boring, needs to be flashier.
3. As a group, discuss possible ways (print, television, radio or other) to increase awareness about elections and voting and to encourage young people to vote. Be prepared to present your ideas to the class.
- Make sure TV ads are on shows that young people watch.
  - Have politicians come to schools and get rid of pamphlets.
  - I think TV is the most successful objective because most people watch TV and will sit through commercials.
  - Mail, phone calls.
  - Show the young voters communist countries that can't vote.
  - Posters and advertisements. Also, putting up ads to give the public a heads up.
  - Make it more popular because no one talks about the elections until around a day or 2 before it.
  - More action.
  - Have to make sure they are put in the places where people can be aware of them, they have to apply to both age groups.
  - More appealing to younger people, humour, information, not stating the same fact over and over.
  - Target old people. Don't try to make the ads too cool, they're not.
  - Phone calls to your house to remind you. Small description of candidates' platform on ballot.
  - Have easily accessible information, put the ads in public places where people will see the message. Schools could send out information.
  - Spread out the commercials and ads during the years, not just before an election.

- Have a lot more advertisements. But people won't like it all, in your face advertisement.
- Good advertisements and free stuff for voting.
- Hold debates at schools. Hold more referendums so people can see the issue.
- Television ads that will relate to younger groups.
- Ads on radio stations that younger ages listen to.

## Appendix VI: Survey Results

Question	Percentage	N= 496
<b>Age</b>		
15 Years Old		3
16 Years Old	74.4%	369
17 Years Old	20.6%	102
18 Years Old	3.6%	18
19 Years Old		1
<b>Grade</b>		
Grade 10		1
Grade 11	95%	471
Grade 12	4.6%	23
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	43.5%	216
Male	55.6%	276
<b>Place of Birth</b>		
Students born in Canada	80%	397
Students born outside of Canada	17.7%	88
Students with at least one parent born in Canada	62.1%	308
Students with both parents born outside of Canada	31.5%	156
<b>Parents' highest level of education</b>		
High School	30.2%	150
College	25%	124
University (Undergraduate)	20.2%	100
University (Graduate or PhD)	18.8%	93
None of the above	2.4%	12
<b>Knowledge Questions</b>		
MP = James Moore or Paul Forseth	15.1%	75
MLA = Karn Manhas, Christy Clark or Richard Stewart	15.9%	79
PM = Paul Martin	80%	397
Fomer PM = Jean Chrétien	78.8%	391
Premier = Gordon Campbell	62.1%	308
Eligible Voting Age = 18	71.8%	356
Federal Finance Minister	0.008%	4
Federal Foreign Affairs Minister	0.008%	4
MP Role A: to support or oppose proposed legislation in the interests of his/her constituents	77.6%	385
MP Role B: to attend community events	27.8%	138
MP Role C: to help constituents with questions about anything that is the business of the federal government	74.6%	370
<b>All roles correctly identified</b>	27%	134

Provincial responsibility: Education	84.7%	420
Provincial responsibility Healthcare	68.3%	339
Provincial responsibility Marriage	34.3%	170
<b>All provincial responsibilities correctly identified</b>	<b>17.3%</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>Liberal leader = Paul Martin</b>	<b>77.2%</b>	<b>383</b>
Liberal leader = Stephen Harper	6.7%	33
Liberal leader = Gilles Duceppe	5.4%	27
Liberal leader = Jack Layton	0.008%	4
<b>BQ leader = Gilles Duceppe</b>	<b>78.2%</b>	<b>388</b>
BQ leader = Stephen Harper	4.2%	21
BQ leader = Jack Layton	6.0%	30
<b>NDP Leader = Jack Layton</b>	<b>54.2%</b>	<b>269</b>
NDP Leader = Stephen Harper	22.2%	110
NDP Leader = Gilles Duceppe	4.6%	23
NDP Leader = Paul Martin	7.7%	38
<b>Conservative Leader = Stephen Harper</b>	<b>55.4%</b>	<b>275</b>
Conservative Leader = Gilles Duceppe	5.6%	28
Conservative Leader = Paul Martin	4.8%	24
Conservative Leader = Jack Layton	22.2%	110
<b>All four leaders correctly identified</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>245</b>

**Discussing politics is not fun.**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Agree
<b>All</b>	30 6.05%	108 21.77%	169 34.07%	126 25.40%	61 12.30%	138 27.82%	187 37.70%
<b>Females</b>	9 4.17%	41 18.98%	55 25.46%	65 30.09%	20 9.26%	59 27.31%	85 39.35%
<b>Males</b>	21 7.50%	58 20.71%	97 34.64%	61 21.79%	41 14.64%	79 28.21%	102 36.43%

**I am interested in politics.**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Agree
<b>All</b>	63 12.70%	142 28.63%	133 26.81%	129 26.01%	26 5.24%	205 41.33%	155 31.25%
<b>Females</b>	22 10.19%	55 25.46%	44 20.37%	54 25.00%	6 2.78%	96 44.44%	60 27.78%
<b>Males</b>	41 14.64%	68 24.29%	73 26.07%	75 26.79%	20 7.14%	109 38.93%	95 33.93%

**I know where to get information about political parties, candidates and electoral process.**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Agree
<b>All</b>	38 7.66%	117 23.59%	95 19.15%	193 38.91%	47 9.48%	155 31.25%	240 48.39%
<b>Females</b>	12 5.56%	35 16.20%	32 14.81%	95 43.98%	17 7.87%	58 26.85%	112 51.85%
<b>Males</b>	26 9.29%	71 25.36%	52 18.57%	98 35.00%	30 10.71%	97 34.64%	128 45.71%

**It is every citizen's duty to vote in federal elections.**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Agree
<b>All</b>	35 7.06%	67 13.51%	104 20.97%	174 35.08%	110 22.18%	102 20.56%	284 57.26%
<b>Females</b>	10 4.63%	15 6.94%	33 15.28%	86 39.81%	50 23.15%	31 14.35%	136 62.96%
<b>Males</b>	25 8.93%	46 16.43%	56 20.00%	88 31.43%	60 21.43%	71 25.36%	148 52.86%

**I think we should learn about government, politics and the electoral process in school.**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Agree
<b>All</b>	35 7.06%	61 12.30%	115 23.19%	208 41.94%	72 14.52%	96 19.35%	280 56.45%
<b>Females</b>	10 4.63%	13 6.02%	36 16.67%	105 48.61%	32 14.81%	30 13.89%	137 63.43%
<b>Males</b>	25 8.93%	41 14.64%	68 24.29%	103 36.79%	40 14.29%	66 23.57%	143 51.07%

**Voting should be mandatory.**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Agree
<b>All</b>	93 18.75%	169 34.07%	126 25.40%	62 12.50%	42 8.47%	262 52.82%	104 20.97%
<b>Females</b>	26 12.04%	54 25.00%	45 20.83%	29 13.43%	23 10.65%	104 48.15%	52 24.07%
<b>Males</b>	67 23.93%	91 32.50%	67 23.93%	33 11.79%	19 6.79%	158 56.43%	52 18.57%

**I would like to know more about government, politics and the electoral process.**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Agree
<b>All</b>	37 7.46%	104 20.97%	182 36.69%	137 27.62%	34 6.85%	141 28.43%	171 34.48%
<b>Females</b>	14 6.48%	33 15.28%	64 29.63%	64 29.63%	13 6.02%	56 25.93%	77 35.65%
<b>Males</b>	23 8.21%	62 22.14%	99 35.36%	73 26.07%	21 7.50%	85 30.36%	94 33.57%

**I would not vote if I did not feel I knew enough about the parties and candidates.**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Agree
<b>All</b>	9 1.81%	50 10.08%	82 16.53%	244 49.19%	107 21.57%	59 11.90%	352 70.97%
<b>Females</b>	2 0.93%	10 4.63%	25 11.57%	112 51.85%	54 25.00%	16 7.41%	167 77.31%
<b>Males</b>	7 2.50%	36 12.86%	49 17.50%	132 47.14%	53 18.93%	43 15.36%	185 66.07%

**I have similar political beliefs as my parents.**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Agree
<b>All</b>	33 6.65%	94 18.95%	199 40.12%	132 26.61%	36 7.26%	127 25.60%	168 33.87%
<b>Females</b>	9 4.17%	35 16.20%	69 31.94%	57 26.39%	13 6.02%	52 24.07%	70 32.41%
<b>Males</b>	24 8.57%	51 18.21%	105 37.50%	75 26.79%	23 8.21%	75 26.79%	98 35.00%

**I feel that politics don't affect me.**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Agree
<b>All</b>	130 26.21%	201 40.52%	92 18.55%	48 9.68%	20 4.03%	331 66.73%	68 13.71%
<b>Females</b>	53 24.54%	67 31.02%	31 14.35%	18 8.33%	7 3.24%	147 68.06%	25 11.57%
<b>Males</b>	77 27.50%	107 38.21%	50 17.86%	30 10.71%	13 4.64%	184 65.71%	43 15.36%

**I can't see the difference between the various parties and candidates and what they stand for.**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Agree
<b>All</b>	62 12.50%	161 32.46%	124 25.00%	110 22.18%	33 6.65%	223 44.96%	143 28.83%
<b>Females</b>	21 9.72%	63 29.17%	40 18.52%	53 24.54%	12 5.56%	90 41.67%	65 30.09%
<b>Males</b>	41 14.64%	92 32.86%	66 23.57%	57 20.36%	21 7.50%	133 47.50%	78 27.86%

**I feel it will be my duty to vote when I am old enough.**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Agree
<b>All</b>	26 5.24%	47 9.48%	119 23.99%	208 41.94%	94 18.95%	73 14.72%	302 60.89%
<b>Females</b>	5 2.31%	11 5.09%	38 17.59%	107 49.54%	37 17.13%	22 10.19%	144 66.67%
<b>Males</b>	21 7.50%	30 10.71%	69 24.64%	101 36.07%	57 20.36%	51 18.21%	158 56.43%

**I want to have a say in how the country is run.**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Agree
<b>All</b>	8 1.61%	14 2.82%	96 19.35%	236 47.58%	136 27.42%	22 4.44%	372 75.00%
<b>Females</b>	3 1.39%	3 1.39%	31 14.35%	107 49.54%	59 27.31%	9 4.17%	166 76.85%
<b>Males</b>	5 1.79%	8 2.86%	56 20.00%	129 46.07%	77 27.50%	13 4.64%	206 73.57%

**I am interested in the results of elections.**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Agree
<b>All</b>	20 4.03%	50 10.08%	108 21.77%	210 42.34%	104 20.97%	70 14.11%	314 63.31%
<b>Females</b>	8 3.70%	17 7.87%	31 14.35%	101 46.76%	40 18.52%	30 13.89%	141 65.28%
<b>Males</b>	12 4.29%	28 10.00%	63 22.50%	109 38.93%	64 22.86%	40 14.29%	173 61.79%

**None of the political parties have policies/ideas that I like.**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Agree
<b>All</b>	28 5.65%	146 29.44%	241 48.59%	50 10.08%	29 5.85%	174 35.08%	79 15.93%
<b>Females</b>	7 3.24%	46 21.30%	93 43.06%	20 9.26%	10 4.63%	65 30.09%	30 13.89%
<b>Males</b>	21 7.50%	88 31.43%	120 42.86%	30 10.71%	19 6.79%	109 38.93%	49 17.50%