

**Voter Turnout among Younger Canadians and Visible Minority Canadians
Evidence from the Provincial Diversity Project**

Prepared for
Elections Canada

By

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Executive Summary

Context

Although it is increasingly well documented that younger Canadians and visible minority Canadians tend to vote less than other Canadians, the causes of this variation in voter turnout are less clear. This report investigates the causes of this greater propensity to abstain among younger Canadians and visible minority Canadians. It looks at voting in federal elections, but also at voting in provincial elections, and most importantly it looks at the propensity to abstain in both levels of elections, what can be qualified as habitual non-voting. The report compares younger Canadians (aged 18-24 and 25-34) and older Canadians (aged 35+), as well as visible minority Canadians and Canadians who are not members of a visible minority group.

This report relies on the *Provincial Diversity Project (PDP)*. The PDP is a research platform led by Antoine Bilodeau (Concordia), Luc Turgeon (Ottawa), Ailsa Henderson (Edinburgh), and Stephen E. White (Concordia). The *Provincial Diversity Project* survey was conducted online by Léger Marketing and surveyed close to 10,000 Canadians during the winter of 2014, including oversamples of young Canadians (n=1900) and visible minority Canadians (n=1600).

Overview of the Results and Policy Implications

The findings confirm that younger Canadians and visible minority Canadians tend to vote less than other Canadians. This holds for federal elections and provincial elections. Moreover, our investigations indicate as others have done before, that younger Canadians are not simply more likely to abstain from voting from time to time, but rather that they are more likely to be habitual non-voters, that is to systematically abstain from voting at every election. While only 10% of Canadians aged 35 years and older report not having voted in both federal and provincial elections, this proportion increases to 31% among the 25 to 34 and to 47% among the 18 to 24. Among visible minority Canadians, the proportion of habitual non-voters is 29% in comparison to 14% among other Canadians.

The findings indicate that younger and older Canadians differ from each other on some key socio-demographic characteristics and political attitudes. Younger Canadians are more likely to be students and to some extent are more likely to be recent immigrants. Moreover, younger Canadians are also less likely to feel close to a political party, less likely to feel guilty when not voting, and also less confident in Elections Canada.

Younger Canadians are also different from older Canadians on other characteristics investigated in this report. The differences for the above-mentioned characteristics are especially important, however, because these characteristics are predictors of being habitual non-voters. Overall, the findings indicate that younger Canadians' profile in terms of greater likelihood of being a student, being a recent immigrant as well as their lower propensity to feel close to a party, to feel guilty when not voting, and their lesser confidence in Elections Canada, together explain about two thirds of the gap in their greater propensity to be habitual non-voters. The reasons why younger Canadians are less likely to vote thus appear to be rooted both in their socio-demographic characteristics and their political attitudes.

Some of these findings are surprising. This is particularly the case for the finding that students are more likely to be habitual non-voters. Contrary to Gélinau (2013), we found that

students are more likely to be habitual non-voters than non-students among younger Canadians. In effect, the study suggests that younger Canadians are more likely to be habitual non-voters than older Canadians in part because a larger proportion of them are still in school. Such divergent findings with Gélinau's are puzzling, especially considering the key role that such a characteristic appears to play in our analyses to explain the gap in habitual non-voting. It is difficult to determine why being a student is correlated with a higher propensity to vote in Gélinau's study and with a lower propensity to vote in our study. We nevertheless offer a tentative explanation in the conclusion as to why we believe it intuitively makes sense to expect students to vote less than non-students. Briefly, following Howe's argument (2010), a prolonged education would contribute to create an "extended adolescence" in which increased interactions with peers of the same age and delayed social responsibilities would lead to a lower propensity to vote.

The role of confidence in Elections Canada is another novel finding, although intuitive. Younger Canadians express less confidence in Elections Canada than older ones, and such lower confidence in the guardian of elections appears related to a lower propensity to vote. Interestingly, it holds beyond voting in federal elections; it is also related to habitual non-voting. This suggests that ensuring the strong integrity of the electoral process and of the institution in charge of administering the electoral process is essential to ensure that younger Canadians engage more with the electoral process and even to ensure that all Canadians continue to vote.

Fortunately, Canadians as a whole appear to express a strong level of confidence in Elections Canada, more so than in the legislative bodies of the federal and provincial governments. An age-gap exists, however, between younger and older Canadians, and it partly explains why younger Canadians are more likely to be habitual non-voters. We did not investigate the reason why younger Canadians express less confidence in Elections Canada than older ones, but the consequences are real and clear: younger Canadians vote less than older ones. These are thus questions Elections Canada might want to investigate further in the future.

The report also sheds an important new light on the role of "opinionation" in the propensity to vote. In essence, younger Canadians are less opinionated than older Canadians (that is they are less likely to hold or express political opinions), and the findings indicate that those less likely to hold opinions are more likely to be habitual non-voters. Among the reasons why younger Canadians vote less is that they have not yet formed substantive opinions on many political issues, especially those relating to the functioning of political institutions in Canada. Of course, it is possible that such lower levels of opinionation might essentially reflect a lack of knowledge about politics, something we could not account for in this study. This nevertheless points to another possibility to explore further. In any case, such lower levels of opinionation among younger Canadians arguably signal a disengagement from politics.

Other findings are less surprising but nevertheless equally important as the ones above. About half of younger Canadians do not feel guilty about the idea of not voting. This is substantially more than among older Canadians, and this gap in a sense of civic duty substantially helps to explain why younger Canadians are more likely to be habitual non-voters. It appears that remobilizing Canadian youth in the electoral process (federal and provincial) must involve efforts at building this sense of civic duty. This study is not the first one to highlight such a finding (see Blais, 2000). Many voter education programs have been initiated over the years, such as CIVIX's *Student Vote* program for elementary and high school students or Elections Canada's *Choosing our Mascot* for primary schools students. The question that we need to investigate now is whether

those programs are efficient in the long term, not only at teaching about voting, but also at instilling a sense of civic duty among younger Canadians.

The greater disconnect with political parties among the youth is another important factor to explain why younger Canadians are more likely to be habitual non-voters than older Canadians. The solution to youth disengagement with electoral politics thus appears to be in part in the hands of parties who need to find ways to reconnect with the Canadian youth.

Younger Canadians are not the only group examined in this report. Visible minority Canadians, like younger Canadians, are also more likely to be habitual non-voters. The reasons why they are more likely than other Canadians to be habitual non-voters are somewhat different, however, and can be summarized in two points. First, a large proportion of visible minority Canadians in our sample are recent immigrants (24%) and recent immigrants appear more likely to be habitual non-voters. What precisely impedes them from voting during their first decade in Canada remains to be identified. The optimistic prospect, however, is that visible minorities born abroad but who have lived in Canada for more than 10 years appear as likely as the rest of the population to vote. If anything, this suggests that the challenge of voting for members of visible minority groups who are immigrants is only temporary. Government efforts at stimulating and facilitating voting in this group of Canadians should therefore be targeted primarily at recent immigrants.

Second, visible minority Canadians are on average younger than other Canadians. Since we know that younger Canadians vote less and that visible minority Canadians are younger than the rest of the population, it is not then surprising to observe that they vote less. In other words, trying to understand why visible minority Canadians vote less is at least in part the same task as finding out why younger Canadians vote less. By finding ways to address low voter turnout among youth, governments and community partners are simultaneously tackling another task, namely stimulating voting among Canadians of visible minority background. Programs targeting younger Canadians, however, need to be built around the socio-demographic reality that a significant proportion of Canada's youth is of a more diverse ethnic and racial background than it used to be.

To conclude, it is important to emphasize that the different propensity to vote between visible minority Canadians and other Canadians is not rooted in political differences, but mostly in socio-demographic differences. There are some differences in the political attitudes of visible minority Canadians and other Canadians but these only marginally explain the gap in voting between the two groups.

Introduction

Over the past decade, a tremendous amount of resources have been devoted to tracking youth voter turnout. The evidence is quite clear: younger Canadians vote significantly less than older Canadians. *Elections Canada* estimates that voter turnout in the 2011 federal election was 38.8% for those aged 18-24 and 45.1% for those aged 25-34, compared with 71.5% and 75.1% for those aged 55-64 and 65-74 respectively. Blais and Loewen (2011) found that regardless of the socio-economic variables (education, income, etc), voter turnout increases with age.

However, young voters are not the only segment of Canadian society to exhibit a lower propensity to vote. Earlier evidence suggested that immigrants were somewhat less likely than other Canadians to vote and that the size of the turnout gap varied across different groups of immigrants (Black, 1987; Chui, Lambert, Curtis, 1991). Liviana Tossutti's (2007) analysis of the *Ethnic Diversity Survey*, the largest dataset available to investigate immigrants' participation in federal, provincial and municipal elections, came to a similar conclusion. She found that members of non-European immigrant groups displayed the lowest levels of electoral turnout. The above studies indicated significant variation in electoral participation across various groups of immigrants in Canada. Gidengil and Roy (forthcoming, 2015) help us make sense of that variation by highlighting that members of visible minority groups are least likely to vote. While past research has shown that Canadians belonging to visible minority groups, especially immigrants, experience the greatest difficulty in social and economic integration, Gidengil and Roy (forthcoming, 2015) indicate that this is also true in terms of electoral participation.

Although it is increasingly well documented that younger Canadians and visible minority Canadians tend to vote less than other Canadians, the causes of this variation in voter turnout are less clear. This report tries to provide a better understanding of the reasons why younger Canadians and visible minority Canadians tend to vote in smaller proportions than other Canadians. To do so, this report investigates the characteristics of voters among these groups of Canadians.¹

This report relies on the *Provincial Diversity Project (PDP)*. The PDP is a research platform led by Antoine Bilodeau (Concordia), Luc Turgeon (Ottawa), Ailsa Henderson (Edinburgh), and Stephen E. White (Concordia). The PDP aims at providing a better understanding of the way in which identity and attachment, views about federalism, attitudes toward ethnic diversity and immigration, political participation, as well as views on social, economic and political issues, differ across provinces in Canada.

The *Provincial Diversity Project* was conducted with the support of Léger Marketing, Concordia University, the Secrétariat aux affaires intergouvernementales canadiennes du Québec, the Canadian Network for Research on Terrorism, Security and Society, Elections Canada, the Institute for Research on Public Policy and the Chaire de recherche du Canada en études québécoises et canadiennes de l'UQAM.

The *Provincial Diversity Project* survey was conducted online by Léger Marketing in the winter of 2014 and surveyed close to 10,000 Canadians. *The Provincial Diversity Project* survey

¹ We use Statistics Canada's definition of visible minorities, which is a "person other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour. The visible minority population consists mainly of the following groups: Chinese, South Asian, Black, Arab, West Asian, Filipino, Southeast Asian, Latin American, Japanese and Korean." To simplify the reading of this report, we often use at times "other voters" to refer to non-visible minority voters.

has three components. The first component of the project provides a portrait of Canadians in each province. More than 6400 Canadians were interviewed in all ten provinces: 1000 respondents were interviewed in each of Quebec, Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia; 500 Canadians were interviewed in each of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Manitoba and Saskatchewan; and 400 Canadians were interviewed in Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland and Labrador. The second component of the project provides oversamples of visible minority Canadians in Quebec, Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia; 400 visible minority Canadians were interviewed in each of the four provinces. Finally, the third component of the project provides regional samples of young Canadians (aged 18 to 34). The study interviewed 500 young Canadians in Quebec and 350 young Canadians in each of the following regions: the Atlantic, Ontario, the Prairies, and British Columbia. Elections Canada provided the financial support to conduct the young Canadian component of the survey (except for Quebec, which was funded by the Institute for Research in Public Policy).

The report relies on some of the strategic advantages of the *Provincial Diversity Project*. First, the project oversamples young Canadians and visible minority Canadians. Second, the project examines voter turnout in both federal and provincial elections. Third, the project examines the correlates of voting that are specific to each of the federal or provincial political dynamics. For instance, the report examines whether respondents are interested *in federal* politics and in the *politics of their province*, and it examines whether respondents would feel guilty not voting in *federal elections* and in *provincial elections*. This feature of the *Provincial Diversity Project* allows us to move beyond the examination of general political attitudes, to examine whether some federal and provincial-specific political attitudes structure Canadians' propensity to vote. The following political attitudes and characteristics are examined: interest in politics, feeling close to a political party, the perception that politics is too complicated, feeling that one has no say in what the government does, feeling guilty about not voting, feeling that one's vote can make a difference, frequency of political discussions at home during one's youth, confidence in the House of Commons, in the provincial legislature and in Elections Canada, attachment to Canada and the province, the perceived impact of government on one's life, and social trust.

Following existing research on voter turnout (Gélineau, 2013), we divide the correlates of voting into two groups: 1) socio-demographic characteristics and 2) political attitudes. The report thus begins by comparing the socio-economic profiles and political attitudes of younger and older Canadians, and those of visible minority Canadians and other Canadians. Second, it separately examines the characteristics of younger and older voters in federal and provincial elections, as well as those of voters who are members of a visible minority groups and those who are not. Third, the report examines the characteristics of younger voters and visible minority voters who are habitual non-voters (those who did not vote in both federal and provincial elections). Fourth, once we have identified some of the key characteristics of voters among younger Canadians and visible minority Canadians, the report evaluates to what extent these characteristics account for the gap in voter turnout between younger and older Canadians and between visible minority Canadians and other Canadians. Finally, the report provides a discussion on the role of low opinionation in explaining the lower voter turnout among younger Canadians and visible minority Canadians.

We start by exploring levels of voter turnout among Canadians in federal and provincial elections using the PDP. The PDP asked respondents to indicate whether they had voted in the previous federal and provincial elections. As indicated in Table 1, Canadians report having voted

in the previous federal and provincial elections in broadly similar proportions. Moreover, and consistent with findings from existing studies, younger Canadians tend to vote less than older ones. While 88% of Canadians aged 35 and older report having voted in the last federal election, this proportion drops to 66% among those aged 25 to 34, and to 49% for those aged 18 to 24.² There is, thus, a 39-point gap between Canadians aged 18 to 24 and those aged 35 years and older. Similar gaps are observed in provincial election voter turnout. Also consistent with existing research, visible minority Canadians are less likely than other Canadians to report having voted in previous federal and provincial elections. The gaps are substantial: 16 points for federal elections and 18 points for provincial elections.

Table 1: Self-Reported Voting in Federal and Provincial Elections

Voted in last elections (%)	Age-Groups			Visible Minority Status	
	18-24	25-34	35+	Visible minority Canadians	Other Canadians
Federal election	49	66 ^a	88 ^a	68	84 ^a
Provincial election	50	65 ^a	86 ^a	65	83 ^a
n=	971	2323	5007	2202	5609

Difference with 18-24 or visible minorities: a: p<.001; b: p<.01; c: p<.05.

Source: Provincial Diversity Project

1. The Socio-Economic Profile of Younger Canadians and Visible Minority Canadians

Younger Canadians are less likely to vote than older ones. Visible minority Canadians are less likely to vote than other Canadians. Why? In order to start exploring the reasons why we observe such gaps in voting, the report first compares the socio-economic profile of the different groups. It is well known that some socio-economic characteristics are associated with lower and higher propensity to vote. Should younger and older Canadians or visible minority Canadians and other Canadians have different socio-economic profiles, this could help us identify some of the reasons why voter turnout varies across these different segments of the Canadian population. Table 2 presents the distribution of the socio-demographic characteristics.

² These proportions clearly over-estimate the proportions of Canadians who actually vote in federal and provincial elections. Such an over-reporting of voter turnout is not specific to the Provincial Diversity Project; it has been observed in all of the Canadian Election Studies conducted over the last few decades.

Table 2: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Younger and Visible Minority Canadians

	Age-Groups			Visible Minority Status	
	18-24	25-34	35+	Visible minority Canadians	Other Canadians
Age (mean)	22	30***	55***	38	50***
Education (% highest degree)					
High school or less	28	15**	20**	11	22***
Post-secondary	24	31**	32**	21	33***
University	45	41	36***	51	35***
Post-graduate	2	12***	13***	17	11***
Household income (% less than \$30,000)	40	20***	16***	24	17***
Unemployed (%)	8	8	4***	7	5**
Student (%)	49	9***	1***	14	5***
Married (%)	19	55***	68***	54	63***
Time spent at religious inst. (% weekly)	10	11	13	18	11***
Recent immigrant (%)	8	9	3***	24	2***
Minimum n=	787	2075	4300	1938	4862

Source: Provincial Diversity Project (2014).

Difference with 18-24 or visible minorities: ***: p<.001; **: p<.01; *: p<.05.

The Socio-Economic Profile of Younger Canadians

Younger and older Canadians differ on many socio-economic characteristics. First, a larger proportion of younger Canadians than older Canadians hold a university degree (45% and 41% for those aged 18-24 and 25-34 as opposed to 36% for those aged 35 and older). These differences reflect a well-documented gradual structural transformation in the Canadian population since the 1950s. The differences would actually be much larger if we unpacked the group of Canadians aged 35 and older.³

Younger Canadians are also more likely to earn \$30,000 or less than older Canadians (40%, 20%, and 16% respectively for Canadians aged 18 to 24, 25 to 34 and 35 and older). This finding can easily be explained by the fact that a substantial proportion of Canadians aged 18 to 24 are still in school. Indeed, close to half of our sample of 18 to 24 (49%) declared still being students in comparison to only 9% of those aged 25 to 34 and only 1% of those aged 35 and older. Younger Canadians are also more likely to report being unemployed than older Canadians, which could also help explain the differences in household income.

Another difference, somewhat predictable, concerns the proportions of Canadians reporting being married. Not surprisingly, younger Canadians are substantially less likely to report being married than older Canadians (19%, 55%, and 68% respectively for Canadians aged 18 to 24, 25 to 34 and 35 and older). Most of the above observations are not really surprising;

³ Canadians aged 35 and older are more likely to hold a post-secondary degree but this is only a reflection of the time it takes to complete such higher levels of education.

younger and older Canadians are at different stages of the life-cycle. They are nevertheless worth mentioning as they could help explain the different propensity to vote across age groups.

A final difference worth reporting concerns the proportion of respondents that are recent immigrants, that is in Canada for 10 years or less. The differences are not large; while 8% and 9% of Canadians aged 18 to 24 and 25 to 34 are recent immigrants, this proportion is only 3% among the 35 and older.

The Socio-Economic Profile of Visible Minority Canadians

The differences in socio-economic characteristics are also quite systematic between visible minority Canadians and other Canadians. On all characteristics reported in Table 2, visible minority Canadians and other Canadians differ in a statistically significant manner. One of the most important differences is probably that visible minority Canadians are on average younger than other Canadians (38 vs. 50 year old).

Visible minority Canadians in our sample also appear more likely to hold a university degree (51% vs. 35%), and even to hold a post-graduate degree (17% vs. 11%). Interestingly, visible minorities in the aggregate appear less likely to vote in spite of this higher level of education.

Visible minority Canadians also appear more likely to hold an income lower than \$30,000, more likely to be unemployed, more likely to be students and less likely to be married. Finally, and not surprisingly, they are substantially more likely to be recent immigrants than other Canadians (24% vs. 2%). As with younger Canadians, the socio-economic profile of visible minority Canadians offers some potential to explain at least part of the gap in voting observed with other Canadians.

2. The Political Profile of Younger Canadians and Visible Minority Canadians

Younger and older Canadians and visible minority Canadians and other Canadians differ, as expected, in terms of their socio-economic profiles. In addition, their different propensity to vote could also reflect different ways of relating to politics. The report now presents the profile of these segments of the Canadian population in relation to their interest in politics, closeness to political parties, sense of political efficacy, opinions with regards to the importance of voting and the perception that their vote can make a difference. The following sections also compare the opinions of the different groups in terms of confidence in public institutions, attachment to Canada and their province, as well as the perceived impact of governments on their lives. Finally, the report also looks at opinions with regards to social trust and the extent to which Canadians discussed politics at home during their youth. Table 3 presents the distribution of political attitudes across the different groups.

Table 3: Political Attitudes among Younger Canadians and Visible Minority Canadians

	Age-Groups			Visible Minority Status	
	18-24	25-34	35+	Visible minority Canadian	Other Canadians
Interest in Politics (mean score, 0-10)					
Federal politics	4.8	5.6***	6.7***	6.0	6.4***
Provincial politics	5.1	5.8***	7.0***	6.1	6.8***
Closeness to a political party (%)					
Federal politics	64	71**	81***	70	80***
Provincial politics	62	69*	79***	69	78***
Politics is too complicated (% strongly agree/agree)					
Federal politics	68	58***	45***	62	46***
Provincial politics	65	53***	42***	60	42***
People like me have not much say in politics (% strongly agree/agree)					
Federal politics	73	74	76	72	76**
Provincial politics	67	67	69	69	69
I would feel guilty if I did not vote (% strongly agree/agree)					
Federal election	48	55*	74***	65	71
Provincial election	50	55	75***	67	71
I feel that my vote can make a difference					
(% strongly agree/agree)	64	63	77***	74	74
Political Discussion at Home During Childhood					
(mean score, 0-1)	.38	.40	.47***	.44	.45
Confidence in public institutions (mean score, 0-10)					
House of Commons	5.2	5.0	5.0	5.9	4.9**
Provincial legislature	5.3	5.1	5.3	6.0	5.1***
Elections Canada	5.5	5.9**	6.3***	6.6	6.1***
Attachments (mean score, 0-10)					
Canada	7.6	7.7	8.1***	8.1	8.0
Province	7.3	7.3	7.9***	7.4	7.8***
Impact of governments (mean score, 0-10)					
Federal	6.7	7.0	7.6***	7.3	7.5
Province	6.8	7.4***	8.0***	7.5	7.8***
Social Trust					
(% most people can be trusted)	30	31	44***	33	43***
Minimum n=	711	1918	4741	1886	5169

Source: Provincial Diversity Project (2014).

Difference with 18-24 or visible minorities: ***: p<.001; **: p<.01; *: p<.05.

Political Attitudes of Younger Canadians

For a number of political attitudes, Table 3 reports important differences between younger and older Canadians. First, Canadians aged 35 years and older are more likely to be interested in politics than younger Canadians. The mean scores in terms of interest in federal politics on a scale between 0 (not interested) and 10 (very interested) are 4.8 for Canadians aged between 18 and 24, 5.6 for Canadians aged between 25 and 34 and 6.7 for those over 35. Comparable gaps are observed for interest in provincial politics.

Younger Canadians are also less likely to feel close to a political party. For federal politics, the percentage of Canadians who feel close to a political party is 64% for the 18-24 age group, 71% for the 25-34 age group, and 81% for those over 35. For provincial politics, the percentage of Canadians who feel close to a political party is 62% for the 18-24 cohort, 69% for the 25-34 cohort, and 79% for those over 35.

A larger proportion of younger Canadians than older ones appear to perceive politics as too complicated. When asked whether they agreed with the statement “Sometimes I feel federal politics is too complicated for people like me”, 68% of Canadians aged 18 to 24 report that they either strongly agree or agree in comparison to 58% of those aged 25 to 34 and 45% of those aged 35 and older. Once again, similar differences are observed for provincial politics. Interestingly, however, younger Canadians are as likely as older ones to believe that they have not much say in federal or provincial politics.

Another major difference in the political attitudes of younger and older Canadians relates to the feeling of guilt about not voting. Younger Canadians are substantially less likely than older Canadians to report that they would feel guilty if they did not vote in either a federal or provincial election. The percentage of Canadians who would feel guilty if they didn't vote at a federal election is 48% for those aged 18 to 24, 55% for those aged 25 to 34, and 74% for those over 35. The same pattern holds for feeling guilty about not voting in provincial elections. This finding is consistent with Blais (2000) who observes that the sense of duty to vote is weaker among younger Canadians.

The differences between younger and older Canadians are far more limited however when considering the perception that one's vote can make a difference. While 77% of Canadians aged 35 years and older agree with the statement, the proportions are 64% and 63% respectively for the 18 to 24 and 25 to 34 age groups.

There are also significant differences between younger and older Canadians in terms of their level of confidence in Elections Canada. Canadians aged 35 years and older and those between the ages of 25 and 34 express higher levels of confidence in Elections Canada than those aged 18 to 24 (6.3 and 5.9 vs. 5.5). No differences are observed across the age groups for the levels of confidence in the House of Commons and the provincial legislature. As a side note, it is worth emphasizing that every age group exhibits higher confidence in Elections Canada than in either the House of Commons or the legislature of their province.

Younger Canadians report in a smaller proportion than older ones that they discussed politics at home with their parents during their youth. Younger Canadians, however, also appear somewhat different from older ones in terms of attachment to Canada and their province and the perceived impact of federal and provincial governments. Canadians aged 35 years and older are

more attached to both orders of government and also perceived a greater impact of both orders of government than younger Canadians. Finally, Canadians aged 35 and older are more likely to express the view that most people can be trusted.

On most of the political attitudes examined, younger Canadians thus appear different than older Canadians; for some attitudes, the differences are smaller while for others they are larger. Likely, these differences in political attitudes contribute to explaining why younger Canadians vote less than older Canadians. Section 3 will examine whether these factors do relate to the propensity to vote in federal and provincial elections.

Political Attitudes of Visible Minority Canadians

In many ways, visible minority Canadians also differ from other Canadians on many political attitudes. Like younger Canadians, they tend to exhibit a weaker psychological engagement with politics than other Canadians. Visible minorities appear somewhat less interested in politics than other Canadians, whether it is in federal politics (6.0 vs. 6.4) or in provincial politics (6.1 vs. 6.8). Visible minorities are also less likely than other Canadians to feel close to a political party (70% vs. 80% at the federal level, and 69% vs. 78% at the provincial level). Moreover, visible minority Canadians are more likely than other Canadians to express the opinion that politics is too complicated for them (62% vs. 46% at the federal level, and 60% vs. 42% at the provincial level).

In contrast to younger Canadians, however, visible minorities are not less likely than other Canadians to report that they would feel guilty if they did not vote in federal or provincial elections. Although a gap exists between visible minorities and other Canadians with respect to the guilt about non-voting, the differences are not statistically significant. Similarly, visible minority Canadians and other Canadians are as likely to report that their vote can make a difference.

Visible minorities are distinct from younger Canadians with regards to confidence in public institutions. For all three institutions, visible minorities express higher levels of confidence than other Canadians (6.6 vs. 6.1 for Elections Canada; 5.9 vs. 4.9 for the House of Commons; and 6.0 vs. 5.1 for the provincial legislature).

Interestingly, while visible minority Canadians do not differ from other Canadians when it comes to attachment to Canada or the perceived impact of the federal government on their lives, they express a weaker attachment to their province and perceive a lesser impact for the provincial government. Finally, visible minority Canadians are less likely than other Canadians to express the view that most people can be trusted.

The political attitudes of visible minorities and other Canadians are likely to play a key role in accounting for their different propensity to vote. Whether it is the lower levels of interest in politics, the lower propensity to feel close to a party, the greater perception that politics is too complicated, these all represent potential candidates for explaining visible minorities' weaker propensity to vote.

3. Characteristics of Younger Voters

The next step in identifying why younger Canadians are less likely to vote than older Canadians is to identify the characteristics of voters. Analyses are performed separately for younger and older Canadians because some characteristics could be related to voting for one group, but not for the other one. The analyses rely on binomial logistic regressions to identify the characteristics of Canadian voters by age cohort, dividing respondents into those aged 18 to 24, 25 to 34, and 35 and older. The analyses were performed separately for federal and provincial elections. Table 4 reports the results of these analyses for voting in federal elections and Table 5 reports the results for voting in provincial elections.⁴

Table 4: Correlates of Voting in Federal Elections among Younger Canadians

	Voting in Federal Elections (1-0)						
	18-24			25-34			35+
Socio-Demographic Factors	B	SE		B	SE	B	SE
Age	.04	.13		-.02	.04	.04	.01 a
Woman	-.34	.36		-.25	.23	.01	.21
Education (ref. no high school)							
Post-secondary	1.14	.52 c		.99	.32 b	.46	.25
University	1.28	.45 b		1.05	.32 a	.83	.31 b
Post-graduate	.62	.91		1.32	.48 b	1.01	.52
Household income	.08	.05		.11	.04 b	.01	.04
Unemployed	1.73	.66 b		-.65	.45	.34	.47
Student	-.32	.37		-1.41	.41 a	.77	.98
Married	.36	.45		.46	.24	.58	.25 c
Time spent at religious inst.	-.75	.53		.07	.34	-.22	.36
Visible minority	.32	.45		-.40	.35	-.24	.40
Immigrant (ref. Can. Born)							
0-10 years	-2.18	.72 b		-2.08	.57 a	-.51	.79
11-20 years	-.39	.62		-1.29	.54 c	.73	.88
More than 20 years	-2.0	1.01 c		-.08	.50	-.36	.41
Regions (ref. Ontario)							
Quebec	.83	.47		.61	.39	1.05	.35 b
BC	-.92	.51		.17	.32	-.22	.27
Prairies	-.52	.50		-.60	.30 c	-.12	.25
Atlantic	.55	.74		.25	.36	-.08	.27
Political Orientations and Attitudes							
Interest in federal politics	.07	.08		.11	.05 c	.04	.04
Close to federal party	1.21	.41 b		1.14	.26 a	.88	.21 a
Federal politics is too complicated	.22	.67		-.25	.43	-.79	.39 c
People like me have no say in federal politics	.39	.68		.09	.44	.65	.42
I would feel guilty if I did not	2.40	.55 a		3.17	.40 a	2.94	.32 a

⁴ Multivariate analyses presented in Tables 4 and 5 (and all other following tables) are based on weighted data to respect the socio-economic composition in each province as well as the relative weight of provinces in Canada. Because the data are weighted, no pseudo R-squared is reported.

vote in federal election								
I feel my vote can make a difference	.91	.58	.93	.41	c	1.75	.39	a
Discussed politics during youth at home	.96	.56	.54	.35		.21	.29	
Confidence in HofC.	-.16	.11	-.20	.08	c	-.13	.05	b
Confidence in Elections Canada	.21	.09	.19	.07	b	.14	.05	b
Attachment to Canada	.09	.08	-.09	.05		.05	.04	
Impact of federal govt.	-.14	.09	.08	.06		.07	.04	
Social trust	.82	.39	.00	.25		.03	.22	
Constant	-5.78	3.19	-2.85	1.40	c	-5.68	.80	a
Number of observations	378		1358			3417		

Source: Provincial Diversity Project. Entries report B coefficients (Binomial logistic regressions)
a: p<.001; b: p<.01; c: p<.05

Table 5: Correlates of Voting in Provincial Elections among Younger Canadians

	Voting in Provincial Elections (1-0)						
	18-24		25-34		35+		
Socio-Demographic Factors	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	
Age	.08	.13	.00	.03	.05	.01	a
Woman	.06	.34	.05	.24	.17	.21	
Education (ref. no high school)							
Post-secondary	1.31	.44	.96	.31	.28	.26	b
University	1.29	.42	1.03	.34	.89	.29	b
Post-graduate	1.51	.89	1.09	.46	.13	.39	
Household income	.04	.05	.09	.04	.02	.04	
Unemployed	.95	.66	-.83	.43	.33	.48	
Student	-.18	.35	-1.01	.40	-.20	1.0	
Married	-.33	.46	.06	.24	.62	.23	b
Time spent at religious inst.	-.09	.53	-.26	.30	-.39	.33	
Visible minority	-.20	.46	-.24	.41	-.48	.42	
Immigrant (ref. Can. Born)							
0-10 years	-3.03	.94	-2.18	.59	-1.73	.58	b
11-20 years	.33	.64	-1.47	.68	.55	.79	
More than 20 years	-6.37	1.50	.42	.56	-.43	.39	
Regions (ref. Ontario)							
Quebec	1.59	.42	.91	.33	1.40	.34	a
BC	.33	.47	.24	.31	-.18	.26	
Prairies	.50	.53	-.37	.29	.01	.23	
Atlantic	.45	.56	.23	.32	.32	.26	
Political Orientations and Attitudes							
Interest in provincial politics	.08	.08	.08	.04	.16	.04	a
Close to provincial party	.66	.38	.70	.24	.88	.21	a
Provincial politics is too complicated	.36	.60	-1.21	.44	-.68	.39	
People like me have no say in provincial politics	-.41	.63	.78	.43	.21	.39	
I would feel guilty if I did not	2.43	.50	3.52	.40	3.02	.27	a

vote in provincial election									
I feel my vote can make a difference	.19	.58		.49	.40		1.14	.36	b
Discussed politics during youth at home	.75	.51		.41	.35		.14	.29	
Confidence in prov. legislature	-.06	.09		-.06	.09		-.19	.07	b
Confidence in Elections Canada	.07	.09		.09	.06		.17	.08	c
Attachment to province	.17	.07	c	.10	.05	c	.02	.04	
Impact of provincial govt.	.00	.09		-.04	.05		.00	.05	
Social trust	.20	.37		-.08	.23		.11	.21	
Constant	-6.94	3.15	c	-3.85	1.19	a	-5.34	.74	a
Number of observations	407			1385			3434		

Source: Provincial Diversity Project. Entries report B coefficients (Binomial logistic regressions)

a: $p < .001$; b: $p < .01$; c: $p < .05$.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Younger Voters

Some socio-demographic characteristics systematically correlate with voting among all three age groups and for both provincial and federal elections. Education is one such characteristic. Canadians with higher education are more likely to report having voted. Being a recent immigrant is associated with a lower likelihood of reporting having voted in federal and provincial elections. Predicted probabilities were calculated based on the multivariate analyses by keeping all variables at the sample means and by varying whether or not respondents were recent immigrants or not. According to these predicted probabilities, the gaps in voter turnout between recent immigrants and the Canadian-born population are substantial. By keeping all other variables in the model at the sample mean (i.e. controlling for them), the predicted probability of having voted in the preceding federal election was 64% for Canadian-born respondents aged 18 to 24, compared to 17% for recent immigrants (those in Canada for up to 10 years) in that age group, a 47-point gap.⁵ The observed gap is even larger for the provincial elections, at 58 points (67% vs. 9%). Among voters aged 25 to 34, the gap is 39 points with regards to federal elections (89% vs. 50%) and 45 points with regards to provincial elections (87% vs. 42%). Recent immigrants aged 35 and older also appear somewhat less likely to vote than the Canadian-born population, but the gap holds only for voting in provincial elections and is much smaller than among younger Canadians, namely 12 points (97% vs. 85%).⁶

Another systematic correlate of voting among socio-demographic characteristics is region of residence, or more precisely living in Quebec. Quebecers are more likely than other Canadians to report having voted in the previous provincial elections, and this holds for all three age groups. The results are also consistent with recent voter turnout in provincial elections. For example, in the 2014 provincial elections in Quebec and Ontario, voter turnouts were respectively 71.4% and 52.1%. Quebecers' greater propensity to vote also holds to some extent for the federal elections, but only among those aged 35 and older.

⁵ Respondents were explicitly offered the choice to answer that they were not eligible to vote. Recent immigrants (and other respondents) who answered that they were not eligible to vote in the previous elections were not included in the analyses. Recent immigrants' lower propensity to vote is therefore not a reflection of their ineligibility to vote.

⁶ Given the lack of variance in reported voter turnout among the 35 years and older (88% and 86% report having voted in the previous federal and provincial elections), the effect reported with the predicted probabilities are necessarily smaller than among Canadians. This holds for this variable and all others in the analyses.

Other socio-demographic characteristics are not systematic for all three age groups. Some are statistically significant among Canadians aged 35 and older only. As researchers studying other countries, including the United States (Wolfinger and Wolfinger, 2008), have found, being married is associated with a greater likelihood to vote. It holds for both federal and provincial elections, but only among older Canadians aged 35 and older.

Age is also such a characteristic. Of course, the age-range is much wider among our group of older Canadians (35+) than among the 18 to 24 and among the 25 to 34, but it is nevertheless worth emphasizing that the age variable is statistically significant among the 35 and older only. In other words, while we observe that someone who is 50, for instance, is more likely to vote than someone who is 35, we observe no difference in turnout between an 18-year-old and a 24-year old, or between a 25-year-old and a 34-year-old, after controlling for all other variables in the analyses.

Other correlates are statistically significant only among Canadians aged 25 to 34. Income falls in this category. The greater the household income, the more likely Canadians aged 25 to 34 are to report having voted in either federal or provincial elections. The predicted probabilities indicate a 14-point gap in voting in federal elections between the poorest and wealthiest Canadians aged 25 to 34. The gap is 15 points for voting in provincial elections. No such relationship is observed among Canadians aged 18 to 24 or 35 and older.

Being a student also falls into that category. Canadians aged 25 to 34 who are students are less likely to report having voted in either the last federal or provincial elections. The predicted probabilities indicate that the gap is 23 points for voting in federal elections (66% for students vs. 89% for non-students) and 10 points for voting in provincial elections. This finding is in sharp contrast with Gélinau's (2013) who observed that students were more likely – not less – to vote. We will come back to these divergent findings in the conclusion. Intriguingly, no relationship is observed among Canadians aged 18-24, and this holds both for federal and provincial elections. It is difficult to explain why being a student appears to decrease voting among the 25 to 34 but not among the 18-24. Maybe this could be explained by the fact that during the ages of 18-24, age trumps the student effect. In other words, voter turnout would be so low within that age group that it would not really matter whether one is a student or not. This reasoning, however, is speculative and before we conclude that being a student does not decrease voter turnout among the 18 to 24, we should wait until further analysis is conducted in the section on habitual non-voting. No relationship between student status and voting is observed among Canadians aged 35 and older, but it should be noted that very few people of this age group report still being in school (less than one per cent).

There is one socio-demographic characteristic that appears as a correlate of voting only for the 18 to 24, namely being unemployed. Its direction, however, is counter-intuitive, with unemployed people more likely to report having voted, and its effect is observed only for voting in federal elections, not for voting in provincial elections. It is difficult to make sense of this finding.

Other socio-demographic characteristics do not appear as correlates of voting for any group or at any level of government. Gender does not appear to systematically correlate with voting, nor does spending time with people at a religious institution. Interestingly, being of a visible minority background does not appear as a correlate of voting in any of the three age groups. While descriptive data in Table 1 indicate that visible minorities are less likely to vote in

either federal or provincial elections, the analyses in Tables 2 and 3 indicate that such differences are not statistically significant once we control for socio-demographic characteristics and political attitudes.⁷

Political Attitudes of Younger Voters

A certain number of political attitudes emerge as statistically significant correlates of voting among all three age groups and for both federal and provincial elections. First, Canadians who feel close to a party are more likely to report having voted than those who do not feel close to a party. Among Canadians aged 18 to 24, predicted probabilities indicate that 68% of those who feel close to a federal party report having voted, compared with 39% of those who do not feel close to a federal party; a 29-point gap. Similarly, the gap is 16 points for feeling close to a provincial party and voting in provincial elections; the relationship is statistically significant only at the .10-level however. Among the 25 to 34 year olds, those who feel close to a party are 16 points more likely to vote in federal elections and 10 points more likely to vote in provincial elections. Finally, there are gaps of four points and three points respectively for voting in federal and provincial elections among the 35 and older age group. The gaps are substantially smaller for this latter group, but nevertheless statistically significant. The sample size is much larger for this age group.

Second, Canadians of all three age groups who expressed that they would feel guilty if they did not vote were also more likely to report having voted than other Canadians. The gaps in voting between those who strongly agree that they would feel guilty and those who strongly disagree are substantial. This is in fact the strongest correlate of voting both for federal and provincial elections and among younger and older Canadians. Canadians aged 18 to 24 who strongly agree that they would feel guilty if they did not vote are 52 points more likely to report having voted than those who strongly disagree with the statement (83% vs. 31%). A similar pattern is observed for provincial elections, with a 53-point gap. The strong correlation between the feeling of guilt and voting is also observed among the 25 to 34 and the 35 and older age groups. Among those aged 25 to 34, the gaps are 43 points and 54 points respectively for federal and provincial elections. Among those aged 35 years and older, the gaps are 18 and 21 points. These findings are consistent with previous research showing that the opinion that voting is a duty for citizens is one of the strongest predictors of whether or not someone votes (Blais, 2000: 100).

Other correlates are statistically significant, but not for all age groups. The perception that one can make a difference by voting is one such characteristic. Among Canadians aged 35 years and older, those who perceive that their vote can make a difference are more likely to vote in both federal and provincial elections. Those who strongly agree with the statement that they feel that by voting they can make a difference are seven points more likely to vote in federal elections than those who strongly disagree with the statement; the gap is five points for provincial elections. Among Canadians aged 25 to 34, the relationship holds only for federal elections, and it does not hold among Canadians aged 18 to 24 in either federal or provincial elections. It is difficult to make sense of these contrasting findings across age groups.

We also observe that confidence in the House of Commons or in the provincial legislature is negatively correlated with voting but not in all cases. Canadians aged 25 to 34 or 35 years and

⁷ It is important to note that the oversample of visible minority Canadians is not included in the analyses for Tables 2 and 3 while this oversample is used when reporting findings specifically for visible minorities (see Table 5).

older who hold greater confidence in the House of Commons appear less likely to report having voted in the federal elections. The same holds for confidence in the provincial legislature and vote in the provincial elections, but only among those aged 35 years and older. Two observations are worthy here. First, even if we accept that greater confidence is associated with lower voter turnout, it does not mean that people abstain from voting because they have great confidence in their legislative bodies. Arguably, these findings make more sense if we look at them from the opposite perspective. These findings might instead signal that people who have lower confidence in the legislative bodies are more likely to vote either because they wish to replace the government or as a way of ensuring that governments are more accountable to the population. Second, even though the findings report a relationship between confidence in legislative bodies and voter turnout, the relationship is somewhat inconsistent, with greater confidence related to a lower propensity to voting among certain age groups only and not always for both orders of government. This is consistent with existing research indicating only a weak or even nonexistent relationship between political discontent and political engagement (see Howe 2010: 38-40). Whether a relationship exists between political engagement and political discontent, what the direction of the relationship is, and why there is such a relationship remains a matter open for further clarification and discussion.

Confidence in Elections Canada is also a correlate of voting. For federal elections, we observe that Canadians of all three age groups who express greater confidence in Elections Canada are more likely to report voting. The gaps between those who express no confidence at all (0) and great confidence (10) are 44, 24, and 4 points respectively for Canadians aged 18 to 24, 25 to 34 and 35 and older.⁸ We also observe a relationship between confidence in Elections Canada and voting in *provincial* elections, a surprising finding considering that Elections Canada does not administer provincial elections. Presumably though, respondents are expressing a general confidence in our electoral system. For provincial elections, however, the relationship is observed only among the 35 years and older.

Attachment to one's province appears as a correlate of voting. Those expressing a stronger attachment are more likely to report having voted in the provincial elections. The relationship is observed among the 18 to 24 and the 24 to 35 age groups. The gaps in voting between those very strongly attached to their province (10) and those not attached at all (0) are 40 and 14 points respectively among the 18 to 24 and the 25 to 34 respondents. This is an interesting finding as it echoes Howe's findings (2010). It is also one of the only two political attitudes that emerge as a correlate of voting only among younger Canadians. No equivalent relationship is observed between attachment to Canada and voting in federal elections. The only other correlate of voting that is significant for younger Canadians only (18-24) is social trust (positively correlated with voting), but the impact is only for federal elections.

A number of political attitudes do not appear as systematic correlates of voting. First, surprisingly, interest in politics does not turn out to be systematic correlate of voting. It is a significant correlate of voting only among Canadians aged 24 to 35 for federal elections and among the 35 years and older for provincial elections. This does not mean that interest in politics is not related to voting. Additional analyses indicate that Canadians more interested in politics are likely to vote in all three age groups. The results do not remain significant, however, once the analyses control for other political attitudes. Results not presented.

⁸ Once again, the relationship for those aged 35 years and older is significant because of the larger sample size.

Second, the perception that politics is too complicated (internal efficacy) sometimes emerges as a correlate of voting but its effect is not systematic. It correlates negatively with voting in provincial elections among the 24 to 35 years old and with voting in federal elections for the 35 years and older. The same holds for external efficacy. Canadians who believe that they have no say in political affairs are not more or less likely to vote in federal or provincial elections than other Canadians.

Third, the perception that the federal or provincial government exerts a significant impact on one's life does not relate to the propensity to vote. Finally, there is no evidence presented in Table 4 and 5 supporting a relationship between the frequency of political discussions at home during one's youth and the propensity to vote.

The variable "political discussion at home during youth" deserves a more in-depth discussion, however. The variable is different from all the other ones from a temporal perspective. Respondents are not indicating how frequently they discuss politics now, but rather how frequently they did that at home during their youth. This difference is potentially important because these political discussions likely temporally precede many or all of the political attitudes variables included in the model. One's interest in politics, closeness to a party or feeling guilty when not voting could have emerged in part because of the political discussions during one's youth. Accordingly, comparing their effect in a multivariate model like the ones in Tables 4 and 5 is unlikely to specify the model properly. To verify this possibility, additional analyses were performed assessing the relationship between frequency of political discussions and voting in federal and provincial elections, but this time controlling for only the socio-demographic variables. The results are unequivocal; when controlling for only the socio-demographic variables, the frequency of political discussions at home during one's youth is positively and significantly related to voting in both federal and provincial elections and for all three age groups (results not presented). Canadians aged 18 to 24, 25 to 34, and 35 and older who reported frequent political discussions at home were 25, 24, and 8 points more likely to have reported having voted in the federal election, respectively. Equivalent gaps are observed for voting in provincial elections.

Thus, there are a certain number of correlates of voting that are common to both younger and older Canadians. While some correlates apply only to younger Canadians (18 to 24 or 25 to 34), they are the exception (income, being a student, and attachment to the province). Moreover, it is important to emphasize that while there are a few correlates that are age-specific, they do not appear to be correlates specific to either provincial or federal elections. Overall, the dynamics of voter turnout in Canada appear to relate more to general political engagement than anything unique to either provincial or federal politics. These analyses are important as they allow us to further identify those characteristics that are likely to explain the gap in voting between younger and older Canadians. Political attitudes such as feeling close to party, feeling guilty when not voting, or confidence in Elections Canada are all significant correlates of voting and are attributes not equally shared by younger and older Canadians (see Tables 2 and 3). As to whether these political attitudes can really explain the gap in voting between younger and older Canadians and to what extent, we will come back to this in a later section.

4. Characteristics of Visible Minority Voters

In order to understand why visible minority Canadians are less likely to vote than other Canadians, it is necessary to determine whether the socio-economic characteristics and political attitudes for which visible minorities and other Canadians differ are indeed related to voting. The analyses were performed separately for visible minority Canadians and other Canadians as well as for voting in federal and provincial elections. The task is, using binomial logistic regressions, to identify the characteristics of visible minority voters.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Visible Minority Voters

As indicated in Table 6, there are three socio-demographic characteristics that are correlates of voting for both visible minority Canadians and other Canadians. Age is the first characteristic. As prior research has documented, those who are older are more likely to report having voted; this holds both among visible minority voters and other voters, and it holds for federal and provincial elections. The relationship among visible minority voters for provincial elections is significant at the .10-level. That older people are more likely to vote thus extends to visible minority Canadians as well.

Table 6: Correlates of Voting among Visible Minority Canadians

	Voting in Federal elections (1-0)				Voting in Provincial elections (1-0)						
	Visible Minority Canadians		Other Canadians		Visible Minority Canadians		Other Canadians				
Socio-Demographic Factors	B	SE		B	SE		B	SE			
Age	.04	.01	a	.04	.01	a	.02	.01	.04	.01	a
Woman	.11	.23		-.15	.17		-.25	.21	-.02	.18	
Education (ref. no high school)											
Post-secondary	.16	.38		.63	.23	b	.55	.43	.70	.22	b
University	.54	.37		.95	.26	a	.91	.38	.88	.23	a
Post-graduate	.46	.49		.91	.38	c	.66	.41	.54	.38	
Household income	.14	.05	b	.02	.03		.11	.04	.02	.03	
Unemployed	.62	.43		.34	.37		1.33	.47	.33	.39	b
Student	.52	.40		-.35	.37		.49	.45	-.33	.33	
Married	-.02	.28		.64	.18	a	.13	.27	.44	.18	b
Time spent at religious inst.	-.32	.32		-.22	.33		-.56	.31	-.29	.32	
Immigrant (ref. Can. Born)											
0-10 years	-1.29	.30	a	-.52	.78		-1.56	.32	-1.78	.75	b
11-20 years	-.28	.34		.29	.94		.03	.31	-.06	1.23	
More than 20 years	-.60	.31		-.17	.48		-.36	.31	-.26	.46	
Regions (ref. Ontario)											
Quebec	.71	.33	c	1.02	.28	a	.58	.35	1.46	.27	a
BC	-.01	.27		-.15	.24		.02	.25	-.23	.24	
Prairies	-.87	.28	b	-.01	.22		-.27	.27	-.05	.21	
Atlantic	1.84	1.43		.17	.25		-.61	1.23	.27	.23	
Political Orientations and Attitudes											
Interest in (fed./prov.) politics	.08	.05		.08	.04	c	.19	.05	.14	.04	a

Close to party (fed./prov.)	.86	.32	b	.88	.18	a	.90	.28	b	.56	.19	b
Politics (fed./prov.) is too complicated	-.39	.49		-.57	.31		-.10	.47		-.54	.32	
People like me have no say in (fed./prov.) politics	.79	.45		.68	.34	c	-.32	.45		.42	.33	
I would feel guilty if I did not vote in (fed./prov.) election	2.22	.40	a	3.13	.28	a	2.93	.42	a	3.33	.24	a
I feel my vote can make a difference	1.37	.39	a	1.67	.33	a	.92	.41	c	1.47	.31	a
Discussed politics during youth at home	-.07	.39		.43	.27		-.82	.41	c	.52	.25	c
Confidence in HofC/Prov. Legis.	-.03	.06		-.12	.05	b	-.25	.08	b	-.14	.05	b
Confidence in Elections Canada	.10	.06		.12	.04	b	.26	.10	b	.08	.04	
Attachment to (Canada/prov.)	.08	.06		-.00	.03		.11	.06	c	-.00	.03	
Impact of (fed./prov.) govt.	.00	.06		.04	.04		-.05	.06		.01	.04	
Social trust	.51	.27		.02	.18		.22	.23		.18	.17	
Constant	-5.87	.80	a	-5.57	.70	a	-5.05	.79	a	-4.97	.60	a
Number of observations	1190			3772			1206			3806		

Source: Provincial Diversity Project. Entries report B coefficients (Binomial logistic regressions)
a: $p < .001$; b: $p < .01$; c: $p < .05$.

Region is the second characteristic that affects voting for both visible minority and other Canadians. People living in Quebec are more likely to report having voted. This holds both in the context of federal and provincial elections. The relationship for visible minorities in the context of provincial elections is significant only at the .10-level.

Being a recent immigrant is the third characteristic. Recent immigrants, whether they are visible minority members or not, tend to vote less than the rest of the population, and this holds in both federal and provincial elections. The only exception is for Canadians who are not members of a visible minority group in the context of federal elections. The predicted probabilities indicate that the gaps in reporting having voted in provincial elections between the Canadian-born population and recent immigrants are 29 points (87% vs. 58%) and 15 points (96% vs. 81%) respectively among visible minority voters and other voters. The least likely group to vote based on these analyses appears to be visible minorities who are recent immigrants.

Some characteristics, while they emerge as correlates of voting for Canadians who are not members of a visible minority group are not significant for visible minorities. This is the case for education. While education is associated with a greater propensity to vote for Canadians who are not members of a visible minority group both in federal and provincial elections, it does not emerge as a systematic correlate of voting for visible minority Canadians. The same finding is observed for being married. While married Canadians who are not members of a visible minority appear more likely to vote in federal or provincial elections, this is not the case among visible minorities. Conversely, household income is positively correlated with voting (both in federal and provincial elections), but only among visible minority Canadians; the relationship is not statistically significant among other Canadians.

Finally, a certain number of socio-demographic characteristics do not emerge as significant correlates of voting for either groups or any level of election. This is the case for gender. There is no gender gap in voter turnout either among visible minority Canadians or other Canadians. Second, being a student does not appear to be a significant correlate of voting either.

Third, the same generally holds true for being unemployed, although it is positively correlated with voting in provincial elections among visible minorities. Finally, there is no evidence of a relationship between the time spent with other people at a religious institution and the likelihood of reporting having voted in either federal or provincial elections.

Political Attitudes of Visible Minority Voters

What about political attitudes? Do they have a similar impact on the tendency to vote of visible minority Canadians and other Canadians? There are important common correlates of voting among visible minority Canadians and other Canadians, and many of those are the same observed when comparing younger and older Canadians.

Feeling close to a political party, feeling of guilt about non-voting, and the perception that one's vote can make a difference are three systematic correlates of voting for both visible minority Canadians and other Canadians that are also common to older and younger voters.⁹ Interest in politics is also a correlate of voting here for both visible minority Canadians and other Canadians, while it was not so clear when comparing age groups.

To this list, we can add confidence in either Elections Canada or in the House of Commons/provincial legislature. Two further clarifications are required here. First, neither relationship is statistically significant in the context of federal elections among visible minorities. Second, as mentioned earlier in the discussion of younger and older voters, while confidence in Elections Canada is associated with a greater propensity to vote, confidence in the legislative branch of government is associated with a lower propensity to vote. As mentioned above, the relationship between higher confidence in the legislative bodies and lower voter turnout could mean that people with low confidence in the legislative bodies are more likely to mobilize in an attempt to defeat the government or send the signal that they watch closely what the government is doing. As for the positive relationship between confidence in Elections Canada and voter turnout, this could simply denote a greater desire to vote when the process and those who administer it are perceived to be trustworthy.

We do not find systematic correlates of voting for either group or level of election in the remaining list of variables: feeling that one has no say in politics, feeling that politics is too complicated, attachment to Canada or to the province, the perceived impact of government on one's life or social trust. Each of these variables at best emerges as a correlate of voting for only one group and for only one of the two levels of elections.

It is difficult to make sense of the results for the variable measuring the frequency of political discussions at home during one's youth. While the frequency of political discussions does not significantly correlate with voting in federal elections for either visible minorities or other Canadians, with regards to voting provincial elections it is negatively correlated for visible minorities and positively correlated for all other Canadians. Like we did for younger and older Canadians, we also tested the link between frequency of political discussions at home during one's youth and voting, but controlling only for socio-demographic characteristics. The results confirm what we observed among younger and older Canadians. When controlling for only socio-demographic characteristics, Canadians who discussed politics at home frequently during their youth are more likely to vote in federal and provincial elections. This holds for visible

⁹ With the exception of the perception that the vote can make a difference, which is not significant among younger Canadians.

minorities and other Canadians, although the relationship is not significant for visible minorities in the context of provincial elections (not presented).

Once again, as we observed when comparing younger and older voters, many of the correlates of voting are common to both visible minority Canadians and other Canadians and to both provincial and federal elections. A few correlates of voting are specific to either visible minority Canadians (household income) or other Canadians (education and being married). As we observed when comparing younger and older Canadians, there are no correlates of voting that are specific to one type of election. The reasons why people vote and do not vote appear to relate more to their individual characteristics and the way that they relate to politics more generally than political dynamics that are specific to either federal or provincial elections.

The previous two sections have identified several key characteristics of voters, whether they are younger or older, or whether they are members of a visible minority group or not. This still does not precisely answer the questions at the centre of this report: why are younger Canadians less likely to vote than older ones? And why are visible minority Canadians less likely to vote than other Canadians? Before we try to answer these questions, we propose to examine the situation from another perspective. We leave aside whether or not Canadians vote in federal or provincial elections and instead focus on those who abstain in both, that we call here “habitual non-voters”.

Two motivations justify such a decision. First, of course, we would prefer that all Canadians vote in every election. In practice, however, this is not always possible for people to vote for a variety of reasons (see Pammet and Leduc, 2003). Hence, looking at individuals’ participation in a single election can be misleading, as argued by Howe, because people might simply have been busy, sick or unable to vote for other reasons (2010:12). It might not reflect a deeply entrenched orientation toward voting or the political system more broadly. The more fundamental problem is not when Canadians miss out at one election, but rather when they systematically abstain from voting in multiple or in all elections. As Howe (2010) argues, these systematic abstainers, or habitual non-voters, likely hold more profound motivational reasons to abstain from voting than people who miss one election from time to time. Second, we also examine whether people abstain from voting at both federal and provincial elections because our preceding analyses have clearly demonstrated that for the most part, the correlates of voting are the same for both federal and provincial elections. In short, there do not seem to be many important order-of-government-specific reasons why Canadians abstain from voting in federal or provincial elections. The reasons why people do not vote appear more related to broader sets of political attitudes not specifically related to one order of government.

5. Characteristics of Habitual Non-Voters

In the present section, we examine the characteristics of habitual non-voters or, in our research design, those who report not having voted in either the last federal or provincial elections. Not surprisingly, our data in Table 7 indicate that younger Canadians and visible minority Canadians are more likely to be habitual non-voters. While only 10% of Canadians aged 35 years and older report not having voted in both federal and provincial elections, this proportion increases to 31% among the 25 to 34 and to 47% among the 18 to 24.¹⁰ Conversely,

¹⁰ It is important to emphasize that we limit our analyses to people who were eligible to vote in both elections.

being a habitual voter, that is having voted in both elections, increases with age. While 85% of older Canadians report having voted in both federal and provincial elections, that proportion is 61% among Canadians aged 25 to 34 and only 44% among those aged 18 to 24. Similarly, visible minority Canadians are more likely than other Canadians to be habitual non-voters (29% vs. 14%), and while only 62% of visible minority Canadians report having voted in both elections, this proportion is 81% among other Canadians. There are very few Canadians who report having voted in only one of the two elections, and the proportion of Canadians who report having voted in only one of the two elections is evenly split between those who voted only in the federal elections and those who voted only in the provincial elections (results not presented).

Table 7: Habitual Non-Voting among Younger Canadians and Visible Minority Canadians

	Age Groups			Visible Minority Status	
	18-24	25-34	35+	Visible Minority Canadians	Other Canadians
Has voted in both federal and provincial elections (%)	44	61 ^a	85 ^a	62	81 ^a
Has voted in only one of the two elections (%)	10	8	5 ^a	8	5 ^b
Has not voted in neither of the two elections (%)	47	31 ^a	10 ^a	29	14 ^a
n=	738	2139	4829	1840	5351

Difference with 18-24 or visible minorities: a: $p < .001$; b: $p < .01$; c: $p < .05$.

Source: Provincial Diversity Project

But who are the habitual non-voters? To identify the characteristics of habitual non-voters, we performed binomial logistic regressions in which the dependent variable indicates whether respondents have not voted in both elections. The political attitude variables included in the model are different from those used in previous analyses. In Tables 4, 5 and 6, we associated the vote at a specific level (province or federal) with a political attitude associated with this level of government. For instance, in investigating voting in federal elections, we looked at the relationship with interest in *federal politics*. Similarly, in investigating voting in provincial elections, we looked at the relationship with interest in *provincial politics*. For the following analyses, we combined the political attitudes for both orders of government. For instance, the model includes a variable that measures interest in both federal and provincial politics.

Habitual Non-Voters among Younger Canadians

Table 8 presents the findings for the comparison of age groups. The analyses confirm the findings observed in the previous analyses. First, more educated people are less likely to be habitual non-voters. This holds among all three age groups. Second, recent immigrants are more likely to be habitual non-voters; this holds among Canadians aged 18 to 24 and those aged 25 to 34, but not among older Canadians. The effect for being a recent immigrant is substantial. Among the 18 to 24, the predicted probabilities indicate that while about 23% of Canadians would be habitual non-voters, this proportion is more than 90% among recent immigrants. Finally, Quebecers appear less likely to be habitual non-voters, regardless of the age group examined.

Table 8: Correlates of Habitual Non-Voting among Younger Canadians

	Habitual non-voters (1-0)							
	18-24			25-34			35+	
Socio-Demographic Factors	B	SE		B	SE	B	SE	
Age	-.02	.13		.06	.04	-.04	.01	a
Woman	.21	.39		.17	.26	.11	.25	
Education (ref. no high school)								
Post-secondary	-1.82	.55	a	-1.08	.34	-.67	.29	c
University	-1.35	.47	b	-.88	.33	-1.12	.33	b
Post-graduate	-1.13	1.09		-1.52	.56	-1.37	.63	c
Household income	-.10	.05	c	-.11	.04	-.01	.05	
Unemployed	-1.46	.75	c	.96	.49	-.79	.59	
Student	.80	.40	c	1.81	.46	-.70	1.27	
Married	-.08	.47		-.35	.26	-.72	.29	c
Time spent at religious inst.	.97	.55		.16	.40	.52	.46	
Visible minority	-.54	.47		.12	.40	.39	.43	
Immigrant (ref. Can. Born)								
0-10 years	3.57	.87	a	2.52	.63	.73	.89	
11-20 years	.10	.71		2.12	.67	-1.65	1.05	
More than 20 years	2.92	1.12	c	.04	.56	.31	.47	
Regions (ref. Ontario)								
Quebec	-1.61	.56	b	-1.11	.40	-2.06	.43	a
BC	.80	.54		-.16	.34	.03	.30	
Prairies	.37	.56		.55	.34	-.15	.28	
Atlantic	-.80	.71		-.55	.38	-.42	.32	
Political Orientations and Attitudes								
Interest in (fed./prov.) politics	-.05	.05		-.04	.03	-.03	.02	
Close to party (fed./prov.)	-.82	.23	a	-.63	.15	-.56	.12	a
Politics (fed./prov.) is too complicated	-.17	.38		.44	.26	.57	.24	c
People like me have no say in (fed./prov.) politics	.34	.41		-.13	.27	-.23	.27	
I would feel guilty if I did not vote in (fed./prov.) election	-1.16	.29	a	-2.03	.25	-1.78	.19	a
I feel my vote can make a difference	-.53	.61		-1.02	.47	-1.65	.47	a
Discussed politics during youth at home	-.68	.61		-.44	.39	-.21	.36	
Confidence in HofC/Prov. Legis.	.14	.06	c	.10	.05	.09	.04	c
Confidence in Elections Canada	-.24	.09	c	-.18	.08	-.16	.06	b
Attachment to (Canada/prov.)	-.08	.05		-.02	.03	-.06	.03	c
Impact of (fed./prov.) govt.	.08	.05		.01	.03	-.05	.03	
Social trust	-1.25	.46	b	-.12	.29	-.13	.25	
Constant	4.68	3.27		1.95	1.50	6.73	.89	a
Number of observations	357			1309			3355	

Source: Provincial Diversity Project. Entries report B coefficients (Binomial logistic regressions)

a: p<.001; b: p<.01; c: p<.05.

Many political attitudes also emerge as correlates of habitual non-voting among all age groups. Being close to a party (whether federal or provincial), feeling guilty when non-voting (whether in federal or provincial elections), and confidence in Elections Canada are all associated with a lower propensity to be a habitual non-voter. Confidence in the legislative branch of government is also a correlate of being a habitual non-voter, but as indicated previously, it is an inverse correlation: greater confidence in the legislative branch is associated with a weaker propensity to vote. We already discussed the potential meaning of such a relationship. Feeling that one's vote can make a difference is negatively correlated with being habitual non-voters, but the relationship is not significant among Canadians aged 18 to 24.

Other characteristics apply to some groups but not to others. For instance, higher income correlates negatively with being a habitual non-voter, but only among younger Canadians (those aged 18 to 24 and 25 to 34). Similarly, Canadians aged 18 to 24 and 25 to 34 who are students are more likely to be habitual non-voters. This last finding highlights the benefits of looking at habitual non-voting instead of looking only at voting at federal or provincial elections separately. When looking at federal and provincial election separately, being a student was not a correlate of voting among the 18 to 24; it now is.

The findings concerning being unemployed are puzzling. While Canadians aged 25 to 34 who are unemployed appear more likely to be habitual non-voters, among Canadians aged 18 to 24, the opposite is observed and the unemployed appear less likely to be habitual non-voters. It is very difficult to make sense of this counter-intuitive finding.

Four characteristics are specific to Canadians aged 35 years and older. First, those who are married are less likely to be habitual non-voters. Second, older people – within this age range – are less likely to be habitual non-voters. Third, those who feel politics is too complicated are more likely to be habitual non-voters. And fourth, those more attached to Canada and/or their province are also less likely to be habitual non-voters.

Habitual Non-Voters among Visible Minority Canadians

Table 9 presents the findings for the comparison of visible minority and other Canadians. Age and living in Quebec are the only two socio-demographic correlates of habitual non-voting common to both visible minorities and Canadians who are not members of a visible minority group among the socio-demographic characteristics. Older people and those living in Quebec are less likely to be habitual non-voters.

Table 9: Correlates of Habitual Non-Voting among Visible Minority Canadians

	Habitual non-voters (1-0)					
	Visible Minority Canadians			Other Canadians		
Socio-Demographic Factors	B	SE		B	SE	
Age	-.03	.01	b	-.04	.01	a
Woman	.13	.25		.30	.21	
Education (ref. no high school)						
Post-secondary	-.05	.41		-.96	.26	a
University	-.38	.40		-1.21	.28	a
Post-graduate	-.50	.54		-1.23	.44	b
Household income	-.16	.06	b	-.04	.03	
Unemployed	-.83	.49		-.64	.43	
Student	-.79	.48		.38	.40	
Married	-.01	.31		-.64	.21	b
Time spent at religious inst.	.69	.36		.45	.41	
Immigrant (ref. Can. Born)						
0-10 years	1.35	.33	a	.87	1.10	
11-20 years	-.02	.39		-.58	1.01	
More than 20 years	.56	.33		.28	.56	
Regions (ref. Ontario)						
Quebec	-1.12	.41	b	-1.92	.32	a
BC	-.10	.29		-.04	.27	
Prairies	.56	.32		-.25	.26	
Atlantic	-1.77	1.51		-.52	.28	
Political Orientations and Attitudes						
Interest in (fed./prov.) politics	-.05	.03		-.05	.02	c
Close to party (fed./prov.)	-.59	.16	a	-.49	.12	a
Politics (fed./prov.) is too complicated	.32	.31		.35	.19	
People like me have no say in (fed./prov.) politics	-.25	.30		-.23	.21	
I would feel guilty if I did not vote in (fed./prov.) election	-1.58	.26	a	-1.85	.15	a
I feel my vote can make a difference	-1.12	.41	b	-1.69	.39	a
Discussed politics during youth at home	.18	.43		-.32	.32	
Confidence in HofC/Prov. Legis.	.03	.04		.11	.03	b
Confidence in Elections Canada	-.08	.08		-.17	.05	b
Attachment to (Canada/prov.)	-.06	.04		-.02	.02	
Impact of (fed./prov.) govt.	.02	.03		-.02	.03	
Social trust	-.56	.30		-.21	.21	
Constant	5.61	.82	a	6.19	.74	a
Number of observations		1146		3691		

Source: Provincial Diversity Project. Entries report B coefficients (Binomial logistic regressions) a: p<.001; b: p<.01; c: p<.05

Education and being married are correlates of habitual non-voting that are specific to Canadians who are not members of a visible minority group. Conversely, income and being a recent immigrant are two correlates of habitual non-voting that are specific to visible minority Canadians. Visible minority Canadians with a greater household income are less likely to be habitual non-voters. And visible minority Canadians who are recent immigrants are significantly more likely to be habitual non-voters. Our predicted probabilities indicate that while about 8% of visible minorities born in Canada are habitual non-voters, this proportion climbs to 24% among those who are recent immigrants. Habitual non-voting among visible minorities who are recent immigrants is thus substantial.

With regards to political attitudes, feeling close to a party, feeling guilty when not voting, and feeling that one's vote can make a difference are all associated with a lower likelihood of being a habitual non-voter for both groups. This also holds for interest in politics, although the relationship is significant only at the .10-level among visible minority Canadians.

Greater confidence in the legislative branch of government is associated with a greater likelihood of being a habitual non-voter, but only among Canadians who are not members of visible minority group. Conversely, greater confidence in Election Canada is associated with a lower likelihood of being a habitual non-voter and again only among Canadians who are not members of a visible minority group.

Feeling that politics is too complicated or that one does not have much say in what the government does are not correlates of habitual non-voting here, either for visible minorities or other Canadians. The same holds for discussing politics at home during one's youth, attachment to the political communities, perceived impact of government on one's life, or social trust.

Overall, the present section confirms many of the correlates identified in Tables 4, 5 and 6. Its contribution is to suggest that these correlates of voting not only relate to occasional abstention that normally takes place among the population at every election, but also to the growing and more worrisome reality of habitual non-voting (or systematic abstention across elections). Political attitudes such as feeling close to a party, feeling guilty when not voting, believing that voting can make a difference, and confidence in public institutions are key attitudes to instil in order to prevent the emergence of habitual non-voting, a behaviour that is growing and that has potentially critical consequences for the representation of many groups in our elected House of Commons and more broadly for the legitimacy of our political institutions.

Explaining the Gaps in Habitual Non-Voting

Although the analyses have identified several key characteristics that can potentially explain the greater propensity of younger Canadians and visible minority Canadians to be habitual non-voters, we have not yet evaluated precisely how much each characteristic can help explain the observed gaps in habitual non-voting between these groups. To answer this question, we performed simulations. We begin with younger Canadians.

The Reasons for Higher Habitual Non-Voting among Younger Canadians

Based on the multivariate analyses presented in Table 8, we can predict what would be the level of habitual non-voting among younger Canadians if they had the same profile as older

Canadians on a key set of characteristics. The simulation is performed for one variable at a time to assess how much each variable can explain the gap in voter turnout. All other variables are kept at the sample mean. The simulations are conducted only for Canadians aged 18-24. Table 10 presents the results of these simulations. For each simulation, the table reports how much the gap in habitual non-voting would shrink should younger Canadians share the same attribute as older Canadians. The capacity of each variable to explain the gap in habitual non-voting between younger and older Canadians is dependent on how strongly the variable correlates with habitual non-voting and how large the difference is between younger and older Canadians in holding this attribute. For instance, if feeling close to a party strongly correlates with habitual non-voting for younger Canadians and younger Canadians are substantively less likely to feel close to a party, then the variable will explain a significant gap in habitual non-voting.

Table 10: Explaining the Gap in Habitual Non-Voting Between Younger and Older Canadians and Visible Minority Canadians and Other Canadians

	Capacity to explain gap between 18-24 and 35 and older)	Capacity to explain gap between visible minorities and other Canadians
Socio-Economic Characteristics		
Age	n.s. ¹	-4
Being a recent immigrants	-4	-3
Being a student	-7	n.s. ¹
Political Attitudes		
Closeness to political party	-3	-1
Feeling guilty if not voting	-7	-2
Confidence in Elections Canada	-4	n.s. ¹
Gap observed in descriptive data – see Table 7	37	15
Gap potentially explained	25	10
Unexplained Gap	12	9

Capacity to explain the gap: Explained gaps in habitual non-voting based on predicted probabilities derived from analyses in Tables 8 and 9. Keeping everything else at the sample means, Canadians aged 18-24 were attributed the score of Canadians aged 35 and older (visible minority Canadians were attributed score of other Canadians) for each of the variables listed in the Table. Simulations were performed one at a time for each variable.

1. Variable was not statistically significant for younger Canadians (Table 8) or visible minority Canadians (Table 9) and therefore cannot explain difference in habitual non-voting with other Canadians.

The gap in habitual non-voting observed between the two groups was 37 points (see Table 7). Our simulations indicate that if younger and older Canadians shared the same attributes in terms of the likelihood of being a recent immigrant, being a student, feelings of guilt when not voting, closeness to a political party and confidence in Elections Canada, the gap in habitual non-voting would shrink by about 25 points. This is approximately two thirds of the observed gap in

habitual non-voting. The two variables with the greatest potential to explain the gap are the feeling of guilt when not voting and being a student.

First, if younger Canadians were as likely as older ones to feel guilty when not voting, the propensity to be habitual non-voters would decrease by seven points. The importance of trying to create a sense of civic duty, via civic education programs or otherwise, is thus potentially critical.

Second, if the proportion of 18 to 24 year-olds who are students were the same as that among the 35 and older, the proportion of habitual non-voters would shrink by another 7 points. The large effect for the student variable is caused by the large gap in the proportion of 18 to 24 and 35 and older who are students in the sample (49% vs. 1%). Should this finding be replicated by other studies, it would suggest that the challenge of voter turnout among the Canadian youth is not about to disappear as the share of the population staying longer in school is increasing. On a more optimistic note, however, it might suggest that the problem is more temporary and that once finished with school or university, Canadians might start to vote more often; but that remains to be verified.

Third, also important are the different levels of confidence in Elections Canada that could explain about 4 points in the gap in habitual non-voting between younger and older Canadians. The perceived quality of the fairness and transparency of the electoral process and of those in charge of that process is thus potentially critical in maintaining the desire of people to participate in the electoral process.

Fourth, the magnitude of the effect is also of 4 points for being a recent immigrant. The size of the effect for this characteristic is impressive considering that the proportion of younger Canadians who are recent immigrants is not substantively larger than that for older Canadians (8% vs. 3% – see Table 2). This indicates how substantively greater habitual non-voting is among recent immigrants.

Finally, younger Canadians' weaker relationship with political parties also partly explains their greater propensity to be habitual non-voters. Should younger Canadians be as likely as older ones to feel close to a political party, their likelihood of being habitual non-voter would decrease by three percentage points. The solution to youth disengagement with electoral politics thus appears to be in part in the hands of parties who need to find ways to reconnect with the Canadian youth.

The Reasons for Higher Habitual Non-Voting among Visible Minority Canadians

The story is somewhat different for visible minority Canadians. First, the gap in habitual non-voting with other Canadians is not as large as that observed between younger and older Canadians (15 points vs. 37 points). Second, being a student here cannot be part of the explanation because this was not a factor associated with habitual non-voting among visible minority Canadians. The same holds for confidence in Elections Canada; although it was a significant correlate of habitual non-voting among the general Canadian population, it was not among visible minority Canadians. In any case, visible minority Canadians expressed greater confidence in Elections Canada than other Canadians, not lower. Third, although some of the correlates of voting are the same as for younger Canadians, the capacity to explain the gap in habitual non-voting between visible minority Canadians and other Canadians is limited because the two groups are essentially as likely to hold these attitudes. This holds for feeling guilty when not voting and the perception that one's vote can make a difference (see Table 3).

To understand the greater propensity to be habitual non-voters among visible minority Canadians, we need to turn our attention toward their socio-economic status, more specifically the fact that a large proportion of them are recent immigrants and that they are younger than the rest of the population.

First, as we observed for our analyses of younger Canadians, one of the reasons why visible minority Canadians are more likely to be habitual non-voters is that a larger proportion of them are recent immigrants (24% vs. 2%), and recent immigrants are more likely to be habitual non-voters. Intriguingly, the relationship is not as strong as that observed among younger Canadians. Although the reason for this weak relationship is not clear, the consequences on its capacity to explain the gap in habitual non-voting are clear. Despite a large difference in sample composition on this characteristic, it only explains the gap in habitual non-voting by 3 points.

Second, visible minority Canadians are younger than the rest of the Canadian population. In our sample, the average age of visible minority Canadians is 38 years while for the rest of the population it is 50. Controlling for all other factors included in the analyses in Table 9, should visible minority Canadians be the same age as the rest of the Canadian population (50 instead of 38), their propensity to be habitual non-voters would decrease by 4 points.

Of course, our analyses do not provide a complete explanation as to why younger Canadians and visible minority Canadians are more likely to be habitual non-voters. The analyses allow us to explain only part of the gap. The share of that gap that is explained is nevertheless substantial, about two-thirds for each group. Moreover, the simulations point to different stories for each group. While the explanations for younger Canadians relate both to their socio-economic status and political attitudes, the explanations for visible minority Canadians relate only to their socio-economic status. Our investigations thus reveal two groups of Canadians who are less likely to vote but who abstain from voting for different reasons. On both cases, a better understanding of the challenges for voting among recent immigrants is needed. In the specific case of younger Canadians, however, the challenge is greater as we need a broader understanding of the roots of their disengagement with politics in terms of their perception that voting is a duty, their disconnect with parties, or even their lower level of confidence in Elections Canada.

6. Opinionation and Voter Turnout

The preceding sections aimed at identifying the characteristics of voters and of habitual non-voters among younger Canadians (those aged 18 to 24 and 25 to 34) and among visible minority Canadians. Among both socio-demographic attributes and political attitudes, many characteristics were identified. In the present section, we offer an exploration into another possibility, namely the role of opinionation or holding opinions (see Krosnick and Milburn, 1990; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). Holding an opinion is arguably an important step toward voting. Having an opinion as to whether or not the government cares about the people, whether we can trust public institutions, or even whether it is important to vote is potentially important in explaining why one votes. A certain number of studies examine the characteristics of who hold opinions or provide opinions to questions in political surveys (Krosnick and Milburn 1990; Rapoport 1982; Milbrath and Goel 1977; Francis and Busch 1975). Rare are the studies, however, that examine the consequences of not holding opinions.

Previous research has examined the link between knowledge and voting, but this is not what we are interested in here. Knowledge is important; it is necessary for a proper understanding

of the surrounding political environment and for the proper practice of democracy (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). Knowledge and opinionation are surely related. It is likely that possessing a greater political knowledge facilitates the development of political opinions; people must “know what something is before they can say how they feel about it, or whether or not they like it” (Cook 1985: 1081). Knowledge and opinionation, thus, might be related, but they are nevertheless different concepts. People who do possess knowledge do not necessarily hold opinions, and conversely, people with weak knowledge can still express firm opinions. Accordingly, the present section aims at exploring whether a link exists between opinionation and the likelihood of voting.

It also appears important to study the link between opinionation and voting for methodological reasons. As reported in the analyses identifying the characteristics of habitual non-voters among younger Canadians in Table 8, only 357 Canadians aged 18 to 24 qualify to be included in the multivariate analyses while 971 are available in the overall PDP sample. Why are not all respondents aged 18 to 24 included in the multivariate analyses? There are two main reasons.

First, given the young age of these respondents, many were simply not eligible to vote in the preceding federal or provincial elections. For instance, about 19% of the 18 to 24 year olds report that they were not eligible to vote in the previous elections, compared to 4% of the 25 to 34 years olds. This reduces the sample size from 971 to 768 respondents. Nothing can be done to include these respondents; we simply cannot investigate whether or not they are habitual non-voters.

Second, and most importantly, Canadians aged 18 to 24 years old are significantly more likely to answer “I don’t know” to many questions of the survey, especially those relating to politics. For instance, while about 19% of Canadians aged 18 to 24 years old answer that they don’t know how much confidence they have in Elections Canada, this proportion is 11% among the 25 to 34 year olds and only 4% among those aged 35 years and older. Similarly, the proportions of respondents answering that they don’t know when asked how much of an impact the federal government has on their lives are 13%, 8% and 3% respectively for the 18-24, 25-34 and 35 and older cohorts.

Table 11 presents the distribution of “don’t know” responses to the following political attitude questions that were included in our analyses: feeling close to a political party (federal and provincial), politics is too complicated (federal and provincial), I would feel guilty if I did not vote (federal and provincial), people like me have no say in politics (federal and provincial), I feel my vote can make a difference, attachment to Canada and the respondent's province of residence, the impact of provincial and federal governments on respondent’s life, confidence in the House of Commons, in the legislative assembly of the province they reside in, and in Elections Canada. This adds up to a total of sixteen questions.

Table 11: Opinionation among Younger Canadians and Visible Minority Canadians

Number of “don’t know” responses (%)	Age Groups			Visible Minority Status	
	18-24	25-34	35+	Visible minority Canadians	Other Canadians
0	57	68	84	72	80
1	7	9	7	6	8
2	9	9	4	7	5
3	9	5	2	7	3
4	3	2	1	2	1
5	6	2	0	2	1
6 and more	8	5	2	5	2
	n= 888	2174	4698	5275	1950

Source: Provincial Diversity Project.

Table 11 indicates that Canadians aged 18 to 24 are less likely than older Canadians to hold a substantive opinion on all sixteen questions. While 84% of Canadians aged 35 and older have provided an opinion in response to all sixteen questions, this proportion drops to 68% among those aged 25 to 34 and to 57% among those aged 18 to 24. In contrast, we observe that while less than 2% of Canadians aged 35 and older answer “I don’t know” to at least six of the sixteen questions, this proportion increases to 5% among Canadians aged 25 to 34 and to more than 8% among those aged 18 to 24.¹¹

These numbers indicate that many Canadians aged 18 to 24 were not included in the analyses used to identify habitual non-voters because they held no opinion on one or many variables included in the model. The moment that one “don’t know” response is provided, the respondent cannot be included in the analyses.¹² The data presented in Table 11 thus indicate that based on the 16 items examined, we can only keep 57% of Canadians aged 18-24, 68% of those aged 25 to 34 and 84% of those aged 35 years and older for the analyses. The rest of respondents are excluded because they provide one or more “don’t know” responses.¹³

¹¹ Whether the reality of high “don’t know” response rates in the *Provincial Diversity Project* among the youth is something unique to this data is a possibility; investigating whether this is also the case in other political surveys like the Canadians Election Study is a task beyond the scope of this current report. The difference in the propensity for “don’t know” responses between visible minorities and other Canadians is more limited. Accordingly, we limit this section of the report to the analyses of younger Canadians.

¹² Because listwise deletion method is used.

¹³ Other methods can be used when conducting multivariate analyses that allow including respondents who provide non-responses such a imputing sample means for missing cases. We prefer not to use such methods. The following analyses indicate that respondents who provide don’t know as a response may have a different political profile and propensity to vote, and accordingly we should treat their missing information as such instead of trying to impute a response that they did not provide. We acknowledge, however, that such a methodological decision is open for debate in the field and ultimately further analyses should be performed to better understand both the meaning of these non-responses and what kinds of implications using different methods to treat the missing information have on the results of our inferences.

Non-response, or a weak level of opinionation, is thus more prevalent among younger Canadians than older Canadians. This finding is consistent with Kronick and Milburn’s conclusions (1990). This might not be too surprising given that younger Canadians have accumulated less experience interacting with and observing the Canadian political system than older Canadians have. Sears and Valentino (1997) also observe a lower level of opinionation among younger Americans.

Together, the ineligibility to vote and the greater propensity to provide “don’t know” responses substantially reduce the sample size available for the analysis of Canadians aged 18 to 24 (from 971 to 357 in the multivariate analysis). This has important implications not just for the sample size available, but also for the *characteristics* of the sample available for the analyses. As a final step to this report, we propose to examine whether there is a connection between weak opinionation and the propensity to be a habitual non-voter. By doing so, we do not only bring a novel perspective on the reasons why people vote or not, but we also extend the analyses to a group of Canadians that is very often excluded from the analyses investigating the roots of non-voting.

In order to investigate this question, the analyses presented in Table 12 examine, once again, whether or not Canadians are habitual non-voters. This time, however, we limit the investigation to socio-demographic characteristics and include our scale of opinionation that indicates the number of times respondents have selected “I don’t know” in response to the sixteen political questions listed above. Because of low frequencies, scores ranging from 6 to 16 are merged together and coded as 6. The scale ranges from 0 to 6. We perform the analyses here for each of the three age categories: 18-24, 25-34, and 35 and older.

Table 12: Opinionation and Habitual Non-Voting among Younger Canadians

	Habitual non-voters (1-0)								
	18-24			25-34			35+		
Socio-Demographic Factors	B	SE		B	SE		B	SE	
Age	-.01	.10		.01	.03		-.07	.01	a
Woman	-.02	.28		.32	.19		.03	.17	
Education (ref. no high school)									
Post-secondary	-1.09	.35	b	-.76	.23	b	-.72	.20	a
University	-1.84	.38	a	-1.07	.22	a	-1.23	.23	a
Post-graduate	-3.44	1.62	c	-1.59	.39	a	-1.55	.39	a
Household income	-.05	.04		-.16	.03	a	-.09	.04	a
Unemployed	-.79	.54		.56	.28	c	-.91	.43	c
Student	.80	.31	c	.27	.34		-1.77	1.06	
Married	-.23	.29		-.05	.18		-.63	.21	b
Time spent at religious inst.	-.24	.42		-.84	.29	b	-.31	.29	
Visible minority	.02	.36		.18	.31		.19	.45	
Immigrant (ref. Can. Born)									
0-10 years	2.02	.85	c	2.52	.50	a	1.11	.56	c
11-20 years	.63	.55		1.72	.48	a	-.42	.73	
More than 20 years	3.51	1.30	b	.30	.45		.34	.37	
Regions (ref. Ontario)									
Quebec	-1.41	.36	a	-1.07	.24	a	-1.67	.33	a
BC	.21	.38		-.44	.25		.15	.22	
Prairies	.10	.38		.27	.23		.04	.20	

Atlantic	-0.79	.40	c	-0.05	.25	.03	.21		
Don't know scale (0-6)	.31	.09	b	.38	.06	a	.39	.07	a
Constant	.91	2.33		.00	.89		3.30	.50	a
Number of observations	488			1657			3727		

Source: Provincial Diversity Project. Entries report B coefficients (Binomial logistic regressions)

a: $p < .001$; b: $p < .01$; c: $p < .05$.

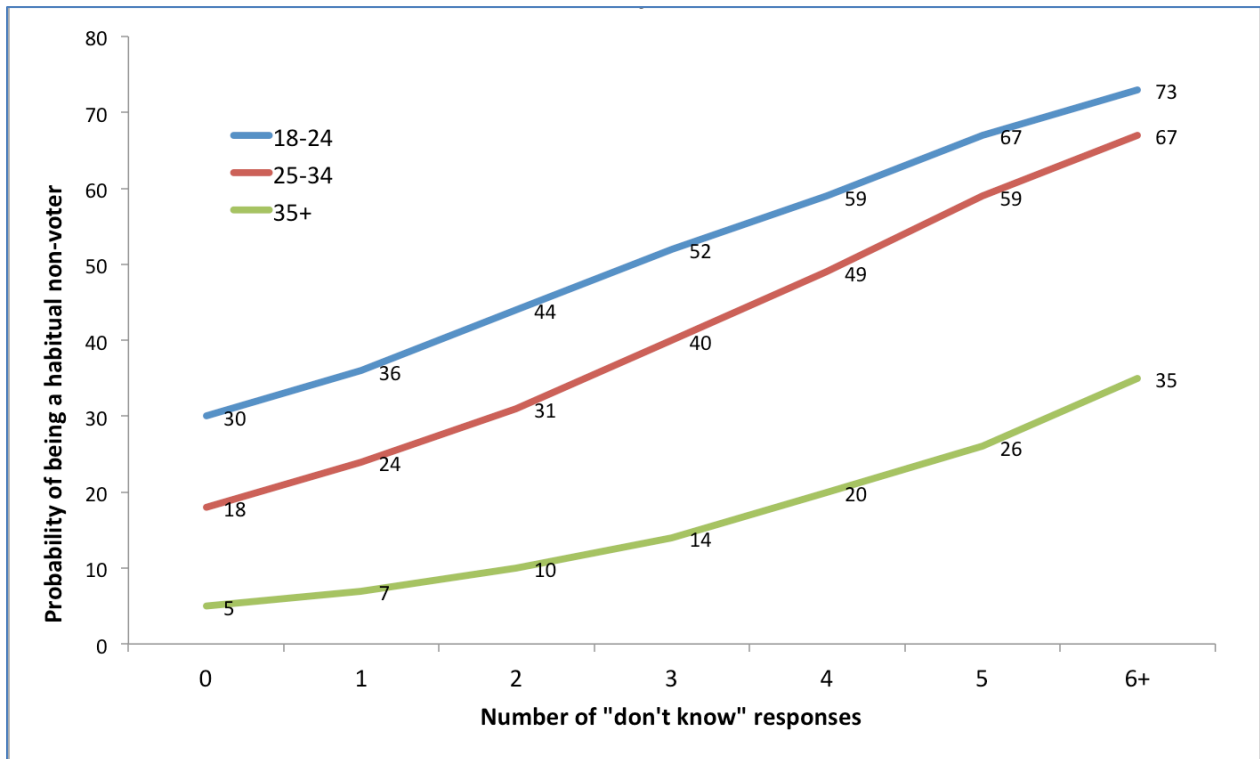
First, it is important to highlight the sample available for the analyses. For the age group 18 to 24, our sample size is 488 as opposed to the 357 that would have been eligible if all political variables were included in the model. For the 25 to 34 year old group, the sample size is 1657 (as opposed to 1309), and for the 35 and older group, the sample size is 3727 (as opposed to 3355). The sample sizes for the 18 to 24 and 25 to 34 age groups thus increase by 37% and 27% respectively, while the sample size of those aged 35 years and older increases by only about 11%. These sample-size increases are important. They highlight the extent to which, among younger voters, we lose a substantial proportion of the sample if we exclude them on the basis of “don’t know” responses.¹⁴

Second, the findings further support the importance of “don’t know” responses by showing that the scale of opinionation (or number of “don’t know” responses) is significantly related to the propensity of being a habitual non-voter. The larger the number of “don’t know” responses, the greater the likelihood of being a habitual non-voter. This holds among all three age groups. Figure 1 reports the predicted probabilities of being a habitual non-voter by level of “don’t know” responses for each of the three age groups. The results clearly highlight the increasing probability of being a habitual non-voter among all three age groups as the number of “don’t know” responses increases. Moreover, it is striking to see that the lower propensity to vote is not limited to those who provide a large number of “don’t know” responses. The relationship appears linear; even a single mention of a “don’t know” response increases the probability of being a habitual non-voter. Any indication of low opinionation, no matter how minor, increases the likelihood of being a habitual non-voter.¹⁵

Figure 1: Predicted Probability of Being a Habitual Non-Voter by Number of “Don’t Know” Responses to Political Questions

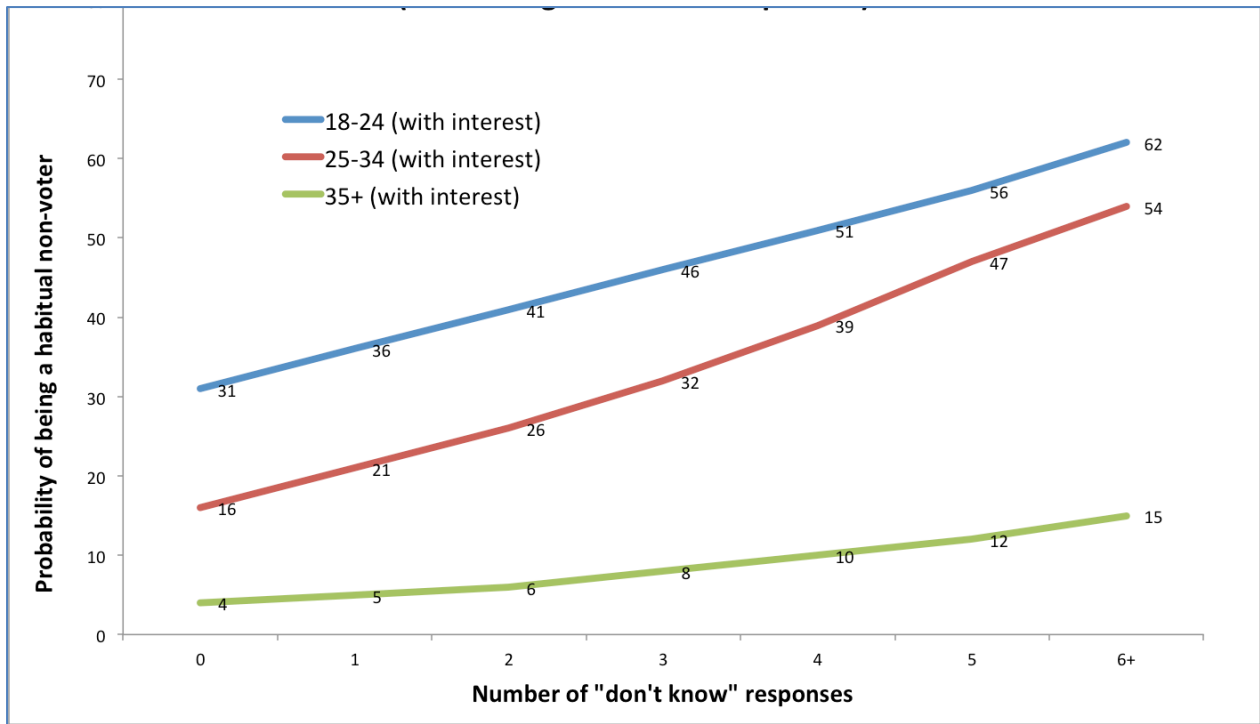
¹⁴ There are still a large numbers of missing cases because of the household income question.

¹⁵ Other specifications were tested to verify that the relationship was indeed linear. Among visible minority Canadians, we also observe that a greater propensity to provide “don’t know” responses is associated with a greater likelihood to be a habitual non-voter (results not presented).



Is the propensity to answer “don’t know” simply the reflection of a weak interest in politics? Interest in politics negatively correlates with the propensity to provide “don’t know” responses; the greater the interest in politics, the smaller the number of “don’t know” responses. The correlation coefficients are $-.37$, $-.34$, and $-.27$ respectively for Canadians aged 18-24, 25-34 and 35 and older. We further investigated the link between “don’t know” responses and interest in politics by adding the latter variable in our multivariate analyses. We do not present the full table here but Figure 2 reports the predicted probabilities of being a habitual non-voter according to the number of “don’t know” responses provided by respondents once controlling for interest in politics. In contrast to Figure 1, the slopes in Figure 2 are not as steep. Including interest in politics thus accounts for a portion of the link between “don’t know” responses and habitual non-voting. One of the reasons why the people who report “don’t know” responses do not vote is that they are not interested in politics. But this is not the entire story; the relationship between opinionation and habitual non-voting remains significant even when controlling for interest in politics. And the effect is substantial; if we performed a simulation like the ones we performed in the previous section, setting the mean level of opinionation of younger Canadians (1.44) to that observed for older Canadians (.36), the model predicts that the level of habitual non-voting would be about 5 points lower among younger Canadians. Of course, part of the effect would likely be explained by other political attitudes presently not explained, but this nevertheless signals a non-negligible importance of the opinionation variable.

Figure 2: Predicted Probability of Being a Habitual Non-Voter by Number of “Don’t Know” Responses to Political Questions (controlling for interest in politics)



This suggests that one of the reasons that Canadians do not vote is a low level of opinionation. A significant proportion of Canadians do not appear to have developed firm opinions about their attachment to the political system, their sense of civic duty, or their evaluation of government responsiveness. For them, voting appears to be a less appealing activity. The relationship holds among all three age groups, but as demonstrated in Table 10, younger Canadians exhibit substantially lower levels of opinionation than older Canadians. It is worth emphasizing that our analyses do not control for respondents' knowledge of Canadian politics. Unfortunately, such indicators are not available in the *Provincial Diversity Project*. It is possible that the relationship between opinionation and habitual non-voting could be partially or fully accounted for if indicators of respondents' knowledge of politics were included in the model. Delli Carpini and Keeter argue that knowledge is even the strongest predictor of opinionation in their analyses (1996:230).

7. Conclusion and Policy Implications

Using data from the *Provincial Diversity Project*, this report explored the factors that explain the propensity of younger Canadians and visible minority Canadians to vote less than other Canadians. The most important question, however, is not so much why they did not vote in one particular election or another, but rather why some segments of these groups systematically abstain from voting at every election and at elections at different orders of government. For this reason, after exploring the correlates of voting among younger Canadians and visible minority Canadians in federal and provincial elections, we turned our attention to habitual non-voting. In any case, very few differences in correlates of voting were identified between federal and provincial elections.

Our investigations indicate as others have done before, that younger Canadians are not simply more likely to miss out on voting in one election from time to time, but that they are more likely to be habitual non-voters, that is to systematically abstain from voting at every election. Quite importantly, the study reveals that this is also the case for visible minority Canadians; they are more likely to be habitual non-voters than other Canadians.

The important question then became, why? In order to answer this question, we first identified the socio-demographic characteristics and political attitudes for which younger and older Canadians, and visible minority Canadians and other Canadians, differ. We then identified whether these characteristics were correlates of habitual non-voting. Finally, we estimated through simulations to what extent each of these variables could explain the gap in habitual non-voting between these different groups of the Canadian population.

Our analyses allow us to explain an important part of the gap in habitual non-voting between younger and older Canadians and between visible minority Canadians and other Canadians. While the explanations for younger Canadians relate both to their socio-demographic status and political attitudes, the explanation for visible minority Canadians relates mainly to their socio-demographic status. Our investigations thus reveal two groups of Canadians who are less likely to vote but who abstain from voting for somewhat different reasons.

More specifically, being a student appears to be an important factor to consider in explaining the gap in habitual non-voting between younger and older Canadians. Contrary to Gélinau (2013), we found that students are more likely to be habitual non-voters than non-students among younger Canadians, and that younger Canadians were more likely to be habitual non-voters than older Canadians in part because a larger proportion of them is still in school. Such divergent findings are puzzling, especially considering the key role that such a characteristic appears to play in explaining the gap in habitual non-voting. It is difficult to determine why being a student is correlated with a higher propensity to vote in Gélinau's study and with lower propensity to vote in our study. We can however offer a tentative explanation as to why we believe it intuitively makes sense to expect students to vote less than non-students.

In the conclusion of his book, Paul Howe (2010) provides an in-depth reflection as to the broader roots of decline in voter turnout among the Canadian youth. His proposed argument refers to the emergence of what he calls a "extended adolescence" in which younger Canadians are experiencing a very long transition between childhood and adulthood. The main source of this change, Howe reports, would be the progressive increase over the past decades in the number of people who attend higher education and the prolonged length of that education. This "extended adolescence" would increase interactions with peers of the same age and limits the extent of their social responsibilities.

Of course, our findings do not provide a detailed and direct demonstration in support of Howe's thesis. It nevertheless provides one set of evidence that supports it, namely that students are less likely to vote than non-students. Arguably, students are precisely at this stage of "extended adolescence" in which they have increased interactions with peers and a limited set of social responsibilities. Students are at a stage of their life in which for the most part they do not have children, do not own a property, do not know if they are living in the city or province where they will settle down after completing their education, and do not know in which profession they will work or in which social class they will belong. Likely, such an extended stage of life in between the shelter and guidance provided by parents and the settlement into a more defined

social positioning, might help explain why students are less likely to vote, and more broadly why younger Canadians are less likely to vote. Of course, this is a big conclusion based only on a limited set of evidence, but the point here is not so much to rule in a conclusive manner why younger Canadians vote less than older ones, but to further encourage the reflection and discussion as to what might be the consequences on voting of delayed social responsibilities, if there really is such a delay.

A weaker sense that voting is a civic duty is another main factor to account for a substantial part of the gap in habitual non-voting between younger and older Canadians. About half of younger Canadians do not feel guilty about the idea of not voting. This is substantially more than among older Canadians. It appears that remobilizing the Canadian youth in the electoral process (federal and provincial) must involve efforts as building this sense of civic duty. This study is not the first one to highlight such a finding (see Blais, 2000). On this matter, it is now time to move beyond the diagnostic stage of why younger Canadians vote less and to identify why younger Canadians are less committed to the norm that voting is part of their civic duty. We need to start identifying the promising avenues to favour the emergence of such a sense of civic duty. Many civic education programs have been initiated over the years, such as CIVIX's *Student Vote* program for elementary and high school students or Elections Canada's *Choosing our Mascot* for primary schools students. The question is whether those programs are efficient in the long term, especially at instilling a stronger sense of civic duty.

Confidence in Elections Canada is the third factor to help make sense of why younger Canadians are more likely to abstain from voting than older Canadians. Younger Canadians express less confidence in Elections Canada than older ones, and such lower confidence in the guardian of elections appear related to a lower propensity to vote. Interestingly, it holds beyond voting in federal elections; it is also related to habitual non-voting. This suggests that ensuring the strong integrity of the electoral process and of the institution in charge of administering the electoral process is essential to ensure that younger Canadians engage more with the electoral process and even to ensure that all Canadians continue to vote. Fortunately, Canadians appear to express a strong level of confidence in Elections Canada, more so than in the legislative bodies of the federal and provincial governments. An age-gap exists, however, between younger and older Canadians. Do younger Canadians express less confidence in Elections Canada because they know little about the institution? Will confidence in Elections Canada grow as younger Canadians become older or will it stay lower? In short, is the lower confidence in Elections Canada among younger Canadians the reflection of the stage at which they are in their life cycle or rather the reflection of generational phenomenon? It was not possible to explore why younger Canadians express less confidence in Elections Canada than older ones, but the consequences are real and clear: younger Canadians vote less than older ones. These are thus questions Elections Canada might want to further investigate in the future.

The fourth factor that helps explains why younger Canadians are more likely to be habitual non-voters than older Canadians is their greater disconnect from political parties. The solution to youth disengagement with electoral politics thus appears to be in part in the hands of parties who need to find ways to reconnect with the Canadian youth.

A final consideration that appears relevant to explain why younger Canadians are more likely to be habitual non-voters is their difficulty to articulate opinions about political matters. Our analyses indicate that younger Canadians are substantively more likely to provide "don't know" responses to political questions, and that such responses are significantly correlated with

the likelihood of being a habitual non-voter. Of course, it is possible that such low levels of opinionation might essentially reflect a lack of knowledge about politics, something we could not account for in this study. This nevertheless points to another possibility to further explore. In any case, such lower levels of opinionation among younger Canadians arguably signals a disengagement with politics.

Turning to visible minority Canadians, we find that the situation is a bit different. The details of the story can be found in the section where the gap in habitual non-voting is explained. The core of the story is that the main two factors that explain why visible minority Canadians vote less than other Canadians relate to their socio-demographic situation. First, a large proportion of visible minority Canadians in our sample are recent immigrants (24%) and recent immigrants appear more likely to be habitual non-voters. This finding also applies to younger Canadians. What precisely impedes recent immigrants to vote during their first decade in Canada remains to be identified. The optimistic prospect, however, is that visible minorities born abroad but who have lived in Canada for more than 10 years appear as likely as the rest of the population to vote. If anything, this suggests that the challenge of voting for members of visible minority groups who are immigrants is only temporary. Government efforts at stimulating and facilitating voting in this group of Canadians should therefore be targeted primarily at recent immigrants.

The other main component as to why visible minority Canadians are more likely to be habitual non-voters than other Canadians is that they are on average younger. Since we know that younger Canadians vote less and that visible minority Canadians are younger than the rest of the population, it is not then too surprising to observe that they vote less. In other words, trying to understand why visible minority Canadians vote less is at least in part the same task as to finding out why younger Canadians vote less. By finding ways to address low voter turnout among youth, governments and community partners are simultaneously tackling another task, namely to stimulating voting among Canadians of visible minority background. Programs targeting younger Canadians, however, need to be built around the socio-demographic reality that a significant proportion of Canada's youth is of a more diverse ethnic and racial background than it used to be.

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