

**Who Participates? A Closer Look at the Results of the
National Youth Survey**

Final Report

**Prepared
for
Elections Canada**

by

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Context	3
Overview of the Results	3
Policy Implications	4
Introduction	5
1. The Correlates of Voter Turnout Among Young Canadians	6
Socio-demographic Characteristics	6
Political Attitudes and Behaviours	8
Multivariate Analysis of Voter Turnout	10
2. Analysis by Age Group	13
Self-Reported Reasons for Voting and Not Voting	13
The Social Environment	13
Civic Attitudes and Activities	14
What Defines Canadian Youth?	14
3. Students Versus Non-students	15
Self-Reported Reasons for Voting and Not Voting	16
The Social Environment	16
Civic Attitudes and Activities	16
What Defines Canadian Students?.....	16
4. Analysis by Province/Region	17
Self-Reported Reasons for Voting and Not Voting	18
The Social Environment	18
Civic Attitudes and Activities	18
Are There Provincial/Regional Variations Among Canadian Youth?	18
5. Building Voter Resources	19
Socio-demographic Characteristic	20
Sources of Information	22
Forms of Behaviour	22
Correlates of Knowledge and Interest (Multivariate Analysis)	23
6. Discussion and Conclusion	25
Age Groups, Students and Provinces/Regions.....	26
Policy Implications	27
References	28

List of Tables

Table 1.1: Voter Turnout by Socio-demographic Characteristics	6
Table 1.2: Voter Turnout by General Attitudes Toward the Political System.....	8
Table 1.3: Voter Turnout by Level of Information and Knowledge.....	9
Table 1.4: Voting – Logistic Regression (Marginal Effects).....	10
Table 2.1: Age Groups – Multinomial Logistic Regression (Marginal Effects).....	14
Table 3.1: Students – Logistic Regression (Marginal Effects)	16
Table 4.1: Provinces/Regions – Multinomial Logistic Regression (Marginal Effects)	19
Table 5.1: Knowledge and Interest by Socio-demographic Characteristics	20
Table 5.2: Knowledge and Interest by Sources of Information	22
Table 5.3: Knowledge and Interest by Forms of Behaviour	23
Table 5.4: Knowledge and Interest (Socio-demographics) – Logistic Regression (Marginal Effects).....	24
Table 5.5: Knowledge and Interest (Information and Behaviours) – Logistic Regression (Marginal Effects).....	25

Executive Summary

Context

Following the May 2011 general election, Elections Canada commissioned a survey of Canadian youth. The National Youth Survey aimed to provide a representative sample of Canadian youth, including Aboriginal youth, ethnocultural youth, unemployed youth, youth with disabilities and those living in rural areas. A first report using these data provided a general portrait of the attitudes and behaviours of Canadian youth. The report emphasized the motivational and access barriers to electoral participation that many youth experience. Educational attainment, age, income, political interest and knowledge as well as exposure to influencers were all identified as determinants of voter turnout. The report also identified civic duty as the most commonly cited reason for voting and personal circumstances as the most commonly cited reason for not voting. In the end, political knowledge, political interest and knowledge of the electoral process were all identified as key determinants of voting. Yet when breaking down the respondents into subgroups, the National Youth Survey revealed interesting variations in voter turnout among Canadian youth.

This report aims to explain the differences in patterns of political participation among subgroups of Canadian youth. Using the National Youth Survey data, we systematically explore the similarities and differences in attitudes and behaviours among youth. In doing so, we compare the determinants of political participation among different age groups, between students and non-students and across provinces and territories. We also explore how political knowledge, political interest and knowledge of the electoral process affect the decision to vote or not to vote.

Overview of the Results

In many ways, young Canadians behave just like any other citizens. The correlates of electoral participation discussed in Section 1 of this report – i.e. political knowledge, interest, and civic duty – are quite similar to those we would find in the general population. They also conform to previous analyses of electoral participation among Canadian youth. At the same time, the analysis of the National Youth Survey produced results somewhat divergent from our expectations. Two findings are worth underscoring. First, once the model accounted for attitudinal and behavioural factors, most of the usual socio-demographic correlates vanished. This might suggest that once we control for attitudes and behaviours, there are no longer any socio-demographic differences among Canadian youth with regard to electoral participation. Second, the fact that cynicism appeared to have a strong effect on the decision to vote or not is surprising. This result is unprecedented in the literature on Canadian voting behaviour.

Beyond these broad findings, the analysis sought to document the extent to which the patterns of electoral participation varied by age group, student status and province/region. The analysis of attitudes and behaviours associated with turnout by age group allowed us to conclude that, among Canadian youth, the 20- to 24-year-olds find themselves in a state of transition. Many of them are beginning post-secondary studies, have few contacts with candidates and parties, and have lost their initial enthusiasm for the electoral process. In other words, the socio-demographics play against them, and they don't yet enjoy the benefits of political knowledge and interest.

The analysis of attitudes and behaviours associated with turnout by student status revealed that much of the observed variation can be explained by age. However, despite having lower income and being younger, students have higher levels of political knowledge and higher levels of civic participation. Lastly, we found limited variations in attitudes and behaviours associated with turnout across provinces/regions, most of it being explained by level of political knowledge and interest in politics.

Policy Implications

Our analyses of age groups, student status and provinces/regions all pointed to the central role played by political interest and knowledge. The analyses presented in the following pages allowed us to make two recommendations about whom to target and how:

1. The findings make it clear that Canadian youth cannot be treated as a homogeneous group; political interest and knowledge are not uniformly distributed among youth. It is therefore important to design policies that are targeted to specific subgroups of this population.
2. Our findings suggest that civic participation, civics courses, the Internet and discussing politics are all important vectors of political knowledge and interest. As a result, policies aimed at involving youth in civic activities and encouraging them to talk about politics can only have beneficial effects on electoral participation.

Introduction

Following the May 2011 general election, Elections Canada commissioned a survey of Canadian youth. The National Youth Survey aimed to provide a representative sample of Canadian youth, including Aboriginal youth, ethnocultural youth, unemployed youth, youth with disabilities and those living in rural areas. The study generated a data set on motivational and access barriers for young Canadians between the ages of 18 and 34.

A first report using these data provided a general portrait of the attitudes and behaviours of Canadian youth (Malatest 2011). The report emphasized the motivational and access barriers to electoral participation among youth as a whole. Educational attainment, age, income, political interest and knowledge as well as exposure to influencers were all identified as determinants of voter turnout. The report also identified civic duty as the most commonly cited reason for voting and personal circumstances as the most commonly cited reason for not voting. In the end, political knowledge, political interest and knowledge of the electoral process were all identified as key determinants of voting.

When breaking down Canadian youth into subgroups, the National Youth Survey revealed interesting variations in voter turnout. Although turnout seems to increase with age, it does not follow a linear trend, as the 20–24-year-olds were found to participate to a lesser extent than their younger peers. Another interesting finding is that students (especially those from younger age groups) were found to participate more than non-students.

Pushing the analysis further, the report also revealed some differences in the determinants of political participation among youth subgroups. In addition, it provided evidence that motivational and access barriers varied from one group to another. Yet the report did not investigate how these differences may help to explain the gaps in participation highlighted above. How influential is the family environment in providing the motivation for young Canadians to vote? Do interactions among young voters increase or decrease turnout among them? How does the school environment affect voter turnout among Canadian youth? And finally, do these patterns vary across provinces and territories?

This report aims to explain the differences in patterns of political participation among subgroups of Canadian youth. Using the National Youth Survey data,¹ we systematically explore the similarities and differences in attitudes and behaviours among youth. In doing so, we compare the determinants of political participation among different age groups, between students and non students, and across provinces and territories. We also explore how political knowledge, political interest and knowledge of the electoral process affect the decision to vote or not to vote.

Finally, the report explores the implications of these findings both for Elections Canada's education initiatives and for other stakeholders. In doing so, it provides recommendations for future policies and initiatives aimed at increasing voter turnout among youth.

¹ The National Youth Survey consisted of a telephone survey of a national random sample of 1,372 youth; an additional 1,293 interviews were completed with youth from subgroups recruited through a variety of purposive (non-random) methods. The analyses in this report rely exclusively on the national random sample.

1. The Correlates of Voter Turnout among Young Canadians

Our general understanding of the reasons why individuals vote or not is based on analyses of the whole population. As a result, we know that young voters vote less than their older peers and that newer generations vote less than young voters from previous generations. Yet it is not all that clear whether younger voters react in the same way to the factors that are identified in the general voting behaviour literature. Do socio-economic variables behave the same way among young Canadians as they do in the general population? Are young Canadians affected by political knowledge and interest in the same way as predicted by the general models?

The National Youth Survey allows us to answer these questions. We break down the analysis into two subsets of variables:

- socio-demographic characteristics
- political attitudes and behaviours

We first look at bivariate relationships linking these variables to turnout and then estimate their impact using a multivariate regression model.

Socio-demographic Characteristics

Table 1.1 presents the estimated turnout rate among the different subgroups of Canadian youth.² The results reveal patterns that are mostly consistent with prior knowledge. One exception has to do with gender. The table suggests that men vote slightly more often than women, while voting records indicate the opposite (Elections Canada 2012, 9). Survey data also generally indicate that women, especially those from the most recent generations, vote to a greater extent than men, or at least to the same extent (see, for example, Blais and Loewen 2011). We will address this issue further in the multivariate analysis below.

Table 1.1: Voter Turnout by Socio-demographic Characteristics

Variable	Percentage
Gender	
Male	45.0%
Female	40.4%
Age	
18–19	41.5%
20–24	37.9%
25–29	43.3%
30–34	42.6%
Income	
<\$40,000	35.7%

² In addition to the socio-demographic weight provided by the polling firm, we weighted the data to reflect the effective participation rate (by age group), as documented by Elections Canada (2012).

\$40,000+	48.9%
Education	
No post-secondary	33.9%
Some post-secondary	61.6%
Student	
Student	51.6%
Not a student	40.5%
Marital status	
Married	44.3%
Not married	42.1%
Aboriginal	
No	43.7%
Yes	23.0%
Living environment	
Urban	44.0%
Rural	39.9%
Residential stability	
Moved	42.7%
Did not move	42.5%
Immigration status	
Born in Canada	43.3%
Not born in Canada	37.4%

The table also suggests that voter turnout increases as young voters get older, with the exception that 18–24-year-olds who are eligible to vote for the first time (i.e. 18–19-year-olds) vote more often than those who were eligible to vote during the previous election (20–24-year-olds). A similar difference has been found in the estimations of turnout by age group produced by Elections Canada following the past four general elections (Elections Canada 2005, 2008, 2012, n.d.).

Also consistent with prior findings is the fact that individuals with higher income (over \$40,000) vote substantially more often than those with a lower income. At over 13 percentage points, the difference seems even larger than the one reported by Blais and Loewen (2011) on the basis of data from the Canadian Election Studies. The level of education has an even greater effect on the likelihood of voting. Those who have attended a post-secondary institution have a likelihood of voting more often by almost 30 percentage points than those who have never attended a post-secondary institution. Similarly, young Canadians who are active students (at any level) have a turnout rate 7 percentage points higher than those who are not students.

The participation rate among married young Canadians is only slightly higher than that of unmarried individuals. Young Canadians who identify as Aboriginal have a turnout rate over 20 percentage points lower than non-Aboriginals. Those living in urban settings vote about 4 percentage points more often than young Canadians living in rural areas. Respondents who moved in the last two years are neither more nor less likely to vote than those who did not move.

Finally, respondents who were born in Canada vote more often than those who were born abroad by almost 6 points.

Political Attitudes and Behaviours

Beyond socio-demographics, several other variables have been found to have an effect on whether citizens vote in elections. These can be broken down into two broad subcategories:

- general attitudes toward the political system
- level of information and knowledge about politics and the electoral process

Table 1.2 shows the bivariate relationship between voter turnout and general attitudes toward politics and the political system. As one would expect, young Canadians who display a high level of interest toward politics in general vote more often than those who are less interested by almost 30 percentage points. The effect is even greater when we consider the level of interest toward the 2011 election. Over half of those who were interested in the May 2011 election voted, while only 10.5 percent of those who were not interested voted. This would suggest that beyond their general level of interest toward politics, young Canadians are interested in the specific context of the election. Also, the results indicate that individuals who believe that voting is a civic duty are much more likely to report having voted. While those who agree with the statement about civic duty display a reported turnout rate of 48.9 percent, only 9.2 percent of those who disagree with the statement have voted.

Table 1.2: Voter Turnout by General Attitudes Toward the Political System

Interest in politics	
Variable	Percentage
High	52.4%
Low	23.6%
Interest in election	
High	54.7%
Low	10.5%
Sense of civic duty	
High	48.9%
Low	9.2%
Cynicism	
High	26.7%
Low	55.4%

The National Youth Survey also provides evidence that cynicism is negatively related to voter turnout among young Canadians.³ Although the literature has provided little support for such a

³ The variable that measures cynicism is an index composed of three questions measuring different attitudes toward politics, democracy and political parties. The scale reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) for the index is 0.5699.

proposition, the bivariate analysis suggests that respondents who are highly cynical have a mean turnout rate of just 26.7 percent, while 55.4 percent of those with a low level of cynicism report having voted in the last election.

Table 1.3 reports the participation rates of young Canadians by level of information and level of knowledge. The survey allowed us to measure political knowledge in different ways. The first variable relates to the capacity of respondents to correctly identify the party that won the most seats in the last federal election, which level of government has primary responsibility for education and the name of their provincial or territorial premier. Those who correctly answered two or three of the questions were placed in the high-knowledge category, while respondents who correctly answered one or none of the questions were placed in the low-knowledge category. As one would expect, young Canadians with higher levels of knowledge participate to a much greater extent than those with lower levels of knowledge. The gap in turnout is over 35 points.

Table 1.3: Voter Turnout by Level of Information and Knowledge

Variable	Percentage
Political knowledge	
High	59.1%
Low	22.3%
Knowledge about electoral process	
Some/a lot	65.2%
None	26.4%
Voter information card	
Yes	50.0%
No	30.1%
Newspaper as main source of information	
Yes	65.7%
No	40.4%
Internet as main source of information	
Yes	65.5%
No	38.4%
Radio as main source of information	
Yes	41.4%
No	42.6%
Social networks as main source of information	
Yes	45.8%
No	42.5%
Contacted by party/politician	
Yes	55.7%
No	35.9%

The description of the variables used to build the index can be found in Appendix B.

Civic participation	
At least one form	47.3%
None	35.0%

The National Youth Survey asked respondents whether they could identify the options available to voters to cast their ballot other than on Election Day (i.e. by mail, at the advance polls and at their local Elections Canada office). We divided that sample into those who could not identify any of these options (None) and those who could identify at least one alternative to voting on election day (Some/a lot). Here again, the level of information about the electoral process has a major impact on voter turnout. There is a gap of almost 40 percentage points between the two groups, with almost two thirds of those with some knowledge of alternative voting options reporting that they had voted in the previous election. Similarly, those respondents who reported having received a voter information card (VIC) from Elections Canada were more likely to report having voted by almost 20 percentage points.

In addition to these knowledge questions, the survey asked respondents to identify their primary source of information about the election. The results indicate that electoral participation was higher among newspaper readers and general Internet users (media website, blog or other web source). In both instances, the participation gap separating users from non-users is over 25 percentage points. The data also reveal that radio users and social network aficionados are not more likely to vote, with the turnout gap being within the margin of error.

Being contacted by a candidate or political party directly might also affect the level and nature of information acquired by voters. It might also affect the likelihood of voting. As a matter of fact, the National Youth Survey indicated that those who reported being contacted vote to a greater extent than those who were not contacted. The gap is almost 20 percentage points.

Finally, Table 1.3 suggests that respondents who engage in other forms of political participation are likely to participate more than those who do not. In this case, the participation gap is slightly above 12 percentage points. These other forms of participation include expressing views by contacting a newspaper or commenting on a blog, attending a community meeting, contacting a politician, participating in a demonstration or signing a petition.

Multivariate Analysis of Voter Turnout

The bivariate relationships presented above do not account for the fact that many of the variables are measuring similar phenomena. For example, it is possible that respondents with post-secondary education are also more informed about politics. We might also see that, on average, students are younger than non-students. As a result, the bivariate analysis may overestimate some of the effects. In order to disentangle all of this and isolate the truly independent effect of each variable, we need to conduct a multivariate analysis in which we estimate the effect of every single variable while controlling for the others.

Table 1.4 reports the estimated effect of each variable on the probability of voting, all other things being equal. The complete regression results can be found in Appendix A (Table A1.4). Given that every variable is binary (0 or 1), the entries can be interpreted as the percentage-point change in the probability of voting if a respondent possesses that characteristic. For example, all

else being equal, a respondent who has a high level of political knowledge (1) is 8.6 percentage points more likely to vote than one who has a low level of political knowledge (0).

Table 1.4: Voting – Logistic Regression (Marginal Effects)

Variable	Percentage point change
Voter information card	--
Knowledge (general)	+8.6
Knowledge (process)	+16.1
Newspaper (main source)	+17.3
Internet (main source)	+11.7
Contacted by party/candidate	--
Civic participation	--
Interest in politics	--
Interest in election	+29.0
Cynicism	-10.2
Sense of civic duty	+14.7
Female	-8.9
20–24 year-olds	--
25–29 year-olds	--
30–34 year-olds	--
High income	--
Post-secondary education	--
Student	+10.5
Married	--
Aboriginal	--
Rural	--
Moved	--
Born in Canada	+9.8

Note: “--” indicates that the estimated effect does not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. See Table A1.4 for complete regression results.

When we look at Table 1.4, we can see that 10 of the variables have an effect on turnout that is statistically different from zero. In seven of these cases, the effect is above 10 percentage points. The strongest correlate of electoral participation is interest in the election (+29.0 points), followed by newspapers as the main source of information (+17.3 points), knowledge of alternative means of voting (+16.1 points) and feeling that voting is a civic duty (+14.7 points). Interestingly, we find that cynicism is also strongly related to voting because the more cynical have a lower probability of voting by a little over 10 points. This is rather surprising since the literature has not found strong evidence with regard to cynicism.

All in all, the results suggest that socio-demographics, political attitudes, and knowledge and behaviours all affect the extent to which young Canadians vote or not. In this model, the only

three socio-demographic variables that indicate an independent effect on turnout are Female (−8.9 points), Student (+10.5 points) and Born in Canada (+9.8 points). The fact that the bivariate analysis indicated that other socio-demographic variables were correlated to turnout simply suggests that these are covariates of other independent variables. For example, the fact that the effect of one particular variable – 20–24-year-olds – vanishes in the regression analysis could be explained by the inclusion of the variables measuring political attitudes. Hence, this would suggest that if respondents aged 20–24 vote to a lesser extent, it is likely because they are less interested in politics, less interested in the election or more cynical, not because they are 20–24 years old. A similar interpretation can be offered for the fact that the effect of Post-secondary Education disappears when adding the knowledge and behaviours variables into the model. This might simply be explained by the fact that respondents with post-secondary education are generally more knowledgeable or are more likely to rely on the Internet to find out information about politics.

The fact that the Female variable indicates a negative effect is surprising, but should be interpreted with care. In fact, the negative effect may simply be the residual effect of the variable once we control for other factors. For example, young women tend to have higher levels of education, are less cynical about politics and have a greater sense of civic duty (the data support these claims; analysis not shown). This would help explain why, in most surveys, we observe that women vote more often than men (at least when looking at the bivariate relationship). It is only after controlling for all of these factors that the data indicate that women vote less often than men. We should not put too much emphasis on that coefficient since, in reality, this negative effect is compensated by the fact that women are more educated, less cynical and have a greater sense of civic duty. Ultimately, we do not have any theoretical reason to believe that women vote less (or more) often than men just because they are women.

It is interesting to note that while the variable measuring interest in the election (+29.0 points) has a strong impact on the individual propensity to vote, the variable measuring broad political interest does not seem to affect turnout at all. This suggests that, among young Canadians, the motivation to vote has more to do with the issues specific to one election than their overall interest in public matters.

The fact that cynicism (−10.2 points) is found to affect the propensity to vote may seem surprising because cynicism is rarely found to be a significant correlate of voting in the literature. One of the reasons why our results are different from previous attempts at measuring the impact of cynicism in the Canadian context might have to do with the specific questions used to build the index. For example, the questions used by the Canadian Election Studies were not systematically reproduced in the National Youth Survey. As a result, it might be the case that our measure captures a slightly different dimension of political cynicism than that found in previous studies.⁴ That being said, our measure does tap into individual dissatisfaction with political parties and politics in general. An alternative explanation of this surprising result might have to do with the possibility that cynicism among young Canadians was linked to specific issues at

⁴ For a description of the questions used in previous studies to measure cynicism, see Blais et al 2002, page 228 or Rubenson et al 2004, page 420.

play during the 2011 general election. However, it is not possible to verify that claim directly. This will have to be the object of future research endeavours.

2. Analysis by Age Group

It is rather well established in the literature that as individuals grow older, their propensity to vote increases (Phelps 2004; Wass 2007; Sloam 2007). This is known as the life-cycle effect (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). Yet the National Youth Survey unveiled a puzzling pattern of voter turnout along age groups. The data suggest that the relationship between age and turnout among youth is not linear. The survey identifies a drop in turnout among 20–24-year-olds.

The pattern observed in the National Youth Survey is not entirely new. The fact that the turnout rate drops suddenly among 20-24 year-olds, only to rise again among those 25 and older, has been documented on the basis of voting records data. Both in Canadian federal elections (Elections Canada 2005, 2008, 2012, n.d.) and Quebec provincial elections (Gélineau & Teyssier 2012), first-time voters seem to turn out to a greater extent than their peers who were eligible to vote in the previous election.

Of particular interest is what accounts for the drop in turnout among 20–24-year-olds. What factors are linked to the lower turnout rate in this group in comparison to 18–19-year-olds and youth over 25? Is this an access or a motivation issue? Is it related to “leaving the nest” and/or the high school environment? Or is it simply that turnout is higher among first-time voters?

It is worth noting that the age gap found in the National Youth Survey is rather small and barely statistically significant. Yet given that a similar pattern has been found with the use of voting records, it is entirely justified to push the investigation further.

Self-Reported Reasons for Voting and Not Voting

First, we look at the reasons identified by the respondents as to why they voted or why they did not vote. Table A2.1 (in Appendix A) breaks down the reasons for voting by age group. It is interesting to note that younger voters display more positive attitudes toward politics and democracy than their older peers. Voters aged 18–19 stand out in believing that voting allows them to express their opinions and views. Although these same voters are least likely to see voting as a civic duty, they are more likely than their older peers to believe that it is important to vote. Also, if the 18–19-year-olds are motivated by the opportunity of expressing their views and by the importance of the act of voting, they are the least likely to vote in order to support or oppose a candidate or political party.

Turning to the reasons identified by the respondents for not voting (see Table A2.2), the most apparent difference concerns the 25–29-year-olds. While they are more likely to invoke access barriers as a reason for not voting, they are slightly less likely to fall back on attitudes.

The Social Environment

The National Youth Survey includes several questions on the political socialization of Canadian youth. It appears that family influence and peer influence diminish with age (see Table A2.3). Younger voters (aged 18–19) are least likely to discuss politics with their partner or spouse and

are more likely to discuss politics with friends. They are more likely to report having discussed politics with their family as they were growing up. And as these young voters grow older, they are more likely to discuss politics with their colleagues.

Civic Attitudes and Activities

Civic attitudes and behaviours might also have an impact on how younger voters feel about politics in general. The National Youth Survey asked several questions to measure these dimensions. For example, voters aged 25-29 are more likely to report having expressed their views on a blog or a newspaper (see Table A2.4). As voters get older, they are more likely to report having attended a community meeting, having contacted a politician, or having signed a petition. On the other hand, older voters are less likely to report having participated in a demonstration or having volunteered.

Overall, those aged 18–24 are more likely to report getting political information through their friends and family. Voters aged 18–19 are least likely to report getting information through newspapers (see Table A2.5). As voters get older, they are more likely to report getting information through radio.

What Defines Canadian Youth?

From Section 1, we know that political knowledge, information, civic duty and interest in the election have a positive effect on the propensity of young Canadians to vote. We also learned that cynicism has a negative impact on turnout among them. Now to what extent do these factors vary among age groups? For example, if it is true that individuals from the younger groups vote less often than their older peers, is it because they are less informed, less interested and/or more cynical about politics?

Table 2.1 presents the results of a multinomial logistic regression in which the dependent variable is defined by age group. Using such a strategy allows us to compute the change in predicted probability that the respondents belong to each age group, given the presence or absence of each characteristic, all else being equal. For example, having a high level of knowledge of the electoral process increases the probability (+5.4 points) of an individual being in the 30–34-year-old age group. It can also be understood as a controlled correlation. Hence, higher levels of knowledge of the electoral process can be found among 30–34-year-olds, everything else held constant.

Table 2.1: Age Groups – Multinomial Logistic Regression (Marginal Effects)

Variable	Percentage point change	18–19-Year-olds	20–24-Year-olds	25–29-Year-olds	30–34-Year-olds
Voter information card		–11.6	--	--	+9.3
Knowledge (general)		--	--	--	--
Knowledge (process)		--	–6.7	--	+5.4
Newspaper (main source)		–15.1	+9.9	--	--
Internet (main source)		–6.6	+6.6	--	--
Contacted by party/candidate		--	–7.2	+6.9	--
Civic participation		--	–6.2	--	--

Variable	Percentage point change	18–19-Year-olds	20–24-Year-olds	25–29-Year-olds	30–34-Year-olds
Interest in politics		--	--	--	--
Interest in election		+12.4	--	--	–9.0
Cynicism		--	--	--	+6.1
Sense of civic duty		--	–9.3	--	--
Female		--	--	--	--
High income		--	–5.8	--	+8.6
Post-secondary education		–9.8	--	–7.8	--
Student		+7.6	+18.4	–15.7	–10.3
Married		--	--	--	+21.1
Aboriginal		--	--	--	--
Rural		--	--	--	--
Moved		--	--	+11.4	–11.0
Born in Canada		--	--	--	+9.1
Live with parents		+11.6	+13.9	--	–18.5

Note: “--” indicates that the estimated effect does not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. See Table A2.6 for complete regression results.

With that in mind, Table 2.1 suggests that 18–19 year-olds are less likely than their older peers to report having received the voter information card and to use newspapers or the Internet as their main source of information. However, they are more likely to have shown high levels of interest for the 2011 general election. The 20–24 year-olds are less informed about the electoral process, less likely to be contacted by parties or candidates and engage less in civic activities. They also are less likely to believe that voting is a civic duty. For their part, the 25–29 year-olds are more likely to be contacted by parties and politicians. Finally the 30–34 year-olds are more likely to have received the voter information card and more informed about the electoral process. However, they are less likely to have been interested in the 2011 general election and more cynical than their younger peers. This latter finding might suggest that cynicism is a trait that people acquire as they age.

The socio-demographic variables indicate, not surprisingly, that income, post-secondary education, and marriage are related to age. The older respondents are, the more likely they are married, have higher incomes, and have completed some postsecondary education. Respondents in the older categories are less likely to be students, while those in the younger categories are more likely to be active students and live with their parents.

3. Students Versus Non-students

The literature provides evidence that education plays a significant role in predicting turnout, especially among younger voters (Blais 2002). The social environment in which students find themselves might also be conducive to higher turnout rates among them. Colleges and universities provide forums in which students can discuss politics and gain information about it, two factors that were found to help boost voter turnout. As a result of these mechanisms, one would expect to observe several attitudinal and behavioural differences between students and non-students among Canadian youth. The National Youth Survey allows us to verify those

possibilities. The data do indicate that there is a difference in turnout between students and non-students, as indicated by Table 1.4.

Self-Reported Reasons for Voting and Not Voting

As shown in Table A3.1, students and non-students do not seem to differ much on the basis of their reported reasons for voting. Students are slightly more numerous in reporting that they vote because voting allows them to express their views and opinions. It is interesting that no clear pattern emerges with regard to sense of civic duty or social pressure. Just about half of students and non-students report that they have voted as a result of that attitude.

Among non-voters (Table A3.2), a greater number of students abstain because they have cynical views about the process, but the difference is very small. In addition, non-students are more likely to report not having voted as a result of personal circumstances; but again, the differences are very small.

The Social Environment

Family influence seems to matter more among students than non-students (see Table A3.3). Students are also more likely to report discussing politics with friends and peers. Thus far in the analysis, students are least likely to report discussing politics with their partner or spouse. Not surprisingly, most of these effects disappear when controlling for age (analysis not shown).

Civic Attitudes and Activities

On attitudes and motivation, students are more likely to report having volunteered (Table A3.4). Students are more likely to report that their main source of information is friends and family (Table A3.5). Once again, these effects disappear when controlling for age; hence, the differences might not be explained by school attendance per se.

What Defines Canadian Students?

What, then, distinguishes the students who have been surveyed through the National Youth Survey? As we did for the age groups, we ran a logistic regression on the variables used in Table 1.4 to see whether any of them can help explain the difference in turnout observed between students and non-students.

Table 3.1 reports the difference in predicted probability of being a student in the presence or absence of each of the characteristics used to predict turnout. Only three attitudinal and behavioural factors stand out. Canadian students appear to be more informed about politics in general, are more likely to engage in civic activities, and are much more likely to think that voting is a civic duty. Unlike the bivariate relationships presented above, these effects are independent of age. As a result, we can claim that attending an educational institution increases political knowledge. We can also conclude with confidence that students have a stronger sense of civic duty and engage more frequently in civic activities.

Table 3.1: Students – Logistic Regression (Marginal Effects)

Voter information card	Percentage point
Variable	point

	change
	--
Knowledge (general)	+5.4
Knowledge (process)	--
Newspaper (main source)	--
Internet (main source)	--
Contacted by party/candidate	--
Civic participation	+5.6
Interest in politics	--
Interest in election	--
Cynicism	--
Sense of civic duty	+17.5
Female	--
20-24 year-olds	--
25-29 year-olds	-27.2
30-34 year-olds	-29.5
High income	-7.0
Post-secondary education	--
Married	--
Aboriginal	--
Rural	-7.3
Moved	--
Born in Canada	--
Live with parents	--

Note: “--” indicates that the estimated effect does not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. See Table A3.6 for complete regression results.

As for socio-demographics, students come mostly from the 18–19 and 20–24 age groups because the likelihood of being a student is significantly lower among 25-29 year-olds (–27.2 points) and 30-34 year-olds (–29.5 points). The probability of having an income above \$40,000 is also lower among students (–7.0 points). Finally, students live more often in urban areas, as evidenced by the fact that the probability that they live in rural areas is 7.3 points lower than for non-students.

4. Analysis by Province/Region

The National Youth Survey provided participation rates by province/region, but did not analyze differences in attitudes or behaviour patterns across them. Although self-reported participation rates across regions did not vary significantly, it is valuable to understand how the reasons for voting and not voting, the social environment, and access and motivation barriers vary across provinces.

Self-Reported Reasons for Voting and Not Voting

Table A4.1 shows very few provincial/regional differences with regard to the reasons for voting. Young Quebecers are slightly less numerous in responding that they vote because it allows them to express their opinions and/or views. However, they are more likely to say that voting is a civic duty. Respondents from the Northern territories, for their part, are more prone to vote because they believe it is important. Hence, the sense of civic duty seems to resonate more with respondents from Quebec and the Northern territories.

As for the reasons not to vote (Table A4.2), there is little variation to report. One exception is that British Columbians are less likely to cite motivational factors as the main reason for not voting, while respondents from Ontario and the Atlantic provinces are slightly more prone to give these reasons. British Columbians are rather more numerous in claiming that personal circumstances are the main reason for not voting.

The Social Environment

Turning to the people or groups that have influenced the voting decision (Table A4.3), once again, provincial/regional differences are very small. Quebec respondents are less numerous in responding that their voting decision was influenced by any of the identified people or groups. Aside from that, all of the other differences are rather small.

Civic Attitudes and Activities

On the list of civic activities (Table A4.4), Northern territories voters are less likely to report having expressed their views on a blog or in a newspaper. Quebec voters are less likely to report having participated in a community meeting, while Northern territories voters are more likely to have done so. British Columbia (BC) voters are less likely to report having contacted a politician, while Northern territories voters are more likely to have done so (the difference is not statistically significant, however). Quebec and Northern territories voters are less likely to report having signed a petition; BC voters are more likely to have done so. Quebec voters are less likely to report having volunteered, while BC and Northern territories voters are more likely to have volunteered. Quebec voters are less likely to report having volunteered for a political party.

As far as the main source of information about the 2011 election is concerned, BC and Prairies voters are more likely to report that it came from newspapers (Table A4.5). Quebec voters are more likely to report that it was from television and less likely from the Internet. Quebec and Northern territories voters are more likely to report that it is from radio. Quebec and Ontario voters are less likely to report that it is from their friends and family.

Are There Provincial/Regional Variations Among Canadian Youth?

As with age groups and student status, we test the general conclusion reported in Table 1.4 in the different provinces and territories, grouped into six regions. We are interested in identifying the characteristics that make the regions stand out. Are young Canadians as informed, interested and cynical about politics in each region? In order to answer that question, we ran a multinomial logistic regression on the variable that identifies the provinces and territories. As in Table 2.1, we computed the change in predicted probability that the respondents pertain to each province/region, given the presence or absence of each characteristic, all else being equal. For

example, having a high level of knowledge about politics decreases the probability of an individual living in Ontario. It can also be understood as a controlled correlation. Hence, lower levels of political knowledge can be found in Ontario.

Quebec residents are more likely to report having received the VIC. They are also more knowledgeable about the electoral process and display higher levels of civic duty. However, Quebec residents are less interested in politics and more cynical about politics. Ontario respondents are less knowledgeable about politics and are more likely to be contacted by parties or candidates, yet they are more interested in politics. Young Canadians from the Prairies are more informed about politics and are less likely to be contacted by parties or candidates. In BC, young Canadians engage more in civic activities and were more interested in the 2011 general election. Finally, young Canadians living in the Northern territories are more likely to rely on newspapers as their main source of information.

Percentage point change

Table 4.1: Provinces/Regions – Multinomial Logistic Regression (Marginal Effects)

Variable	Atlantic Provinces	Quebec	Ontario	Prairies	BC	Northern Territories
Voter information card	--	+8.9	--	--		
Knowledge (general)	--	--	-8.9	+7.3	--	--
Knowledge (process)	--	+5.1	--	--	--	--
Newspaper (main source)	--	--	--	--	--	+0.4
Internet (main source)	--	--	--	--	--	--
Contacted by party/candidate	--	--	+12.6	-10.0	--	--
Civic participation	--	--	--	--	+6.8	--
Interest in politics	--	-16.1	+15.3	--	--	--
Interest in election	--	-9.2	--	--	+8.0	--
Sense of civic duty	-4.1	+11.6	--	--	--	+0.9
Cynicism	--	+5.9	--	--	--	--

Note: “--” indicates that the estimated effect does not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. Socio-demographic variables were included in the analysis. Coefficients are not reported. See Table A4.6 for complete regression results.

5. Building Voter Resources

The National Youth Survey revealed that political knowledge, knowledge of the electoral process, and interest in the 2011 general election were all key determinants of voting (see Table 1.4). We have also seen in the previous sections that these resources sometimes vary by age, student status and province/region, but not in ways that allow us to identify clear actions to help increase these resources. As a matter of fact, the factors that help to increase these resources remain to be explored. Beyond age, are there socio-demographic characteristics associated with higher levels of knowledge and interest? Are there specific attitudes and behaviours that are associated with knowledge and interest? What about political parties and candidates? Finding answers to these questions will allow us to identify measures that can foster these attitudes.

Socio-demographic Characteristics

Table 5.1 reports the levels of knowledge and interest by different socio-demographic characteristics. Knowledge is both reported as general knowledge about politics and as knowledge about the electoral process, using the same categories used in Table 1.3. Interest is also dichotomized using the same categories we used in Table 1.2. Interest is reported as broad political interest and as interest in the 2011 general election. The percentages shown in Table 5.1 are the percentage of respondents who have high levels of interest and knowledge.

Table 5.1: Knowledge and Interest by Socio-demographic Characteristics

Variable	Knowledge (Politics)	Knowledge (Process)	Interest (Politics)	Interest (Election)	Percentage
Gender					
Male	57.1%	40.9%	71.0%	76.5%	
Female	53.4%	42.6%	62.3%	69.8%	
Age					
18–19	51.3%	32.5%	76.5%	86.4%	
20–24	50.3%	31.5%	63.3%	70.5%	
25–29	54.8%	43.2%	63.5%	71.7%	
30–34	63.1%	56.9%	66.3%	68.2%	
Income					
<\$40,000	44.1%	30.2%	64.3%	69.3%	
\$40,000+	65.3%	52.4%	67.8%	76.1%	
Education					
No post-secondary	40.7%	27.2%	61.0%	68.1%	
Some post-secondary	64.8%	51.5%	70.1%	76.3%	
Student					
Student	61.2%	39.4%	69.6%	78.3%	
Not a student	53.8%	42.2%	65.8%	71.8%	
Marital status					
Married	61.0%	49.1%	68.2%	72.8%	
Not married	53.5%	35.6%	66.0%	73.0%	
Aboriginal					
No	57.0%	43.0%	67.0%	74.1%	
Yes	24.2%	20.3%	57.7%	53.8%	
Living environment					
Urban	59.2%	42.2%	68.9%	73.0%	
Rural	47.7%	41.1%	62.0%	73.1%	
Residential stability					
Moved	52.2%	40.6%	69.3%	77.4%	
Did not move	57.3%	42.4%	64.1%	69.7%	
Immigration status					
Born in Canada	54.8%	42.9%	66.6%	71.7%	
Not born in Canada	58.6%	32.6%	65.7%	83.6%	

Variable	Knowledge (Politics)	Knowledge (Process)	Interest (Politics)	Interest (Election)	Percentage
Live with parents					
Yes	54.2%	34.7%	68.6%	78.3%	
No	56.1%	46.3%	65.3%	69.2%	

Gender is clearly a characteristic that affects the respondents' level of knowledge and interest. Yet the gap seems to be higher for interest (both dimensions). The percentage of individuals highly interested in politics is almost 10 points higher among men, and interest in the 2011 general election is about 7 points higher for men. Comparatively, however, the gap is only about 3 points for political knowledge. It is interesting to note that knowledge of the electoral process is greater among women, but only slightly (less than 2 points). These last two differences are not statistically significant.

No uniform pattern can be identified with regard to age group. For both forms of knowledge, we find a higher percentage of highly informed individuals among 30–34 year-olds. The percentage drops steadily among younger individuals. However, there is no clear difference in knowledge between 18–19 and 25–29 year-olds. The pattern for interest is reversed. The most interested individuals (both forms) are those aged 18–20, by 10 to 15 points, than any other age group. Also, there does not seem to be any substantial difference in interest among the other age groups.

Income and post-secondary education clearly affect knowledge. Those individuals whose income is higher than \$40,000 are more likely to be highly informed, by over 20 percentage points, about both politics and process (+21.2 and +22.2 points, respectively). The same knowledge gap (over 20 points) can be observed for post-secondary education (+24.1 and +24.3 points). The pattern is not so clear for interest. Although higher income and education are associated with a greater percentage of highly interested respondents, the gap is smaller. The interest gap is also wider for education (+8.9 and +8.2 points) than for income (+3.5 and +6.8 points).

Being a student also increases the likelihood of being highly informed and interested, but not in an entirely consistent pattern. Students have a higher level of political knowledge (+7.4 points), are more interested in politics (+3.8 points) and were more interested in the 2011 election (+6.5 points). Yet they are slightly less aware of the alternative ways of voting (–2.8 points).

Married respondents are generally more knowledgeable about politics and process (+7.5 and +13.5 points, respectively), but not systematically more interested in either politics (+2.2 points) or the 2011 election (+1.8 points). Overall, young Aboriginal Canadians are substantially less informed about and interested in politics and process than other Canadians. For them, the knowledge gap is especially large, ranging from –32.8 points (politics) to –22.7 points (process). The interest gap is also significant, from –9.3 (politics) to –20.3 (2011 election).

All in all, the knowledge and interest gaps are rather small with respect to the living environment (urban or rural), having moved recently, being born in Canada and living with parents. The only differences worth mentioning are that respondents living in rural areas have a lower level of general political knowledge (–11.5 points), those who moved recently were slightly more interested in the 2011 general election, and Canadian-born respondents are more aware of the alternative ways to vote (+10.3 points) but were less interested in the election (–11.9 points) than

those born in Canada. Finally, respondents who live with their parents are less likely to know about the alternative ways of voting (−8.9 points) but were more interested in the 2011 election (+9.1 points).

Sources of Information

Beyond socio-demographics, young Canadians’ sources of information might be of interest. Understanding whether some forms of information acquisition are associated with higher levels of knowledge and interest can certainly inform the policy debates about political participation, especially since knowledge and interest are strong correlates of voter turnout.

Table 5.2 lays out the percentages of respondents with high levels of knowledge and interest by several sources of information about politics and the electoral process. Having taken a civics course consistently increases knowledge and interest. Not surprisingly, this has a stronger effect on the general forms of knowledge (+13 points) and interest (+22.8 points) than on the specificities of the electoral process (+5 points) and interest in the 2011 election (+11.6 points).

Table 5.2: Knowledge and Interest by Sources of Information

Variable	Knowledge (Politics)	Knowledge (Process)	Interest (Politics)	Interest (Election)	Percentage
Civics course					
No	47.0%	38.4%	51.7%	65.9%	
Yes	60.0%	43.4%	74.5%	77.5%	
Voter information card					
No	40.5%	28.9%	66.6%	71.1%	
Yes	62.4%	47.7%	67.6%	74.5%	
Contacted by party/candidate					
No	47.5%	37.7%	64.5%	70.1%	
Yes	68.3%	53.3%	71.4%	79.2%	
Newspaper (main source)					
No	56.2%	42.5%	67.5%	74.5%	
Yes	68.9%	51.0%	75.6%	81.2%	
Internet (main source)					
No	54.0%	40.3%	63.9%	71.4%	
Yes	69.0%	53.4%	82.8%	87.7%	

Respondents who reported having received the VIC are more knowledgeable about politics in general (+21.9 points) and about the electoral process (+18.8 points). Yet there does not seem to be any relationship between having received the VIC and any form of interest. Having been contacted by a political party or candidate is associated with higher levels of knowledge (both forms) and interest (both forms).

Respondents who use newspapers as their main source of information are more informed (+12.7 points and +8.50 points, respectively) and more interested (+8.1 points and +6.7 points).

Finally, respondents who claim to be using the Internet as their main source of political information have consistently higher levels of information and interest. The knowledge gap ranges from 13.1 points to 15.0 points; the interest gap ranges from 16.3 points to 18.9 points.

Forms of Behaviour

In addition to socio-demographics and sources of information, level of political knowledge and interest may be affected by specific behaviours. Expressing one’s views in a newspaper, engaging in a discussion on a blog, attending a community meeting, contacting a politician, taking part in a protest, signing a petition or even discussing politics certainly contributes to increasing the levels of both political knowledge and interest.

Table 5.3 displays the percentage of highly informed and interested respondents by different forms of behaviour who have been found to contribute to building political knowledge and interest. In both cases (civic participation and discussing politics), the exhaustive list of behaviours was combined to form a single Yes/No variable. The civic participation variable takes the value 1 if the respondent reported having done at least one of the activities that were presented in the survey; otherwise, it takes 0. The Discuss Politics variable takes the value 1 if the respondent reported discussing politics with at least one of the persons identified in the survey or if the respondent reported talking about politics at home when growing up; otherwise, it takes 0.

Table 5.3: Knowledge and Interest by Forms of Behaviour

Variable	Knowledge (Politics)	Knowledge (Process)	Interest (Politics)	Interest (Election)	Percentage
Civic participation					
No	46.2%	34.1%	57.3%	63.1%	
Yes	60.7%	46.5%	72.1%	79.1%	
Discuss politics					
No	21.2%	28.1%	17.9%	31.8%	
Yes	57.5%	42.7%	69.6%	75.9%	

Civic participation and discussing politics are clearly associated with higher levels of knowledge and interest. Having taken part in a civic activity increases the percentage of highly informed individuals by 14.5 points (politics) and 12.4 points (process). It also increases the percentage of highly interested individuals by 14.8 points (politics) and 16 points (election). A similar pattern can be established with respect to discussing politics. Those respondents reporting having discussed politics (at least once) are more likely to be more informed and interested. The gap is substantive across the board, ranging from 14.6 points (process) to 36.6 points (politics) for knowledge and from 44.1 points (election) to 51.7 points (politics) for interest.

Correlates of Knowledge and Interest (Multivariate Analysis)

Now that we have established some bivariate patterns of variation with regard to political knowledge and interest, a multivariate approach is needed to ensure that our findings withstand the inclusion of control variables. Tables 5.4 and 5.5 report the change in predicted probability

when accounting for the presence or absence of the characteristic associated with each independent variable included in the model.

Table 5.4 includes the estimates for the socio-demographic variables only. The results suggest that both forms of knowledge are mainly contingent upon income, education and student status. Each one of the three variables increases the probability of being a highly informed individual by 10 to 20 percentage points. In addition, the model indicates that Aboriginal respondents and those living in rural areas are less informed about politics by 20.9 points and 8 points, respectively. As for the other form of knowledge, the results suggest that being 20–24 years old (–11.1 points), being married (–9.7 points) and living with parents (–2.1 points) all play against knowing about alternative ways of voting.

Turning to interest, Table 5.4 reveals that respondents in every age group are less likely to be highly interested than the 18–19 year-olds (the reference category) (both forms, from –22.0 points to –29.2 points). In other words, this is a clear indication that the level of interest among 18-19 year-olds is much higher. Having some post-secondary schooling also increases the general level of interest (+11.5 points) and interest in the 2011 general election (+14.8 points). In addition, women (–7.3 points) and those living in rural areas (–8.6) are generally less interested in politics. Citizens not born in Canada were also less interested (–15.6 points) in the 2011 general election.

Table 5.4: Knowledge and Interest (Socio-demographics) – Logistic Regression (Marginal Effects)

Variable	Knowledge (Politics)	Knowledge (Process)	Interest (Politics)	Interest (Election)	Percentage point change
Female	--	--	–7.3	--	
20-24 year-olds	--	–11.1	–22.0	–23.7	
25-29 year-olds	--	--	–26.4	–26.7	
30-34 year-olds	--	--	–26.2	–29.2	
High income	+15.8	+17.2	--	--	
Post-secondary education	+14.7	+19.6	+11.5	+14.8	
Student	+15.3	+10.6	--	--	
Married	--	–9.7	--	--	
Aboriginal	–20.9	--	--	--	
Rural	–8.0	--	–8.6	--	
Moved	--	--	--	--	
Born in Canada	--	--	--	–15.6	
Live with parents	--	–2.1	--	--	

Note: “--” indicates that the estimated effect does not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. See Table A5.1 for complete regression results.

These conclusions about socio-demographics can be useful for better targeting policy interventions meant to increase voter turnout. Yet they do not help determine the nature of these interventions. Table 5.5 looks at the impact of different sources of information and civic behaviours that we identified in the previous bivariate analysis.

Table 5.5: Knowledge and Interest (Information and Behaviours) – Logistic Regression (Marginal Effects)

Variable	Percentage point change			
	Knowledge (Politics)	Knowledge (Process)	Interest (Politics)	Interest (Election)
Voter information card	+12.7	+11.2	--	+11.5
Civic participation	--	--	--	--
Civics course	--	--	+17.6	--
Newspaper (main source)	--	--	--	--
Internet (main source)	+9.7	--	+20.3	+15.2
Contacted by party/candidate	+10.7	+9.0	+6.9	+8.5
Discuss politics	+29.0	--	+38.8	+24.3

Note: "--" indicates that the estimated effect does not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. See Table A5.2 for complete regression results.

Two factors emerge as strong and consistent correlates of knowledge and interest. First, Table 5.5 suggests that respondents who use the Internet as their main source of information were more likely to be informed about the 2011 election (+9.7 points), are more interested in politics (+20.3 points) and were more interested in the election (+15.2 points). The results also indicate that discussing politics is a key determinant of general political knowledge (+29.0 points), interest in politics (+38.8 points) and interest in the 2011 general election (+24.3 points). Also, having received the VIC is positively associated with both forms of knowledge (+12.7 points and +11.2 points) as well as with interest in the 2011 election (+11.5 points). In addition, having taken a civics course increases general political interest (+17.6 points). Finally, respondents who report having been contacted by political parties or candidates are also more informed (+10.7 points and +9.0 points) and more interested (+6.9 points and +8.5 points).

6. Discussion and Conclusion

In many ways, young Canadians behave just like any other citizens. The correlates of electoral participation discussed in Section 1 of this report are quite similar to those we would find in the general population. They also conform to previous analyses of electoral participation among Canadian youth (e.g. Blais and Loewen 2011). For example, the previous analysis (Malatest 2011) provided ample evidence that political knowledge and interest are central factors in explaining why young Canadians vote or not. It also highlighted the role of the Internet as a source of information and the fact that direct contact from political parties or candidates contributes to increased electoral participation.

At the same time, this analysis of the National Youth Survey produced results somewhat divergent from our expectations. Two findings are worth underscoring. First, most of the usual socio-demographic correlates vanished once the model accounted for attitudinal and behavioural factors. The only two socio-demographic variables that continue to have an impact on turnout are being a student and being a woman. This might suggest that once we control for attitudes and behaviours, there are no longer any socio-demographic differences among Canadian youth with regard to electoral participation. Among youth, most (if not all) of the variance is thus explained by attitudes and behaviours.

Second, the fact that cynicism appeared to have a strong effect on the decision of whether to vote or not is surprising. This result is unprecedented in the literature. As stated earlier, it is difficult to compare our results with those of previous research since the National Youth Survey did not include the same questions as those found in prior surveys. That being said, we are confident that the cynicism index measures what it is supposed to measure – i.e., individual discontent with politics and political parties. One possible explanation for the unexpected results is that cynicism relates to the specific character of the 2011 general election. However, it is not possible to fully confirm that proposition using the data at hand.

Age Groups, Student Status and Provinces/Regions

Beyond those broad findings, the analysis sought to document the extent to which the patterns of electoral participation varied by age group, student status and province/region. Despite the low level of variation in turnout observed across these variables, the exploration of these vectors certainly provides valuable information for policy-makers. Understanding the intricacies of the process in such a way makes it possible to better adapt policies related to increasing electoral participation to the target audience.

The analysis of attitudes and behaviours associated with turnout by age group allowed us to conclude that, among Canadian youth, family influence erodes with age, knowledge is higher among 30–34-year-olds and interest is higher among first-time voters (18–19-year-olds). These findings may help explain the drop in participation observed among 20–24 year-olds. Those aged 18–19 benefit from family pressure, high levels of interest and general enthusiasm about the electoral process. This alone may help explain why they vote at levels similar those aged 25 and older. For their part, respondents aged 25 and older have socio-demographics on their side (post-secondary education, higher income, married, etc.), they have more contact with candidates and political parties, and they are more informed about politics and the electoral process. Thus, 20–24 year-olds find themselves in a state of transition. Many of them are beginning post-secondary studies, have few contacts with candidates and parties, and have lost their initial enthusiasm about the electoral process. In other words, socio-demographics play against them, and they do not yet enjoy the benefits of political knowledge and interest.

The analysis of attitudes and behaviours associated with turnout by student status revealed that much of the observed variation in these can be explained by age. The bivariate associations in family influence, discussing politics with friends and taking a civics course disappear when controlling for age in a multivariate model. However, despite having lower income and being younger, students have higher levels of political knowledge and higher levels of civic participation.

Finally, we found limited variations in attitudes and behaviours associated with turnout across provinces/regions. While youth from Quebec and Ontario were found to have higher levels of political knowledge than those in other provinces (especially those from the Prairies), they also displayed lower levels of interest in politics. Youth from Ontario reported more contact with parties and candidates, while those from the Atlantic provinces and the Prairies reported lower levels of contact. Ultimately, BC youth stood out from the other provinces/regions in having higher levels of interest in the 2011 election and higher levels of civic participation.

Policy Implications

Our analyses of age groups, student status and provinces/regions all pointed to the central role played by political interest and knowledge. The key question, then, is how to foster interest and knowledge among Canadian youth. The analyses presented in the previous pages allow us to make recommendations about whom to target and how.

First, the findings make it clear that Canadian youth cannot be treated as a homogeneous group. Political interest and knowledge are not uniformly distributed among 18–34-year-olds. It is therefore important to design policies that are targeted to specific audiences. While 18–19-year-olds are more interested, they are less informed about politics in general and about the electoral process. Those aged 24 and older are more informed about politics and about the process, but are less interested. As a result, fostering interest among 18–19-year-olds is not as optimal as targeting those aged 24 and above. Similarly, because students are more informed, information campaigns should be targeted primarily to those young Canadians not currently in school, especially those who have not completed any post-secondary studies.

Second, the conclusions found in the last section of the report suggest that civic participation, civics courses, the Internet and discussing politics are all important vectors of political knowledge and interest. As a result, policies aimed at involving youth in civic activities and giving them the opportunity to talk about politics can only have a beneficial effect on electoral turnout. Providing information about politics in general as well as information about the electoral process are also key to increasing voter turnout among youth. Finally, using the Internet to reach out to youth is certainly an essential component of any outreach activity targeting Canadian youth.

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