

Working Paper Series on  
Electoral Participation and Outreach Practices

# The Electoral Participation of Young Canadians

Paul Howe



## **Working Paper Series on Electoral Participation and Outreach Practices**

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*The Electoral Participation of Aboriginal People*  
by Kiera L. Ladner and Michael McCrossan

*The Electoral Participation of Ethnocultural Communities*  
by Livianna Tossutti

*The Electoral Participation of Persons with Special Needs*  
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*The Electoral Participation of Young Canadians*  
by Paul Howe

For information, please contact:

Public Enquiries Unit  
Elections Canada  
257 Slater Street  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0M6  
Tel.: 1-800-463-6868  
Fax: 1-888-524-1444 (toll-free)  
TTY: 1-800-361-8935  
www.elections.ca

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## Foreword

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We consider democracy to be the best form of government because it is the only one that recognizes and protects the intrinsic value and equality of each individual. Participating in elections is the essential starting point of any democratic system.

The *Canada Elections Act* provides the Chief Electoral Officer with the authority to implement public education and information programs to make the electoral process better known to the public, particularly to those persons and groups most likely to experience difficulties in exercising their democratic rights. These programs are collectively known as *outreach*.

Elections Canada has developed numerous outreach initiatives to assist electors in exercising their democratic rights. Four target groups – youth, Aboriginal electors, ethnocultural communities and electors with special needs – were identified on the basis of research showing that these groups tend to vote less than the mainstream Canadian population and may experience difficulties in accessing the electoral process.

Elections Canada commissioned four concept papers to refine its outreach strategy and initiatives. The papers studying the participation of Aboriginal electors, ethnocultural communities and electors with special needs were prepared, respectively, by Kiera L. Ladner (University of Manitoba) and Michael McCrossan (Carleton University), Livianna Tossutti (Brock University) and Michael J. Prince (University of Victoria).

This paper by Paul Howe, Associate Professor, University of New Brunswick, examines the electoral participation of young Canadians. The study analyzes recent voter participation literature and focuses particularly on youth. As well, it reviews “best practices” in elector outreach in various jurisdictions – in Canada and abroad – and applicable lessons learned. The study identifies areas for further research and makes recommendations for outreach to young electors.

Elections Canada is pleased to publish this study, and I wish to thank Professor Howe for his excellent work and his collaboration with us. The observations and conclusions are those of the author.

I trust that you will find this research study informative and that it will enrich public debate about measures to increase voter participation in federal elections.



Marc Mayrand  
Chief Electoral Officer





## Executive Summary

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This paper has been prepared to help Elections Canada refine its elector outreach strategies with respect to young Canadians. It first reviews recent literature on the electoral participation of young people and identifies significant research gaps. It then describes outreach strategies targeted at young electors in other jurisdictions and identifies applicable lessons for Canada.

The research review focuses on three areas particularly pertinent to understanding the efficacy of youth outreach strategies:

- The distinction between habitual non-voters, who never vote, and intermittent non-voters, who vote sometimes but not always. Largely overlooked in recent research, this distinction should be accorded greater attention in investigating the nature of non-voting among young Canadians and assessing the likely impact of different outreach strategies.
- The relative significance of life cycle and cohort effects in explaining low turnout levels among young Canadians. This paper highlights questions that arise in recent research about the appropriate conceptualization of these effects and that point to the value of further research into political socialization processes in late adolescence, when young people are approaching or reaching voting age.
- Administrative facilitation and mobilization of voters. Particular attention is paid to recent innovative research in the United States using experimental methods to gauge precisely the impact of different mobilization techniques. Applying these or similar research methods in Canada would enhance our understanding of the efficacy of various outreach methods.

The review of youth outreach strategies in other jurisdictions provides an overview of the efforts underway in all Canadian provinces and selected countries. Three relatively active jurisdictions are examined more closely: the United Kingdom, Australia and British Columbia. Many of the initiatives underway in these places mirror those already in place at the federal level in Canada. Some salient variations include:

- Registration procedures, including B.C.'s popular on-line registration facility and registration at ages 17 and 16 in Australia and the U.K., respectively.
- The national civics curriculum at the secondary school level in Australia and the U.K.
- The support provided by elections agencies to teachers in educating students about electoral processes, particularly by the Australian Electoral Commission.
- The frequency with which mock elections, or similar events designed to familiarize students with voting processes and democratic procedures, are held.
- The use of pilot studies to test and evaluate new outreach methods, especially in the U.K.

While a number of noteworthy outreach methods are in place in these three jurisdictions, there is no incontrovertible evidence of a sizable impact on voter turnout among young people. This may reflect the modest effect of any single initiative, the difficulty of precisely measuring the turnout levels of young people and/or significant lags between program implementation and increased voter participation. Further investigation and monitoring by academic researchers and elections agencies is recommended to assess whether anticipated benefits are realized in the coming years.

## Introduction

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This paper<sup>1</sup> has been prepared to help Elections Canada refine its elector outreach strategies with respect to young Canadians.<sup>2</sup> The paper first reviews recent literature<sup>3</sup> on the electoral participation of young people and identifies significant research gaps, focusing especially on those aspects of current debates most relevant to assessing the efficacy of elector outreach approaches. The paper then examines outreach strategies targeted at young electors in other jurisdictions and draws conclusions about best practices and applicable lessons for Canada.

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<sup>1</sup> The research assistance of Vincent French, particularly in the preparation of the appendices to this report, is gratefully acknowledged.

<sup>2</sup> The data for the 1974 Canadian National Election Survey were originally collected by Harold Clarke, Jane Jenson, Lawrence LeDuc and Jon Pammett and made available by the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research. The data for the 2004 Canadian Election Study were originally collected by André Blais, Elisabeth Gidengil, Neil Nevitte, Patrick Fournier and Joanna Everitt and were accessed on the Canadian Election Study Web site at [www.ces-ec.umontreal.ca/](http://www.ces-ec.umontreal.ca/). Neither the original investigators nor the distributing agencies bear any responsibility for the analysis and interpretations provided in this paper.

<sup>3</sup> Much of the literature exists in electronic form. Since the publication of this paper, some URLs may have changed.

# 1. Literature Review and Research Gaps

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This section describes the findings from a selective review of recent literature on the electoral participation of young people and identifies significant gaps in the research. The focus is on areas where further research might help in the ongoing refinement of Election Canada's outreach strategies.

## 1.1 Two Types of Non-Voters: Habitual and Intermittent

A useful starting point is to consider a distinction, largely overlooked in recent research on the Canadian case, between two types of non-voters: habitual non-voters, who never vote; and intermittent non-voters, who vote sometimes but not always.<sup>4</sup> This distinction is more present in American research, occasionally as a focus of analysis (Sigelman et al. 1985; Kaplan 2004), but more often as a variable used to explain which sections of the electorate are most likely to be influenced by voter mobilization initiatives (discussed further in Section 1.3.2). In other words, the distinction is highlighted precisely in the context of assessing the efficacy of elector outreach strategies.

Its relevance is fairly self-evident. The intermittent non-voter, having voted in the past, is more likely to be persuaded to vote in future elections than the habitual non-voter. Thus, for intermittent non-voters, the aim is to *facilitate voting* among those who already have a certain motivation to vote, whereas for habitual non-voters, the goal is to *motivate voting* among those not currently disposed to participate (International IDEA 1999, 44). To determine appropriate methods of elector outreach, it is important to know whether non-voting is an intermittent or habitual behaviour.

### 1.1.1 Are Young Canadians Habitual Non-Voters?

The tacit assumption in some recent analysis is that the decline in voting among young Canadians represents a rise in habitual non-voting: Young Canadian non-voters have been termed “dropouts” (Milner 2005) and characterized as “tuned out” (Gidengil et al. 2003). However, this has not been empirically verified and does not have to be the case. A lower voting level among the young could simply represent an increase in the number of intermittent non-voters and/or a decrease in the incidence of voting among young, intermittent non-voters.

Surveys probing voter participation in multiple elections can provide some insight into the relative proportions of the two types of non-voters in the Canadian population as a whole and within age groups.<sup>5</sup> Comparing these proportions over time sheds light on the nature of turnout decline among young Canadians.

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<sup>4</sup> See, however, a recent report prepared for Elections Manitoba, which does make such a distinction to useful effect (Prairie Research Associates, “Low Voter Turnout: A Survey of Voters and Non-voters,” March 10, 2004, available at [www.electionsmanitoba.ca/pdf/MB\\_Voter\\_Turnout\\_Survey.pdf](http://www.electionsmanitoba.ca/pdf/MB_Voter_Turnout_Survey.pdf)).

<sup>5</sup> These are subject to the normal cautions associated with the consistent overestimation of voter participation using survey methods.

Table 1 provides data along these lines, categorizing respondents from the 1974 and 2004 Canadian election studies based on their reported participation in three elections: the federal elections of 1974 and 2004, the previous federal elections (in 1972 and 2000) and the most recent provincial election.<sup>6</sup> For both periods, the youngest age group is limited to those old enough to be eligible to vote in all three elections.

**Table 1 – Multi-Election Participation by Age Group, 1974 and 2004 (in Percentages)**

<b>1974</b>							
<b>Elections Voted In</b>	<b>Under 30*</b>	<b>30–39</b>	<b>40–49</b>	<b>50–59</b>	<b>60–69</b>	<b>70-plus</b>	<b>Total</b>
None	0.0**	1.7	0.7	1.2	2.3	2.3	1.3
One	6.9	6.7	2.5	2.6	2.7	2.3	4.0
Two	27.0	19.3	13.9	13.7	11.5	12.2	16.4
Three	66.0	72.3	82.9	82.5	83.5	83.1	78.3
N	259	404	439	343	260	172	1,877
<b>2004</b>							
<b>Elections Voted In</b>	<b>Under 30*</b>	<b>30–39</b>	<b>40–49</b>	<b>50–59</b>	<b>60–69</b>	<b>70-plus</b>	<b>Total</b>
None	15.7	9.9	4.4	2.4	2.6	1.8	5.4
One	16.7	10.9	4.8	1.4	1.4	3.0	5.5
Two	19.7	13.8	11.0	10.5	7.8	6.9	11.4
Three	47.9	65.4	79.7	85.7	88.2	88.2	77.7
N	305	477	745	630	348	331	2,836

\* Only respondents old enough to be eligible to vote in all three elections are included. In the 1974 data, this is the 25-to-29 age group. For 2004, it is the 23-to-29 age group.

\*\* Columns may not add up to precisely 100 percent because the figures have been rounded. Weights supplied by the original investigators have been applied to all calculations.

According to the figures, in 1974, there were very few habitual non-voters in the population as a whole (1.3 percent). Furthermore, there were no more habitual non-voters among the younger respondents than in older age groups. Non-voting among young people was primarily because of intermittent non-voters; and within this category, occasional non-voters – those who missed just one election – were far more numerous (27.0 percent) than more frequent non-voters who missed two elections (6.9 percent).

Nowadays, patterns of non-voting have changed significantly, especially among those under 40. In the 2004 data, the number of habitual non-voters under 30 (15.7 percent) is much higher than in 1974. So too is the percentage of two-time abstainers (16.7 percent). There are now almost as many in each of these categories as there are one-time abstainers (19.7 percent). The pattern is similar in the 30-to-39 age group: while the total amount of non-voting is lower, the relative proportions of the three categories of non-voters are roughly equivalent.

<sup>6</sup> In using questions that ask about participation in elections from several years back, the potential for faulty recall must be recognized as a significant issue. Other methods of measuring multi-election participation are suggested at the end of this section.

Among those aged 40 to 49, however, the proportions start to shift, with fewer habitual non-voters and considerably more intermittent non-voters, especially those who missed voting in just a single election (although there are still more habitual non-voters than in 1974). In the older age categories, the proportions shift further still, revealing very few habitual non-voters.

Clearly, a considerable change has occurred in the composition of the non-voting population, especially in the younger age groups. Habitual non-voting is more significant nowadays among young people and more so than the figures in Table 1 might initially suggest. First, habitual non-voters contribute more than their share of non-voting, since by definition they abstain consistently rather than occasionally. Thus the calculations in Table 2, which focus on the under-30 group in the more recent period, show that habitual non-voters, though less numerous than intermittent non-voters, account for nearly half (47 percent) of the *total abstentions* reported by respondents for the three elections in question.<sup>7</sup>

**Table 2 – Habitual Non-Voters’ Contribution to Non-Voting (Under-30 Group, 2004)**

<b>Elections Voted In</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Number of Abstentions</b>	<b>Total Abstentions (%)</b>
None	15.7	48	$48 \times 3 = 144$	47
One	16.7	51	$51 \times 2 = 102$	33
Two	19.7	60	$60 \times 1 = 60$	20
Three	47.9	146	$146 \times 0 = 0$	0
Total	100	305	306	100

Furthermore, it is widely recognized that those who fail to participate in elections are also less likely to participate in surveys. Extending this reasoning, habitual non-voters are almost certainly less likely to participate in surveys than intermittent non-voters. Thus, the 2004 Canadian Election Study data likely under-represent the number of habitual non-voters to a significant degree.<sup>8,9</sup>

Other useful avenues of research can be built around the distinction between habitual and intermittent non-voters. For example, when non-voters were asked in the 2004 election study why they did not vote, 32 percent of habitual non-voters cited relatively entrenched impediments – they did not know whom to vote for or what the issues were, or they had no interest in the

<sup>7</sup> These calculations are based on the unweighted data.

<sup>8</sup> This is apt to be especially true of young people because it appears to have been particularly difficult to secure the participation of young respondents in the 2004 election study. Whereas 19.9 percent of electors are in the 18-to-29 age category – see Elections Canada, “Estimation of Voter Turnout by Age Group at the 38th Federal General Election (June 28, 2004),” Appendix, p. 2 (Final Report, available at [www.elections.ca/loi/report\\_e.pdf](http://www.elections.ca/loi/report_e.pdf)) – this group accounts for only 14.6 percent of the sample. The same sharp discrepancy does not appear in the 2000 Canadian Election Study, suggesting that young people are becoming increasingly difficult to reach using traditional survey methods. This will only exacerbate the already widely acknowledged problems of using survey data to assess levels of political engagement among young people.

<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the number of habitual non-voters may be overstated by classifying as such everyone who failed to vote three times. Intermittent non-voters could, by chance, have happened to not vote in those three elections, especially if the incidence of intermittent non-voting is on the rise. More detailed calculations are needed to calculate the relevant probabilities of such outcomes and make suitable adjustments to the data. The figures presented here are merely intended to give a general sense of changing patterns of voter participation.

election. Such reasons were cited by only 15 percent of intermittent non-voters. Meanwhile, 54 percent of the latter cited circumstantial reasons for not voting – they were too busy or ill to vote or were absent on election day – compared to only 21 percent of habitual non-voters.<sup>10</sup> Such differences would clearly affect the types of elector outreach strategies that should be used to target the two types of non-voters.

### **1.1.2 Policy Implications and Possible Research Directions**

The characterization of many young people as political dropouts, and the attendant conclusion that bringing them to the polls entails the relatively challenging task of instilling the motivation to vote, does appear to have some merit. At the same time, the 2004 data indicate that there remain significant numbers of intermittent non-voters, both in general and among younger age groups. The behaviour of this group of voters might be more readily modified by elector outreach initiatives that focus on facilitating voting. Thus, there is merit in pursuing both of these two general strategies to increase voter participation among the young.

Further analysis is needed to provide more definitive conclusions. This, then, represents a first research gap, one that is worth pursuing given its relevance to elector outreach programs. Possible approaches to estimating voting patterns of individuals over time include:

- Introducing a panel component to future Elections Canada studies based on actual voting records (see Elections Canada 2005) that would allow the electoral participation of individuals to be tracked over more than one election.
- Using panel surveys to track participation. This would allow comparisons with earlier panel surveys, such as those conducted for the 1974, 1979 and 1980 federal elections.
- Asking respondents in cross-sectional surveys direct questions about their general voting habits. Such questions have appeared on past national election studies and could be replicated to generate further comparisons between past and present.

In addition, further analysis of behavioural and attitudinal differences between habitual and intermittent non-voters would be valuable. Such analysis would help reveal the principal obstacles to voting in the two groups as well as methods of overcoming them.<sup>11</sup>

## **1.2 Life Cycle and Cohort Effects**

Recent Canadian research on voter participation among the young draws a more prominent conceptual distinction between life cycle and cohort effects. With respect to the former, Blais et

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<sup>10</sup> This is consistent with the finding of Pammett and LeDuc that reasons for not voting form two distinct clusters: a “lack of interest factor” and a “personal/administrative factor.” See J. H. Pammett and L. LeDuc, “Explaining the Turnout Decline in Canadian Federal Elections: A New Survey of Non-voters” (Ottawa: Elections Canada, 2003, available at [www.elections.ca](http://www.elections.ca)).

<sup>11</sup> A particularly useful data set for exploring differences between habitual and intermittent non-voters would be Statistics Canada’s 2003 survey on social engagement because it has a large sample size (nearly 25,000), includes multiple electoral participation questions (about the most recent federal, provincial and municipal elections) and covers many other topics relevant to voter participation. For a general overview of this study, see “2003 General Social Survey on Social Engagement, Cycle 17: An Overview of Findings” (available at [www.statcan.ca:8096/bsolc/english/bsolc?catno=89-598-X](http://www.statcan.ca:8096/bsolc/english/bsolc?catno=89-598-X)).

al. estimate that voter turnout tends to increase by roughly 15 percentage points as people progress through the life cycle from ages 20 to 50 (2004, 224). However, today's young people are starting the life cycle at a lower level of voter turnout than their parents did, and this gap continues as they age. This cohort effect accounts for about 20 percentage points of the lower turnout among those born in the 1970s and somewhat less for those born in the 1960s and 1950s (Blais et al. 2004, 225). Comparative analysis suggests that these cohort effects are relatively large in Canada compared to other countries (Blais and Dobrzynska 2003); this pattern is important since it portends further decline in aggregate voter turnout levels in coming years.

Research into the electoral participation of young adults is often divided according to the life cycle-cohort distinction. A significant body of literature focuses on explaining the life cycle pattern of voter participation increasing with age. Much of this research originates in the U.S. (Verba and Nie 1972; Miller and Shanks 1996), where low levels of voting in the early stages of adulthood have long been a feature of political life. The typical approach is to look for consistent and predictable stages of adult development that are potentially relevant to electoral participation: moving out of the parental home, holding a steady job, getting married and so on.

Highton and Wolfinger (2001) have recently observed, however, that the effects of such factors have normally been assumed rather than demonstrated. Drawing on a very large survey sample, the authors find that specific life transitions actually make little difference to voter participation; they suggest that the life cycle effect may instead reflect a more gradual and nebulous process of accumulating "life experience" with age.

Others take a different tack by questioning the assumption that life cycle patterns have remained constant over the years.<sup>12</sup> The path typically followed from youth to independent adulthood may not be the same today as it was 20 or 30 years ago. Thus, focus groups with Ontarians aged 20–29, carried out in 2002 by Environics on behalf of the Centre for Research and Information on Canada, found that factors such as living at home, remaining longer in full-time education and stagnating in entry-level jobs have created a pattern of "delayed maturity." The young people participating in these groups saw civic involvement as something for a later stage, when they are more settled in other areas of their lives and ready to assume the full roles and responsibilities of adulthood (Environics 2003, 7–8).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> This is the assumption in most quantitative analyses of life cycle and cohort effects. Thus, when Blais et al. propose a life cycle effect of 15 percentage points from age 20 to age 50, they are assuming that today's young people will follow the same trajectory of electoral participation as those who went before them (albeit beginning at a lower starting point). But this estimate is based, as it must be, on what happened to young people of the past. The aging and maturing process that is unfolding among today's young adults may be distinctive and may produce a different trajectory of political participation. See A. Blais et al., "Where Does Turnout Decline Come From?" in *European Journal of Political Research* 43,2 (2004): 221–36.

<sup>13</sup> The same conception informs Kimberlee's analysis of youth disengagement in the U.K. (2002) and is mentioned in passing as an important possibility in D. Stolle and M. Hooghe, "Inaccurate, Exceptional, One-Sided or Irrelevant? The Debate about the Alleged Decline of Social Capital and Civic Engagement in Western Societies," *British Journal of Political Science* 35,1 (2005): 149–67, p. 165 n. 89. A recent journalistic piece also articulates this perspective effectively; see N. Köhler with C. Campbell and S. Maich, "Stop Him Before He Votes" (*Maclean's*, January 16, 2006, 24–26).



Research on cohort effects, meanwhile, typically focuses on different factors than research aimed at unpacking life cycle effects (Hooghe 2004). The aim is to find characteristics of younger cohorts that exhibit stability over time, as these are the factors most plausibly linked to consistently lower levels of voting as cohorts age. Two clusters of characteristics seem to be the most significant: reduced levels of political attentiveness and the erosion of ties to community.

### **1.2.1 Reduced Levels of Political Attentiveness**

Political attentiveness refers to three intertwining factors: political interest, attention to politics in the media and political knowledge. Numerous authors have shown that today's younger generations, in Canada and elsewhere, are considerably less interested and knowledgeable about politics than older citizens, and significantly less likely to read newspapers or follow politics on television. The deficits across these areas, furthermore, have been linked to lower turnout levels among the young (Wattenberg 2002, 2003; Milner 2001, 2002; Howe 2004, 13–18; Rubenson et al. 2004, 416–17).

Some are skeptical of the significance of these findings. It has been suggested, for example, that levels of political attentiveness among the young may be more symptom than cause – that is, part and parcel of the phenomenon of disengagement rather than explanations for it (Johnston and Matthews 2004, 10). Others, however, see them as independent causal factors. They cite, for example, changes in the media environment over the past 20 years (the proliferation of television channels, the emergence of the Internet) that have enhanced individual choice (Baum and Kernell 1999; Prior 2002) and led many young people to ignore political news and information in favour of other diversions (Wattenberg 2002, 90–95).

There is also some question about the degree to which the sharp differences currently observed between young and old on various political attentiveness measures represent life cycle or cohort effects. Whereas Howe (2003, 2006) reports that knowledge gaps persisting over time are consistent with cohort effects, Gidengil et al. state that political interest shows a life cycle pattern of increasing with age (2004, 22). Definitive evaluation of these matters is rendered more difficult by inconsistent wording of survey questions on many of the key measures.

Finally, some would contend that attempts to gauge political attentiveness, often based on survey methods, focus too narrowly on the realm of formal politics, thereby failing to capture the diversity of ways in which today's young people engage politically (Yates and Youniss 1999; Henn, Weinstein and Wring 2002; O'Toole, Marsh and Jones 2003; Gauthier 2003; Vromen 2003; MacKinnon and Maxwell 2006). This view often emerges from qualitative studies seeking an expansive and empathetic understanding of how young people look at the world. In this view, the principal challenge is not so much fostering political attentiveness in the young as channelling their participatory energies into the electoral arena and the polling booth. This may entail transforming the political system and political actors as much as young people themselves.

### 1.2.2 The Erosion of Ties to Community

A second general trend that has been linked to lower voting levels among younger cohorts is their weakened ties to community. The seminal work here is Robert Putnam's influential account of the erosion of "social capital" in the U.S. (2000), which suggests that declining electoral participation is part of a broader syndrome of disengagement from community life, one that has affected younger generations most acutely.<sup>14</sup> In Putnam's work, low levels of participation among the young in civic and community associations are one important indicator of declining social capital; on this measure, the evidence for a similar pattern in Canada is mixed (compare Johnston and Matthews 2004, 12, with Howe 2004, 6).

Other manifestations, for which the evidence seems more solid, include weak affective ties to community and nation (Howe 2004, 13) as well as skepticism about traditional social norms (Nevitte 1996), including the perceived duty to vote (Blais 2000, 92–114). While Putnam marshals considerable evidence to demonstrate that the erosion of social capital among young Americans is a result of cohort, not life cycle, effects, similar evidence for the Canadian case is sometimes lacking because earlier data sources do not always exist that can be compared to current ones.<sup>15</sup>

### 1.2.3 Reduction in the Voting Age and the Enduring Effects of Early Experiences

Another theory offering potential insight into the voting behaviour of younger cohorts comes from Mark Franklin's comparative analysis of voter turnout in a number of established democracies since 1945 (2004). Franklin proposes that the reduction in the voting age from 21 to 18 in many places some 35 years ago meant that young people started to be initiated into the voting process at an age when they were less likely to participate (because of the life cycle pattern noted above). Taking up the idea that voting is a habitual behaviour (Plutzer 2002), Franklin argues that early experience tends to have a lasting impact; the first three elections at which one is eligible to vote are crucial in determining whether one becomes a habitual voter or non-voter.

Also important in determining whether people vote at these initial opportunities are features of the elections themselves. Close electoral contests, most notably, spark higher levels of initial participation among young electors.<sup>16</sup> In Canada, this theory may explain why turnout started to decline among cohorts that joined the electorate after the voting age was reduced in 1970 and

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<sup>14</sup> A recent analysis of the relevant literature in this area, and gaps therein, can be found in Stolle and Hooghe, "Inaccurate, Exceptional, One-Sided or Irrelevant?"

<sup>15</sup> I have also suggested elsewhere that there are important interactions between political inattentiveness and the erosion of ties to community: specifically, that the political participation of those without strong ties to community is apt to be more strongly influenced by personal factors, such as level of attentiveness to politics. This helps explain why variations in political knowledge have a considerably greater impact on voter participation among younger generations than older ones. See P. Howe, "Political Knowledge and Electoral Participation in the Netherlands: Comparisons with the Canadian Case," *International Political Science Review* 27,2 (2006): 137–66.

<sup>16</sup> Others also point to the impact of electoral competition on turnout. See D. Studlar, "Canadian Exceptionalism: Explaining Differences over Time in Provincial and Federal Voter Turnout," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 34,2 (2001): 299–319 and J. W. Endersby, S. E. Galatas and C. B. Rackaway, "Closeness Counts in Canada: Voter Participation in the 1993 and 1997 Federal Elections," *Journal of Politics* 64,2 (2002): 610–31.

why the decline has been particularly sharp among those who joined the electorate in the 1990s (that is, those born in the 1970s), when Canadian federal elections were relatively uncompetitive (Johnston and Matthews 2004, 13–15).

Not only the specifics of Franklin's theory have potential relevance, however. Also valuable are certain presuppositions about life cycle and cohort effects.

In particular, Franklin's theory reminds us that if cohort effects are sometimes a product of persistent characteristics of cohorts, they can also originate in cohorts' distinctive formative experiences. Thus, the search for attributes of particular cohorts that can explain their voting behaviour over time can focus on features that distinguished these groups *when they were young* rather than today. From this perspective, the strand of research noted above – probing possible changes in life cycle patterns of political socialization and engagement – is potentially doubly relevant. Not only might it point to a different trajectory of future participation for those who are young today (that is, an altered life cycle pattern), it might also help us understand the formative circumstances – in addition to the voting age and amount of electoral competition – that conditioned the degree to which various cohorts took up the habit of voting when they first had the opportunity.

In other words, an altered life cycle pattern can also explain the origins of the cohort effects that have resulted in younger generations failing to vote early on, thereby creating a habit of non-voting that remains with them as they age. Implicit in this proposition is the notion that Franklin, in emphasizing the impact of variable factors in the electoral environment, may underestimate the abiding challenge of persuading today's young people to cast a ballot at the first opportunity.

Meanwhile, Franklin also emphasizes that the act of voting in itself is important to subsequent voting. Other theories assume that voting will not be sustained if underlying motivational and attitudinal supports – a lack of political knowledge or a weak sense of civic duty, for example – are not addressed. There is some support in the literature for Franklin's more optimistic assessment. People who have been stimulated to vote in one election by relatively "superficial" means – such as being contacted during the campaign – remain more likely to vote in a subsequent election, controlling for other factors that influence participation (Green and Shachar 2000; Gerber, Green and Shachar 2003). This would suggest that among the early experiences conducive to later electoral participation, opportunities to engage in the act of voting are important.

#### **1.2.4 Policy Implications and Possible Research Directions**

The discussion above points to a mix of policy implications and possible directions for future research.

While strategies to promote voting among young people would ideally address all dimensions of their disengagement from politics, simply promoting the act of voting may achieve significant results. However, it should also be recognized that these initiatives may need to overcome some

relatively significant hurdles represented by distinctive life cycle dynamics among today's young adults.

By this reasoning, holding mock elections in high schools could be an important strategy (Linimon and Joslyn 2002) because they occur in a setting where it is possible to encourage and cajole young people to cast a vote in their first (informal) exposure to the electoral process. Now that such elections are being organized in conjunction with federal and provincial elections through the Student Vote project, evaluating their impact is an important next step. The fact that only some high schools have participated in this program should facilitate the evaluation because comparisons can be drawn between the subsequent electoral participation of young people who attended participating schools and those who attended non-participating schools.

One way to gather relevant data would be to ask respondents on future post-election surveys which high school they attended and when they graduated.<sup>17</sup> Another approach would be to design future studies of voter participation based on sampling voters lists (Elections Canada 2005) with such evaluation in mind. Stratifying the selection of constituencies and polling stations to include some located in areas served exclusively by participating high schools and others located in areas served by non-participating schools would facilitate analysis of the impact of mock elections.<sup>18</sup>

Mock elections in high schools might also provide an opportunity for further research, both quantitative and qualitative, into processes of political socialization and engagement among today's young people. One objective of such research would be to identify the abiding tendencies of today's adolescents that help explain their *aggregate tendency* to participate less in initial elections than generations that preceded them. Another objective would be to consider *variation within* the late-adolescent population, seeking to identify factors that lead some young people to take the opportunity to vote in mock elections in their high schools and others to forego it.

Conducting research in the high school setting has the advantage of providing access to all segments of youth society, including the most marginalized, indifferent and/or disaffected, who often cannot be effectively targeted once they have left school. Building on established findings from the political socialization literature, including the significant influences of the family environment (Sandell and Plutzer 2005; Verba, Lehman Schlozman and Harris 2005) and socio-economic circumstance (Plutzer 2002; Hardina 2003) on the predisposition to participate,<sup>19</sup> such research could help identify complementary initiatives (such as educational programs) that are needed to overcome obstacles to electoral participation in particular subgroups.

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<sup>17</sup> A practical challenge, given the number of high schools in Canada and the need to determine which ones participated in Student Vote, but presumably not insurmountable.

<sup>18</sup> There might also be further stratification with respect to the degree of electoral competition in constituencies; this would allow a comparative assessment of different hypotheses. It would also be necessary to pick areas where most residents are unlikely to move since the effects of participation in Student Vote would not be seen in voter turnout levels among new electors until the next election.

<sup>19</sup> See also a recent collection of papers on civic engagement processes among young people in "Teacher Symposium," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 36,2 (2003): 253–92 as well as the papers presented at a 2002 symposium at McGill University, "Citizenship on Trial: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Political Socialization of Adolescents," available at [www.youthconference.mcgill.ca/papers.html](http://www.youthconference.mcgill.ca/papers.html).

An emphasis on targeting new electors does not address the low voting levels among young people who have already joined the electorate. Much of the above discussion would suggest that changing the behaviour of habitual non-voters in this group will be relatively difficult. However, considerable uncertainty remains about the true number of habitual non-voters among young people and whether their tendency not to vote represents, to some degree, the effect of “delayed maturity,” which will prove partly self-correcting as they age.

At the same time, a significant percentage of the non-voting population under age 40 are intermittent non-voters, and it is reasonable to believe that the behaviour of this group could be significantly modified by various administrative provisions and elector mobilization initiatives, as described below.

### **1.3 Administrative Facilitation and the Mobilization of Voters**

The distinctions between habitual and intermittent non-voters on the one hand, and life cycle and cohort effects on the other, provide important conceptual background for grasping the nature of non-voting among today’s young Canadians. These differences also highlight the importance of one strategy for addressing the matter: fostering a disposition to vote in new cohorts of electors.

In the areas of electoral administration and voter mobilization, another general strategy is apparent: to facilitate voting among electors who already have a certain disposition to vote. There is considerable evidence that policies and procedures based on this second strategy can make a significant difference in voter participation levels among young voters.

#### **1.3.1 Electoral Administration**

With respect to electoral administration, it is widely acknowledged that registration procedures have an impact on voter participation rates (Brians 1997; Highton 2000). More onerous procedures, relying on individual initiative, can dissuade some non-registered persons from casting a ballot. The creation of the National Register of Electors in 1997 has introduced significant challenges in ensuring that new electors are included. Furthermore, higher rates of residential mobility among young people result in their elector information often being outdated; this creates an administrative obstacle to unfettered participation (Black 2003).

Other elements of electoral administration, such as advance voting and voting by proxy, have also been found to influence voter turnout (Blais, Massicotte and Dobrzynska 2003). While research on such matters does not typically draw links to the participation of young people, one comparative analysis of electoral administration practices across American states found that the effects on voter turnout of a series of “best practices” were most pronounced among young people and those with lower levels of education (Wolfinger, Highton and Mullin 2005).

### **1.3.2 Voter Mobilization**

In the area of voter mobilization, the past few years have seen considerable advances in our knowledge of what works best. The most important development, concentrated in the U.S., has been the introduction of experimental methods designed to assess with greater confidence and precision the impact of different types of voter mobilization. In their seminal work, Green and Gerber have conducted experiments in real elections, randomly assigning electors to control groups and experimental treatments, to gauge the impact of those treatments on voter participation. Their work has been reported in numerous articles and summarized in popular book form (Green and Gerber 2004). Other researchers have followed their lead (Green and Gerber 2005), conducting similarly rigorous research that overcomes some of the intrinsic limitations of more traditional methods of inquiry – in particular, survey research (Green and Gerber 2003).

Important findings have emerged from this burgeoning area of research:

- Common wisdom about the efficacy of various mobilization methods does not always hold true when they are subjected to rigorous testing.
- Methods that embody a “personal touch” have the greatest impact. For example, door-to-door canvassing generally has a greater effect on voter participation than phone calls, direct mail or e-mail. In some cases, the latter have been found to have no effect whatsoever (Gerber and Green 2000; Green, Gerber and Nickerson 2003; Green and Gerber 2004).
- The effects of mobilization techniques can vary moderately depending on factors such as the message used (Green and Gerber 2004, 36–37) and the nature of the electoral contest (Bennion 2005). The timing of contact seems to have a particularly significant impact; closer to voting day is more effective (Niven 2002; Green 2004).
- Non-partisan appeals to “get out the vote” are as effective as appeals on behalf of a particular party.
- Mobilizing efforts often have the greatest impact on those who have voted in the past or who report a general inclination to vote (Niven 2001, 2004; Green 2004). Habitual non-voters are not as readily influenced. However, it has also been suggested that these uneven effects are mainly observed in low-turnout elections (Green and Gerber 2004, 37–38).
- Young voters can be influenced by mobilization techniques as much as older voters (Green 2004; Bennion 2005).
- Few differential effects on first-time voters are reported. As suggested above, this is a distinct category of young electors, and it might usefully be examined separately.

### **1.3.3 Policy Implications and Possible Research Directions**

These findings have implications for voter participation trends and elector outreach strategies in Canada:

- The significant effect of personal contact on voter participation is consistent with Canadian findings based on survey methods (Rubenson et al. 2004, 413), and it supports the idea that

the impersonal methods of election campaigning increasingly favoured by political parties in recent times are partly to blame for reduced voter turnout (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993).

- It is reasonable to suggest that the change from enumeration to the National Register of Electors in 1997 had this effect as well: a personal stimulus to vote, provided by the home visit from an enumerator, was lost (Black 2003, 163).
- It follows that targeted revision (Black 2003, 195), a practice now used to register voters in the campaign period in areas where registration is low (including areas where many young people reside), might be redesigned to include the objective of encouraging these people to vote.
- Elector outreach strategies that emphasize the role of allied organizations in encouraging participation of young people through direct personal contact promise to be another relatively effective and cost-efficient strategy.
- Media campaigns enlisting the help of committed voters in encouraging young people to participate might also be a useful complement to campaigns that target youth directly. The aim, as one British study puts it, should be to encourage those who do participate to become “advocates for voting” (Johnson and Marshall 2004, 17).<sup>20</sup>

The rigorous approach being adopted by American researchers to test voter mobilization methods also raises questions about new directions for research in Canada. At this time, Canadian academic researchers are not using experimental designs in this area; and any such efforts would be hampered by lack of access to official voting records to determine who voted and who did not. To address this research gap, three strategies are possible:

- Apply what has been learned elsewhere on the assumption that the practicalities of voter mobilization are not likely to be fundamentally different in Canada, notwithstanding the differences between the Canadian and American political systems and cultures.
- Conduct research on voter outreach initiatives already in place in Canada, focusing on the effects of variation over time and place. For the most part, this would preclude true experimental designs, in which subjects are randomly assigned to treatment and control groups, but it could include natural experiments, in which treatments differ but there is no random assignment. An example is research designed to look for differences in voter turnout between students who attended schools that participated in the Student Vote program and those who attended non-participating schools.
- Conduct studies using experimental methods designed to provide rigorous testing of the efficacy of different approaches to voter mobilization. These methods are more feasible for new and untried initiatives than for established programs. Random assignment to treatment and control conditions could be applied in some cases to individual electors and in others to geographic regions (Arcenaux 2005). For example, polling divisions subject to targeted revision could be randomly assigned to either receive or not receive encouragements to vote at the time of the home visit. In the U.S., researchers have also conducted experiments in high schools, randomly assigning students to groups that are then exposed to different

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<sup>20</sup> These thoughts are in keeping with recent works, such as A. Zuckerman, ed., *Social Logic of Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), critical of assumptions of “atomistic” political behaviour, which overlook the importance of personal networks in influencing individuals.

experimental treatments (Green and Gerber 2004, 92). The drawback to this approach is that it requires a commitment to controlled conditions; it favours rigorous evaluation over fully implementing potentially effective programs.

## **1.4 Summary**

This review of the literature on youth voter participation has focused particularly on those themes most pertinent to elector outreach programs targeted at young people. This section offers some general conclusions.

First, it is useful to draw a distinction between habitual and intermittent non-voters because the outreach initiatives to which the two groups are likely to respond are quite different. Largely overlooked in recent research, this distinction merits further investigation to better understand the nature of non-voting among young Canadians as well as the attitudinal and behavioural tendencies associated with the two types of non-voters.

The importance of the distinction between life cycle and cohort effects is more widely recognized in the literature on youth participation, and a number of noteworthy findings have emerged. Yet, important questions remain about how these effects are most appropriately conceptualized and whether there are any significant interactions between evolving life cycle dynamics and the distinctive behaviour of new cohorts. The notion that today's young people need particular support and encouragement to take up the habit of voting is an important one. To better understand these processes, further research focusing on political socialization dynamics in late adolescence (when young people are approaching or reaching voting age) would be valuable.

It is also worth looking closely at election administration and targeted mobilization initiatives. These elements of elector outreach appear to be most relevant to encouraging intermittent non-voters to vote more consistently. With respect to programs and policies in this area, the most rigorous methods of assessment – field experiments – are still in their infancy, and much can still be learned about their effects on voter participation. Further research using experimental or quasi-experimental designs would likely yield significant practical insights into ways to bring would-be voters to the polls.

In turning to consider elector outreach strategies in various jurisdictions, these general notions – instilling the voting habit in new electors, facilitating participation among those disposed to vote and uncertainty about the effects of different initiatives – are consistent structuring themes. At the same time, there are significant variations in the efforts devoted to elector outreach, the methods of implementing broad strategies and the degree to which elections agencies work with other players in developing and delivering outreach programs.



## 2. Youth Elector Outreach in Other Jurisdictions

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### 2.1 Introduction

Having reviewed some relevant academic perspectives on voter disengagement among young people, this section examines outreach strategies targeted at young electors in other jurisdictions and suggests some lessons learned.

A first step in reviewing youth elector outreach practices elsewhere was to examine the Web sites of elections agencies in other jurisdictions. Included were the national-level agencies in the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, the United States, France and Germany as well as, for the purposes of comparison, all Canadian provinces and territories. (See appendices 1 and 2.) For the U.S., where electoral administration is highly decentralized, further documentation was consulted – in particular, a recent review of elector outreach practices in 40 American states produced by the National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS).<sup>21</sup>

Information was also pursued on initiatives, particularly in the provinces, that would not necessarily appear on the Web sites of elections agencies (for example, youth events associated with the work of the New Brunswick Commission on Legislative Democracy). The same was done for the U.S. This activity, however, was more ad hoc and cannot be considered an exhaustive review of other initiatives.

Programs and policies identified in the preliminary review were assembled into tables and categorized according to four broad elements of elector outreach identified by Elections Canada: public information and education, raising awareness and building allies, easy voting access and research initiatives. These tables appear in Appendix 1 (Canadian provinces and territories) and Appendix 2 (selected countries). Three jurisdictions that have adopted relatively intensive, innovative and/or successful strategies – the U.K., Australia and British Columbia – were selected for more in-depth review.

Before describing those case studies, a few general observations are in order:

- While the Web sites of most provincial elections offices in Canada mention the problem of youth voter turnout, many do not dedicate a section to the issue. Numerous initiatives are underway across the country, but they often appear to be ad hoc rather than part of a concerted long-term strategy. British Columbia and Quebec seem to have the most active and sustained programs of elector outreach with respect to young people.
- Of the other countries considered, the U.K. and the American states have the most active elector outreach programs aimed at young people. Australia and New Zealand also have sustained initiatives in this area. No information on such efforts could be found on the Web sites of the national-level elections agencies in Germany or France.

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<sup>21</sup> Available at [www.stateofthevote.org/New%20Mill%20Survey%20Update.pdf](http://www.stateofthevote.org/New%20Mill%20Survey%20Update.pdf).

- In all countries but the U.S., elector outreach is relatively centralized. In the U.S., most initiatives take place at the state level. Furthermore, while partnerships between elections agencies and other players are a common theme in all jurisdictions, American non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have often taken the lead in initiating programs. In recent years, however, many states have recognized the value of these efforts and are now collaborating with NGOs to administer a wide range of programs designed to increase electoral participation among young Americans.<sup>22</sup>

## 2.2 United Kingdom

The significant drop in voter turnout among young people in the U.K., evident since the 1997 general election but especially pronounced in 2001 and 2005, has made youth disengagement from electoral politics a very salient issue in that country. Elector outreach and education strategies have been developed that include a number of notable programs and features.

### 2.2.1 Elector Outreach Initiatives

The first is the introduction of a national civics curriculum in British schools in 2002 aimed at students up to age 16. Pilot programs have also been tested for 16- to 19-year-olds in Education and Training.<sup>23</sup> Despite optimistic expectations, however, a recent evaluation has found that the effects of the civics curriculum have been disappointing in some respects, particularly in the area of political literacy – that is, students’ knowledge of democratic institutions and processes (Cleaver et al. 2005, 17).<sup>24</sup> According to Beccy Earnshaw, Outreach Manager at the Electoral Commission, this likely reflects the fact that many teachers are not very familiar with this part of the civics curriculum and therefore have not been teaching it effectively or with confidence.<sup>25</sup> The Commission is therefore considering implementing teacher-training programs to enhance this central component of the civics curriculum.

The Electoral Commission has been active in other areas as well. Mock elections in British schools are sponsored in conjunction with the Hansard Society to coincide with general elections. The latter organization has been helping to organize such elections since the 1950s, but the participation rate has increased significantly in recent years, in part because of the natural fit with the new civics curriculum. In the 2005 election, over 2,100 schools and approximately 800,000 students participated.<sup>26</sup> One difference between this and Canadian practice is that students vote for other students as “candidates” under party labels rather than for the actual candidates in their constituency.

<sup>22</sup> In light of the tremendous volume of information for the American states, these initiatives are not summarized in Appendix 2. Instead, see the comprehensive overview recently produced by NASS and referred to in note 21.

<sup>23</sup> Information on these programs is available on the Department for Education and Skills Web site at [www.dfes.gov.uk/citizenship](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/citizenship).

<sup>24</sup> The Department for Education and Skills has commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research to conduct research into its citizenship education programs. See [www.nfer.ac.uk/research-areas/citizenship/](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/research-areas/citizenship/).

<sup>25</sup> Telephone interview with Beccy Earnshaw, Outreach Manager, Electoral Commission, February 3, 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Visit [www.hansardsociety.org.uk/node/view/354](http://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/node/view/354).

A further idea being considered – in keeping with a general strategy of engaging youth consistently rather than just at election time – is to increase the frequency of mock elections by holding them every autumn to coincide with school council elections. In addition to allowing students to participate more frequently in mock national elections, it is hoped that the school council elections, sometimes taken lightly by students, would come to be seen as more serious democratic exercises.<sup>27</sup>

Promotional campaigns have also been a prominent part of the Commission's activities. Again, the Commission has aimed for a consistent presence rather than focusing its efforts solely on election time. Thus, media campaigns in 2001 and 2002, encouraging young people to register and participate in elections, were not tied to any specific electoral event.

The messages conveyed in these and other campaigns have drawn on a notion consistently appearing in the Commission's research: young people in the U.K. *are* interested in political issues but fail to connect this to electoral politics and the choice among political parties. Campaigns have thus sought to instill a sense that voting matters. Slogans such as "Votes are Power" are designed, the Commission's Web site suggests, to "reposition voting as a powerful tool of expression."<sup>28</sup> While the more recent slogan, "If you don't do politics, there's not much you *do* do," seems to adopt a more chastising tone, the principal aim is reportedly to "make politics personal" – in other words, to underscore that the world of politics is connected to the concrete, day-to-day issues that matter most to young people.<sup>29</sup>

Partnerships are another significant feature of the outreach strategy in the U.K. Numerous organizations have been brought together into the Commission's Youth Voting Network.<sup>30</sup> The Commission's Web site is another important element. The main site, while highly informative, might be somewhat daunting for the casual user. A separate Web site, geared to voters, has been created to provide basic information on how and where to vote.<sup>31</sup>

Other elector outreach initiatives, though not always oriented toward the young, are also worthy of note. The New Initiatives Fund<sup>32</sup> has provided funding to independent organizations to carry out programs designed to promote public awareness of electoral processes and participation in elections; many of the sponsored projects have focused on young people. In assessing the New Initiatives Fund, the Commission's Outreach Manager suggests that its main value has been in reaching new audiences rather than generating new ideas about outreach methods.

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<sup>27</sup> Telephone interview with Beccy Earnshaw, February 3, 2006.

<sup>28</sup> Visit [www.electoralcommission.org.uk/media-centre/votesarepower.cfm](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/media-centre/votesarepower.cfm). The message is similar to the slogan used in Elections Canada's media campaigns in the past two federal elections: "Why not speak up when everyone is listening?"

<sup>29</sup> Becky Lloyd, Campaigns Manager, Electoral Commission, "If you don't do politics ...." *the register* issue 4 (April 2004). Available at [www.electoralcommission.org.uk/templates/search/document.cfm/10577](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/templates/search/document.cfm/10577).

<sup>30</sup> Visit [www.electoralcommission.org.uk/about-us/relatedwork.cfm](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/about-us/relatedwork.cfm).

<sup>31</sup> The Web site is at [www.aboutmyvote.co.uk](http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk).

<sup>32</sup> A document outlining information for prospective applicants is available at [www.electoralcommission.gov.uk/files/dms/ApplicantsInfo\\_9717-7911\\_E\\_N\\_S\\_W\\_.pdf](http://www.electoralcommission.gov.uk/files/dms/ApplicantsInfo_9717-7911_E_N_S_W_.pdf).

The Commission is winding down this program, but it will run similar projects, through partnerships, that are somewhat larger and potentially more sustainable and with which it is more directly involved. The value of partners that can work effectively in different communities continues to be recognized and will be an integral part of such initiatives.<sup>33</sup>

Another method of testing new approaches has been the extensive use of pilot projects, particularly during local elections.<sup>34</sup> These pilots have been used, for example, to test different voting methods, including postal and electronic voting. Postal voting, in particular, seemed to produce higher participation levels in the pilots and was therefore promoted more heavily as a voting option in the 2005 general election. While it was taken up by more voters than ever before, the effect on turnout was disappointing because it seemed to be used mainly as an alternative by people who would have voted anyway.<sup>35</sup>

Voter registration has also become a focus. The Commission's proposals for change have attempted to balance ease of registration against security concerns, which were prominently featured in media reports in the 2005 campaign with respect to postal voting.<sup>36</sup> Security concerns are one key reason why the Commission has recommended moving away from the practice of annual household registration to a system based solely on individual registration. (This provides the enhanced security of obtaining the signatures of individual electors.)

However, a new *Electoral Administration Bill*,<sup>37</sup> currently being considered by Parliament, still allows for household registration; the principal concern of the government is that eliminating household enumeration is likely to reduce registration rates. The Electoral Commission has been considering ways to assuage this concern by proposing methods to facilitate registration that will be familiar to Canadians: arranging data sharing with other government agencies and sending a package to new electors on their 18th birthday.

One other important method being considered is using annual mock elections in secondary schools as an occasion to target young electors for registration – an approach that is possible because voters can register at age 16.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Telephone interview with Beccy Earnshaw, February 3, 2006.

<sup>34</sup> A fact sheet summarizing these initiatives can be downloaded from [www.electoralcommission.org.uk/templates/search/document.cfm/6139](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/templates/search/document.cfm/6139).

<sup>35</sup> Electoral Commission, "Election 2005: Turnout: How many, who and why?" October 2005, pp. 40–47, available in the Publications section of the Commission's Web site at [www.electoralcommission.org.uk/about-us/2005researchreport.cfm](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/about-us/2005researchreport.cfm).

<sup>36</sup> The Commission's proposals are contained in two reports: "The Electoral Registration Process: Report and Recommendations," May 2003, available at [www.electoralcommission.gov.uk/templates/search/document.cfm/7973](http://www.electoralcommission.gov.uk/templates/search/document.cfm/7973) and "Securing the Vote: Report and Recommendations," May 2005 available at [www.electoralcommission.gov.uk/templates/search/document.cfm/12944](http://www.electoralcommission.gov.uk/templates/search/document.cfm/12944).

<sup>37</sup> An overview and further links are available at [www.electoralcommission.org.uk/elections/eladbill.cfm](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/elections/eladbill.cfm).

<sup>38</sup> Telephone interview with Beccy Earnshaw, February 3, 2006.

### 2.2.2 Lessons Learned

Against this backdrop of significant outreach activity, one important fact stands out: turnout among those 18 to 24, estimated at 39 percent in the 2001 election, remained stagnant in the 2005 general election at 37 percent. Since there have been no discernible effects to date, it is difficult to say which elements of the U.K. strategy are most effective. Still, the British experience suggests certain important lessons with respect to youth elector outreach initiatives.

The first is the important influence of the broader political environment. In recent reports, the Electoral Commission has been forthright in highlighting the role that political parties, as well as the media, have to play in drawing voters into the electoral process. Its analysis of low voter turnout in the 2005 election emphasizes the lack of competitiveness in recent elections, the uneven mobilization efforts of the parties<sup>39</sup> and the media's somewhat lacklustre campaign coverage.<sup>40</sup> Such influences are largely beyond the control of elections authorities, though the Commission does see a role for itself in facilitating debate about how the parties and the media can be encouraged and guided to play a more positive role. It plans to organize events on this theme in the future.<sup>41</sup>

A second general theme is that youth disengagement is a deeply embedded problem with no quick solutions. The response has been to make youth engagement an ongoing priority – using intermittent media campaigns and the new plan to hold annual mock elections in secondary schools – rather than concentrating efforts during election campaigns. Registration at age 16 also means that efforts to register new electors, under whatever regime is adopted, can be relatively extended rather than focusing heavily on election time.

Finally, the Commission's research agenda is noteworthy. In addition to producing a large volume of research studies (a summary can be found in Johnson and Marshall 2004), the Commission uses pilot projects – in local elections and through the New Initiatives Fund – which are important because they encourage innovation and experimentation in real-world settings, where the impact of new initiatives can be better gauged.

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<sup>39</sup> The Commission reports that voters in “marginal” ridings in 2005 were five times more likely to be contacted than those in “safe” constituencies. See “Election 2005: Turnout,” p. 34.

<sup>40</sup> In addition to its general analysis in “Election 2005,” the Commission focuses particularly on the role of parties and the media in “Election 2005: Engaging the Public in Great Britain, December 2005,” available at [www.electoralcommission.org.uk/templates/search/document.cfm/14157](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/templates/search/document.cfm/14157).

<sup>41</sup> Telephone interview with Beccy Earnshaw, February 3, 2006.

## 2.3 Australia

While both electoral registration and voting are mandatory in Australia, registration rates among young people are considerably lower (around 81 percent) than among older Australians (around 96 percent).<sup>42</sup> A recent survey of 16- to 17-year-olds found, furthermore, that only 50 percent would vote upon turning 18 if it were not mandatory (Print, Saha and Edwards 2004, 8–9). There is also a general sense of disenchantment with political parties and the political process, and it appears to be particularly acute among younger citizens (Vromen 2003). For various reasons, then, political disengagement among young Australians is a significant concern.

### 2.3.1 Elector Outreach Initiatives

Education programs have been put in place to help address this issue. A civics program, Discovering Democracy, was initiated in 1997 by the federal Department of Education, Science and Training.<sup>43</sup> While the states are responsible for the details of curriculum development, the federal government provides teaching resources. Furthermore, the state and federal governments agreed to a set of national standards in this area in 1999 and undertook the first national assessment of student achievement in 2004.<sup>44</sup>

The federal department of education also organizes events that complement civics education programs. Every fall, it sponsors Celebrating Democracy Week and awards grants to schools across the country for various civics-related events. It also organizes the National Schools Constitutional Convention, a student parliament that has been held each year since 1996, drawing delegates from across the country. And in May 2005, it held the National Civics and Citizenship Forum, a two-day event involving teachers and other interested stakeholders.<sup>45</sup>

For its part, the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) plays a significant role in supporting civics education by providing educational resources and programs focused on electoral processes. The AEC's contributions<sup>46</sup> include:

- Producing teaching resources, such as videos and print material, for students of various ages as well as adult learners.<sup>47</sup>
- Dedicating a full-time staff member to teacher training in electoral education. In addition to organizing workshops for teachers, sessions are also conducted with Bachelor of Education students at Australian universities.

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<sup>42</sup> The fine for non-compliance is \$20 if uncontested or \$50 if contested unsuccessfully in court. Offenders are more likely to be detected if they are registered but do not vote than if they simply do not register. Enrolment figures are from the "AEC Annual Report 2004–2005," available at [www.aec.gov.au/\\_content/what/publications/annual\\_report/2005/output1\\_1\\_1.htm](http://www.aec.gov.au/_content/what/publications/annual_report/2005/output1_1_1.htm).

<sup>43</sup> A history of the debate that led up to the adoption of this program can be found in an undated discussion paper by Murray Print and Mary Gray, "Civics and Citizenship Education: An Australian Perspective," available at [www.abc.net.au/civics/democracy/ccanded.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/civics/democracy/ccanded.htm).

<sup>44</sup> An overview can be found at [www.civicsandcitizenship.edu.au/cce/default.asp?id=8985](http://www.civicsandcitizenship.edu.au/cce/default.asp?id=8985).

<sup>45</sup> Links to these initiatives can be found at [www.civicsandcitizenship.edu.au/cce/default.asp?id=9193](http://www.civicsandcitizenship.edu.au/cce/default.asp?id=9193).

<sup>46</sup> Information on AEC programs comes from documents on the AEC Web site and a telephone interview with Shauna Williamson (Director, Public Awareness Programs) and Phil Diak (Director, Media and Communications), February 8, 2006.

<sup>47</sup> Visit [www.aec.gov.au/\\_content/how/education/resources/index.htm#teacher\\_resources](http://www.aec.gov.au/_content/how/education/resources/index.htm#teacher_resources).

- Running electoral education centres in four cities<sup>48</sup> to provide interactive learning experiences about voting and elections. Student groups, most commonly in the 10-to-12 age bracket, are the principal users. Each year, about 100,000 students visit the centres.
- Maintaining offices with three permanent staff members in each of Australia's 150 constituencies. The district returning officers (DROs) in these offices provide education sessions upon request in schools and with community groups. The structure of these sessions and the materials they use have been somewhat uneven in the past, but a standard presentation is being developed to ensure consistency and high quality. This presentation will also be tailored to different audiences.
- Assisting schools, through the DROs, in running either mock elections or school elections. Requests for these services are less frequent. (Still, however, they number in the "hundreds per year."<sup>49</sup>) There is no general program of mock elections in Australian schools during federal or state elections.

Another dimension of the AEC's activities is directly promoting voter participation. With respect to young people, the main focus is ensuring high registration levels. The fact that individuals can register at age 17 allows the AEC to target senior secondary students; DROs, when visiting schools, distribute information on registration procedures. The AEC is also looking at incorporating a registration drive into the annual Celebrating Democracy Week events in high schools.

In a similar vein, the AEC targets post-secondary students during orientation week, setting up booths at universities to provide information about electoral processes and registration. The AEC also facilitates registration by offering on-line verification of registration status as well as downloadable registration forms (although they must be mailed in once completed). At this time, the AEC is not considering adopting a fully electronic registration procedure.

In addition to these ongoing efforts, the AEC undertakes an advertising blitz at the start of each election, advising people to make sure they are registered before the rolls close (one week after the writ is dropped). General appeals are supplemented by messages targeted at young people and those who have recently moved. Legislation currently under consideration would reduce the window for post-writ registration to only three days after an election is called. This change will put greater pressure on the AEC (and citizens themselves) to maximize enrolment in advance of elections.

In promoting electoral participation, the AEC uses both educational and promotional materials that appeal primarily to the idea that voting makes a difference. Thus, the cover page of *Australian Democracy Magazine* (aimed at secondary school students and adult learners) reads "Have your say in our country's future,"<sup>50</sup> while a poster encouraging young people to register reads "Enrol, it makes a difference" and "It's your future so get involved."<sup>51</sup> The poster does also

<sup>48</sup> The centre in Perth is run jointly with the Western Australian Electoral Commission.

<sup>49</sup> Telephone interview with Shauna Williamson, February 8, 2006.

<sup>50</sup> Visit [www.aec.gov.au/\\_content/How/education/resources/democracy\\_magazine.pdf](http://www.aec.gov.au/_content/How/education/resources/democracy_magazine.pdf).

<sup>51</sup> Available at [www.aec.gov.au/\\_content/How/education/resources/youth\\_poster.pdf](http://www.aec.gov.au/_content/How/education/resources/youth_poster.pdf).

note that registration and voting are compulsory, although the AEC generally prefers to emphasize “the carrot rather than the stick.”<sup>52</sup>

Partnerships have not been as prominent an element of youth elector outreach in Australia as in some other jurisdictions. However, in one initiative, the AEC worked with radio station Triple J to promote electoral participation and registration at rock concerts sponsored by the station.

To help determine the effectiveness of its efforts and generate ideas for new initiatives, the AEC has recently launched a research program on young electors in collaboration with academic researchers. This is a four-year project focusing on secondary school students. Called the Youth Electoral Study, it includes qualitative focus group research and large-scale surveys, both of which incorporate a longitudinal research design. Focus groups have been held with students in schools across the country and will be followed up with interviews with the same individuals in later years. In addition, a national cross-sectional survey conducted in 2004 will be followed by another in 2006. The substantive focus of the research is on political socialization processes – in particular, links between “pro-voting behaviour and family, school and other social and psychological variables” (Print, Saha and Edwards 2004, 3). Three reports with initial findings have been produced to date.<sup>53</sup>

### **2.3.2 Lessons Learned**

As in the U.K., the effort to promote electoral engagement among young Australians is still in its early stages. Thus, clear and compelling evidence of which elector outreach and education strategies work best has not yet emerged. However, some useful general lessons are apparent. The most important is the significant role that elections agencies can play in civics education. While departments of education naturally take the lead role, the AEC contributes considerably to the education of young citizens about electoral processes.

Another notable feature of the Australian experience is the significant effort to register new electors in advance of elections. (This is facilitated by “pre-registration” at age 17 and necessitated by relatively strict post-writ registration rules.) Finally, the research design of the Youth Electoral Study – in particular, its longitudinal component – promises to yield considerable insights into processes of political socialization and voter engagement.

## **2.4 British Columbia**

In British Columbia, as in other parts of Canada, a great deal of attention has been devoted to the issue of low voter participation among the young. Elections BC calculated that turnout among those 18 to 24 in the 2001 provincial election, based on all eligible voters rather than just registered voters, was 28 percent. Turnout in this age group in the 2005 provincial election remained low but did increase to 35 percent (an increase of 25 percent).

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<sup>52</sup> Telephone interview with Phil Diak, February 8, 2006.

<sup>53</sup> These can be found in the Publications section of the AEC Web site at [www.aec.gov.au/\\_content/What/publications/](http://www.aec.gov.au/_content/What/publications/).



### 2.4.1 Elector Outreach Initiatives

A first notable feature of Elections BC's work in the area of youth elector engagement is how precisely it estimates voter participation. BC Stats provides eligible population figures by age group. Elections BC extracts information from voters lists about whether an individual participated in an election and adds it to the province's electronic database of electors; it can then calculate precisely the number of voters in a given age group and thus the participation rate.<sup>54</sup>

This is not to say that the effects of youth outreach initiatives can be determined precisely because significant confounding factors exist from one election to the next. (For example, the 2005 election was a much closer contest than the 2001 election and included a referendum on a new electoral system; both factors could have contributed to the increase in turnout among young voters.) But Elections BC's data-collection approach could potentially provide more reliable estimates of the effect of youth elector outreach initiatives than are possible in jurisdictions that rely on survey-based estimates of participation across age groups.

One area in which Elections BC has focused its efforts to engage young citizens is education. Two education kits have been developed, one for Grade 5, the other for Grade 11, to be used with the civics curriculum. Jennifer Porayko, Communications Manager at Elections BC, reports favourable feedback from teachers, who find the materials very helpful in teaching students about electoral processes, a subject with which many are not especially at ease.<sup>55</sup> Elections BC also worked with the Student Vote project to run mock elections during the 2005 provincial election. This was a successful initiative (66,000 students participated) that will be repeated in future elections.

Facilitating voter registration is another key focus. Because rates of residential mobility are high, B.C. has faced significant challenges in maintaining an accurate and comprehensive database of eligible voters. Data from Elections BC show that the overall registration rate among eligible electors was 78 percent in the 2001 election and only 38 percent among those under age 25.<sup>56</sup>

Legislative changes have paved the way for significant improvements in these figures. By restricting the use of voter registration data to preparing voters lists, B.C. is now able to share data with the National Register of Electors. Another critical legal change was waiving the signature requirement for registration; this allowed on-line voter registration to be introduced in September 2004. Unlike other jurisdictions, where registration forms can be electronically accessed but must then be completed and returned in hard copy, the B.C. system allows full electronic registration. Between September 2004 and March 2005, 110,000 on-line transactions were completed.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> One implication of this is that Elections BC could generate relatively precise calculations of the incidence of habitual and intermittent non-voting in different age groups, and the population at large, since it effectively stores information on the voting history of all registered individuals. However, such calculations would prove useful only if registration rates were reasonably high, but until recently, they were not.

<sup>55</sup> Telephone interview with Jennifer Porayko, Communications Manager, Elections BC, February 8, 2006.

<sup>56</sup> Visit [www.elections.bc.ca/eac/2001VPStats\\_Summary.pdf](http://www.elections.bc.ca/eac/2001VPStats_Summary.pdf).

<sup>57</sup> Elections BC, *Annual Report 2004/2005*, pp. 5–6.

These important changes were followed by a concerted registration drive running up to the May 2005 election. The work began in February 2005 and included mailing registration information to all households along with “field outreach” to targeted groups (those in long-term-care facilities and the homeless). The drive also set up district electoral offices relatively early, giving electoral officers time to visit schools and universities to encourage students to register.

These efforts increased the registration rate significantly – from 71 percent in 2003–2004 to 90 percent in 2004–2005. Among those 18 to 24, the rate over the same period increased dramatically – from 21 percent to 43 percent. However, in the 2001 election, a more appropriate comparison point, the rate of registration among those 18 to 24 was 38 percent, suggesting a more modest impact. Meanwhile, the overall accuracy of address information for electors did not improve, falling slightly from 74 to 72 percent.<sup>58</sup>

Elections BC has recommended a further legislative change to facilitate registration: allowing citizens to register (but not vote) at age 16. Enrolment programs could then be aimed at high school students.<sup>59</sup> While this recommendation has not been acted on, Elections BC continues to support it,<sup>60</sup> believing that it could, along with on-line registration, significantly increase the rate of enrolment among new electors. The effects could be greater still if mock elections were used to undertake concerted registration drives in B.C. high schools.

Another notable initiative taken by Elections BC was hiring a youth liaison officer who focused on youth elector outreach from September 2004 until the election in May 2005. This staff member attended numerous events, setting up a booth to provide electoral information to young people, and established contacts with a wide variety of youth organizations in the province to enlist their support in promoting youth participation.

In the area of media communications, Elections BC adopted a somewhat different tone from other jurisdictions in at least some of its campaign advertising in 2005. Commercials using emotional testimonials from recent immigrants to Canada, and images from elections in Iraq, were used to convey the message that voting is a valuable right not to be forsaken. This implied sense of civic obligation is markedly different from the approach commonly used in other jurisdictions, where young people are called on to vote to “have their say” or “make a difference.”

The fact that the province now has fixed election dates facilitated numerous elements of Elections BC’s outreach strategy in 2005. For example, it hired and trained staff (such as the youth liaison officer) well in advance of the election date, prepared communication and educational materials in advance and maintained an effective registration drive for three months (a relatively lengthy period) leading up to the election.

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<sup>58</sup> Elections BC, pp. 12 and 16.

<sup>59</sup> Elections BC, “Report of the Chief Electoral Officer: 37th Provincial General Election May 16, 2001,” p. 14, available at [www.elections.bc.ca/elections/ceofin2001.pdf](http://www.elections.bc.ca/elections/ceofin2001.pdf).

<sup>60</sup> Telephone interview with Jennifer Porayko, February 8, 2006.

### **2.4.2 Lessons Learned**

A number of elements of the B.C. experience are noteworthy. First, there was a definite upswing in participation among young people in 2005, though it cannot be said with certainty what specifically caused this to happen. The introduction of electronic registration, a first in North America, is certainly significant, and if its early effects on young people have been modest – the rate of registration was still just 43 percent in 2005 – it holds considerable potential for the future. Finally, B.C.’s fixed election dates, another distinctive feature of this jurisdiction, have reportedly made the work of Elections BC in promoting registration and voter participation considerably more effective and efficient.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Telephone interview with Jennifer Porayko, February 8, 2006.



### 3. Best Practices and Recommendations

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From the foregoing review of elector outreach strategies in other jurisdictions, it is somewhat difficult to distill a template of best practices. In all cases, initiatives aimed at encouraging young people to vote are relatively recent, and their effects have been modest at best. Evaluating these effects is hampered by the simultaneous introduction of multiple initiatives as well as by important confounding factors. (The most significant is likely the variation in electoral competitiveness from one election to the next.) If the most important criterion of best practices in elector outreach is demonstrated effectiveness in stimulating turnout, definitive conclusions are not possible.

That said, this review, plus findings from the literature on voter participation, do point to some initiatives that are likely to bear fruit in the long run, and they suggest some general guidelines with respect to best practices.

First, outreach efforts should be sensitive to the balance of habitual and intermittent non-voters in the targeted population. A significant number of younger Canadians are habitual non-voters, so seeking to instill the habit of voting among new cohorts of electors is a sound general strategy. At the same time, a significant number of young people are intermittent non-voters, who are likely to respond to more modest outreach initiatives aimed principally at facilitating voting.

With respect to new cohorts of electors, civics education is commonly one key way to address some of the underlying impediments to youth participation – in particular, a lack of knowledge and interest in politics. While education departments naturally take the lead in developing and implementing such programs, elections agencies can and do play an important supporting role in providing teaching resources and training or sessions in schools on voting and elections. A general consensus suggests that these are a valuable complement to the efforts of teachers themselves.

Mock elections are also seen as important school-based activities, offering considerable potential to familiarize young people with the act of voting. The practice (or intention) in other jurisdictions is to sponsor similar school-based events more regularly – either annual mock elections or some type of annual Democracy Day (or Democracy Week). Some jurisdictions also support making school council elections more edifying exercises in democratic learning, though no significant results have been achieved yet.

Another consistent priority across the jurisdictions examined is finding ways to maximize rates of voter registration. British Columbia's on-line registration program has enjoyed considerable success, and it merits close examination for possible replication elsewhere. Australia and the United Kingdom can take advantage of a registration age that is lower than the voting age to target new electors earlier, while Elections BC has recommended adopting the same provision. The reasoning is that a lower registration age allows elections agencies to target registration campaigns at young people attending secondary school – a more captive audience than post-secondary students or young people in the workforce.

Partnerships with relevant organizations are also generally seen to be important as they allow elections agencies to extend their reach and enhance their credibility with young people. A related strategy, which is intriguing but has not actually been tested or put into practice in the jurisdictions considered, is to enlist committed voters as allies – individuals who might become “advocates for voting.” This effort could significantly increase personal appeals to young people to vote (the most efficacious form of mobilization in controlled experiments).

Another general theme that emerges is that voter mobilization is affected by the actions (or inactions) of political parties and the media. Given that elections agencies must remain steadfastly non-partisan, their potential intervention in this area is limited. The U.K.’s Electoral Commission, however, does see a role for itself in facilitating debate about the role of these important actors in the political process.

In all jurisdictions considered, it is recognized that evaluation and research are essential to developing effective outreach strategies. As part of this, measuring participation rates across age groups accurately and regularly is clearly important; the method of Elections BC represents an effective approach in this regard. The effects of elector outreach may be modest; if estimates of participation are subject to significant margins of error, it can be difficult to determine whether any results have been achieved.

Also important to sound evaluation is the way in which programs and initiatives are delivered. The effects of those introduced “across the board” are often difficult to judge in the presence of confounding factors from one election to the next. Where possible, it is desirable to vary how programs are delivered; one example is to use pilot programs, ideally based on experimental methods. For these to be carried out effectively, thereby permitting rigorous evaluation, elections agencies should retain considerable control over research design and implementation.

In conclusion, while the academic literature and practices in other jurisdictions point to strategies that are likely to be effective in drawing young people back to the polling booth, much can still be learned about the precise effects of specific initiatives. Further investigation and monitoring by academic researchers and elections agencies alike is needed to assess whether anticipated benefits are realized in the years to come.

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## Interviews

- Phil Diak, Director, Media and Communications, Australian Electoral Commission.
- Beccy Earnshaw, Outreach Manager, U.K. Electoral Commission.
- Jennifer Porayko, Communications Manager, Elections BC.
- Shauna Williamson, Director, Public Awareness Programs, Australian Electoral Commission.

## Appendix 1 – Youth Elector Outreach Initiatives, Canadian Provinces and Territories

Province or Territory	Public Information and Education	Raising Awareness and Building Allies	Easy Voting Access	Research Initiatives
<b>Alberta</b>	Alberta section on nationwide Student Vote Web site (2004, non-partisan, non-profit; Elections Alberta listed as one of many supporters). <sup>62</sup> Youth Can Vote Web site (Calgary city initiative begun in 2001 as Kids Can Vote by a teacher and Calgary Catholic School Board; as of 2004, Youth Can Vote is an initiative of the Mayor's Youth Council). <sup>63</sup>	Go-Public luncheon series involving provincial and municipal leaders and youth. Provincial sponsors were mostly businesses; no government agency appears to have been involved (Dec. 2003, Canadian Unity Council). <sup>64</sup>	No information available.	No information available.

<sup>62</sup> Visit [www.studentvote.ca/alberta/index.php](http://www.studentvote.ca/alberta/index.php).

<sup>63</sup> Visit <http://content.calgary.ca/CCA/City+Hall/Business+Units/Community+and+Neighbourhood+Services/Children+and+Youth/Youth+Can+Vote.htm>.

<sup>64</sup> Available at [www.cucweb.ca/calgary/calgarypdf/Young\\_leaders/gopublic\\_9dec2003.pdf](http://www.cucweb.ca/calgary/calgarypdf/Young_leaders/gopublic_9dec2003.pdf). Organized by the Canadian Unity Council with a provincial and municipal focus.

<b>British Columbia</b>	<p>Elections BC Youth section on Web site (n.d.).<sup>65</sup></p> <p>B.C. section on nationwide Student Vote Web site (2005, non-partisan, non-profit; has the support of Elections BC among many other groups).<sup>66</sup></p> <p>Education kits created for students in Grade 5 in 2001 and Grade 11 in 2003, (Elections BC).<sup>67</sup></p> <p>Youth Education section on Citizens' Assembly Web site includes classroom materials on voting systems. B.C. government set up the independent assembly. Some links are to materials not produced by the government (2003).<sup>68</sup></p> <p>Get Your Vote On Web site created by and for young citizens; no mention of government involvement (2004).<sup>69</sup></p>	Youth Liaison Officer hired for 2005 provincial election to establish links with and provide information to youth organizations (2005, Elections BC).	On-line voter registration; 2005 election was the first in which people could register on-line (Elections BC). <sup>70</sup>	No information available.
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<sup>65</sup> Go to [www.elections.bc.ca/youth/youthmain.htm](http://www.elections.bc.ca/youth/youthmain.htm).

<sup>66</sup> Available at [www.studentvote.ca/bc/index.php](http://www.studentvote.ca/bc/index.php).

<sup>67</sup> The main page is [www.elections.bc.ca/youth/education.htm](http://www.elections.bc.ca/youth/education.htm). For links to these packages, click Elections BC's Education Kits.

<sup>68</sup> Visit [www.citizensassembly.bc.ca/public/learning\\_resources/educational\\_resources](http://www.citizensassembly.bc.ca/public/learning_resources/educational_resources). Also click School Materials on the left menu. Some of the materials come from the Elections BC Web site, others from Elections Canada, PBS, U.K. government, etc., but all are targeted at youth for use by BC teachers.

<sup>69</sup> Originated in Vancouver and Victoria. It was so successful that it has been exported to the rest of Canada. See [www.getyourvoteon.ca/GYVO/Web/Pages/index.aspx](http://www.getyourvoteon.ca/GYVO/Web/Pages/index.aspx).

<sup>70</sup> A news release with further details is available at [http://www.elections.bc.ca/newsrel/n\\_050405.pdf](http://www.elections.bc.ca/newsrel/n_050405.pdf).

<b>Manitoba</b>	<p>MB4Youth Web site targets youth and offers information and links to additional materials about citizenship, government and voting (n.d., Government of Manitoba).<sup>71</sup></p> <p>Government of Manitoba information on the government and how it works; not specifically targeted at youth (n.d., Government of Manitoba).<sup>72</sup></p>	<p>Manitoba's <i>Municipal Act</i> allows youth to be appointed to sit on municipal council (with restricted privileges).<sup>73</sup></p> <p>Go-Public, a luncheon series for youth and for provincial and municipal leaders. Provincial sponsors were mostly corporate; no mention of government sponsors (Nov. 2003, Canadian Unity Council).<sup>74</sup></p> <p>Manitoba Youth Town Hall meetings (2001, headed by MB4Youth, a government of Manitoba initiative).<sup>75</sup></p> <p>Elections Manitoba Web site Educational Resources section provides teaching materials, details on mock elections, etc. Geared to teachers and educators (n.d., Elections Manitoba).<sup>76</sup></p>	<p>Elections Manitoba Web site provides information on student voting (for Manitobans studying out of province and extra-provincial students in Manitoba).<sup>77</sup></p>	<p>A study prepared for Elections Manitoba examines low voter turnout (2004, Elections Manitoba).<sup>78</sup></p>
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<sup>71</sup> See <http://web2.gov.mb.ca/mb4youth/doSearch.php?groupID=2&language=en>.

<sup>72</sup> Go to [www.gov.mb.ca/legislature/info/facts.html](http://www.gov.mb.ca/legislature/info/facts.html). Can also be reached from the MB4Youth Web site: Click Web Resources > Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

<sup>73</sup> Available at [www.amm.mb.ca/PDF/Magazine/Fall2005/diversity.pdf](http://www.amm.mb.ca/PDF/Magazine/Fall2005/diversity.pdf). This PDF also mentions the Regina Regional Economic Development Authority ([www.rreda.com](http://www.rreda.com)), which has a Future Leaders program. It targets youth, but not specifically for voting; it is oriented toward municipal and political involvement, economic development and so on.

<sup>74</sup> Available at [www.cucweb.ca/calgary/calgarypdf/Young\\_leaders/gopublic\\_20nov2003.pdf](http://www.cucweb.ca/calgary/calgarypdf/Young_leaders/gopublic_20nov2003.pdf). Though it is organized by the Canadian Unity Council, Go-Public has a provincial focus. Most of the sponsors were private corporations in Manitoba.

<sup>75</sup> Go to [www.edu.gov.mb.ca/youth/Initiatives/ManitobaYouthTownHallMeetings.html](http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/youth/Initiatives/ManitobaYouthTownHallMeetings.html).

<sup>76</sup> See [www.electionsmanitoba.ca/main/education/edu\\_intro.htm](http://www.electionsmanitoba.ca/main/education/edu_intro.htm).

<sup>77</sup> Visit [www.electionsmanitoba.ca/main/voter/student/studentvoting.htm](http://www.electionsmanitoba.ca/main/voter/student/studentvoting.htm).

<sup>78</sup> Available at [www.electionsmanitoba.ca/pdf/MB\\_Voter\\_Turnout\\_Survey.pdf](http://www.electionsmanitoba.ca/pdf/MB_Voter_Turnout_Survey.pdf).

<b>New Brunswick</b>	The New Brunswick Advisory Council on Youth (NBACY) Web site provides links to educational content (1986, Government of NB). <sup>79</sup>	Youth and Democracy Forum forwarded recommendations to Commission on Legislative Democracy; some members of Commission were present (2004, part of NBACY, Government of NB). <sup>80</sup> NextNB was created to choose 21 leaders (ages 20–35) for the future of NB. It aims to get youth involved in the decision-making process (2004, Government of NB with University of NB and other corporate sponsors). <sup>81</sup> NBACY (1986, Government of NB). <sup>82</sup> Rock the Boat campaign (community forums and group discussions for youth to get involved in politics) (2005, NBACY, Government of NB). <sup>83</sup> The Big Splash resulted from Rock the Boat campaign; community forum participants met at St. Thomas University to discuss their findings (2005, NBACY, Government of NB). <sup>84</sup>	No information available.	The Commission on Legislative Democracy has numerous recommendations for increasing youth voter turnout, such as on-line registration and mandatory civics program. <sup>85</sup>
<b>Newfoundland</b>	Brochure from Elections Newfoundland and Labrador (n.d.). <sup>86</sup>	Can request a school visit on Elections Newfoundland and Labrador Web site (n.d.). <sup>87</sup>	No information available.	No information available.

<sup>79</sup> Go to [www.gnb.ca/0049/nb-e.asp](http://www.gnb.ca/0049/nb-e.asp).

<sup>80</sup> See [www.gnb.ca/0049/ydforum-e.asp](http://www.gnb.ca/0049/ydforum-e.asp).

<sup>81</sup> Available at [www.nextnb.ca/](http://www.nextnb.ca/).

<sup>82</sup> Visit [www.gnb.ca/0049/index-e.asp](http://www.gnb.ca/0049/index-e.asp).

<sup>83</sup> See [www.gnb.ca/0049/rocktheboat-e.asp](http://www.gnb.ca/0049/rocktheboat-e.asp). It includes a PDF describing the initiative.

<sup>84</sup> Go to [www.gnb.ca/0049/bigsplash-e.asp](http://www.gnb.ca/0049/bigsplash-e.asp).

<sup>85</sup> Available at [www.gnb.ca/0100/Summary-e.pdf](http://www.gnb.ca/0100/Summary-e.pdf).

<sup>86</sup> Available at [www.elections.gov.nl.ca/elections/redirectpdf.asp?reqpdf=pdf/your-right.pdf](http://www.elections.gov.nl.ca/elections/redirectpdf.asp?reqpdf=pdf/your-right.pdf). Does not specifically say it is targeting youth, but the layout and photos suggest a young audience.

<sup>87</sup> Visit [www.elections.gov.nl.ca/elections/schools/default.asp](http://www.elections.gov.nl.ca/elections/schools/default.asp).



<b>Nova Scotia</b>	No information available.	No information available.	No information available.	No information available.
<b>Ontario</b>	Educational materials on Elections Ontario Web site for use in classroom (n.d.). <sup>88</sup>	For Youth Initiative, municipality-based organization (created by youth) to get involved in the civic process in Greater Toronto Area (2003, City of Toronto, United Way and others). <sup>89</sup> Student Vote 2003: Schools in province registered with Student Vote, then debated issues and held mock elections (2003, Elections Ontario with assistance of numerous public and private partners). <sup>90</sup>	No information available.	No information available.
<b>Prince Edward Island</b>	School Election Toolkit from Elections PEI targets Grade 5 (n.d.). <sup>91</sup>	No information available.	No information available.	No information available.
<b>Quebec</b>	Jeunes électeurs, Web site put up by the Directeur général des élections du Québec to inform and engage young voters, offers teaching materials, informative links, province-wide debates among students and others (2005, Directeur général des élections du Québec). <sup>92</sup> Quebec National Assembly Web site includes many initiatives targeted at engaging youth in democratic process (goes back to at least 1992, Quebec National Assembly). <sup>93</sup>	Électeurs en herbe, a provincial organization, conducts mock elections in schools (2004, Centre de développement pour l'exercice de la citoyenneté and other partners). <sup>94</sup> Parlement Jeunesse du Québec creates a mock parliament with youth who table and vote on bills (1986, not for profit, unknown supporter). <sup>95</sup>	No information available.	No information available.

<sup>88</sup> Go to [www.electionsontario.on.ca/en/education\\_materials\\_en.shtml?nocache=true](http://www.electionsontario.on.ca/en/education_materials_en.shtml?nocache=true).

<sup>89</sup> See [www.foryouth.ca/](http://www.foryouth.ca/).

<sup>90</sup> Go to [www.kidsvotingcanada.com/english.htm](http://www.kidsvotingcanada.com/english.htm). The partners for Student Vote 2003 were provincial public and private organizations. The primary Web site, [www.studentvote.ca](http://www.studentvote.ca), lists the partners, and the majority are provincially based.

<sup>91</sup> Available at [www.electionspei.ca/school/SchoolElectionToolkit.pdf](http://www.electionspei.ca/school/SchoolElectionToolkit.pdf). Developed with the assistance of Elections BC.

<sup>92</sup> See [www.jeuneselecteurs.qc.ca/](http://www.jeuneselecteurs.qc.ca/).

<sup>93</sup> Visit [www.assnat.qc.ca/fra/education/index.html](http://www.assnat.qc.ca/fra/education/index.html).

<sup>94</sup> Go to [www.citoyennete.qc.ca/electeursenherbe/index.html](http://www.citoyennete.qc.ca/electeursenherbe/index.html). The Home page is [www.citoyennete.qc.ca](http://www.citoyennete.qc.ca).

<sup>95</sup> See [www.pjq.qc.ca/presentation.phtml](http://www.pjq.qc.ca/presentation.phtml).

<b>Saskatchewan</b>	No information available.	No information available.	No information available.	No information available.
<b>Nunavut</b>	No information available.	No information available.	No information available.	No information available.
<b>Northwest Territories</b>	No information available.	No information available.	No information available.	No information available.
<b>Yukon</b>	No information available.	No information available.	No information available.	No information available.

## Appendix 2 – Youth Elector Outreach Initiatives, Selected Countries

Country	Public Information and Education	Raising Awareness and Building Allies	Easy Voting Access	Research Initiatives
<b>United Kingdom</b>	<p>Young People section (16–24) on U.K. Electoral Commission Web site has information and links to educational materials, campaigns, research, etc.<sup>96</sup></p> <p>Do Politics, a campaign aimed at those working with youth on how to promote democracy (2006, Electoral Commission).<sup>97</sup></p> <p>HeadsUp Web site for citizens under 18 promotes involvement in political process (2004, Hansard Society).<sup>98</sup></p>	<p>Don't Distance Yourself campaign aimed at youth (16–24) using posters and radio ads (2001, Electoral Commission).<sup>99</sup></p> <p>Votes are Power campaign aimed at 16- to 24-year-olds using cinema, radio and poster ads as well as birthday cards (2002, Electoral Commission).<sup>100</sup></p> <p>Electoral Commission campaigns 2001–2005; some are either specifically or jointly targeted at young voters.<sup>101</sup></p>	<p>About My Vote Web site facilitates and encourages voter registration. Not specifically targeted at youth, but linked to Electoral Commission site's Young People section (2006, Electoral Commission).<sup>102</sup></p> <p><i>Electoral Administration Bill</i> promises a wide range of improvements to the way elections are run; these will benefit voters, political parties, candidates and elections</p>	<p>Link from Electoral Commission site's Young People section to further research. While it does not deal exclusively with youth, it addresses many issues of declining turnout.<sup>103</sup></p> <p>Bibliography on Electoral Commission Web site relating to decline in youth voter turnout.<sup>104</sup></p> <p>Age of Electoral Majority study on whether voting age should be lowered (2004, Electoral Commission).<sup>105</sup></p>

<sup>96</sup> Available at [www.electoralcommission.org.uk/toolkit/audience-listing.cfm/18](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/toolkit/audience-listing.cfm/18).

<sup>97</sup> See [www.dopolitics.co.uk/holding.html](http://www.dopolitics.co.uk/holding.html).

<sup>98</sup> Visit [www.headsup.org.uk/content/default.asp](http://www.headsup.org.uk/content/default.asp).

<sup>99</sup> Go to [www.electoralcommission.org.uk/media-centre/dontdistanceyourself.cfm](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/media-centre/dontdistanceyourself.cfm).

<sup>100</sup> Available at [www.electoralcommission.org.uk/media-centre/votesarepower.cfm](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/media-centre/votesarepower.cfm).

<sup>101</sup> See [www.electoralcommission.org.uk/media-centre/campaigns.cfm](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/media-centre/campaigns.cfm).

<sup>102</sup> See [www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/](http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/).

<sup>103</sup> Go to [www.electoralcommission.org.uk/elections/research.cfm](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/elections/research.cfm).

<sup>104</sup> Available at [www.electoralcommission.org.uk/elections/youngpeople.cfm](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/elections/youngpeople.cfm).

<sup>105</sup> Visit [www.electoralcommission.org.uk/templates/search/document.cfm/9416](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/templates/search/document.cfm/9416).

Country	Public Information and Education	Raising Awareness and Building Allies	Easy Voting Access	Research Initiatives
		<p>Y-Vote Mock Elections (2005, Electoral Commission, Hansard Society, Department for Education and Skills).<sup>106</sup></p> <p>New Initiatives Fund provides funding to organizations interested in promoting public awareness of U.K. electoral system (2002, Electoral Commission).<sup>107</sup></p> <p>As head of a 30-member coalition, Electoral Commission launches Youth Voting Network to improve young persons' participation and access to democratic process (2003, Electoral Commission).<sup>108</sup></p>	<p>managers (2005, U.K. government).<sup>109</sup></p> <p>New Initiatives Fund (see Raising Awareness column) helps organizations roll out pilot projects to increase voter access (2002, Electoral Commission).</p> <p>Based on different reports, Electoral Commission expects to adopt measures to increase ease and accuracy of voter registration (2000–present, Electoral Commission).<sup>110</sup></p>	<p>Pilot projects tested in multiple local authorities to evaluate methods to improve voter turnout, widen range of voting methods, improve efficiency of vote counting and increase information available to voters (2000 to present, Electoral Commission).<sup>111</sup></p> <p>New Initiatives Fund (see Raising Awareness column) funds organizations to roll out pilot projects to do further research into voter turnout, voter registration, informing voters and so on.</p>

<sup>106</sup> Visit [www.mockelections.co.uk/](http://www.mockelections.co.uk/).

<sup>107</sup> Go to [www.electoralcommission.gov.uk/templates/search/document.cfm/7911](http://www.electoralcommission.gov.uk/templates/search/document.cfm/7911).

<sup>108</sup> Available at [www.electoralcommission.org.uk/about-us/relatedwork.cfm](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/about-us/relatedwork.cfm).

<sup>109</sup> Visit [www.electoralcommission.gov.uk/elections/eladbill.cfm](http://www.electoralcommission.gov.uk/elections/eladbill.cfm).

<sup>110</sup> Two important reports on this subject are available: “The Electoral Registration Process” at [www.electoralcommission.gov.uk/templates/search/document.cfm/7973](http://www.electoralcommission.gov.uk/templates/search/document.cfm/7973) and “Securing the Vote” at [www.electoralcommission.gov.uk/templates/search/document.cfm/12944](http://www.electoralcommission.gov.uk/templates/search/document.cfm/12944).

<sup>111</sup> See [www.electoralcommission.gov.uk/templates/search/document.cfm/6139](http://www.electoralcommission.gov.uk/templates/search/document.cfm/6139).

Country	Public Information and Education	Raising Awareness and Building Allies	Easy Voting Access	Research Initiatives
New Zealand	<p>Section on Elections New Zealand Web site for students (as well as teachers and researchers) offers educational materials and links to youth-oriented sites and areas (n.d., Elections New Zealand).<sup>112</sup></p> <p>Active-18, an initiative to get those under 18 involved in politics and duties of citizenship (n.d., Elections New Zealand).<sup>113</sup></p> <p>Active Voices, an initiative for Year 7–10 students that educates them about electoral process and government (2002, Elections New Zealand).<sup>114</sup></p>	Youth Parliament is a selected youth get-together to discuss and debate issues related to them (originated in 1994, Ministry of Youth Development). <sup>115</sup>	No information available.	Research paper on voter turnout decline among youth (2005, Elections New Zealand). <sup>116</sup>

<sup>112</sup> Available at [www.elections.org.nz/study.html](http://www.elections.org.nz/study.html).

<sup>113</sup> Visit [www.elections.org.nz/study/active-18.html](http://www.elections.org.nz/study/active-18.html).

<sup>114</sup> See [www.elections.org.nz/study/active-about.html](http://www.elections.org.nz/study/active-about.html).

<sup>115</sup> Go to [www.elections.org.nz/study/youth\\_parlt.html](http://www.elections.org.nz/study/youth_parlt.html).

<sup>116</sup> Available at [www.elections.org.nz/now-or-never-lit-review.html](http://www.elections.org.nz/now-or-never-lit-review.html).

Country	Public Information and Education	Raising Awareness and Building Allies	Easy Voting Access	Research Initiatives
<b>Australia</b>	<p>Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) Electoral Education Centres section targeted at youth, tertiary groups and community groups (n.d., AEC).<sup>117</sup></p> <p>Teacher Professional Development Programs section facilitates transmission of electoral knowledge (n.d., AEC).<sup>118</sup></p> <p>AEC school and community visits program. A rep visits schools and holds information sessions, mock referendums, etc. (n.d., AEC).<sup>119</sup></p> <p>AEC enrolment poster targeted at youth (particularly senior secondary) (n.d., AEC).<sup>120</sup></p> <p>AEC Electoral Education Resources section contains many useful tools, such as teaching materials, youth-oriented campaigns, posters, videos and educational materials (n.d., AEC).<sup>121</sup></p>	No information available.	AEC school and community visits page includes information for students on how to register (n.d., AEC). <sup>122</sup>	Youth Electoral Study examines declining youth voter turnout and registration, analyzes initiatives put in place and determines their effectiveness (2004, AEC and Australian Research Council). <sup>123</sup>

<sup>117</sup> Visit [www.aec.gov.au/\\_content/how/education/centres.htm](http://www.aec.gov.au/_content/how/education/centres.htm).

<sup>118</sup> See [www.aec.gov.au/\\_content/how/education/teacher.htm](http://www.aec.gov.au/_content/how/education/teacher.htm).

<sup>119</sup> Go to [www.aec.gov.au/\\_content/how/education/centres.htm](http://www.aec.gov.au/_content/how/education/centres.htm).

<sup>120</sup> Available at [www.aec.gov.au/\\_content/how/education/resources/youth\\_poster.pdf](http://www.aec.gov.au/_content/how/education/resources/youth_poster.pdf).

<sup>121</sup> Visit [www.aec.gov.au/\\_content/how/education/resources/index.htm](http://www.aec.gov.au/_content/how/education/resources/index.htm).

<sup>122</sup> See [www.aec.gov.au/\\_content/how/education/centres.htm](http://www.aec.gov.au/_content/how/education/centres.htm).

<sup>123</sup> “Report 1: Enrolment and Voting” is available at [www.aec.gov.au/\\_content/What/publications/youth\\_study\\_1/index.htm](http://www.aec.gov.au/_content/What/publications/youth_study_1/index.htm); “Report 2: Youth, Political Engagement and Voting” is at [www.aec.gov.au/\\_content/What/publications/youth\\_study\\_2/index.htm](http://www.aec.gov.au/_content/What/publications/youth_study_2/index.htm); and “Report 3: Youth, The Family, and Learning About Politics and Voting” is at [http://www.aec.gov.au/\\_content/What/publications/youth\\_study\\_3/index.htm](http://www.aec.gov.au/_content/What/publications/youth_study_3/index.htm)

Country	Public Information and Education	Raising Awareness and Building Allies	Easy Voting Access	Research Initiatives
<b>United States</b>	<p>Youth Vote Coalition, a national non-partisan organization (backed by non-governmental organizations), seeks to raise awareness of declining youth turnout and hopes to increase youth participation in political process (1994, various non-profit organizations).<sup>124</sup></p> <p>MTV Choose or Lose initiative encourages young people to vote; includes educational material and meetings.<sup>125</sup></p> <p>New Voters Project, a non-partisan campaign dedicated to increasing youth voter turnout (n.d., Pew Charitable Trust and George Washington University Graduate School of Political Management).<sup>126</sup></p>	No information available.	No information available.	CIRCLE conducts research on civic and political engagement of Americans between 15 and 25 (2001, Pew Charitable Trusts and Carnegie Corporation). <sup>127</sup>
<b>Germany</b>	No information available.	No information available.	No information available.	No information available.
<b>France</b>	No information available.	No information available.	No information available.	No information available.

<sup>124</sup> Go to [www.youthvote.org/about/about.cfm](http://www.youthvote.org/about/about.cfm).

<sup>125</sup> Available at [www.mtv.com/chooseorlose/](http://www.mtv.com/chooseorlose/).

<sup>126</sup> Visit [www.newvotersproject.org/](http://www.newvotersproject.org/).

<sup>127</sup> See [www.civicyouth.org/practitioners/index.htm](http://www.civicyouth.org/practitioners/index.htm).