

A Group Apart: Young Party Members in Canada

**Charting the Course for Youth
Civic and Political Participation**

**Lisa Young
William Cross**

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**Lisa Young
University of Calgary**

and

**William Cross
Carleton University**

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Canadian Policy Research Networks

214 – 151 Slater Street, Ottawa, ON K1P 5H3
Tel: 613-567-7500 Web Site: www.cprn.org

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1. *A Group Apart: Young Party Members in Canada* – Lisa Young and William Cross
2. *Indifferent or Just Different? The Political and Civic Engagement of Young People in Canada* – Brenda O'Neill
3. *The Meaning of Political Participation for Indigenous Youth* – Taiaiake Alfred, Jackie Price and Brock Pitawanakwat
4. *Rendre compte et soutenir l'action bénévole des jeunes* – André Thibault Patrice Albertus and Julie Fortier
5. *The State and Potential of Civic Learning in Canada* – Kristina R. Llewellyn, Sharon Cook, Joel Westheimer, Luz Alison Molina Girón and Karen Suurtamm
6. *"What Do You Mean I Can't Have a Say?" Young Canadians and Their Government* – André Turcotte

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Executive Summary

This paper is premised on compelling evidence that young Canadians have become less likely to join political parties than their counterparts in their parents' or grandparents' generations. Should it continue, this trend will move Canadian political parties further away from being participatory membership organizations, thereby rendering them less effective as bridges between the electorate and the government.

To better understand the factors underlying this tendency, we conducted a survey of young party members and of other politically engaged young Canadians on university campuses. This paper analyzes the differences between these two groups, finding that young party members are more traditional in their orientation and outlook and somewhat more deferential to authority than their non-partisan but engaged counterparts. In many instances, the young party members' upbringings have primed them in the following ways to join parties:

- Young party members' parents are much more likely to have belonged to political parties.
- Young party members are more likely to report having discussed politics at home when they were growing up.
- Young party members are somewhat more likely to have taken a high school civics class or a university-level Canadian political science course.

Moreover, young party members differ from other engaged young Canadians in their orientations toward the political system. Specific differences include these:

- Young party members consume slightly more news than their activist counterparts and are less likely to rely on the Internet as a source of information regarding current events.
- Young party members express slightly higher levels of confidence in social and political institutions.
- Although both young activists and young party members are positively inclined toward interest groups, young activists are substantially less positive toward political parties than are young party members.
- Young party members are considerably more likely to think that joining a political party is an effective way of achieving social change.
- Young activists perceive joining a political party as the *least* effective political tactic, while young party members see it as the *most* effective.

Overall, the young non-party members surveyed see parties as hierarchical organizations that do not welcome young people and that do not give members an adequate role in directing the organization. In essence, there is a culture clash between these egalitarian members of Generation Y and the top-down organization of Canadian political parties.

Many of these findings suggest that declining rates of youth membership in political parties are a product of structurally grounded generational change. It follows that any consideration of policy

reforms or changes to party practice would have to be adaptive: there is little likelihood of reversing the process of attitudinal change underlying these perceptions. To the extent that public policy can influence such tendencies, it would take the form of encouraging more extensive exposure to the operation of the Canadian political process within the formal education system.

The most likely agents of change are the parties themselves. A party that wanted to attract and retain young members could consider the following:

- Focusing resources on creating or maintaining a vibrant network of campus and/or youth clubs (Such groups need to be both social and political in their organization, as social incentives matter more to young people than to older potential members whose social networks are already established.)
- Engaging in meaningful internal reforms that enhance the involvement of individual party members beyond the moments of leadership selection and candidate nomination, bringing members into discussions of policy and party direction
- Encouraging a concentrated effort on the part of all political parties to improve their image, demonstrating to Canadians that they do play a role in stimulating national debates on public policy, and generate and implement new ideas
- Making efforts to reach young Canadians in new and innovative ways, using Internet and related technologies

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A Group Apart: Young Party Members in Canada

Introduction

Fifty years ago, a young Canadian who wanted to make a difference in social and political affairs would almost certainly have acted on this inclination by taking out a membership in a political party. On joining a party, he (and it would almost certainly have been a “he”) would likely have been drawn into an active campus club, attending national party conventions as a youth delegate and having what some observers have described as a disproportionate influence over his party’s policy and leadership choices (Perlin, Sutherland and Desjardins, 1988). This campus activism would, in all probability, have drawn this individual into the mainstream life of his chosen party. For the rest of his adult life, he would likely have remained an active member of this party.

Today, a young Canadian interested in the issues of the day is far less likely to find himself or herself drawn into the life of a political party. Concern about climate change leads more naturally into membership in an environmental organization; a critical analysis of the role of corporations is more likely to draw the contemporary young Canadian into an antiglobalization group than a left-of-centre political party; a student who desires to ensure that his or her religious values are reflected in public policy is as likely to join a pro-life or pro-family advocacy organization as a party on the right of the spectrum.

Why should this trend be of more than passing interest to Canadians? One can certainly argue that it reflects a long-term trend toward more specialized and egalitarian political organizations, and that civic-minded young Canadians can still find (or, for that matter, found) organizations that allow them to express their political views and attempt to influence public policy. There is much to be said for this argument, as advocacy organizations have the potential to contribute positively to Canadian democracy (Young and Everitt, 2004).

While recognizing the potential of advocacy organizations to make such contributions, we premise this study on the idea that Canadian democracy also needs internally democratic, participatory political parties in order to function well. And the foundation for such political parties is laid when Canadians are drawn into partisan political life as young adults, for there is compelling evidence showing that individuals who join parties when they are young remain the activist core of these parties when they are older.

The research that we present in this paper suggests that young Canadians have become less likely to join political parties than their counterparts in their parents’ or grandparents’ generations. For the most part, those who join are unusually privileged both in their exposure to politics and in their socio-economic background. They were likely recruited into party membership by one of their parents, and they received much greater exposure than their contemporaries to politics by virtue of their parents’ political engagement, their social status and their educational opportunities. They have a very different understanding of political parties than do other members of their generation.

Again, we can ask if this is really a source of concern. Party membership in Canada has generally been understood as an elite form of participation. Even 50 years ago, the vibrant cells

of partisan youth activists were found on university campuses, not shop floors.¹ Families have long formed a backbone of partisan recruitment in Canada. All this is true, but our research suggests that the trend is intensifying and that the competition offered by a panoply of advocacy groups is encouraging the trend. The end result may well be that political parties become more distant from the electorate they purport to represent and, thus, less effective in fulfilling the intermediary functions assigned to them in a representative democracy.

To better understand this phenomenon, we have undertaken a survey of young Canadians who have joined three of our political parties, as well as of a sample of young Canadians who might have joined parties in another era but who have chosen instead to be activists in campus groups. Neither of these survey groups captures a representative sample of young Canadians: we focus almost entirely on young Canadians with university educations. The reason for this is simple. Our analytic focus is on a higher-intensity form of political activity – partisan activism – and it is disproportionately those young Canadians having the resources associated with post-secondary education who engage in this activity.

In this paper, we begin by discussing the significance of political parties in a modern representative democracy, contrasting this role to that played by advocacy organizations. We then examine the patterns of youth involvement in these organizations and set out the rationale for our study of youth partisans and campus activists. Our analysis of data proceeds in four sections. First, we ask which young Canadians tend to join political parties and campus advocacy groups. Second, we explore these activists' reasons for joining their organization. Third, we compare young party members with activists in their orientations toward the political system. Finally, we consider policy recommendations that stem from these findings and discuss directions for future research.

We find that young party members are atypical of many young Canadians, being more traditional in their orientation and outlook and somewhat more deferential to authority. In many instances, their upbringing has primed them to join parties, as their parents are likely to have belonged to political parties, to have initiated regular discussions of politics in the family home and to have inculcated habits of news consumption in their children. In essence, we can think of these socializing factors as having exerted a pull toward partisan activity that outweighed the broader societal push away from partisanship.² Young party members stand out particularly in their belief that party members can influence the party and that belonging to a political party is an effective way to influence public policy outcomes.

The paucity of youth participation in Canadian political parties is largely a product of broad structural and societal trends not unique to Canada. As a result, there are few easy policy solutions. Moreover, many of the activities of political parties are, quite appropriately, beyond the reach of state regulation. We conclude, as do many studies of declining youth participation in politics, that greater emphasis on civics education may alter some of the perceptions young Canadians have about the role or function of political parties within the Canadian democratic

¹ In this respect, Canadian party membership is somewhat different from party membership in several West European countries.

² We are grateful to Paul Whiteley of the University of Essex for this characterization.

system. The greater onus, however, is on the parties themselves to tackle public perceptions of their ineffectiveness and to create opportunities for meaningful youth participation.

Political Parties, Advocacy Groups and Democracy

It is difficult, if not impossible, to imagine how Canadian democracy would work in the absence of political parties. Quite simply, our electoral system and institutions of responsible government require that we have political parties to structure our political life. At the time of Confederation, Canadian political parties were loose groupings of Members of Parliament (MPs) with little basis in Canadian society. The requirement in our political system that the government retain the confidence of a majority of Members of the House of Commons meant that the only way for a government to achieve some sort of political stability was to convince MPs to form into a political party on which the government could rely. Canada's first prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, built the Conservative Party as he built the nation, using his powers of patronage to induce MPs to join the government caucus. He also started to build party organization on the ground to support these MPs, once again using his powers of patronage as an inducement. The Liberal Party followed this lead, thereby forming the basis of the Canadian party system.

Today, political parties are required not only to organize parliamentary life but also to organize electoral competition. The parties recruit the candidates we vote for, and the parties provide Canadian voters with alternative visions of government at election time, in essence giving us choices at the ballot box.

The idea that political parties should be internally democratic organizations with wide membership bases has developed over the past century. At first, a party's grassroots organization consisted of party supporters in local constituencies who organized on behalf of the party at election time and, if their party won, were rewarded with patronage. Over time, civil service reforms reduced the amount of patronage that party leaders had at their disposal, and Canadians' democratic norms changed to demand more participatory organizations. So it was that over a lengthy period from Confederation to the present, party members came to win the right to select their local candidate, elect a national party leader and – in some parties and under some circumstances – have a say on the party's policy platform (Carty, 1992).

Membership in a political party in Canada entails few obligations, but also few privileges. It costs a relatively small amount of money to join – \$10 per year – and once an individual has joined he or she has no further obligation to the party. A minority of party members choose to support their party by volunteering on election campaigns, serving on their local party executive or fulfilling other volunteer roles. By the same token, membership entails few privileges. A party member is entitled to vote to determine which individual he or she would like to have run as the party's candidate in the next election (unless the national party has pre-empted this decision). The member can vote to influence the selection of the party leader, either directly or by voting for delegates to a national party convention. Party members can also vote to select delegates to party policy conventions, which discuss the party's policy direction and *may* influence the party's electoral platform (Cross, 2004; Courtney, 1995).

Setting aside the question of whether it is desirable that Canadian parties be membership organizations, the issue of whether Canadian parties need members remains. In one model of party organization – known as the “mass” party – party members are very valuable assets.³ In this model of party organization, which emerged in the era prior to mass electronic media, party members were essential resources for a party, providing the volunteer labour that allowed the party to get out its message to the electorate. In the contemporary era of television and Internet communications, the value of loyal party members knocking on doors and making telephone calls has dropped. Contemporary Canadian parties need members less for their volunteer labour and more to bolster their legitimacy in the eyes of voters and as resources in intra-party contests, notably nominations and leadership contests (Scarrow, 2000).

What would happen if Canadians stopped joining political parties altogether? It is unlikely that parties would cease to exist. Experience in Canada and elsewhere shows that parties unable to raise sufficient funds from supporters can turn to the state for financial support (Katz and Mair, 1995). These funds allow parties to purchase the services, such as polling, advertising and paid call centres, that they need to communicate their messages to voters. An emerging understanding of political parties in democratic systems is that they are “public utilities” – organizations that are necessary to electoral democracy and consequently supported in part or in whole by the state (van Biezen, 2004).

Parties without members would, we believe, be an unfortunate development for Canadian democracy. However limited and imperfect parties are, the ways in which party members engage in party life creates a mechanism through which Canadians can influence the direction of their political parties and thus the choices available to them at the ballot box. Though relatively few Canadians avail themselves of the opportunity to help decide who the Liberal candidate in their riding will be, or who will lead the Conservative Party, those individuals who are motivated to participate do have that opportunity today, and these opportunities provide a connection between Canadian society and its political parties. This situation encourages accountability and responsiveness.

Political parties are, of course, not the only means through which Canadians can participate in political life. Many choose to do so through advocacy groups (or interest groups, as they are sometimes called). These groups also provide a valuable vehicle for participation and a meaningful way for Canadians to engage in the political process (for an elaboration of this argument, see Young and Everitt, 2004). But as valuable as they are to the democratic process, advocacy groups by definition will never govern. The primary focus of this paper on participation in political parties, then, is driven by a concern that the organizations that are eligible to form governments in Canada not be dissociated from Canadian society as their memberships dwindle in size and activity.

³ The mass party is an ideal type that, if it ever existed, was more typical of West European party organization than Canadian party organization. Nonetheless, it remains the normative ideal against which contemporary party organization is evaluated in democratic terms.

Youth Participation in Canadian Political Parties and Advocacy Groups

The research design for this study is predicated on two assumptions: that the rate at which young people are joining political parties is in decline and that young people show a discernible preference for advocacy-type organizations over political parties. Ample evidence supports the first assumption in the Canadian context. In our 2000 Study of Canadian Political Party Members (SCPPM), we found a remarkable dearth of young Canadians involved in federal political parties. Our data indicate that the average age of a member of the five major Canadian federal parties in 2000 was 59. While 11% of Canadians were between the ages of 18 and 25 in that year, only 3% of party members were 25 or younger (Cross and Young, 2004). This pattern reflects a change in the recruitment patterns of Canadian political parties: the 2000 SCPPM showed that, of the party members over the age of 25, almost 20% had joined their party before their 25th birthday.

Mass surveys confirm a downward pattern in young Canadians' propensity to join political parties. A study conducted by the Institute for Research on Public Policy found that only one in 20 Canadians aged 18-30 has ever belonged to a political party (either federal or provincial), compared with one-third of those over age 60 (Howe and Northrup, 2000). The same question was asked in a survey conducted in 1990; at that time, one in 10 respondents aged 18-30 reported having belonged to a party.

The low rate of youth membership in Canadian parties currently stands in sharp contrast to the situation only a generation ago. Perlin, Sutherland and Desjardins (1988) reviewed the formal status accorded to youth in the major parties of the day and analyzed surveys of delegates to the 1983 Conservative and 1984 Liberal leadership conventions. These analysts expressed a strong concern that the overrepresentation of youth at party conventions was distorting parties' internal democratic processes. Twenty years later, such concerns have much less currency.

The second assumption – that the decline in party membership contributes to a rise in activism through advocacy-type organizations – is more difficult to demonstrate conclusively. Certainly, public opinion data show that Canadians born after 1971 are the only age group more likely to report membership in an interest group than a political party (Young and Everitt, 2004: 31) and that younger Canadians are more inclined than their older counterparts to indicate that membership in an interest group is a more effective means of achieving political change than belonging to a political party (Howe and Northrup, 2000). All of this leads to the plausible assumption that those young people who might have joined a political party a generation ago are now more likely to channel their activism through an advocacy group.

This phenomenon is not unique to Canada. Surveys of party members in Denmark (Pedersen et al., 2004), Ireland (Gallagher and Marsh, 2004) and the United Kingdom (Seyd and Whiteley, 2004) also note a consistent pattern of youth underrepresentation in their national party memberships. Moreover, an analysis of levels of party activism across 22 European democracies concludes that declining rates of party membership are attributable largely to generational replacement, as existing cohorts of party activists are not being replaced by younger cohorts of volunteers (Whiteley, 2007). This analysis also observes that “part of the reason for the decline in activism is competition from alternatives. This means that when cultural organizations,

environmental groups and trade unions are strong in a given country, activism in political parties is weakened” (Whiteley, 2007: 22-23).

Methodology

To probe the interplay between party membership and other forms of political engagement, we designed a research program that captured a group of young Canadians with an interest in political life and community problems, some of whom were party members and some who were not. We conducted a mail survey of youth members (aged 18-25) of three federal political parties (Liberal Party, New Democratic Party [NDP] and Bloc Québécois [BQ or Bloc] between November 2003 and February 2004. We mailed surveys to 3,962 young party members from lists of members provided by the parties. After several reminder mailings, an overall response rate of 39% was achieved. These three parties are located at the centre and left of the Canadian political spectrum. Initial plans to survey youth members of the right-of-centre Progressive Conservative and Canadian Alliance parties were rendered impossible when the two parties unexpectedly merged in the fall of 2003.

For the purpose of comparison, we required data from individuals in the same age group who were politically aware and active, but who had chosen not to join a political party. To find such a group, we focused on young Canadians belonging to advocacy-type groups but not political parties. When we examined data from the young party members survey, we found that the vast majority of respondents were either in post-secondary education or were university graduates. More than seven in 10 respondents were students at survey time. Of the remainder, the vast majority (some 80%) had attended a post-secondary institution. Thus, an acceptable group for comparative purposes comprised current university students who were members of advocacy groups. Accordingly, we surveyed members of advocacy groups on five geographically dispersed university campuses (University of British Columbia, University of Calgary, Carleton University in Ottawa, University of Montreal and Mount Allison University in New Brunswick). On each campus, we identified groups whose mandate included a significant advocacy purpose and surveyed members attending group meetings. Examples of the types of groups surveyed include Students for Life, Amnesty International, Students for a Free Tibet and Eco-Action. In total, 581 usable responses were received.

The combined sample of young party members and youth activists encompasses what we might consider a future leadership group in Canadian politics and society. The respondents to our surveys were almost all currently engaged in post-secondary education, they self-identified as being interested in politics or advocacy and they acted on this interest by joining a political or community organization. While recognizing that there are many routes into politics over the course of a citizen’s lifetime, we believe that the respondents to our survey offer us insight into patterns of high-intensity political participation among the youngest generation of Canadian adults and can tell us a great deal about the future of Canadian political parties as membership organizations.

Individuals who responded to our activist survey but indicated that they belonged to a political party posed a methodological problem; 72 respondents fell into this category. For the purpose of

our analysis, when comparing activists and party members, we include these 72 individuals as party members rather than activists.

The absence of young party members on the right of the political spectrum was unavoidable and certainly has implications for the interpretation of our findings. There is some reason to think that the decision whether to join a political party might be somewhat different for young Canadians whose political beliefs tend toward the right. In particular, there are considerably fewer grassroots advocacy organizations espousing conservative causes in Canada than there are advocacy organizations on the left of the political spectrum (particularly if one includes environmental organizations as part of the “left”). Keeping in mind Whiteley’s finding that the presence of alternative single-issue vehicles for participation depresses the propensity for partisan activism, there is some reason to believe that the calculus for joining a party might be somewhat different on the right.⁴ This idea is, however, speculative.

What is clear, however, is that our party members and non-members are reasonably well matched in their political leanings, as there were few non-members who revealed Conservative leanings. We asked non-members whether they considered themselves supporters of a particular party. Less than half considered themselves supporters of a party, but those that did identified support for the NDP (32%), the Liberal Party (24%), the Bloc or Parti Québécois (20%), other parties (15%) and, finally, the Conservative Party (9%). We also asked non-members which party they voted for in the 2004 federal election. Just over 20% of these respondents indicated that they voted for the Liberal Party and another 20%, for the NDP. Almost 18% voted for the Bloc, 11% voted for other parties and only 8% voted Conservative. Another 20% did not vote.

Who Joins?

When we examine the demographic characteristics of our survey respondents, it is clear that both young party members and campus activists form a relatively privileged subset of Canadian youth. Fully half our respondents report that their parents’ household income exceeds \$70,000, and the vast majority was born in Canada (Table 1). This relative affluence is not terribly surprising, given that most of the respondents are university students or graduates, a group that is not generally representative of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2005; Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2007).⁵

We also find, however, considerable differences between young party members and campus activists that give us some clues as to their different patterns of involvement.⁶ The first difference is the gender breakdown of the two groups. While only 46% of the party members are female, fully 62% of the campus activists are women (see Table 1). In this respect, the campus activists roughly reflect the proportion of women in undergraduate programs in Canadian universities (Statistics Canada, 2005), while the party members underrepresent women either as a

⁴ We are grateful to Robin Pettitt of Manchester University for this insight.

⁵ We also asked our respondents about their own personal income. The majority reported a personal income of less than \$10,000, as one would expect for a university student or recent graduate.

⁶ Any discussion of the demographic composition of two groups of Canadians would normally include some discussion of the regional composition of the two groups. Because of the regional differences in the survey populations for this survey, such comparisons are not possible.

proportion of the population or as a proportion of university students. Moreover, the proportion of women among the youth party members would likely have been lower had we been able to survey the right-of-centre parties, as our prior research showed that women were the least well represented in the Canadian Alliance and Progressive Conservative parties (Young and Cross, 2003). The proportionate representation of women among the campus activists, but not among the party members, is an interesting finding. Some evidence suggests that young Canadian women are less engaged in the formal political arena than their male counterparts (Thomas, 2006), but our data suggest that this disengagement does not extend to campus activism. Other studies have found that young women are more inclined than men toward social movement or advocacy-type activities (Hooghe and Stolle, 2004), a pattern that is reflected in the gender breakdown of non-party members in this study.

Table 1. Selected Demographic Characteristics of Party Members and Non-Party Member Activists

Characteristic	Party Members	Activists Only
Female***	46%	62%
Parents' income >\$70,000***	49%	55%
Born in Canada***	91%	81%
Mother tongue not English/French	9%	11%
No religious affiliation***	27%	39%
Catholic***	41%	34%
Never attend religious services*	39%	48%

*** p = 0.001; ** p = 0.01; * p = 0.05 (chi-square)

Although the majority of both party members and activists report having been born in Canada, we find that two in 10 activists and one in 10 party members were born outside the country. Given that we are studying university students, some of the campus activists surveyed may well be international students, so not too much should be made of this difference. A more meaningful measure may be having a mother tongue other than English or French. The activists and party members differed little on this measure. From this, we can tentatively conclude that campus activists are not substantially more likely to be first or second generation Canadians than their partisan counterparts.

We do, however, find an interesting pattern of difference in terms of the two groups' religious affiliations. Campus activists are 12 percentage points more likely than party members to report having no religious affiliation and, correspondingly, are less likely to attend religious services. Membership and activity in a religious community have been found to predict other forms of civic participation (Nakhaie, 2006), so it is interesting that our study shows that religious affiliation and participation are correlated with partisan activity, but not with other forms of

political engagement. The greater religiosity of the party members in the study is suggestive of a more traditional profile among young party members than non-members.

Conversely, party members are seven percentage points more likely than activists to report being Catholic. This difference persists when we control for mother tongue (as a way of ensuring that we are not picking up on differences between francophone Quebecers and anglophone Canadians). The interpretation of this pattern of difference is not obvious, but it is worth noting that religious affiliation remains a highly salient determinant of vote choice in Canada (Blais, 2005).

We also find differences between party members and student activists when we examine their occupational status. Because we surveyed only students, all the campus activists were students, as were 70% of the youth party members. Comparing only the student party members with the campus activists, we find that the party members are substantially more likely not to hold a full-time or part-time job, allowing them to concentrate more fully on their studies and, perhaps, their partisan activity (Table 2). We also find that the student activists are somewhat more diverse in their fields of study, being less likely to study political science or business but more likely to study science or engineering (Table 3).

Table 2. Occupational Status

Status	Party Members	Party Members (Students Only)	Student Activists
Employed full time	21% (243)		
Student and employed (full or part time)	36% (423)	51% (423)	67% (367)
Student	35% (409)	49% (409)	33% (178)
Other	7% (86)		

Note: Because of differences in data sets, this analysis compares the party member data set with the activist data set and does not separate out activists who also belong to parties. The "other" category encompasses the unemployed, homemakers and others. Because of the data set used, we cannot calculate the statistical significance of inter-group differences.

Table 3. Course of Study

Program of Study	Party Members	Student Activists
Political science	21%	12%
Other social science	9%	11%
Humanities	18%	16%
Business/commerce	12%	4%
Law/medicine	9%	10%
Science/engineering	11%	26%
Other	21%	20%

Note: Because of differences in data sets, this analysis compares the party member data set with the activist data set and does not separate out activists who also belong to parties. Statistical significance cannot be calculated.

We also find numerous important differences between young party members and campus activists in their formative experiences. An extensive literature suggests that childhood socialization has an effect on subsequent political attitudes and behaviour (Hooghe, Stolle and Stouthuysen, 2004; Galston, 2001; Braungart and Braungart, 1990). Such studies suggest that exposure to politics in childhood and adolescence, be it via parents' political involvement, discussion of politics in the home or civics education in the schools, predicts subsequent political involvement.

Both groups in our study report higher levels of political socialization than do their peers in the Canadian public; they are much more likely to report having taken a civics course, having parents who were active in political affairs or talking about politics when they were growing up.⁷ Even within this group of young Canadians who have been exposed to more political socialization experiences in the form of parental activities, discussion of politics in the home and formal education, we find significant differences between the young party members and the campus activists. On every measure, we find that a higher proportion of the young party members have experienced greater political socialization (see Table 4).

Not surprisingly, young party members were more than twice as likely as young activists to report that their parents had at some time belonged to a political party. This reinforces our notion that party membership in Canada remains a family affair to a considerable degree; further evidence for this is found below in our discussion of pathways into party membership.

In addition to this, we see that young party members are more likely than non-members to take a Canadian government course in high school and in university, to have talked about politics often or frequently when growing up and to report that their parents were involved in political

⁷ Several of the questions listed in Table 4 were asked in the 2004 Canada Election Study. The relatively small number of respondents who fell in the comparison age group makes it difficult to draw valid conclusions about the patterns of socialization of young Canadians; these results must be interpreted with considerable caution. For the questions dealing with a high school civics class and parents' political activity, there were only 104 respondents. Only 26% of those respondents reported taking a high school civics course, and only 15% indicated that their parents were involved in political activity of any kind. For the question regarding discussion of politics, there were 391 respondents in the comparable age group. Of those, 54% reported talking about politics often or sometimes when they were growing up.

activities. In this respect, childhood or adolescent exposure to political stimuli are important predictors of the subsequent decision to join a political party.⁸

Table 4. Respondents' Political Socialization

Survey Question (and Response)	Party Members	Activists
Did you take a Canadian government or politics class in high school? (Yes) **	58% (705)	50% (248)
Did you take a Canadian government or politics class in university or college? (Yes) ***	48% (553)	40% (189)
When you were growing up, how often did your family talk about politics? (Often and frequently)***	73% (894)	64% (322)
Have either of your parents ever belonged to a political party? (Yes)***	62% (763)	27% (135)
When you were growing up, was either of your parents involved in political activities? (Yes)***	51% (632)	27% (334)

*** p = 0.001; ** p = 0.01; * p = 0.05 (chi-square)

Why Join?

As our core interest is in the question of why fewer young Canadians appear to be joining political parties, we have a particular interest in how our sample of young party members came to join their political party. We find that the majority of the young party members – six in 10 – were asked to join their party, rather than joining on their own initiative. The same is not true of older party members. Our 2000 survey of these older party members found that a majority reported joining on their own initiative.⁹ This finding reinforces our hunch that a young person interested in politics today is less likely to take the initiative and join a political party without being asked to do so.

⁸ The one exception to this is taking a university political science course, as that decision may well have been made after the decision to join a political party and may therefore be a result rather than a predictor of party membership.

⁹ Comparison is based on BQ, Liberal and NDP respondents to the SCPPM.

If young people are more likely to join a party when asked, it is important to know who is issuing the invitations. Are their contemporaries who already belong to political parties reaching out to encourage them to join, or is someone else doing the asking? For young party members, we find that it is family and friends who are asking them to join a party. Of the young party members who were asked to join, almost half were asked by a family member. In contrast, only a quarter of the older party members who were asked to join their party were asked by a family member. Similarly, one-third of young party members were asked to join by a friend, neighbour, fellow student or co-worker, which contrasts again to a quarter of older party members.

Representatives of the party were seldom the ones issuing the invitation. Of those young party members asked to join, only 15% were asked by a local party office or an MP/MLA, and 17% were asked by a candidate running for the party's leadership or a party nomination, or by the candidate's supporter. Herein lies a significant contrast to older party members, over 40% of whom were asked to join by someone formally associated with the party in one of these ways. This suggests that the parties are not reaching out to young people to the same extent, or with the same success, as to older Canadians.

Table 5. Reasons for Joining Party

Reason (Percentage indicating somewhat, very important)	All Youth	Yes to Leadership and/or Nomination	Yes to Specific Public Policy	Liberal	NDP	BQ	Asked to Join	SCPPM
Believe in policies	96	96	98	95	97	97	95	98
Make a difference in political & social issues	89	90	93	91	93	79	84	n/a
Influence party policy on a particular issue	66	67	70	69	67	58	61	56
Enjoy socializing with other people in party	64	58	68	79	46	58	62	n/a
Thought it would help my career	40	38	38	64	17	22	40	13
Thought it would help get government job	27	27	25	44	11	15	30	5

SCPPM: Study of Canadian Political Party Members (2000)

We know that many party members first joined their party at one of the moments when party members have the opportunity to influence the party either by voting to select the party leader or the party's candidate in their local electoral district. As Table 6 shows, just one-third of young party members joined in order to vote in a leadership contest. The number was higher among New Democrats, who had a leadership contest in 2003. Almost two in 10 party members indicated that they joined specifically to vote for a candidate in a nomination contest. Some respondents answered yes to both of these prompts, so the overall result is that four in 10 party members joined specifically for a leadership contest, a nomination contest or both. These numbers indicate the enduring power of leadership and nomination contests as means for Canadian parties to recruit new members. Table 5 also shows that those individuals who first joined to vote in a leadership or nomination contest differ only slightly from other party members in their reasons for joining the party. Most notably, they are substantially less likely than other party members to indicate that they joined because they enjoy socializing with other people in their party.

Table 6. Percentage Indicating They Joined for a Specific Reason

Party	Vote in Leadership Race	Vote in Nomination Contest	A Specific Policy Issue
Liberal	30% (157)	22% (114)	17% (91)
NDP	46% (160)	12% (40)	21% (72)
Bloc	15% (45)	18% (53)	51% (149)

Note: Each of these items asked the respondent whether they had joined because of a particular event (leadership, nomination, policy). A respondent could answer yes to all three, so they are not mutually exclusive categories. There were many missing values on this item, so a missing value was coded as a “no” in order not to artificially inflate the proportion of respondents who indicated that one of these stimuli caused them to join.

As Table 6 illustrates, youth members of the Liberal and New Democratic parties were more likely to be drawn into their party by a leadership or nomination contest than a specific policy issue. This is fairly typical of the patterns of party recruitment and retention in Canada. Historically, membership in Canadian political parties has tended to be cyclical, spiking during nomination and leadership contests and subsiding in subsequent years.

For youth members of the Bloc, however, a different pattern plays out. A specific policy issue – sovereignty – motivated a substantial number of Bloc members to join their party.¹⁰ This inter-party difference plays out in the items designed to further probe members’ reasons for joining the party (see Table 5). Youth members of the Bloc are substantially less likely than Liberals and New Democrats to want to influence party policy on a particular issue. To the extent that membership in the Bloc is driven by support for Quebec’s sovereignty, an issue to which the party is committed, it would be surprising to find young Bloc members more inclined to want to change party policy. Likewise, Bloc members are less likely to want to “make a difference in political and social issues.” Membership in the Bloc appears, from this, to be best interpreted as motivated by a desire to articulate support for the sovereigntist project.

Youth members of the Liberal and New Democratic parties also differ from one another somewhat, with young Liberals being much more likely to indicate that material motivations – career and government jobs – are significant motivators and also being more driven than other young party members by social incentives.

For the purpose of comparison, it would be ideal to know what motivations drove campus activists to join their organization. It is, however, difficult to draw direct comparisons with our sample of campus activists in this respect. We surveyed them as “activist” youth, rather than as members of one particular organization. In fact, fully two-thirds of the respondents to the

¹⁰ Respondents who indicated that they joined because of a particular policy issue were asked an open-ended question about what issue motivated them. While the responses ranged widely for NDP and Liberal respondents, they were virtually all focused on sovereignty or independence for Quebec among BQ respondents.

activist survey belonged to more than one category of group. Because of this, it was impossible to ask them meaningful questions about how they came to join their group. We did, however, ask them to tell us whether a selection of factors was important to them in their decision to belong to a group in each of a series of categories (Table 7).

Table 7. Reasons for Belonging to Group (can select more than one)

Reason	Community Service	Environment	Women's	Ethnic	Sports	Religious	Student
Social reasons	61	46	78	67	82	75	66
Effect changes in public policy	22	50	33	24	5	18	38
Encourage social change	55	77	64	41	9	39	58
Assist with career objectives	38	20	26	19	17	14	44
Improve my community	79	73	73	57	38	59	69

Note: The figures in the table calculate those who checked each reason, reported as a percentage of all those who belong to that type of group. The percentages in bold are the highest ones for each group category.

Table 7 shows that motivations varied depending on the type of group. Overall, though, social incentives were the most frequent motivators for the types of group that were social in character (sports organizations, ethnic groups, religious groups and women's groups). The closest comparative groups for our purposes are environment groups, student groups and community service groups. For these categories of organization, we find striking similarity with the motivations to join parties. While young Canadians joined parties largely to "make a difference in political and social issues," their activist counterparts joined organizations to encourage social change and to improve their communities.

If activists and partisans differ little in their motivations for joining a group, we are left with the puzzle of why they chose the organizational route that they did. To explore this more fully, we now turn to a comparison of the two groups of young Canadians in terms of their orientations toward the political system.

Orientations toward the Political System

In general terms, political participation is driven by a range of factors, including socio-economic status, socialization, political values and attitudes. The participants in this study have in common relatively high levels of socio-economic status, greater childhood exposure to political stimuli and a propensity to participate in social and political organizations. To help us understand why some of these individuals opted to join a political party and others did not, we compare young party members' and activists' orientations toward the political system.

There is compelling evidence of generational differences in attitudes toward the political system. Inglehart (1990) and Nevitte (1996) posit a value shift among younger cohorts of voters in post-industrial states, arguing that younger, post-materialist voters reject hierarchical forms of political participation. O'Neill (2001: 8) suggests that "younger generations are more likely to

engage in ‘new politics’ ... and to be involved with non-traditional institutions and processes such as grassroots social movements and protest behaviour.”

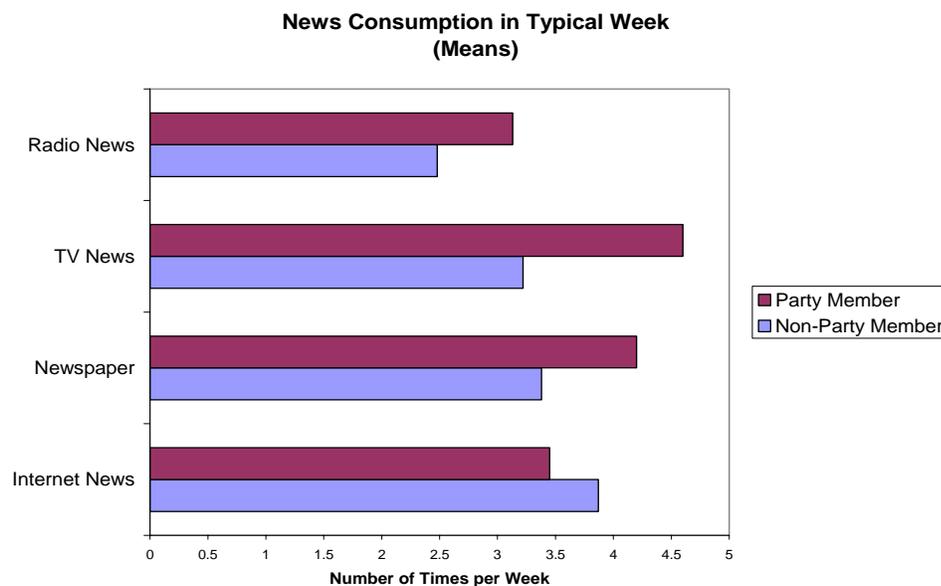
In the following section, we examine five dimensions of young Canadians’ interactions with and attitudes regarding the formal political system. We begin with orientations to the wider political system, with measures of attentiveness to politics, general evaluations of the political system and confidence in political and social institutions. We then move to more narrowly focused orientations, comparing party members’ and activists’ orientations toward political parties and their perceptions of strategic effectiveness.

Attentiveness

The first element of an individual’s orientation toward the political system is attentiveness to public affairs. Studies of youth non-voting in Canada and elsewhere have demonstrated that younger generations pay less attention to politics than prior generations, as manifested through lower rates of news consumption (Buckingham, 2002). The extent of attentiveness to news is an important facet of an individual’s orientation toward the political system, as this affects the level of political information available to that individual. Information, in turn, is significant in shaping both levels of activism and preferences (Gidengil et al., 2004).

Party members in our sample follow the news more avidly than their non-partisan counterparts. Party members report that they consume news from any source 15 times per week, on average. Non-party members consume news only 13 times per week. Figure 1 shows that party members are more frequent consumers of news from traditional sources – newspaper, television and radio – while activists are more likely than party members to visit a news site on the Web.¹¹

Figure 1.



¹¹ All differences in means are statistically significant at $p = 0.000$.

Evaluations of the Political System

It is plausible to think that different perceptions of the responsiveness of the political system to citizens would lead individuals to different kinds of political action. A sense of cynicism regarding established politics, for instance, might well discourage a young person from joining a political party and push him or her in the direction of an interest group.

Plausible as this argument is, we find very little evidence that our two subsets of young Canadians differ in their general evaluations of the political system. Table 8 shows that party members are slightly less inclined toward populism, as measured by the item advocating bringing decisions back to people at the grassroots.¹² Party members are also slightly less likely to think that politics and government are complicated, likely as a result of their greater consumption of news from various sources. Notably, neither the young party members nor the campus activists differ substantially from older party members surveyed in the SCPPM on these items.¹³

Table 8. General Orientations toward the Political System

Survey Statement (and Response)	Youth Party Member	Non-Party Member	SCPPM
We could probably solve most of our big national problems if decisions could be brought back to people at the grassroots. (% agree, strongly agree)	59% (713)	63% (308)	61% (1117)
Sometimes politics and government can seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on. (% agree, strongly agree) *	41% (509)	46% (228)	47% (865)
People like me have no say in what the government does. (% agree, strongly agree)	42% (518)	42% (207)	46% (858)

* Significant at $p = 0.05$ (chi-square); SCPPM: Study of Canadian Political Party Members (2000)

Confidence in Institutions

A third dimension of orientations to the political system is the respondent's confidence in various governmental and societal institutions. If party members expressed markedly more confidence in governmental or societal institutions than their non-partisan counterparts, it might help us to differentiate between more traditional party members on the one hand and more skeptical advocacy group members on the other hand. Although we find a slight tendency in this direction, it is not sufficient to differentiate in a meaningful way between party members and their activist counterparts (see Figure 2). While the party members consistently express greater confidence in each of the institutions (with the exception of the police), these differences are modest in size. The largest differences between the two groups lie in their confidence in their federal and provincial governments, suggesting that the partisans are somewhat more statist in

¹² This difference is not statistically significant.

¹³ For the purposes of comparability, only Liberal, NDP and BQ members were included in the analysis.

their orientations. This suggestion should not be overstated, however, as the activists do not express a greater confidence in non-state institutions like the media, unions or religion.¹⁴

The two groups are remarkably similar in the pattern of their confidence in institutions, expressing the greatest confidence in the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC), followed by public schools, the police and the civil service. It is notable that the apolitical, non-partisan elements of the state garner the greatest confidence among this emerging leadership group. This finding speaks to a skepticism not of government but of politics and politicians, which is perhaps characteristic of this generation. This sentiment was certainly observable in a workshop of young people convened by CPRN in March 2007. Participants repeatedly talked about being turned off by the overtly partisan nature of party politics. It is certainly noteworthy that even members of political parties have less confidence in these organizations than they do in governments, courts and unions. The finding speaks to the general decline in public confidence in political parties, a trend to which party members are apparently not immune (CPRN, 2007).

In fact, when we compare the young party members with all party members as surveyed in the 2000 SCPPM, we find more substantial differences (see Figure 3).¹⁵ Older party members also have the greatest confidence in the courts, but they are substantially less confident in them than are young party members. Older party members express a great deal of confidence in organized religion and political parties, while younger party members have more faith in governments and unions. Taken together, we see a suggestion of a generational shift away from confidence in non-state institutions, including political parties. Certainly, evidence from other industrialized democracies suggests that Canadians are not the only youth who lack confidence in political parties as organizations (Henn, Weinstein and Forrest, 2005; Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley, 2004).

¹⁴ The patterns of confidence in institutions would likely have been quite different had young members of the Conservative Party been included in the sample. They might not have shared their centre-left counterparts' confidence in courts and state institutions.

¹⁵ For the purposes of comparability, only Liberal, NDP and BQ members were included in the analysis.

Figure 2.

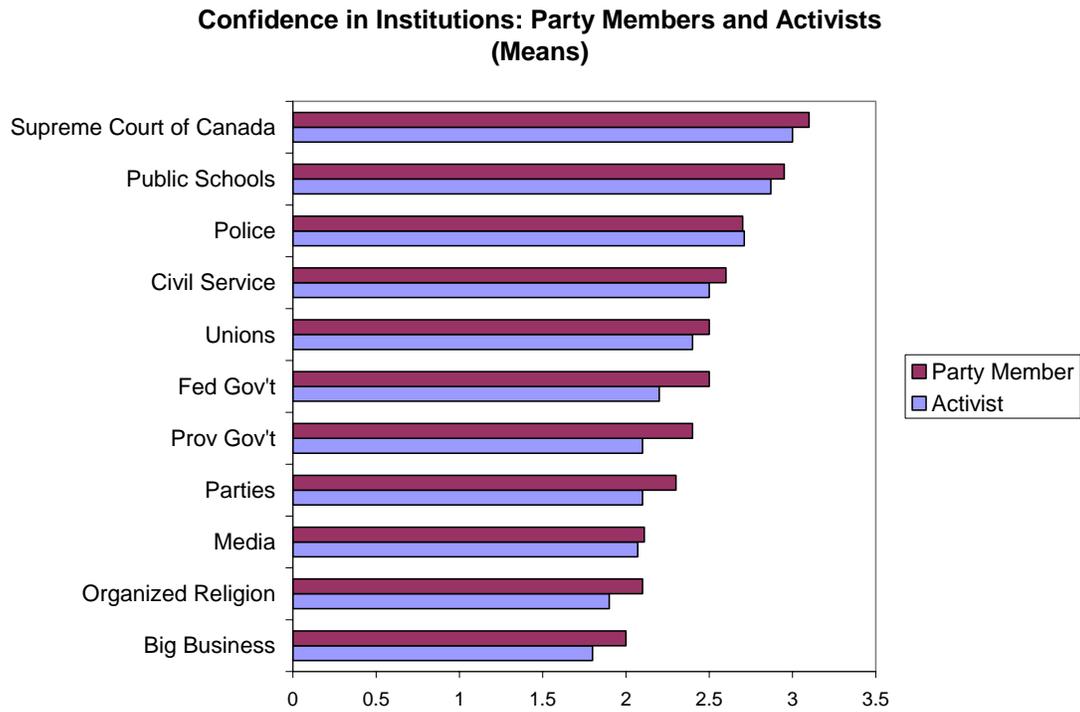
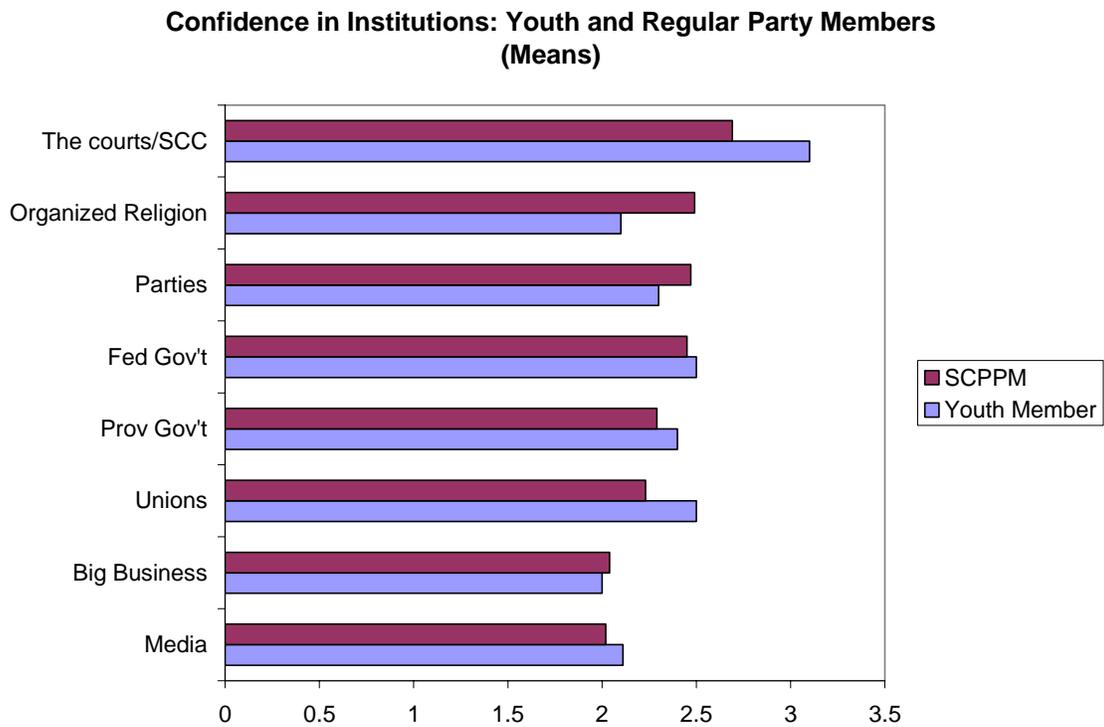


Figure 3.



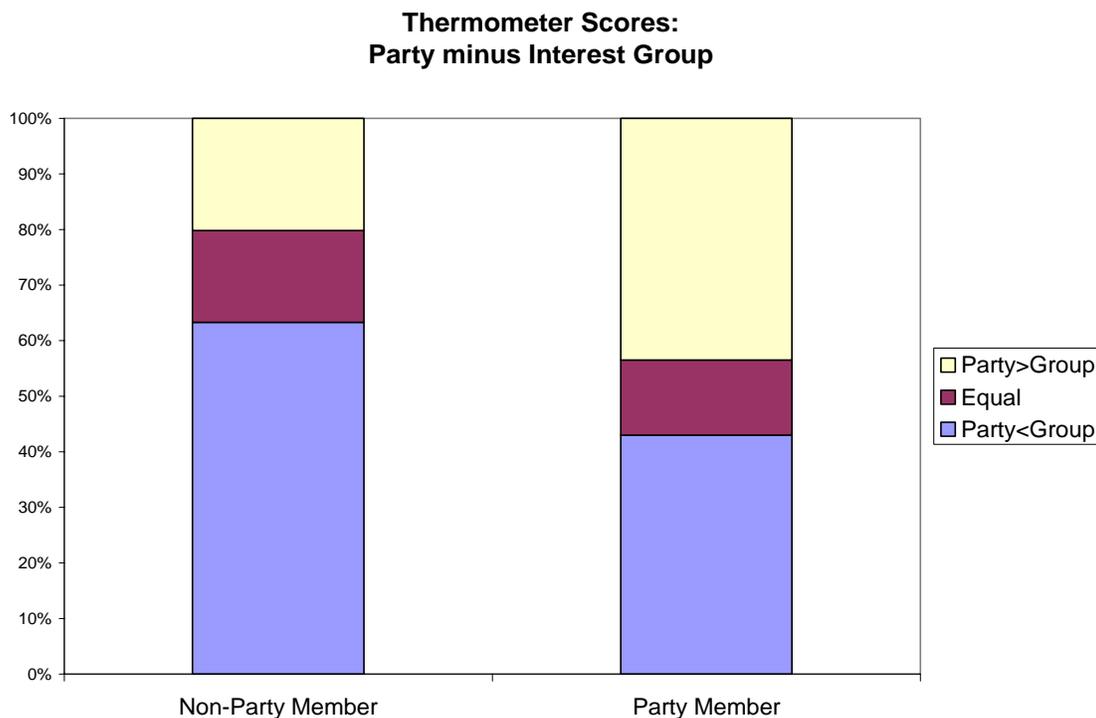
Note: SCPPM: Study of Canadian Political Party Members

Orientations toward Political Parties

A more focused comparison can be made between young party members and campus activists in their evaluations of political parties. Our most general measure of respondents' evaluations of political parties was a thermometer scale that asked each respondent to place political parties (in general) on a 100-point scale where zero is negative and 100 is positive. For party members, the mean score was 59, whereas the average score for group members was only 48. We also asked respondents to evaluate interest groups on the same scale, finding that party members gave groups a mean score of 58 and activists, 62. Although both groups were fairly positive toward interest groups, they differed substantially in their evaluation of parties.

Figure 4 shows that most respondents, whether party members or not, evaluated interest groups more positively than political parties. Among party members, only four in 10 gave parties a higher rating than interest groups. Among interest group members, only two in 10 gave parties a higher rating than groups.¹⁶ While it is interesting that non-party members were far more favourably inclined toward groups than parties, it is perhaps even more interesting that the majority of party members gave interest groups a thermometer score equal to or higher than the score they gave to political parties.

Figure 4.



To probe more deeply into respondents' views of parties, we asked both groups a battery of questions allowing them to evaluate political parties as organizations. In order to group these questions meaningfully for analysis, we conducted a factor analysis, a statistical technique that

¹⁶ Difference of means is statistically significant at $p = 0.000$.

considers the relationships between respondents' views on particular issues and identifies groups of variables on which respondents' views are predicated on a single underlying belief.¹⁷ We then compared responses using factor scores.

Figure 5.

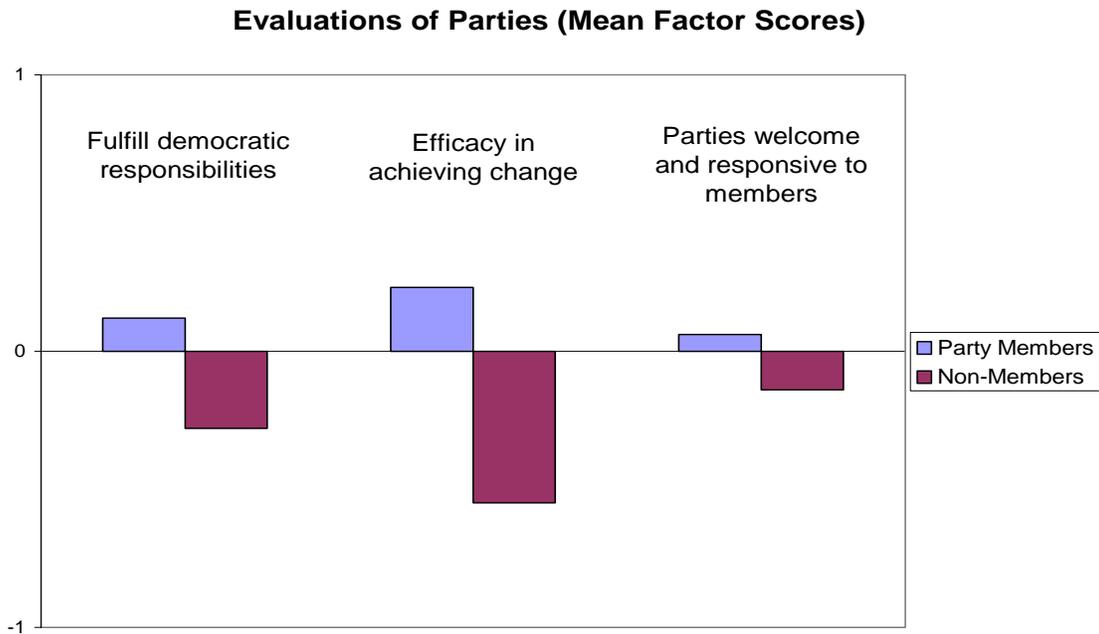


Figure 5 shows that young party members and campus activists vary considerably in their evaluations of parties on three dimensions. Anticipating the objection that these evaluations stem not from respondents' prior evaluations of political parties but rather from the party members' experiences with the parties, we separated out those respondents who had joined the party in the year before the survey because they were the least likely to have been influenced by their experiences within the party. They did not differ substantially from the longer-term party members.

The first dimension – parties' fulfilling their democratic functions – is the most general evaluation, and neither party members nor activists are particularly positive in this evaluation, though young party members are somewhat more positive. Looking at responses on the items that load most heavily on this factor (Table 9), we find, for example, that four in 10 young party members believe that parties do a good job of finding solutions to important problems, while less than two in 10 campus activists agree. Similarly, young party members are twice as likely as campus activists to think that parties do a good job of presenting clear choices on issues.

¹⁷ Details are available from the authors on request.

Table 9. Items Loading Most Heavily on Each Factor

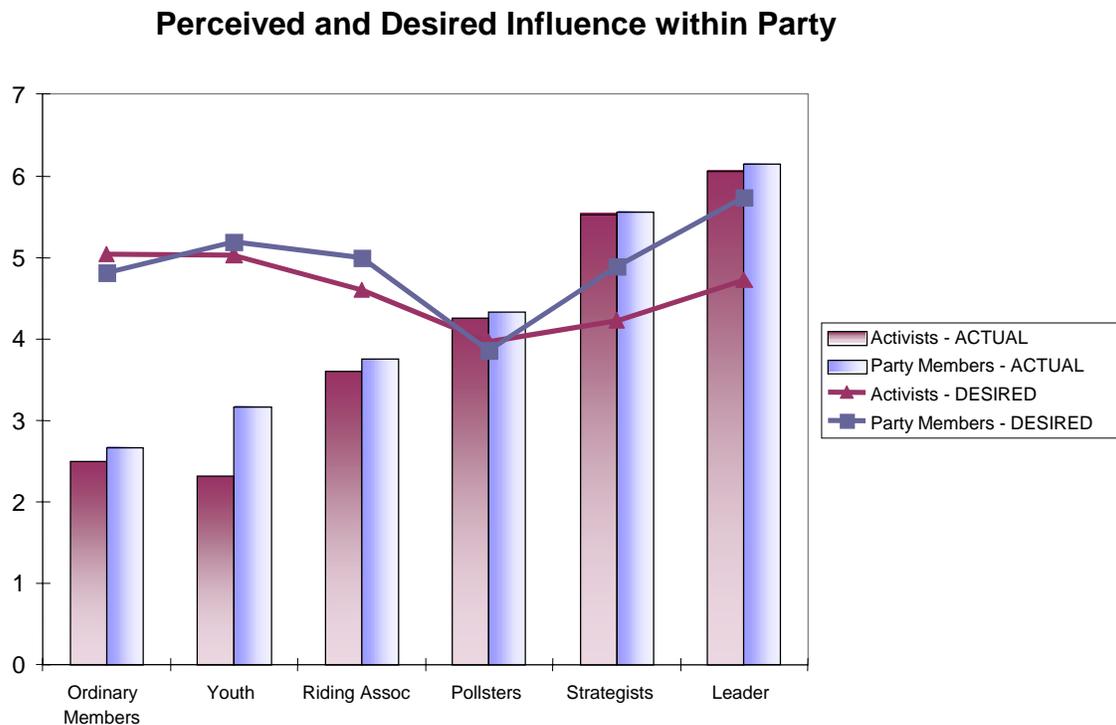
Dimension	Questions/Statements
Fulfilling democratic responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In general, how good a job do parties do at expressing the concerns of ordinary citizens? • In general, how good a job do parties do at finding solutions to important problems? • Some people say that parties are what ordinary people think, others that parties don't care what ordinary people think: what is your view? • In general, how good a job do parties do at presenting clear choices on the issues? • Political parties address the issues that young Canadians care about. • How often do you think political parties keep their promises? • Political parties generally try to look after the best interests of everybody and not just those who vote for them.
Efficacy in achieving change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which do you think is a more effective way to work for change nowadays: join a political party or an interest group? • If you want to achieve social change, how effective is joining a political party?
Welcoming and responsive to members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political parties spend too much time catering to minorities. • Political parties are not welcoming to people like me. • Decision making in political parties is too top-down; the grassroots cannot make its voice heard.

The largest difference between party members and campus activists comes on the second dimension, which taps the respondent's evaluation of parties as effective agents of political change. Young party members are reasonably sanguine about the potential effectiveness of parties; for instance, more than a quarter of them think that joining a political party is a very effective way of achieving social change. Only one in 10 activists agrees with this assessment. This difference suggests that the perceived efficacy of political parties may be a deterrent to potential party members. We pursue this question further below, where we examine evaluations of political parties relative to interest groups, and respondents' evaluations of various tactics. We also find a slight difference between the two groups in their evaluations of parties as internally democratic organizations. For instance, half of young party members and almost three-quarters of campus activists agree that decision making in political parties is too top-down. In response to the statement "Political parties are not welcoming to people like me," only 15% of young party members agree with the statement, as compared with 33% of campus activists.

To probe this difference more thoroughly, we asked both groups of respondents to indicate on a scale from one to seven, where one was very little influence and seven a great deal of influence, how much influence various partisan actors *actually had* and how much they *should have*. The findings are summarized in Figure 6. Both party members and campus activists indicated that they thought ordinary party members, youth party members and riding associations did not wield as much influence as they should, and that pollsters, strategists and the party leader were too

influential. Where the two groups differed the most substantially was on the question of how much influence party strategists and the leader should wield. While party members, on average, were content to see strategists match the power of ordinary members and the party leader to exceed the influence of party members, campus activists were more inclined to have ordinary members and riding associations exercise slightly more influence than either strategists or the leader. This suggests that the leader-focused, top-down organization of Canadian political parties may pose a barrier to parties' ability to recruit new, younger members, and it is consistent with the idea that younger cohorts of citizens are hostile to hierarchical organizations.¹⁸

Figure 6.



Overall, these findings suggest that two particular conceptions of efficacy are important to understanding the difference between party members and campus activists. The first conception of efficacy relates to the ability of a party member to make a difference within the party organization. Activists are less convinced than their partisan counterparts about the ability of party members to shape the direction of their party or engage meaningfully within it. It is striking in this regard that the majority of both party members and activists think that parties are insufficiently internally democratic. The second conception of efficacy relates to the ability of political parties to offer an effective vehicle for achieving social change within the broader political system. Here again, non-members express greater skepticism about the strategic effectiveness of joining a political party as a means of achieving social change.

¹⁸ Dissatisfaction with internal party democracy is not unique to young party members. See Young and Cross (2002).

Strategic Orientations

To further explore respondents' conceptions of the most effective ways of achieving social change, we asked them to evaluate the effectiveness of a variety of political tactics, ranging from joining a political party to demonstrating or striking. As Table 10 shows, young party members and campus activists differ little, except in their estimation of the effectiveness of joining a political party. Joining a political party is the most frequent response given by young party members, while it was the least frequent response from campus activists.

These findings are consistent with the views expressed by participants in the CPRN youth workshop. Many of these young Canadians expressed a preference for more direct political activity over activism in a political party. A common reason given for this preference was that party activity was too remote from any particular policy change that the young activist might wish to achieve. Alternatively, joining a protest or demonstration was seen as more direct action and more likely to have an impact.

Table 10. Party Members' and Activists' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Various Tactics

Members	% Very Effective		Activists
<i>Join a political party</i>	28.3	29.9	Attend a lawful demonstration
Join a boycott	26.5	23.6	Join a boycott
Attend a lawful demonstration	24.7	20.1	Join an illegal strike
Join an illegal strike	18.8	18.1	Occupy a building or factory
Occupy a building or factory	14.0	12.0	Sign a petition
Sign a petition	13.3	10.0	<i>Join a political party</i>

Determinants of Views of Parties

Having found that our two subgroups differ substantially in their views of political parties and interest groups and in their perceptions of the efficacy of groups, we are left with the question of why. Are these differences an artifact of their organizational experiences, or are they rooted in some other factors? Recalling the differences in socialization discussed above, it is plausible to think that differences in socio-economic status, socialization or news consumption might be driving these young Canadians' diverging perceptions of parties and interest groups.

To test this, we used the simplest evaluations of parties and interest groups available: the thermometer scores discussed above. To determine what factors affected respondents' evaluations of parties and groups, we conducted a regression analysis. This allows us to determine the effect of various explanatory variables while holding other factors constant. The results of the two regression analyses are set out in Table 11. Variables that have a statistically significant effect are indicated in bold.

Table 11. Determinants of Evaluations of Political Parties and Interest Groups (Thermometer Scores): Ordinary Least Squares Regression (OLS) Regression

Variable	Political Parties		Interest Groups	
	β		β	
Male	0.95		-5.95	***
No religion	-5.84	***	5.94	***
Attend religious services weekly or more	3.52		1.11	
Family income over \$100,000	2.84	*	0.21	
Talk politics frequently (growing up)	0.42		-0.46	
Parent a party member	0.37		-1.97	
Took high school civics course	2.47	*	2.58	
Took university political science course	6.65	***	3.55	*
Total news consumption per week	0.59	***	0.08	
Internet as % of news consumption	-1.24		1.29	
Years of party membership	0.60	**	-0.44	
R ²	0.10		0.04	

*** p = 0.001; ** p = 0.01; * p = 0.05

Although gender does not affect respondents' evaluations of political parties, it does influence evaluations of interest groups. All other things being held constant, being male decreases a respondent's thermometer evaluation of interest groups by almost six points. This is consistent with other literature demonstrating that young women show a marked preference for social movement and other non-traditional forms of political activity (Hooghe and Stolle, 2004).

Religion, or more accurately an absence of religious affiliation, exerts a strong effect on evaluations of both parties and interest groups. Reporting no religious affiliation depresses evaluations of political parties by almost six points and boosts evaluations of interest groups by the same amount. While it is difficult to draw a direct line between the practice of organized religion and belonging to a political party, it is worth noting that both formal religious organizations and political parties embody core doctrines that their members are expected to accept and often impose a hierarchical form of authority. Secularization, the rejection of hierarchical organizational forms and declining confidence in political parties appear, in this light, to be related phenomena.

Of the socialization variables included in the model, only the variables measuring exposure to politics via formal education (high school civics and university political science courses) have

robust effects. The most substantial of these comes with the almost seven-point increase in evaluations of political parties produced by taking a university Canadian politics course. Such courses usually include discussion of the function of political parties within the political system and may address the reasons for parties to impose discipline and be leader-driven. It is likely that the provision of this contextual information is responsible for these respondents' more favourable evaluations of parties. Notably, the effect of university political science courses on evaluations of interest groups is also positive, and substantial (almost four points).

An important question that this regression analysis allows us to answer is the effect that belonging to a party has on one's overall evaluations of parties and interest groups. To do this, we included a variable that measures the number of years the respondent has belonged to a political party. For those individuals who do not belong to a party, the value for this variable would be zero. We find that, for every additional year an individual has belonged to a political party, his or her evaluation of political parties on a 100-point scale increases by less than one point. Years of membership in a party have no statistically significant effect on evaluations of interest groups. This suggests that, for the most part, engaged young peoples' evaluations of parties and groups are formed prior to their decision to join or not to join a political party.

Policy Implications and Further Research

This analysis has demonstrated that the young Canadians who belong to political parties constitute a distinctive group, even when compared with other young Canadians who are attending university and are engaged by social and political issues. The young party members surveyed in this study tend to be more traditional in their orientation and outlook. They are more likely to attend religious services, attend university full time rather than working while attending school, consume news from traditional sources rather than the Internet and express confidence in major political and social institutions. The young party members also appear more deferential to authority, for instance, by accepting the dominant role of the party leader over party members. The young party members' families also tend to be rich in social capital; the members and their parents are engaged in their communities and in politics.

In many instances, the young party members' upbringings primed them to join parties. Their parents belonged to parties or were politically active in some way and initiated discussions of politics in the home. Beyond the home, the young party members have been more likely to seek out the high school and university courses that examine the political process. It follows from this that the young party members' perceptions of political parties as effective actors are much more positive than those of their peers.

Beyond identifying some of the ways in which young party members differ from their counterparts, we can use this data analysis to identify some of the reasons why young people who might have joined a party a generation ago would not do so today. First, the non-party members in our sample are skeptical of parties as institutions. They tend to see them as hierarchical organizations that do not welcome young people and that do not give members an adequate role in directing the organization. They prefer organizations in which the leader is equal or subservient to the membership as opposed to an organization in which the leader directs

the orientation of the organization. There is a culture clash between these egalitarian members of Generation Y and the top-down organization of Canadian political parties.

Moreover, parties do not appear to young Canadians to be meaningful vehicles for political activity. The non-party members we surveyed perceive parties as offering less satisfaction than an advocacy group for an individual who wants to influence public policy on an issue. Triangulating against surveys of the Canadian public suggests that the perceptions of non-party members are fairly typical of their generation. It is, however, interesting that a better understanding of the political system attained through formal education improves attitudes toward parties.

Beyond these perceptual issues, it is worth noting that Canadian party organizations have also changed over the past generation. As parties on the ground have shrunk relative to their professional apparatus and as plebiscitary notions of party democracy have replaced group-based notions (for instance, mail-in direct votes to replace leaders instead of delegated conventions), opportunities for young people to engage in a meaningful and fulsome way in these organizations have declined. The absence of a youth wing of at least one major party and the decline of campus clubs as a locus for activity have combined to make party membership a less prominent and less meaningful form of either social or political activity for young Canadians.

Many of these findings suggest processes of structurally grounded generational change. It follows that any consideration of policy reforms or changes to party practice would have to be adaptive: there is little likelihood of reversing the process of attitudinal change underlying these perceptions. Moreover, Canadian political parties closely guard their status as private organizations and are not inclined toward changes in public policy that govern their affairs.

To the extent that public policy could address any of the trends identified in this paper, it would take the form of encouraging more formal education centred on democratic institutions and practices. The data presented in this paper demonstrate that formal education focused on civics or Canadian politics increases young people's understanding of the role that parties play and the ways in which they can be effective agents of policy change. To the extent that more young Canadians are exposed to such information, political parties would likely benefit.

If the declining participation of young people in Canadian political parties is to be addressed, the most likely agents of change are the parties themselves. A party that wanted to attract and retain young party members would do well to focus resources on creating or maintaining a vibrant network of campus or youth clubs. Such organizations need to be both social and political in their organization, as social incentives matter more to young people than to older Canadians whose social networks are already well established. Simply put, paying for beverages and snacks for a campus event is a wise investment for a political party with a desire for a long-term membership base.

Beer and nachos is not enough, however. A party that desires a long-term connection with the distinctive generation of young Canadians must engage in meaningful internal reforms that enhance the involvement of individual party members beyond the moments of leadership selection and candidate nomination, bringing members into discussions of policy and direction.

Parties collectively have an incentive in improving their image, and they could do worse than to focus on younger Canadians in an effort to reverse perceptions about their internal structures and lack of policy direction. Canadian political parties do play a meaningful role in stimulating national debates on public policy, generating new ideas and implementing those ideas. Campus clubs and youth groups working across party lines might be a vehicle for communicating that message.

Finally, parties must try to reach young Canadians in new and innovative ways. A generation that has grown up with the Internet and related technologies might be reached using these technologies. More innovative use of the Internet and its capacity to encourage the development of virtual community would serve parties well in their efforts to recruit a new generation of members.

Social science research is struggling to come to terms with the generational changes in attitudes and values that are depressing voter turnout, membership in political parties and other traditional forms of political activity. There are limits to what knowledge can be gleaned by separating out respondents under the age of 30 in surveys of the broader electorate. Research focused directly on the target population will yield greater insight. While this study does focus in on the target population of party members and engaged non-members, future research on this question should try to capture a broader range of both party members and non-members to ensure that the sample is fully representative of the target population. The ability to compare these groups with members of their generation who are not fully engaged in politics would further enhance the findings.

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