



“What Do You Mean I Can’t Have a Say?” Young Canadians and Their Government

Charting the Course for Youth Civic and Political Participation

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Abstract

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This research paper is one of the six papers prepared for CPRN's Democratic Renewal Series, *Charting the Course for Youth Civic and Political Participation*. All research papers and CPRN's synthesis report for this project are available on the CPRN website at www.cprn.org. The six papers are listed below.

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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The observations and conclusions are those of the author(s).

Abstract

Much has been written about how the lives of young people are different than those of previous generations. The literature concurs in stating that anyone below the age of 30 has experienced more control over more aspects of their daily lives than any previous generation. The political process in Canada and other democracies has failed to adjust to this new reality, and, consequently, young voters are staying away from politics. The general aim of this study is to examine some of the generational reasons for the decline in electoral participation in Canada. While previous analyses have established who is less likely to vote, the objective here is to understand the reasons young voters are more likely to stay away from the polls, beyond their generic lack of interest. Based on the results of the Fireweed Barometer (2006), two International Social Survey Programme data sets (2005 – Citizenship; 2006 – Work and the Role of Government) and the Canadian Election Study data set (2004), this study suggests that some of the reasons for low voting turnout reside in the fact that younger voters hold a different set of priorities and interact with the political process differently than older cohorts. This study also suggests that solutions to this problem lie beyond piecemeal democratic reforms.

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