

Youth, Democracy and Civic Engagement: The ‘Apathy is Boring’ Surveys

Heather Bastedo (University of Toronto)
Ilona Dougherty (Apathy is Boring)
Lawrence LeDuc (University of Toronto)
Bernard Rudny (Apathy is Boring)
Tyler Sommers (Carleton University)

Apathy is Boring is a national charitable organization that uses art and technology to educate youth about democracy. Over the past several years, it has reached youth through “street teams” at concerts and festivals across Canada, and at the same time surveyed those in attendance to better understand their attitudes toward issues of democratic participation and civic engagement. In this paper, we analyze the content of 4837 responses to these surveys, which have been collected annually since 2008. Attitudes toward voting and elections, volunteerism and community action are among the topics covered in all of the surveys. In the most recent (2010-11) waves, we added questions on representation, civic duty, and major social issues. While much of the recent literature on this topic finds declining participation of youth in traditional electoral politics, the evidence examined in this paper provides a window on the mechanisms through which young people might become more fully engaged in politics, and the possible implications of such engagement.

Introduction

We begin this analysis with some observations about the general decline in electoral participation. It has been more than two decades since scholars began to take note of the decline in voting turnout in Canada and a number of other western democracies. In Canada, turnout in federal elections declined from a rather reliable level of about 75% in the mid-1980s to levels now around 60%, a decline of more than ten percentage points occurring over a relatively short time (figure 1). Similar declines took place over this period in other countries, although not always at the same times or at the same rates. Prior to 1993, declines in turnout in Canada were relatively few, and were typically explained by seasonal fluctuations owing to the absence of a fixed election timetable. In 1993 however, turnout in the federal election of that year declined abruptly below 70%, and over the following decade, continued to decline – reaching an historic low of 59% in the 2008 election, and rebounding only slightly in 2006 and 2011. In the same period, turnout in many of Canada’s provincial elections ben declining as well, suggesting this trend is not confined only to federal politics (LeDuc and Pammett, 2010).

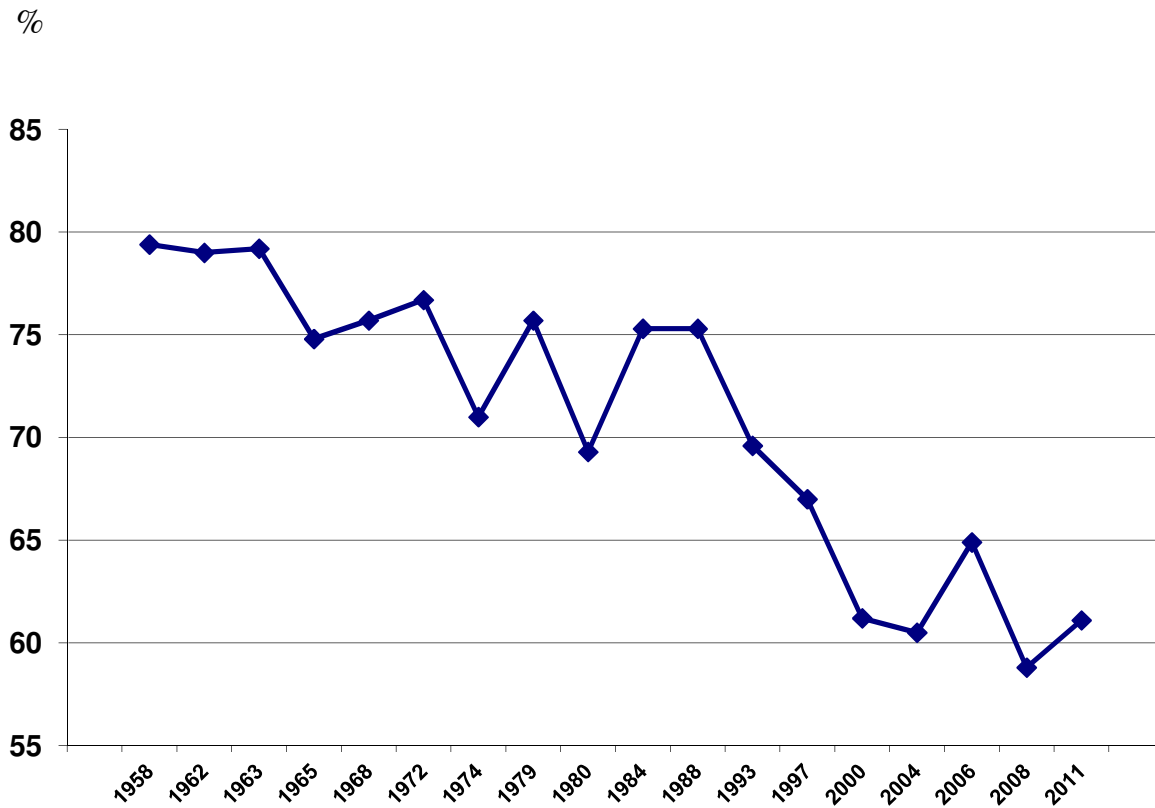
A survey carried out in cooperation with Elections Canada in 2002 to investigate the causes of the turnout decline identified two main characteristics of Canadian nonvoters. Almost half of all the nonvoters surveyed were under thirty years of age, and a majority of these expressed little interest in politics. These respondents assigned much less importance to electoral politics, and they did not exhibit the strong sense of ‘civic duty’ with respect to voting typically found among older cohorts. A picture thus emerged of a younger generation withdrawing or partially withdrawing from politics, a trend which has also been in evidence in many other studies, in Canada and elsewhere (Gidengil et al, 2003; Rubenson et al, 2004; Wass, 2007; Howe, 2010). The broader explanation of the turnout decline is thus to be found more in the

normal processes of population replacement which have been taking place over a number of years than in changes in the values and attitudes of the current electorate. A steady growth in the proportion of the youth population with little interest in politics and a belief that voting is not all that important has been driving turnout down in each successive election.

Figure 2 discloses the pattern of decline in turnout across the generations documented in the Elections Canada survey. Of course, it is not unusual to find lower rates of voting participation among the young. Such patterns are well documented in the literature on nonvoting in Canada and in other countries (Bakvis, 1991; Rose, 1997).

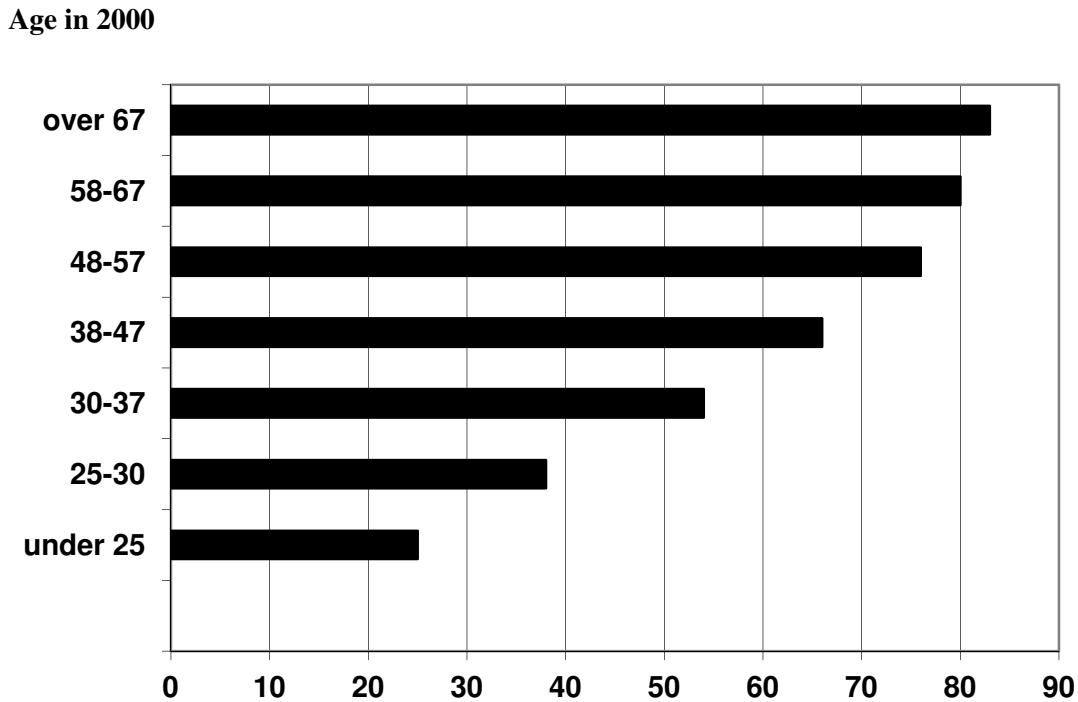
.....

FIGURE 1
Turnout in Canadian federal elections, 1958-2011



Elections Canada: www.elections.ca

FIGURE 2
Estimated voting participation rates by age cohorts, 2000 federal election



Jon H. Pammett, and Lawrence LeDuc, *Explaining the Turnout Decline in Canadian Federal Elections: A New Survey of Non-Voters*. Ottawa: Elections Canada, 2003

.....

But lower participation rates among the young have generally been interpreted as a pattern associated with specific behavioural characteristics of the life cycle. As people age, they become more politically aware and engaged. Evidence suggests however that such changes are occurring more slowly than they have in the past, and that voters, when they do begin to enter the electorate, are doing so later in life (Pammett et al, 2001). Since the mid to late 1970s, each newly eligible cohort of voters has been increasingly disinclined to believe that elections are important or meaningful – a view that stands in stark contrast to that of the generations that entered the electorate before 1974. Accompanying this growing disbelief in the efficacy of elections is a propensity to disengage from electoral participation.

The data referenced above tell us a good deal about *who* is not participating in traditional electoral politics, but they provide only a hint of the reasons *why* younger voters may be disengaging from politics in such large numbers, or more specifically, why the sense of duty to voting has declined in this generation of young people. Qualitative approaches, such as focus groups and internet surveys, have been able to enhance our understanding of contemporary attitudes of young people toward politics, evidenced in two recent studies. Youth have not necessarily made up their minds that politics is irrelevant, but many have difficulty making a connection, and instead focus their attention on other things. They have radically different media habits than previous generations who were exposed to political debate more regularly (Wattenberg, 2008; Milner, 2010). And youth may not actively seek out information about political affairs, but that does not preclude them from being receptive if information is presented. They do possess a sense of civic responsibility even if they feel less guilt in not voting than older generations, and their sense of civic responsibility takes differing forms (LeDuc, Pammett and Bastedo, 2008). Youth are also more difficult to contact by traditional means, and therefore less likely to be mobilized by political parties, than older voters (Nickerson, 2006).

A recent qualitative study of newly eligible young voters in the 2008 federal election conducted on *Facebook* (Goodman et al, 2011) provided the insight that more can be learned about the feelings of contemporary youth toward politics when the respondents are operating in a more natural setting than is provided by the typical focus group or telephone survey. The data to be examined here were collected in such a setting. However, unlike the *Facebook* study, in which only 33 volunteer respondents participated, the *Apathy is Boring* surveys involved thousands of young respondents contacted at a series of cultural events and concerts over a period of several years. While these cannot be said to constitute any sort of “random” sample of young people, they can, in conjunction with the other types of studies mentioned above, enhance our understanding of the attitudes of contemporary youth toward the political world in which they live.

The *Apathy is Boring* surveys

Apathy is Boring is a national, non-partisan, charitable organization that was established in 2004. Its mission is to educate young Canadians about democracy using art and technology. More specifically the organization seeks to increase youth voter turnout, increase youth engagement in their communities, and to promote dialogue between youth and elected officials. Along with its year-round activities, the organization conducts youth mobilization campaigns during federal, provincial, and municipal elections.

The organization has several unique characteristics. Its work targets youth between the ages of 18 and 35 – those who are eligible to vote, but are no longer at school and less likely to live with a parent. *Apathy is Boring* also focuses its efforts on youth who are not currently engaged in the democratic process, be it as voters or by other means. This distinguishes its work from other organizations that work through schools or focus exclusively on young leaders. The organization relies heavily on research from the social sciences to inform the structure of its programs, and also conducts its own research. In the past, *Apathy is Boring* has conducted studies on behalf of Elections Canada looking at electoral accessibility as well as youth

mobilization (Dougherty and Smith, 2008; Rudny et al., 2011). The surveys used for this analysis are an example of this research-programming combination, as they are used to simultaneously reach out to youth and also collect data about their attitudes and democratic participation.

The surveys to be examined here were conducted as part of Apathy is Boring's "street team" program. These street teams are composed of young volunteers who attend concerts, festivals, and other cultural events on behalf of *Apathy is Boring*. The volunteers approach youth at these events, ask them to complete surveys, and tell them about the organization. The surveys were gathered over a period of four years, beginning with an event in Halifax in September 2008 (See Appendix A for a complete list of the events). In all, 4837 responses to these surveys were collected over the entire period. Attitudes toward voting and elections, volunteerism and community action are among the topics covered in all of the surveys (See Appendix B for a copy of the current questionnaire). In the most recent (2010-11) waves, we added questions on representation, civic duty, and major social issues. To date, we have obtained 1093 responses to the new form survey containing these additional items. In the analysis following, we use the complete dataset to examine the variables contained in all waves of the study and the smaller (more recent) file to analyze the items added in 2010-11.

Profile of the respondents

In interpreting the results presented here, it should be stressed that our respondents do *not* constitute a random sample of the Canadian population *or* of Canadian youth more generally. As is seen in table 1, many of the events took place in large cities (Montreal, Toronto, Ottawa, Vancouver, Calgary, Halifax), and respondents are self selected to the extent that they chose to attend a particular event. Insofar as there is a common thread among respondents, it is based on certain non-political interests: the respondents are young people who attend popular music festivals or community and art events. In spite of the large number of respondents to the surveys, care should be taken to avoid generalizations to larger, more diverse populations. Some further caveats are appropriate in this regard, given that not all demographic or behavioural characteristics of our respondents mirror those of the larger populations (although some do). For completeness, we use the 2010-11 survey data to obtain a profile of the A is B respondents (figure 3), although there is little variation in the characteristics shown in figure 3 from those found among the survey respondents in the earlier years.

Just under half (49%) of the 2010-11 respondents were between the ages of 18 and 24. Within this subset, the largest concentrations were age 18 (9% of the total) and 19 or 22 (8% each). Thirteen percent of the respondents were between 13 and 18, with nearly half (6%) of these being age 17. Only seven percent of the respondents were over the age of 35. Females were somewhat overrepresented (60%). Francophones made up 29% of the 2010-11 respondents.

Students at some level comprised half of the respondents (51%), and three quarters reported that they were working. Thus, nearly one-third (32%) were combining work and school in some form. Only seven percent were in neither school nor the labour force at the time of the surveys. As might be expected from the age distribution, education levels varied considerably, but tended toward college or university (figure 3). More than half (58%) were in or had completed university, and another 23% were in or had completed college or CEGEP.

TABLE 1
Regional distribution of respondents to *Apathy is Boring* surveys, 2008-2011

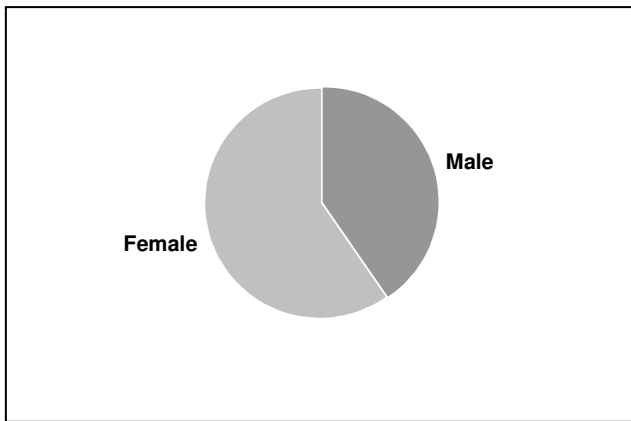
	<u>Quebec</u>	<u>Ontario</u>	<u>West</u>	<u>Atlantic</u>	<u>North</u>	
Montreal	1821					
Other Quebec	309					
Toronto		395				
Ottawa		374				
Other Ontario		337				
Vancouver			91			
Burnaby			190			
Cumberland			101			
Calgary			370			
Edmonton			135			
Saskatoon			27			
Halifax				161		
Antigonish				258		
Sackville				116		
Iqaluit					30	
Whitehorse					122	
	2130	1106	914	535	152	4837

.....

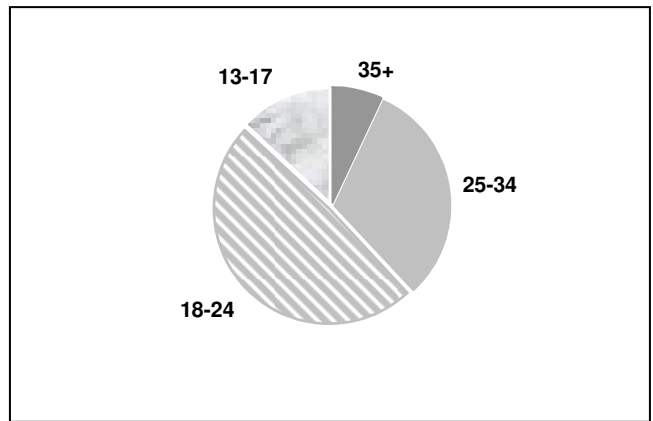
Compared to a larger and more diverse segment of the population, the A is B respondents would be considered a more active and engaged group than would likely be found among young people in other settings. Nearly two-thirds (64%) responded “yes” to a question that asked whether they engaged in any volunteer activity, and an equivalent number (65%) reported that they had voted in at least one election at some level (federal, provincial, or local). About a fifth of the respondents were not eligible to vote, either for reasons of age or citizenship. Only 15% of those surveyed who *were* eligible reported that they had never voted in an election.

FIGURE 3
Demographic and behavioural profile of the 2010-11
Apathy is Boring survey respondents [N=1093]

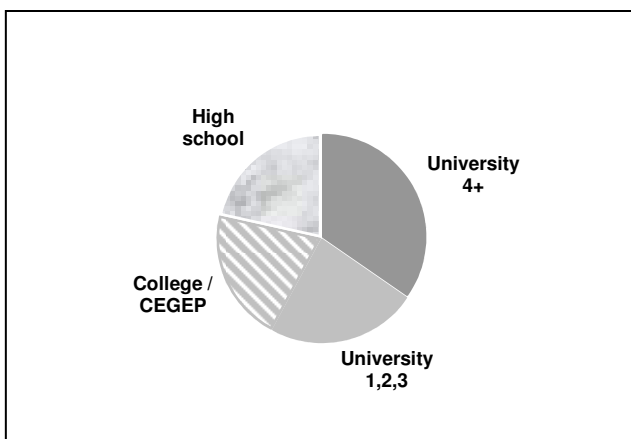
Gender



Age



Education



Language

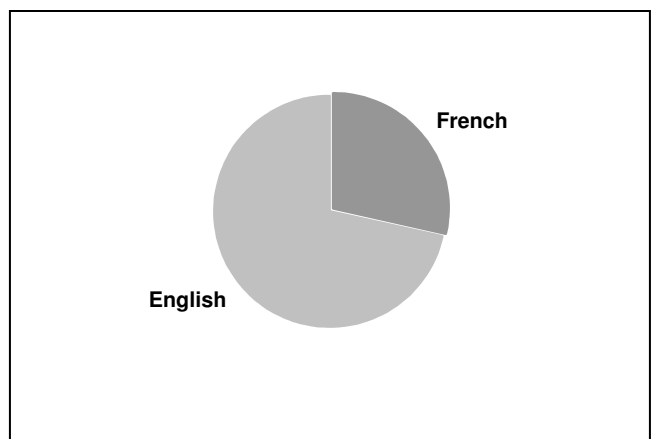
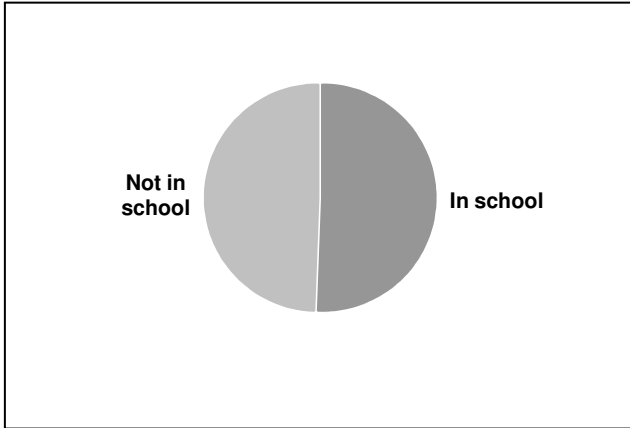
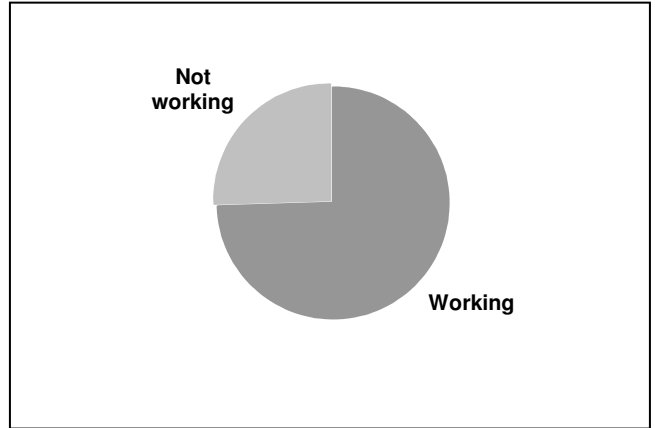


FIGURE 3 (cont.)

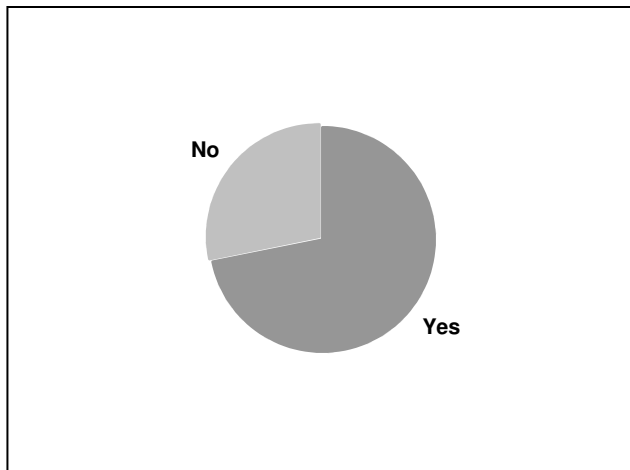
In school?



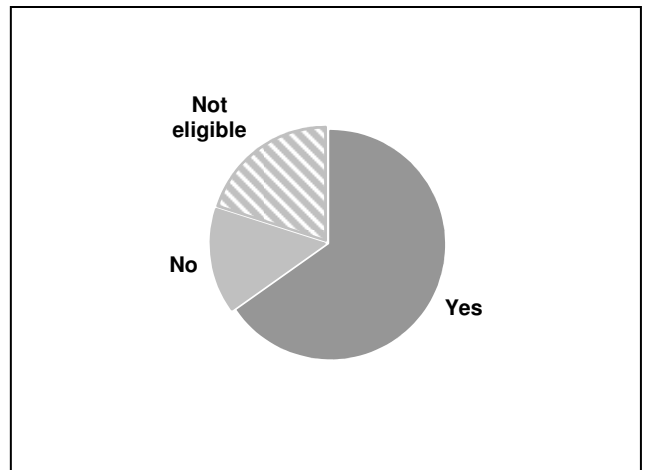
Working?



Volunteer?



Voted in an election?



Voting

Respondents in all waves of the survey were asked whether they had voted in the past five years. This question was asked as follows with respect to federal, provincial and local elections over the past five years.

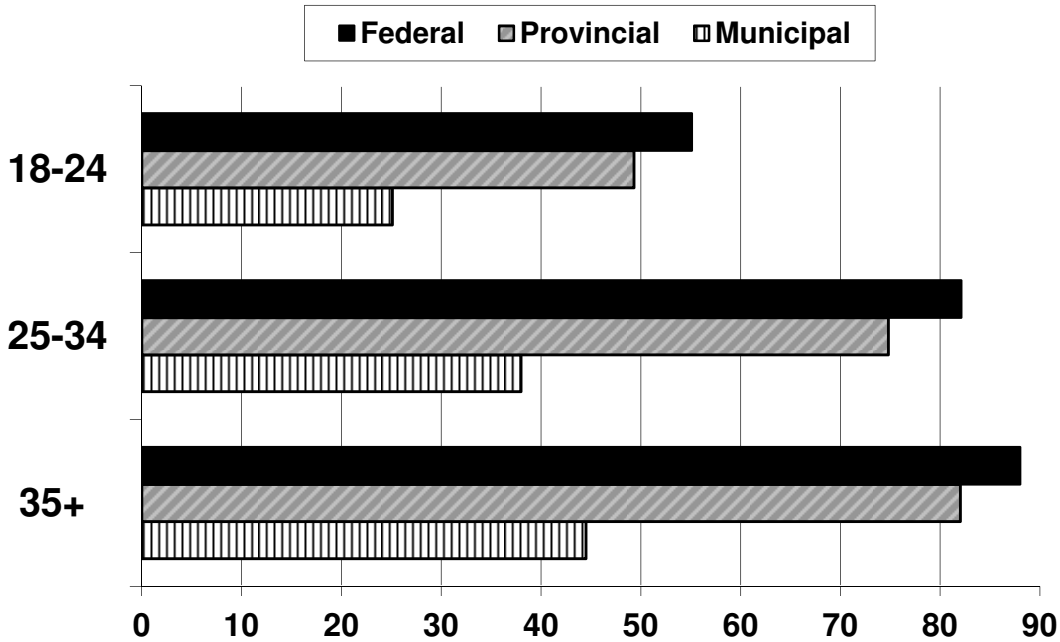
Which past elections have you voted in the past 5 years? (Circle all that apply)		
Federal	Provincial	Municipal

Fifty-five percent of respondents in the age group 18-24 claimed to have voted in a federal election in the past five years (figure 4). 82% of respondents aged 25-34 and 88% of those aged 35 and over also claimed to have voted in a federal election, which is consistent with other literature establishing that younger Canadians have lower turnout rates relative to older Canadians (compare figure 2). Typically the turnout rates for provincial and municipal elections are lower than those of federal elections and the results here are no exception. Forty-nine percent of respondents aged 18-24 claimed to have voted in a provincial election, 75% of those in the 25-34 age group, and 82% of those in the 35+ age group also claimed to have voted. Municipally 25% of respondents aged 18-24 claimed to have voted, 38% aged 25-34, and 45% 35+. Even allowing for the fact that surveys tend to over report voting, it is clear that the A is B respondents are a group that is more likely to vote than a comparable subset of the under 35 population. It should be noted however that these figures cannot be compared exactly with those from surveys such as the election studies, as the reference is to a hypothetical period of five years, during which multiple elections at the different levels may have occurred. Federal elections in 2004, 2006, and 2008, for example, will have provided some of these respondents with more than one voting opportunity at that level.

Respondents were also asked whether their parents voted. A very substantial majority (87%) of the 2008-11 respondents (N = 3859) reported that their parents vote. The reference however was not specific either to level or to any particular election or time period. As might be expected, there is a relationship between voting of the respondents and that of their parents. For those who indicated that their parents vote, the rate of voting in a federal election was 68% (of those eligible to vote). For those who indicated that their parents do *not* vote, the rate of voting in a federal election was twenty points lower (48%). Nevertheless, the Phi coefficient of .13 suggests that the relationship between these variables, while significant ($p < .001$) is not completely explained by family considerations. Many of the young people surveyed will vote, even if their parents do not, and parents voting is, at best, only a weak predictor of future voting participation among youth. In subsequent sections of the paper, we examine two other types of participation – volunteering and response to a community problem.

FIGURE 4

Percent of respondents who report having voted in a federal, provincial or municipal election, by age: *Apathy is Boring* surveys, 2008-2011*



*Eligible voters only. N = 2757

.....

Duty

As with age, duty has been a mainstay in the voting literature, and can be traced back as far as Anthony Downs, (1957). It has been an important attitudinal factor in explaining more recent generational differences in voting participation (Blais, 2000; Rubenson et al, 2004; Goodman et al, 2011). The A is B survey included a number of variables designed to determine how respondents felt about a perceived duty to vote, but also how duty related to other elements of political engagement, such as voting compared to other forms of participation; the role of knowledge in duty, and finally, if voting is important, but not necessary.

Which of the following ideas do you agree with? (Check **all** that apply)

- I have a duty to vote in every election even if I'm busy or not interested.
- There are better ways of participating in politics than voting.
- People who know more about politics have a greater responsibility to vote.
- Voting in elections is important but not necessary.

TABLE 2
Percentage of agreement with duty of voting

a. Apathy is Boring surveys, 2010-11 [N=1093]

	<u>% in agreement</u>
Duty to Vote (even if busy)	76
Better ways to participate than voting	37
Knowledgeable have greater responsibility	25
Voting is not necessary	12

b. Crosstabulation of duty and federal vote [N=1093]

	DUTY TO VOTE		BETTER WAYS		KNOWLEDGE		NOT NECESSARY	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Vote	67%	41%	64%	58%	59%	61%	43%	63%
Not Vote	33%	59%	36%	41%	41%	39%	57%	37%
PHI	.23**		.05		.02		.14**	

** p < .001

.....

The majority (76%) of respondents felt that, even if they were busy, they had a duty to vote (see table 2a). Similarly, we found that only 37% of those polled felt that other forms of participation were better than voting. Most respondents do not feel that there are better ways of participating in politics. Only a small minority of those surveyed (25%) feel that those who have more knowledge have a greater obligation to vote than others who may know less. And similarly, few

(12%) agreed that voting is important but not necessary, painting a picture of commitment to voting that is quite consistent.

Nevertheless, when these variables are entered into crosstabulation with federal voting a different picture emerges. Most of the respondents (76%) believe that they have a duty to vote, that voting is the best way to participate; that knowledgeable and less knowledgeable alike have a responsibility to vote, and that voting is both important and necessary. But those who agree that they have a duty to vote even when they are busy, and those who feel that voting is both important and necessary, are significantly more likely to vote, and these relationships are moderate and somewhat strong, producing a Phi coefficient of .23 and .14 respectively (table 2b). In this sense, then, the A is B respondents are more in line with the patterns typically found among older generations of voters, both with respect to a propensity to engage in electoral participation and doing so, at least in part, out of a sense of civic duty.

Values

Taking into account the post materialist contention that asserts that values changes in this generation of youth may be in part responsible for the change in attitudes toward voting (Inglehart 1971; Nevitte 1996) as well as the growing literature that calls for an evaluation of the capacity of the political context (Bastedo 2012, Franklin 2004, Pharr et. al. 2000), values assessments were included in the 2010-11 survey. To better understand how young people felt about how political representatives were reflecting their values, respondents were asked to indicate if they were happy, or, alternatively unhappy with the way elected officials represented a series of values – diversity, equality, integrity and accountability, as follows.

Are you unhappy with the way that elected officials represent your values in any of the following areas? (Check **all** that apply)

- Diversity (not enough women, young people, minorities, etc.)
- Equality (too much difference between rich and poor)
- Integrity (dishonesty or corruption among political leaders)
- Accountability (politicians listen to the people outside of election time)

The A is B respondents were largely unhappy with the overall degree to which political leaders reflected their values. Reviewing Table 3a we find that youth are least happy with the integrity of elected officials, with 69% of young people expressing dissatisfaction. This is closely followed by 6 out 10 respondents indicating displeasure with both equality and accountability. And finally, 45% of those surveyed were dissatisfied with the way that elected officials represent diversity. In all but one of these four dimensions (diversity), the majority of the respondents were unhappy with the way in which elected officials represent their values.

The importance of values congruence to engagement is made more clear when we examine a crosstabulation of values and voting participation in a federal election. All four values variables produce moderately strong relationships which are statistically significant (see table 3b). The relationship between being happy with the way diversity or equality is represented and voting produces a Phi of .14 for these two attributes, and .15 for integrity. The relationship between being happy with the accountability of elected officials and voting is somewhat stronger, producing a Phi of .21. It is clear in these results that the failure of politicians to adequately reflect their values may partially account for the withdrawal of young people from electoral participation – a pattern which has also been found in other recent studies of Canadian youth (Bastedo, 2012; Howe, 2010). In the following sections of the paper, we explore further these links to patterns of participation, beginning with voting but also considering other types of activities such as volunteering or acting upon a problem in the community.

.....

TABLE 3
Percentage unhappy with the way elected officials represent values

a. Apathy is Boring surveys, 2010-11 [N=1093]

	<u>% unhappy</u>
Diversity	45
Equality	60
Integrity	69
Accountability	60

b. Crosstabulation of values and federal vote [N=1093]

	DIVERSITY		EQUALITY		INTEGRITY		ACCOUNTABILITY	
	Happy	Unhappy	Happy	Unhappy	Happy	Unhappy	Happy	Unhappy
Vote	68%	54%	66%	52%	66%	50%	69%	48%
Not Vote	32%	46%	34%	48%	34%	50%	31%	52%
PHI=	.14**		.14**		.15**		.21**	

** p < .001

Dealing with a problem in the community

In all waves of the survey, a question was asked regarding how the respondents would approach an unspecified “community problem.” This question was designed to gauge the degree of involvement in political affairs beyond voting. Although the question was intended to prompt a single choice, many respondents chose more than one action, so the item is treated here as multiple response.

If you noticed a problem in your community, what would you do?

- a) I would contact an elected official (such as my Member of Parliament or Band Councilor)
- b) Organize a group of friends to hold a public demonstration
- c) Sign a petition
- d) Blog or Twitter about it
- e) Text or email your friends
- f) Probably nothing

As is seen in figure 5, the most likely action was signing a petition (43%). Slightly under a third of the respondents indicated “probably nothing”, meaning that 7 out of ten surveyed would likely do something if there was a problem in their community (figure 5). This response is rather high in comparison with some other types of political activity. Nevertheless, it does not specify what that ‘something’ is, although the alternatives presented suggest a number of possible actions. More expected, we find that smaller numbers of young people are likely to Blog or Tweet, text or email; organize a demonstration, or contact an elected official, hovering around the 20 percent range, as these actions, for the most part, require a greater effort than applying a signature or doing nothing.

Turning to crosstabulation between community involvement and voting, we find that four of the six variables produce a significant relationship. Those respondents that would contact an elected official were also more likely to vote and this relationship is modestly strong and significant ($\Phi = .15$), whereas the relationship is weaker for those who would choose to Blog or Tweet, or sign a petition. However, young people who would choose to do nothing, ($\Phi = -.16$) are significantly less likely to go to the polls at election time. And texting or sending an email, or organizing a demonstration had no influence on voting. In sum, where activities that require less energy, are likely to be chosen, the choice of activity differs in its impact on voting among young people.

FIGURE 6
Response to a problem in the community
Apathy is Boring surveys, 2008-11 [N=3271]

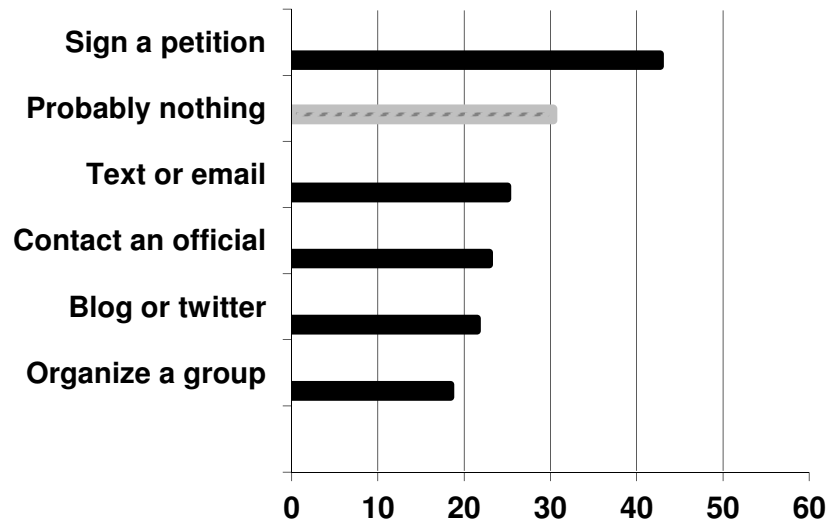


TABLE 4
Crosstabulation of community problem responses and federal vote [N=2407]

	Organize Demonstration		Contact Elected Official		Sign Petition		Blog/ Twitter		Text/ Email		Probably Nothing	
	Org.	Not	Contact	Not	Sign	Not	Blog	Not	Text	Not	Nothing	Something
Vote	68%	67%	81%	65%	72%	64%	73%	66%	67%	67%	54%	71%
Not Vote	32%	33%	19%	35%	28%	36%	27%	34%	33%	33%	46%	29%
PHI	.01		.15**		.08**		.06		.00		.16**	

** p < .001

Volunteering

A substantial majority (61%) of the A is B respondents in the larger dataset (2008-11) answered “yes” in response to a question that asked “Do you volunteer your time?” This number is higher than was found in response to a similar question asked in a recent youth survey conducted by Elections Canada (45%). Both surveys however suggest that young people are highly likely to engage in this type of activity. The A is B survey however also included a question asking the respondents to elaborate on what motivates them to get involved if they answered ‘yes’ to volunteering their time. Respondents were asked to select among suggested motivators designed to provide insight as to what drives citizen engagement ranging from wanting to keep politicians honest, having friends and family who are involved, out of sheer sense of duty, and for more personal reasons such as gaining experience.

If you answered yes to question 5, what motivates you to get involved?
(Check **all** that apply)

- I want politicians to live up to their promises.
- My family and friends are involved too.
- I feel a sense of duty.
- CV building / To gain work experience.

The results of this question found the most respondents (45%) indicating that their sense of duty drives them to volunteer and participate. The other responses were clustered around a similar benchmark with wanting politicians to live up to their promises (30%) gathering the second highest response rate, with family and friends being involved (28%) and to develop a resume or gain experience (26%) following respectively. The image emerging from this data is that the real motivator may not have been captured by this answer or that volunteers are unsure as to exactly why they choose to become involved, but also that there are a number of different motivators. Alternatively, it could be a product of being required to volunteer in order to graduate high school, as students are now required to do in the province of Ontario, and in many of the Quebec school boards. They also reflect the emergent pattern that surfaced in the duty and values sections, with sense of duty and accountability both being important.

The motivation to volunteer however is not strongly related to a motivation to vote. As is shown in table 6, the relationship between voting in a federal election and volunteering is barely significant, with those who report volunteer activity being only slightly more likely to vote than those who do not. There is likewise only a slight relationship between the two other activities – volunteering and response to a community problem (data not shown). Of the three types of engagement examined here, it is clear that substantial numbers of the young respondents will engage in any or all of them, but there is no clearly predictable pattern of engagement based on any single activity, including voting. Here again, this could very well be a product of *required* volunteerism as well as an indication that engagement patterns are not all the same.

FIGURE 7
Do you volunteer your time?
Apathy is Boring Surveys, 2008-11 [N=2739]

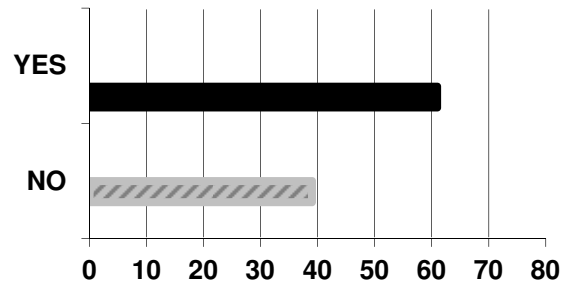


TABLE 6
Crosstabulation of volunteer activity and voting in a federal election*

Vote	Volunteer	
	Y	N
Y	68%	62%
N	32%	38%
PHI	.06	

*Eligible voters only, N=2947

Issues

Respondents to the 2010-11 *Apathy is Boring* surveys were also asked to indicate the issues facing Canadian society that they felt were most important to them. The question specified a number of issues that respondents were asked to rank order in importance, but they were also given the option of adding other issues to the set. Following is the format in which the question was asked in the 2010-11 surveys.

What do you think are the important issues facing our society today? (Number them from most to least important: 1, 2, 3, etc.)	
___ Keeping the Economy Strong	___ Providing Quality Health Care
___ Protecting the Environment	___ Fighting Poverty
___ Avoiding War	___ Other (please specify)
___ Creating Jobs	_____
___ Educational Opportunities for Everyone	

The A is B respondents collectively rated the environment as the most important issue facing the country, followed closely by health care (table 7a). It is not surprising that environmental issues might be prioritized by young survey respondents, but the nearly equal emphasis on health care was unexpected. Education, poverty and war (in that order) also have a relatively high priority among this group. Jobs and the economy, the issues that so often rank highest in general surveys of the mass public, trail far behind.

An approximate comparison of the A is B respondents with those in other public opinion surveys can be found in table 7b. The comparisons are not exact due to differences in question wording and coding of issues. But the general patterns can be discerned. In all four of the polls show in table 7b, jobs and the economy received the highest priority – a pattern found in nearly all public opinion surveys of the past few years. The environment – the issue ranked highest by the A is B respondents – does not rank as high in surveys of the general public, although it is routinely mentioned as an important issue. Other issues highly ranked by our respondents – education, poverty, war – do not rate as highly in general surveys (table 7b).

There are relatively few significant variations among our respondents with respect to their ranking of issues. Respondents over the age of 25 were somewhat more likely to rank the environment highest (42%), compared with the youngest (under 20) age group (27%). Older respondents were also somewhat more likely to prioritize jobs (20%) vs. the youngest group (14%). Variations by age on other issues are minor. There were few differences by gender, although men were somewhat more likely to prioritize the economy (22%) compared with women (17%), and slightly less likely to rank poverty highest (25% vs. 27%). There were few significant differences among respondents when compared by language or education. Francophone respondents were slightly more likely than Anglophones to assign a higher ranking to war or poverty. Differences by level of education were insignificant.

TABLE 7
Ranking of most important issues facing our society today

a. *Apathy is Boring* Surveys, 2010-11

	<u>% ranking first*</u>	<u>mean ranking</u>
Environment	31	3.4
Health care	30	3.2
Education	27	3.4
Poverty	24	3.7
War	21	4.5
Jobs	16	4.5
Economy	16	5.0
Other	4	4.2

*Multiple response [N = 1093]

b. Other recent polls, 2009-11

	<i>Maclean's</i>	<i>Nanos Rsrch</i>	<i>Environics</i>	<i>Globe/CTV</i>
%	<u>Jan 11</u>	<u>Feb 11</u>	<u>Oct 10</u>	<u>Oct 09</u>
Economy, Jobs	35	25	33	43
Deficits	18	5		8
Environment, climate change	13	10	6	9
Health care, aging population	13	22	12	11
Education		5		1
Poverty	7			
War, terrorism	5		2	2

Conclusion

The *Apathy is Boring* data, collected in informal settings over a period of four years, provide a valuable window on the attitudes of contemporary youth toward politics and participation, and the types of political activities in which they might engage. It must be stressed that the data do not derive from a random sample of either young people or of the wider population, and therefore broad generalizations based on these data should be avoided. However, the large number of cases and the diversity of the respondents help to inspire some degree of confidence in our interpretation of the results. The data are quantitative, but our interpretation is largely qualitative.

The A is B respondents are a more active and engaged group than has typically been found in other recent studies of youth. This may be in part because of the nature of the events at which they were surveyed, and also because of the mission of *Apathy is Boring* itself as an organization, part of which is to “educate young Canadians about democracy.” When asked whether they would be interested in “learning more about becoming involved with *Apathy is Boring*” (see Appendix B, question 16), nearly half of the respondents to the surveys (49%) circled “yes”. We would not expect a reply of this magnitude to be found in a random sample of a larger population. The tendency of these respondents to be more engaged and open to involvement is also indicated by their relatively high rates of electoral participation, as well as by the positive responses to questions about volunteering and dealing with a community problem. The data do not necessarily imply that youth in general are suddenly becoming more politically engaged, but they do suggest what some of the forms and mechanisms of such engagement might be as the current generation of young people begins to enter the electorate in greater numbers.

The *Apathy is Boring* respondents are a more educated subset than would be found in a wider population sample, and education is invariably a positive correlate of participation. But little conclusion can be drawn from this factor alone, as more than half of the A is B respondents are still in school. Their education is therefore not yet complete. While the A is B respondents may be atypical in some respects, they do display the same general patterns of engagement commonly found in other studies of participation. Voting, for example, is strongly related to age, even though the vast majority of our respondents were under the age of 35. As they reach their late 20s or early 30s, rates of electoral participation begin to approach the median of the electorate more generally.

In his classic study of political participation conducted nearly a half century ago, Lester Milbrath (1965) conceptualized political participation as a *hierarchy* of activities, moving upward from the most basic activity (voting) to more active forms of engagement such as contacting a public official or becoming involved in an election campaign. In the following decades, scholars became interested in a new range of political activities linked to *protest behaviour*, which only partially conformed to Milbrath’s hierarchical interpretation of political activity (see for example Barnes, Kaase et al, 1979 or Dalton and Kuechler, 1990). In today’s world, it is no longer appropriate to think of political engagement in an ordered or highly structured way, and protest activity in various forms has long ago entered the political mainstream. As turnout in elections nearly everywhere has declined to historically low levels, voting is no longer the most universal activity in the sense that it may have once been. As is seen

in the A is B data, volunteering is a more universal activity among this group than is voting. As many or more of our respondents indicated in response to the “community problem” question that they would be willing to sign a petition as we would expect to vote in an election. The availability and widespread use of new media have made alternative forms of engagement both more accessible and potentially more effective. When a respondent says that, in response to a problem, s/he would blog or tweet about it, it is not obvious how engagement of this kind should be thought of in relation to more traditional acts such as voting or signing a formal petition. They are still relatively new forms of participation, but for this generation of young activists they have already become routine.

Our interpretation of these different forms of engagement, many of which come more naturally to the young who have grown up with them, is reinforced by the fact that virtually all of the relationships between the different forms of engagement considered here are weak. In other words, voting, blogging, petition signing, volunteering, etc. are distinct activities, and one or more of these are engaged in at some time and in some form by the vast majority of our young respondents. Nevertheless, engagement in any one individual act itself is not a strong predictor of voting. A decision not to vote in a particular election therefore does not preclude engagement in other forms. Neither does volunteering or blogging in itself make electoral participation more likely. We would not hypothesize, based on these findings, that turnout in elections will suddenly increase, or that the demographic factors that have been driving turnout down are beginning to moderate. Neither would we argue that these respondents would be more likely to engage in protest activities such as the recent Quebec student strike or the occupy movements, although we could well imagine *some* of them doing so based on other attributes found in this cohort.

Similarly, it is clear in these results that the failure of politicians to reflect their values may partially account for the withdrawal of some young people from electoral participation – a pattern which has also been found in other recent studies of Canadian youth (Bastedo, 2012; Howe, 2010). But here again, the relationship of voting to satisfaction with integrity, equality or diversity is not particularly strong, and therefore these cannot be said to be a critical factor in voting withdrawal among youth, at least within this sample of young people. However, there is a moderately strong relationship between satisfaction with the way politicians can be held to account and voting in this sample that may be more meaningful.

The importance of accountability to youth is further reinforced when we see that the second most important reason for volunteering beyond a sense of duty was the desire for politicians to live up to their promises. Voting and volunteering may not share much in common, as the crosstabulation between these two activities is very weak, but the reasons for doing both, share some common threads that may be important in understanding what makes this generation of young people less engaged overall. This duty/accountability nexus may be particularly important as growing dissatisfaction with political leadership is evidenced in various ways, as for example by the young people on the streets most recently in Montreal.

On some other variables, the A is B respondents look more like older cohorts than we might have expected. Their issue concerns (Environment, Education) reflects generational interests, but they also express concern for Health Care. They do not place the degree of emphasis on Jobs and the Economy that is found today in most polls of the general public, but neither are these concerns absent from their thinking. Clearly, the data reflect both well known generational and life cycle patterns, although these cannot be easily separated in surveys of this kind. The negative feelings that they hold about politics in Canada – e.g. integrity, accountability – are little different than those found among older cohorts or in other surveys. They express a sense of “civic duty” and believe that voting is both important and necessary. If these respondents in any sense represent the future of democracy in Canada, there is every reason to believe that it will be in good hands, but also to expect that the types of political activities in which they engage may not conform so easily to traditional models.

References

- Bakvis, Herman. 1991. *Voter Turnout in Canada: Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing*. Toronto: Dundurn Press.
- Barnes, Samuel H, Max Kaase, et al. 1979. *Political Action*. Beverly Hills CA: Sage.
- Bastedo, Heather. 2012. *They Don't Stand for Me: Generational Difference in Voter Motivation and the Importance of Symbolic Representation in Youth Voter Turnout*. Dissertation, University of Toronto.
- Blais, André. 2006. "What Affects Voter Turnout?". *Annual Reviews of Political Science* 9: 111-25.
- Blais, André. 2000. *To Vote or Not to Vote: The Merits and Limits of Rational Choice Theory*. University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Blais, André and Agnieszka Dobrzynska.. 1998. "Turnout in Electoral Democracies." *European Journal of Political Research*, 33: 239-261.
- Dalton, Russell, 2008. *The Good Citizen: How a Younger Generation is Reshaping American Politics*. Washington: CQ Press.
- Dalton, Russell and Manfred Kuechler. 1990. *Challenging the Political Order: New Political and Social Movements in Western Democracies*. NY: Oxford University Press.
- Downs, Anthony. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. Boston, MA: Addison Wesley.
- Dougherty, Ilona and Adrienne Smith. 2008. *Implementation of the Identification Requirements in the Canadian North*. Montreal: Apathy is Boring.
- Franklin, Mark N. 2004. *Voter Turnout and the Dynamics of Electoral Competition in Established Democracies Since 1945*. NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Franklin, Mark N., Patrick Lyons and Michael Marsh 2004. "The Generational Basis of Turnout Decline in Established Democracies", *Acta Politica* 39: 115-51.
- Gidengil, Elisabeth, André Blais, Neil Nevitte and Richard Nadeau. 2003. "Turned off or Tuned Out?: Youth Participation in Politics", *Electoral Insight*: 9-14.
- Gidengil, Elisabeth, Andre Blais, Neil Nevitte and Richard Nadeau. 2004. *Citizens*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Gidengil, Elisabeth, André Blais, Joanna Everitt, Patrick Fournier and Neil Nevitte. 2005. Missing the Message: Young Adults and the Election Issues. *Electoral Insight*, 7:6-11.

Goodman, Nicole, Heather Bastedo, Lawrence LeDuc and Jon H. Pammett. 2011. "Young Canadians in the 2008 Federal Election Campaign: Using *Facebook* to Probe Perceptions of Citizenship and Participation," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 44: 859-882.

Howe, Paul. 2010. *Citizens Adrift: The Democratic Disengagement of Young Canadians*. Vancouver: UBC Press.

Howe, Paul. 2008. "Political Culture in the Age of Adolescence", paper presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, Vancouver.

Inglehart, Ronald. 1971. "The Silent Revolution in Europe: Intergenerational Change in Post Industrial Societies." *American Political Science Review* 65: 991-1017.

International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA). 2003. *Voter Turnout from 1945 to 1997: A Global Report*. 3rd edition. Stockholm: International IDEA

LeDuc, Lawrence and Jon H. Pammett. 2010. "Voter Turnout" in Heather MacIvor, *Election* (Toronto: Emond Montgomery), pp. 251-267

LeDuc, Lawrence, Jon H. Pammett and Heather Bastedo. 2008. "The Problem of Young Voters: a Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis", paper presented to the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston MA.

Lyons, William and Robert Alexander. 2000. "A Tale of Two Electorates: Generational Replacement and the Decline of Voting in Presidential Elections", *Journal of Politics* 62: 1014-1034

Milbrath, Lester. 1965. *Political Participation*. Chicago: Rand McNally

Milner, Henry. 2010. *The Internet Generation: Engaged Citizens or Political Dropouts?* Medford, MA: Tufts University Press

Milner, Henry. 2002. *Civic Literacy: How Informed Citizens Make Democracy Work*. University Press of New England.

Nevitte, Neil. 1996. *The Decline of Deference: Canadian Value Change in Cross-National Perspective*. Toronto: Broadview Press.

Nickerson, David W. 2006. "Hunting the Elusive Young Voter", *Journal of Political Marketing* 5(3): 47-69.

Norris, Pippa. 2002. *Democratic Phoenix: Reinventing Political Activism*. Cambridge University Press.

- Pammett, Jon H. and Lawrence LeDuc. 2004. "Four Vicious Circles of Turnout: Competitiveness, Regionalism, Culture and Participation in Canada", paper presented to the Joint Sessions Workshops of the European Consortium for Political Research, Uppsala, Sweden
- Pammett, Jon H. and Lawrence LeDuc. 2003a. *Explaining the Turnout Decline in Canadian Federal Elections: A New Survey of Non-Voters*. Ottawa: Elections Canada
- Pammett, Jon H. and Lawrence LeDuc. 2003b. "Confronting the Problem of Declining Voter Turnout Among Youth", *Electoral Insight* 5: 3-8
- Pammett, Jon H., Lawrence LeDuc, Erin Theissen and Antoine Bilodeau. 2001. *Canadian Voting Turnout in Comparative Perspective*. Ottawa: Elections Canada
- Park, Alison. 2000. "The Generational Game", in Jowell et al, *British Social Attitudes 17th Report*, pp. 1-21.
- Pharr, Susan J. and Robert D. Putnam. 2000. *Disaffected Democracies: What's Troubling the Trilateral Countries?* Princeton University Press.
- Rose, Richard. 1997. "Evaluating Election Turnout." in *Voter Turnout from 1945 to 1997: a Global Report on Political Participation*, 2nd edition. Stockholm: International IDEA.
- Rubenson, Daniel, André Blais, Patrick Fournier, Elisabeth Gidengil and Neil Nevitte. 2004. "Accounting for the Age Gap in Turnout", *Acta Politica* 39: 407-21.
- Rudny, Bernard, Ilona Dougherty, André Blais, Delia Dumitrescu and Peter Loewen. 2011. *Youth Engagement and Mobilization in the 2010 Toronto Municipal Election*. Ottawa: Elections Canada.
- Turcotte, André. 2005. "Different Strokes: Why Young Canadians Don't Vote." *Electoral Insight* 7: 12-16.
- Turcotte, André. 2007. "What Do You Mean I Can't Have a Say?" <www.cprn.org>: Canadian Policy Research Network Report.
- Verba, Sidney and Norman H. Nie. 1972. *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality*. University of Chicago Press.
- Wass, Hanna. 2007. "The Effects of Age, Generation and Period on Turnout in Finland: 1975-2003", *Electoral Studies* 26: 648-59.
- Wattenberg, Martin P. 2008. *Is Voting for Young People?* NY: Pearson Longman.
- Wattenberg, Martin P. 2002b. "Electoral Turnout: The New Generation Gap," *British Elections and Parties Review*. 159-173.

Whiteley, Paul, F. 2007. "What Makes a Good Citizen? Citizenship Across the Democratic World" ,in Allison Park et al, *British Social Attitudes 24th Report* London: Sage Publications, pp. 173-201.

Zukin, Cliff, Scott Keeter, Molly Andolina, Krista Jenkins, and Michael X. Delli Carpini. 2006. *A New Engagement? Political Participation, Civic Life and the Changing American Citizen*. Oxford University Press.

APPENDIX A
Dates and location of *Apathy is Boring* events: 2008-2011

<u>Date</u>	<u>City</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>Cases</u>
7/10/2008	Ottawa	Bluesfest Ottawa	42
7/25/2008	Antigonish	Evolve Music Festival	8
8/1/2008	Toronto	Tumi	23
8/2/2008	Sackville	Sappyfest	46
8/3/2008	Montreal	Osheaga	135
8/6/2008	Calgary	Vans Warped Tour Calgary	15
8/10/2008	Vancouver	Under the Volcano	85
8/13/2008	Quebec	Quebec City Concert	28
8/22/2008	Saskatoon	We Are Many Festival	27
9/18/2008	Ottawa	Ottawa Ladyfest	60
9/27/2008	Halifax	D250 Halifax	116
10/1/2008	Montreal	Montreal Concert	16
10/5/2008	Montreal	Puces Pop	51
1/24/2009	London	Canadian Catholic Student Association	47
1/28/2009	Montreal	Tom Fun Orchestra	4
2/19/2009	Montreal	Blueprints for Change Concordia	3
2/26/2009	Montreal	Montreal Technology and Social Network	4
3/13/2009	Ottawa	Manning Center Exhibition and Conference	3
3/18/2009	Montreal	Engage McGill	29
3/20/2009	Montreal	Solidarythme	5
3/28/2009	Montreal	Nomadic Massive Concert	23
4/2/2009	Montreal	Chris Velan Concert	21
5/18/2009	Montreal	K'Naan Concert	50
5/21/2009	Montreal	Joel Plaskett Concert	40
5/30/2009	Iqaluit	Urban Arts Forum	30
6/1/2009	Kuuujuaq	GG's Youth Dialogue	31
6/6/2009	Ottawa	Caledonia Concert Ottawa	16
6/6/2009	Montreal	Montreal Citizens Summit	11
6/16/2009	Montreal	Caledonia Concert Montreal	7
6/18/2009	Montreal	Volunteer Orientation at A is B Office	12
6/19/2009	Toronto	Edgefest Toronto	71
6/19/2009	Montreal	Virgin Festival Montreal	187
6/27/2009	Montreal	Folk on the Canal	14
7/1/2009	Whitehorse	Canada Day- Whitehorse	97
7/4/2009	Halifax	Virgin Festival Halifax	45
7/10/2009	Toronto	Vans Warped Tour Toronto	108
7/11/2009	Montreal	Vans Warped Tour Montreal	28
7/13/2009	St. Catherines	National Friendship Center Workshop	46

7/17/2009	Antigonish	Evolve Music Festival	93
7/25/2009	Calgary	Calgary Folk Festival	31
7/25/2009	Burnaby	Virgin Festival BC	191
7/31/2009	Edmonton	Global Youth Assembly	136
7/31/2009	Sackville	Sappyfest	69
8/8/2009	Calgary	Virgin Festival Calgary	77
8/12/2009	Calgary	Vans Warped Tour Calgary	99
8/14/2009	Montreal	Valorisation Jeunesse	24
8/15/2009	Cumberland	Big Time Out Festival	101
8/21/2009	Ottawa	Ottawa Folk Festival	94
9/11/2009	Montreal	Call to Action Workshop Day with Roots and Shoots	18
9/17/2009	Montreal	K'Naan Concert	41
9/20/2009	Toronto	Manifesto Festival	69
9/25/2009	Montreal	Journee de la Culture	5
10/1/2009	Montreal	Joel Plaskett Concert	38
10/26/2009	Whitehorse	Youth Friendly Workshop	5
10/29/2009	Montreal	Osheaga	1
11/14/2009	Ottawa	Connecting Creators Conference	24
11/21/2009	Montreal	M for Montreal	24
2/4/2010	Montreal	A is B's Cozy Volunteer Orientation	8
2/8/2010	St. Hubert	Civic Participation Workshop	10
2/11/2010	Vancouver	GG Olympic Truce Youth Dialogue	6
2/20/2010	Whitehorse	Frostbite Music Festival	15
3/16/2010	St. Anne de Bellevue	Reaching Uninvolved Youth Workshop	68
4/20/2010	Montreal	The Study	2
4/26/2010	St. Hubert	Reaching Out To Uninvolved Youth - Heritage Regional High School	63
5/20/2010	Shannon	Civic Participation Workshop Dollard des Ormeaux School	43
5/29/2010	Montreal	SWAP Montreal	162
6/15/2010	Montreal	A is B 5 to 7	12
6/19/2010	Montebello	Petit Nation	66
6/20/2010	Montreal	Montreal Folk Festival	29
7/3/2010	Calgary	Sled Island	59
7/9/2010	Toronto	Vans Warped Tour Toronto	123
7/10/2010	Montreal	Vans Warped Tour Montreal	197
7/25/2010	Antigonish	Evolve Music Festival	157
7/25/2010	Guelph	Hillside Music Festival	109
8/26/2010	Montreal	Arts Frosh McGill	59
9/2/2010	Montreal	Mini M	7
9/5/2010	Montreal	M on the Quays	12
9/20/2010	Ottawa	Nomadic Massive	24
9/24/2010	Montreal	Journees de la culture	15
9/27/2010	Montreal	Etat Urgence	4
10/14/2010	Montreal	The Sound of Democracy	18

10/15/2010	Montreal	Montreal Ska Festival	27
2/11/2011	Montreal	Call to Action 2011	43
2/18/2011	Whitehorse	Frostbite	4
2/26/2011	Montreal	WAWA Show	42
3/4/2011	Montreal	Art Matters	20
4/9/2011	Ottawa	PROMdemonium	25
4/20/2011	Montreal	Pecha Kucha Montreal	33
4/27/2011	Ottawa	Stand Up For Democracy	46
5/11/2011	Ottawa	Activate 2011	40
6/10/2011	Montreal	Fringe Montreal 2011	40
6/11/2011	Montreal	Avenue Mont Royal 2011	17
6/15/2011	Montreal	Girls Action Benefit	4
6/17/2011	Montreal	Suoni Per Il Popolo	25
6/18/2011	Montreal	Montreal Folk Fest 2011	40
6/25/2011	Calgary	Sled Island 2011	88
6/26/2011	St. Catherines	SCENE Music Festival	83
7/2/2011	Montreal	Montreal Teen Fest 2011	18
7/9/2011	Montreal	SWAP Montreal 2011	68
7/16/2011	Montreal	Vans Warped Montreal 2011	130
7/23/2011	Guelph	Hillside Music Festival 2011	52

4837

APPENDIX B
2011 survey questionnaire



Apathy is Boring is a national charitable organization that uses art and technology to educate youth about democracy. To see what we're all about, visit www.apathyisboring.com

HI THERE. THANKS FOR TAKING THE TIME TO FILL OUT THIS SURVEY.

- Don't worry – it's completely confidential.
- You can fill out the survey even if you choose to not give your name and email.
- By providing your name and email at the end of the survey, you will automatically be entered into our summer contest to win an Apathy is Boring prize pack.
- The results will be used by Apathy is Boring to educate youth about democracy.

1. Are you eligible to vote in Canada? YES NO
(To be eligible to vote in Canada you must be a Canadian citizen and at least 18 years old)

2. Which past elections have you voted in the past 5 years? (Circle **all** that apply)

Federal Provincial Municipal

3. Do your parents vote? YES NO

4. If you don't vote, what would make you want to vote in the future? (If you already vote, then proceed to question 5. If not, check **all** that apply.)

- Getting answers to all my "how to vote" questions.
- Flexibility about where I go to vote and voting times.
- Fewer restrictions on what I.D. I need to have to vote.
- Being able to vote online.

5. Do you volunteer your time? YES NO

6. If you answered yes to question 5, what motivates you to get involved? (Check **all** that apply)

- I want politicians to live up to their promises.
- My family and friends are involved too.
- I feel a sense of duty.
- CV building / To gain work experience.

7. If you noticed a problem in your community, what would you do? (Check **only one** response)

- Contact an elected official (such as my Member of Parliament or Band Councillor)
- Organize a group of friends to hold a public demonstration
- Sign a petition
- Blog or Twitter about it
- Text or email your friends
- Probably nothing

8. Are you unhappy with the way that elected officials represent your values in any of the following areas? (Check **all** that apply)

- Diversity (not enough women, young people, minorities, etc.)
- Equality (too much difference between rich and poor)
- Integrity (dishonesty or corruption among political leaders)
- Accountability (politicians listen to the people outside of election time)

9. Which of the following ideas do you agree with? (Check **all** that apply)

- I have a duty to vote in every election even if I'm busy or not interested.
- There are better ways of participating in politics than voting.
- People who know more about politics have a greater responsibility to vote.
- Voting in elections is important but not necessary.

10. What do you think are the important issues facing our society today? (Number them **from most to least** important: 1, 2, 3, etc.)

_____ Keeping the Economy Strong _____ Protecting the Environment
_____ Educational Opportunities for Everyone _____ Avoiding War _____ Creating Jobs
_____ Providing Quality Health Care _____ Fighting Poverty
_____ Other (please specify): _____

11. Age: _____

12. Gender: _____

13. What is your level of education? (Circle the highest grade or year completed)

High School				College/CEGEP		University				Graduate School
9	10	11	12	1	2+	1	2	3	4+	<input type="checkbox"/>

14. Are you in school right now? YES NO

15. Are you working right now? YES NO

16. Do you want to learn more about getting involved with Apathy is Boring? YES NO

Contest question: Which Canadian musician would make the best Prime Minister? Why?

Postal Code:

Name:

E-mail*:

* I allow Apathy is Boring to send me timely updates via email. Apathy is Boring takes your privacy very seriously and won't ever abuse the privilege. You can unsubscribe at any time.

THANK YOU

