

Youth at the Ballot Box: Mobilizing for Canada's Election



Increasing youth involvement in Canada's upcoming federal election is vital, considering the gap in participation between different age cohorts. Utilizing innovative approaches to mobilize young voters is essential to empower their influence in shaping the nation's future.

As Canada gears up for its upcoming federal election, one critical issue remains large: youth participation in the electoral process. Despite strides in recent years, there remains a noticeable gap between the voting rates of older and younger demographics. As the country braces for the decisions that will shape its trajectory, exploring innovative strategies to encourage youth to take an active role in shaping their communities and country is imperative.

Canadian youth are less likely to vote compared to other age groups in Canada. The 2020 federal election showed that 80% of youth aged 18-30 voted, compared to 85% of adults aged 31-46 and 90% of adults aged 47 and older. [1] This disparity is even more pronounced in recent provincial and municipal elections nationwide. Interestingly, youth are less likely to cite a lack of interest in the electoral process as a hindrance to engagement. Conflicting schedules with work or school, being away from home, and accessibility issues all contribute to the voting gap in Canada.

Innovative methods, such as political simulations, are being employed nationally to attract youth to the polls. Elections Canada found that youth engaged in mock elections were more likely to vote. Parliamentary

stimulations may promote interest while addressing critical causes of low political engagement. Firstly, political knowledge is declining in the country, and youth aged 15 to 30 are far less likely to be interested in politics. Simply explaining government structure and the electoral process is not sufficient, however. Mock elections and parliamentary stimulations may promote a sense of cohesion and belonging in Canadian democracy that a lecture cannot replicate. Expanding access to these programs could tackle a need for more political knowledge and interest for youth before they reach the polls. [2]

Student Vote, a national program that parallels elections, aims to foster voting practices in high school students and teach them about democracy. Their 2021 federal election results showed that 1 million elementary and high school students voted across the political spectrum. [3] However, the issue remains: how do youth empowered by these programs maintain this passion when they turn 18?

Vote16, the movement to lower the national voting age to 16, has been contentious for decades. Since 1990, politicians have introduced bills across the political spectrum, citing the maturity, insight, and capacity



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youth have to shape elections. Vote16 is a non-partisan campaign that collaborates with leaders and non-profit organizations to advocate for lowering the voting age. Starting good voting practices at 16 may pose a challenge given young adults' significant changes, from moving to a new city for undergraduate education to commencing new activities. Bridging the time frame between introducing elementary and high school students to civic engagement and materializing this into voting may support reducing the national voting gap.

It is vital that political education interests youth in the electoral process. At the same time, structural factors are tackled to ensure accessible elections for all. It is not that youth do not care about issues of inequality, social justice, and affordability. Instead, Canadian youth show up in droves at protests, discussions, and petitions. When this passion materializes in voting, Canadian youth may rapidly change the shape of the country.