

# **The Social and Civic Sources of Voting and Participation**

A Report Commissioned by Elections Canada

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## **Note to the Reader**

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## **Introduction**

Representative democracies like Canada are based on a willingness of citizens to engage in democratic debate and on the institutions that are in place to hear – and respond to – the interests and opinions of the public. Voting is a quintessential form of political participation in representative democracies: citizens select the representatives that will govern them. Voting, from this perspective, allows citizens to engage in a broader democratic debate about what they want government to do. Importantly, elections also create incentives for elected officials to listen to voters by putting their actions under scrutiny during election time and allowing citizens to make a judgment about their performance. Those who do not are presumably shown the door.

This link between citizens and elected officials is therefore at the heart of representative democratic politics, yet past research suggests that the link is much weaker between young electors and their representatives. Voting has declined among more recent generations in Canada (Gidengil et al. 2003; Stolle and Cruz 2005; Blais and Loewen 2009; Barne 2010; Gélinau 2013), and as a result, the incentives that elected officials have to respond to their needs and concerns weaken, at least in comparison to high-level voting constituents.

Why do young people participate so little in electoral politics? Past research has suggested that one reason is that they lack the interest and knowledge to engage in politics (Gidengil et al. 2003; Gélinau 2013; Howe 2010). Understanding how young people learn and become interested in politics then becomes key to understanding how to (re)activate their participation in the electoral arena. We know that the people we interact with, especially those in our immediate social network such as friends and family, can be important influences on what we think about and how we engage in politics (McClurg 2003; Quintelier et al. 2011). We also know that civic education in the classroom can have positive effects (Milner 2010; Mahéo et al. 2012).

In this report, we focus on the social and civic sources of electoral engagement, focusing on factors within the family, in broader social networks, and in the classroom. The analysis draws on the 2015 National Youth Survey (NYS) prepared by Nielsen Consumer Insights for Elections Canada. The survey took place between October 21, 2015, and November 26, 2015, right after the 42nd general election. It employed a mixed mode sampling with 1,503 respondents randomly selected and 1,506 chosen non-randomly from online panels, for a total of 3,009 surveys from Canadians across all provinces and territories. We conclude the analysis by discussing the policy implications for our findings.

## **The Social and Civic Sources of Electoral Participation**

Citizens are not atomized actors. They can influence and are influenced by those around them. Voting itself can be understood as a social act (Bhatti and Hansen 2012). In this section, we examine the influence of various family, social and civic factors in promoting more active political engagement. Our analysis focuses specifically on how these factors may influence young Canadians. From a political socialization perspective, we expect that younger citizens may still be forming their political attitudes and behaviours and therefore

be more open to outside influences. We also know that the life cycle can change our social networks, as we move from being in a school environment and living with parental figures, into the working world and having partners and children of our own, so the types of people who are influencing us may shift as we age. Finally, we also know that these earlier influences can have lasting impacts on how citizens behave later in life (Plutzer 2002; Gerber et al. 2003).

Table 1 provides the basic breakdown in electoral participation across age groups. While surveys tend to notoriously over-report electoral participation compared to actual turnout rates due to people who are more interested being more likely to respond to a survey, they do tend to provide a good indicator of the sorts of factors that are related to turnout. And indeed the NYS survey reproduces the well-known inequality in turnout. Those between the ages of 18 and 22 report voting 64% of the time, compared to those over 35, who reported 91% voting, over 20 percentage points higher than the youngest cohort.

Table 1: Voting by Age Group

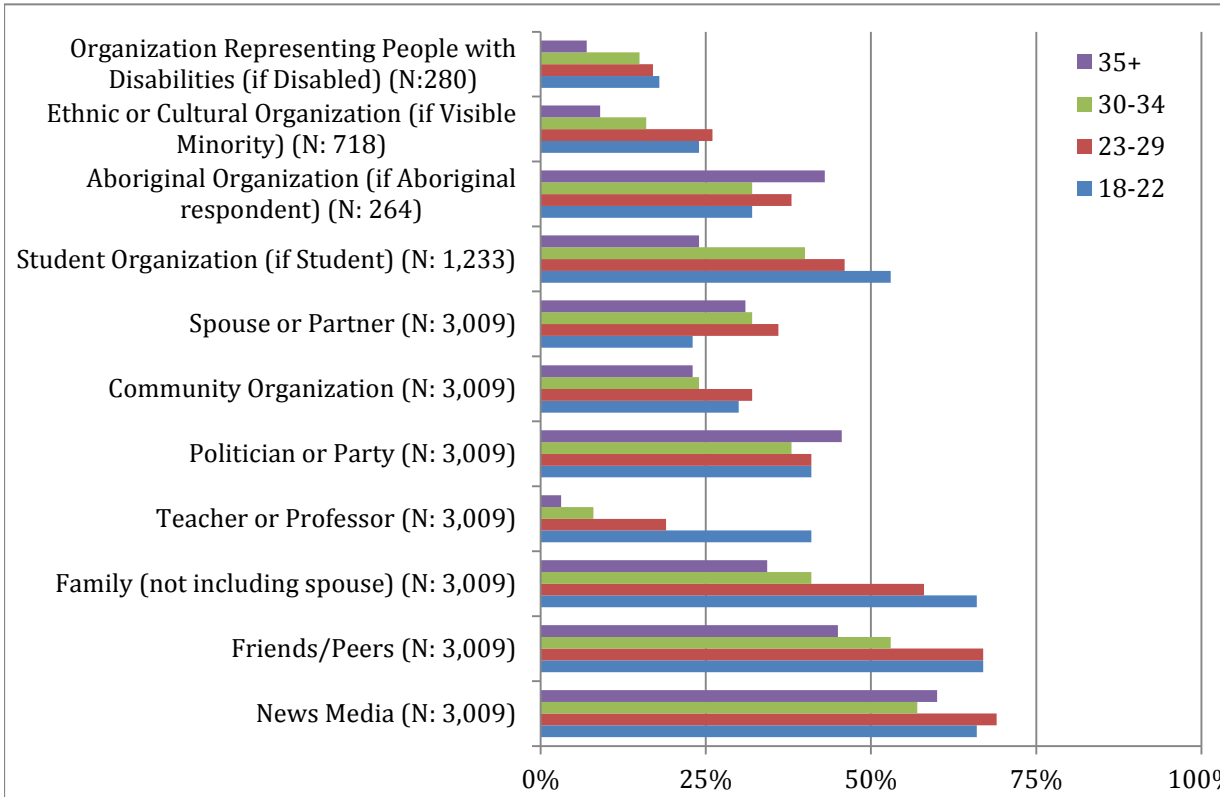
	% voted	N
18-22	64	1,078
23-29	77	819
30-34	66	609
35+	91	503

N: 3,009

Source: Elections Canada National Youth Survey, 2015.

Assuming that voting is to some extent a social act, Figure 1 provides a breakdown by age cohort of the types of people who encouraged each person to vote. Note that overall, 85% of people reported that they received encouragement from at least one of these types of people, and on average, people reported receiving encouragement from a little over three of them. Furthermore, the most common source of encouragement came from the news media, followed by friends and, to a lesser extent (at least for the older age groups), family.

Figure 1: Sources of Voter Encouragement



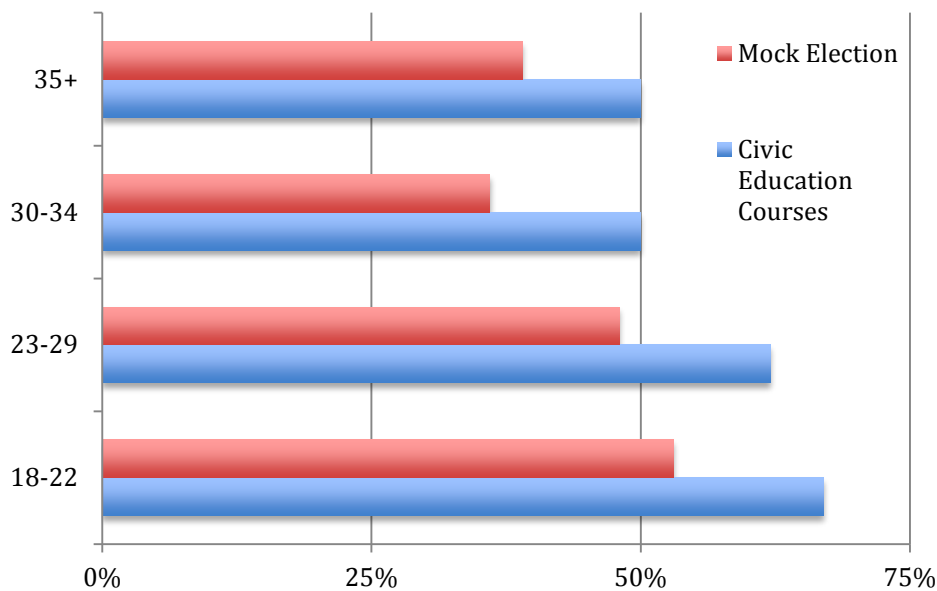
Source: Elections Canada National Youth Survey, 2015.

What Figure 1 also makes clear is that the sources of support vary across age groups. Those in the younger cohorts are more likely to receive encouragement from the top three sources, and this is especially true with respect to the family. It also reproduces itself across many of the other categories, where those in the 18–22-year age group are most likely to report receiving encouragement. The biggest gap is from teachers and professors. Those in the youngest group, who are most likely to have direct, regular contact, are far more likely to report receiving encouragement.

The notable exceptions for the age breakdown are for political parties, spouses, and Aboriginal organizations (among Aboriginal respondents). Political parties seem to be reaching these age groups equally well. It should be noted, though, that while the reach is similar across age groups, it is not particularly elevated for any group: only about 40% of any age group mentioned a political party. Like parties, spouses seem to be equally likely to encourage their partners to vote, regardless of age. This suggests that the youngest cohort is receiving higher levels of encouragement from more sources than their older counterparts, despite their lower levels of overall support.

## Civic Education

Figure 2: Exposure to Civic Education by Age Group



Source: 2015 Elections Canada National Youth Survey.

One of the other principal sources of political socialization is educational institutions (Torney-Purta et al. 2001). Civic education classes and other civic activities within the school setting can provide young people with key skills for later participation, as well as potentially promote interest. Clearly, teachers and student organizations appeared to be uniquely pertinent sources of encouragement. In this subsection, we turn first to the potential for school curriculum to promote electoral participation.

The NYS asked respondents about whether they took courses where they learned about government and politics, as well as whether they had participated in a mock election program in primary school or high school. Figure 2 clearly shows that younger Canadians are far more likely to report having participated in a civics class, as well as voting simulations. Almost three out of four of those in the 18–22 year old range have had a civics education course, compared to just over half of those over 35. Mock elections and other civic simulations are less likely, though the youngest cohort are about 15 percentage points more likely to report having taken part in one.

When we turn to the relationship between age, civic education experiences, and likelihood of voting, we see almost no effect of civic education experiences among those over 35, suggesting that they had no lasting effect on the electoral participation of this generation (see Table 2). Among those under 35, though, we do see a clear pattern of higher levels of participation among those who have taken a civics education course or participated in a mock election, compared to those who have not. The contrast is not nearly as strong if we

compare it to the similar effects in Table 5, but the pattern is consistent with a positive relationship.

Table 2: Influence of Civic Education Exposure on Voting by Age

	% voted without civic education	% voted among those with civic education	% voted among those who did not participate in a mock election	% voted among those who participated in a mock election	N
18–22	53	70	60	68	1,078
23–29	69	81	73	80	819
30–34	54	79	61	77	609
35+	93	90	92	91	503

N: 3,009

Source: 2015 Elections Canada National Youth Survey.

It should be noted that those who report having participated in a civic education course or electoral simulation tend to be more knowledgeable about politics than those who have not.<sup>1</sup> The difference is largest for civics courses (.52, compared to .62 on a 0–1 knowledge scale), and slightly smaller for mock elections (.56, to .6059), though both are significant differences. Interestingly, this relationship is strongest among the younger cohorts, suggesting that the effects of civic education may wear off over time as other influences shape a citizen’s political life. A similar pattern emerges for political interest.

### *Social Networks and Political Discussion*

Two of the major predictors of participation are interest and knowledge, and these can both be facilitated through one’s social environment, both during the formative years and throughout the life course. Political discussion is the most direct way in which the social environment can provide political information and promote political interest. In Table 3, we examine the extent of political discussion across age cohorts by looking at the percentages of those who report engaging in these discussions often.

From these data, it appears that those over 35 are about 50% more likely to have often spoken about politics and government when they were growing up compared to all three other age cohorts. This could suggest that the family environment has shifted away from political discussion for those who were born after 1980. It is also possible that older generations recall more political discussions than actually occurred, given their higher levels of current political engagement.

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<sup>1</sup> Results not shown.

Table 3: Exposure to Political Discussion

	18–22	23–29	30–34	35+
When growing up, how often talked about politics and government	22%	23%	23%	33%
How often do you discuss government and politics with:				
Spouse or partner (if married/common-law)	23%	42%	42%	48%
Friends	22%	25%	25%	30%
Family	31%	28%	28%	32%
Colleagues (if working)	15%	20%	20%	26%
Classmates (if student)	18%	24%	24%	10%

Source: 2015 Elections Canada National Youth Survey.

In terms of current discussion networks, we can see that among married or common-law couples, those over 35 years old are more likely to report discussing politics often (48%) compared to the youngest group (23%). In terms of political discussion among friends, older cohorts are more likely to report discussion (30%) versus the youngest cohort (22%). Discussion among family shows no clear trend. Two additional social environments were included in the survey: discussion among colleagues and among classmates. These were limited to those who reported working or being in school, respectively. Those who are “non-traditional students,” e.g. those returning to school after age 35, are far less likely to discuss politics with their peers at school. The reverse is true in the working environment, where younger workers report less political discussion.

Table 4: Sources of Political Information by Age

	18–22	23–29	30–34	35+
Parties and institutions	19%	15%	13%	3%
Traditional media	25%	29%	42%	66%
Online media	45%	51%	41%	29%
Family or friends	11%	6%	3%	2%

Source: 2015 Elections Canada National Youth Survey.  
 Note: answer categories have been collapsed.

Family and friends, then, are an important source of political discussion. They appear to be less critical, however, in terms of political information, or at least they are not named as often as media sources (see Table 4). Young people in particular tend toward online media sources, whereas those over 35 are much more likely to use traditional media sources. Interestingly, family and friends tend more likely to be a source of information for young people (11%) compared to those over 35 (2%). While this places it as the least likely category, the difference across age groups does further reinforce the idea that social networks have some role to play in promoting political engagement.



## *Family and Social Networks*

Family, friends, and other people in our social networks are clearly sources of encouragement and political discussion. But they may also mobilize voters through their actions. When others participate, a citizen may observe – or hear about – it and be motivated to do so as well. When it comes to family members or others that are close to you, it may be even more direct, sharing transportation to the voting booth and talking about whether to go and vote. The influence can, of course, go both ways.

Table 5: Voting Based on Age and Spouse's Participation

	18–22	23–29	30–34	35+
Spouse abstained	23%	39%	30%	58%
Spouse voted	82%	95%	88%	99%

Source: Elections Canada National Youth Survey, 2015.

Let us first consider the spousal relationship. While fewer young people are married than their older counterparts, a spouse at any age should have a large impact on their partner's behaviour (Stoker and Jennings 1995). We find evidence that citizens – both married and common-law – are much more likely to vote if their spouse does. Eighty-two percent of those in the youngest age group voted when their partner did. This increases to almost 100% among those over 35. Clearly then, being in a relationship with someone who votes seems to make it far more likely that one will themselves.

What is more interesting about the spousal participation patterns is what we observe when the spouse abstains, where we observe a much broader variation. The difference in voting for those 18 to 22 when their spouse votes versus abstains is a fourfold increase. If we compare to those over 35, the difference, while still substantial, is less than half of that magnitude.

Table 6: Voting Based on Level of Participation in Network

	18–22	23–29	30–34	35+
Close friends				
None	17%	39%	32%	82%
Some	44%	58%	34%	62%
Many	63%	77%	66%	98%
Most	84%	87%	87%	95%
Family				
None	19%	37%	31%	76%
Some	43%	53%	32%	85%
Many	58%	76%	61%	96%
Most	78%	86%	87%	94%
Colleagues (if working)				
None	40%	75%	54%	90%
Some	59%	67%	52%	93%
Many	72%	76%	62%	94%
Most	75%	86%	88%	91%
Classmates (if student)				
None	46%	72%	nd	nd
Some	60%	67%	nd	nd
Many	76%	80%	nd	nd
Most	82%	85%	nd	nd

Source: 2015 Elections Canada National Youth Survey.

Notes: Responses are the percent who voted based on the level of their close friends, family, etc., that voted. "Nd" indicates there were too few cases to assess the relationship.

If we look at the participation level among a wider range of citizens' networks, as presented in Table 6, we see a similar pattern emerge. When most of one's friends and family vote, you are very likely to participate yourself, regardless of age (though there is a substantial age gap of, respectively, 10 and 16 percentage points). Yet those in networks where no one votes are much less likely to vote, *in particular among those under 35*. This suggests people who do not participate are more likely to be surrounded by others who also do not participate, especially among the young, and vice versa. Now, from survey data it is impossible to tell whether there is a real difference in the level of participation in a network, without surveying the entire network. It is possible that people are more likely to perceive their network as either apathetic or participative based on their own behaviour, which they then project onto others around them. Yet the finding that those under 35 are likely to have a particularly strong relationship between their behaviour and their perception of their peers' suggests that age may be an important factor in how these networks operate as (de)mobilizers.

This has serious implications for promoting more participation among the younger generations, because given the overall low levels of participation among those under 35, they are more likely to know others their age who also do not participate. Civic environments where young people are in contact with other people their age are ideal environments in which to promote an ethic of participation (Crossley 2008), yet it is not only influenced by what is done in the classroom, but what one's peers are doing.

### *Examining the Overall Effects of Social and Civic Factors*

Throughout this report, we have been focusing on the relationship between age, voting, and various social and civic factors that might influence them. As we have noted previously, many of these factors are likely to matter for voting by increasing political interest and knowledge, two key predictors for civic engagement. In this section, we test the effect of these factors in a multivariate environment. This means that the independent effect of each factor is tested simultaneously with other factors. This is a harder test because it may well be that people who, for example, often discuss politics in their social networks are also socialized toward participation in a variety of other ways (e.g. they are not, in fact, independent from each other). We also want to know if differences in socialization factors are simply a reflection of differences across salient social cleavages like gender and socio-economic status. Finally, we want to see how they hold up to the inclusion of interest and knowledge, the two most likely moderating variations.

Table 7: Explaining Voter Participation: A Multivariate Model

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3				
	Coef.	(s.e)	Coef.	(s.e.)	Coef.	(s.e.)			
Encouraged to vote	0.45	(.03)	-0.04	(.03)	-0.09	(.04)	*		
Talk about politics growing up									
Sometimes	0.36	(.13)	**	0.23	(.15)	0.27	(.16)		
Often	0.62	(.19)	***	0.14	(.22)	0.16	(.24)		
Network political discussion	0.96	(.29)	***	-0.85	(.22)	*	-1.08	(.39)	**
Spouse/partner voted	1.07	(.13)	***	1.11	(.14)	***	1.14	(.15)	***
Network voting	2.58	(.22)	***	2.25	(.24)	***	2.29	(.26)	***
Civic education	0.29	(.12)	*	0.18	(.14)		0.15	(.14)	
Mock election	-0.02	(.12)		0.06	(.14)		-0.00	(.15)	
Age									
23–29	0.32	(.14)	*	0.18	(.16)		0.20	(.17)	
30–34	-0.10	(.15)		-0.16	(.17)		-0.15	(.19)	
35 and older	1.48	(.22)	***	0.89	(.24)	***	1.11	(.26)	***
Women	-0.04	(.11)		0.12	(.13)		0.08	(.14)	
Level of education reached									
College or trades	0.02	(.15)		-0.04	(.17)		-0.10	(.18)	
University	0.70	(.14)	***	0.51	(.16)	**	0.53	(.17)	**
Political interest index				3.37	(.32)	***	3.08	(.35)	***
Political knowledge index				1.11	(.24)	***	1.07	(.26)	***
Duty				1.44	(.13)	***	1.48	(.14)	***
Engagement index							1.22	(.56)	*
Media consumption									
Traditional media							-0.17	(.21)	
Online media							0.21	(.20)	
Family or friends							-0.03	(.30)	
Constant	-2.63	(.21)	***	-4.54	(.30)	***	-4.37	(.37)	***
N	2977		2858		2604				
Pseudo R2	0.2706		0.3783		0.3776				

Source: 2015 Elections Canada National Youth Survey.

Note: One asterisk means "p < .05." Two asterisks mean "p < .01." Three asterisks mean "p < .001."

Table 7 presents three successive models, beginning with the social and civic factors and three basic demographic controls: age, gender, and level of education. In model 2, we add interest, knowledge, and sense of duty. In model 3, we add a participation index and media consumption.

In model 1, it should be noted that several of the socialization variables are highly significant. Those who report talking sometimes or often about politics and government as they were growing up are significantly more likely to vote. Similarly, those who report more political talks in their current networks are also more likely to participate in elections today. We observe similar effects for the level of political mobilization in one's social network. Having a spouse that votes, and having a great number of friends and family

regularly voting, are both related to electoral participation. However, we find no independent effect for being encouraged to vote, nor for civic education experiences, after including the other controls in the model.

The age variable in the model shows what we have indicated throughout this report. Those under 35 seem to vote less than older voters. As we can note across the models, the age effect is consistently positive for those over 35 regardless of the controls included, though the size of the effect does decrease when knowledge and interest are controlled for.

Model 2 provides interesting evidence that knowledge and interest promote (or are at least correlated with) political discussion. Both knowledge and interest are highly salient predictors of voting, and their inclusion in model 2 decreases the effect size of both early political discussion (which remains significant) and current network discussion (which is no longer significant). In other words, those who find themselves surrounded with people who often discuss politics are also more likely to be interested and knowledgeable about politics and, as a result, tend to participate more in electoral politics.

Model 3 provides similar results while controlling for engagement and media consumption. It should be noted, however, that respondents being encouraged to vote are less likely to vote when controlling for engagement, suggesting that these are individuals who are being encouraged because they are unlikely to vote in the first place.

One question that emerges from this analysis is whether these factors seem to matter more for younger voters. It may be the case that socialization factors have unique, or more powerful, effects among younger voters who tend to be more influenced by their social environment, or at least for whom strong habits of voting have yet to be ingrained in their behaviour patterns. In Table 8, we explore this possibility by examining those over 35 and under 35 in separate models.

Table 8: Explaining Voter Participation by Age Group

	Under 35		Over 35	
	Model 1 Coef. (s.e.)	Model 2 Coef. (s.e.)	Model 1 Coef. (s.e.)	Model 2 Coef. (s.e.)
Encouraged to vote	0.04 (.03)	-0.02 (.03)	0.04 (.15)	0.07 (.18)
Talked about politics growing up				
Sometimes	0.30 (.15)	0.21 (.15)	0.78 (.47)	0.70 (.55)
Often	0.58 (.20)	0.31 (.22)	0.84 (.55)	0.74 (.60)
Network discussion	1.12 (.31)	-0.60 (.36)	-0.49 (.78)	-2.61 (.96)
Spouse/partner voted	0.94 (.13)	0.95 (.14)	2.33 (.46)	2.46 (.51)
Network voting	2.77 (.24)	2.66 (.25)	2.22 (.69)	1.77 (.79)
Civic education	0.39 (.12)	0.24 (.13)	-0.77 (.43)	-1.06 (.49)
Mock election	0.03 (.12)	0.08 (.14)	-0.37 (.43)	-0.43 (.44)
Women	-0.07 (.12)	0.10 (.13)	0.18 (.35)	0.04 (.38)
Level of education reached				
College or trades	-0.07 (.15)	0.03 (.17)	0.49 (.45)	0.45 (.49)
University	0.77 (.14)	0.63 (.16)	0.77 (.52)	0.44 (.59)
Political interest index				
Political knowledge index				
Constant	-2.75 (.21)	-4.73 (.30)	-0.60 (.52)	-3.29 (.88)
N	2475	2473	502	502
Pseudo R2	0.25	0.34	0.23	0.33

In Table 8 we rerun models 1 and 2 separately for those under 35 and those over 35. What we are looking for is evidence that some variables work differently for the younger group compared with the older group. What we observe is that in the over-35 models, very few socialization factors appear significant, outside one's spouse's political behaviour (which is highly significant). The level of voting in one's network is significant in the first model, but loses significance when we control for knowledge and interest. The under-35 models, by contrast, show effects for all of the socialization variables that were significant in Table 7. Furthermore, there is some evidence that civic education classes have a positive effect on voting (model 1) by increasing knowledge and interest (model 2, where civic education loses significance).

Some caution needs to be used in comparing these models, because the over-35 age group has a small number of cases. It could be that the non-significant effects are simply a function of sample size and that they would appear in a larger sample. For now, then, these findings are more suggestive than conclusive, but they are consistent with the idea that socializing forces should be more important to citizens who have yet to develop long-standing political attitudes or behaviours.

## Social and Other Forms of Participation

Table 9: Forms of Participation by Age

	18–22	23–29	30–34	35 +
Voted in the last federal election	64%	76%	66%	91%
Wrote a letter or email to a newspaper	4%	4%	3%	6%
Left a comment on a blog, discussion group, or online article	27%	32%	26%	20%
Attended a community meeting about a local issue	13%	14%	12%	20%
Contacted a politician to express your views on an issue	6%	11%	13%	20%
Participated in a demonstration or protest march	8%	10%	10%	6%
Signed a petition	40%	42%	31%	27%
Raised or donated money for a cause	41%	45%	40%	45%
Bought or boycotted products for political, environmental, or ethical reasons	21%	32%	31%	28%
Wore a t-shirt, bracelet, or badge for a cause	31%	26%	21%	19%
Searched for information online about politics or public issues	67%	75%	59%	60%
Used social media to share political information or content	39%	44%	35%	29%
Watched a leaders' debate during the election	49%	54%	43%	65%
Displayed a sign for a party or a candidate during the election	10%	8%	7%	14%
Participated in an event organized by a party or candidate during the election	8%	6%	6%	7%
Attended an information session on how to register and vote in the election	7%	4%	3%	3%
Volunteer for an organization	44%	37%	27%	33%
Volunteer for a politician	3%	2%	4%	4%

Source: Elections Canada National Youth Survey, 2015.

The extent to which traditional forms have been replaced by other forms of civic engagement, like volunteering, protest politics, online activism or political consumerism, remains contested in the literature (Gidengil et al. 2003; Milner 2010; O'Neill 2007; Micheletti et al. 2004). As young people's voting levels have dropped over time, some have questions whether they are simply turning to other, newer forms of participation. Table 9 provides an overview of the various ways in which respondents in the NYS participated.



Voting is the most common form of participation in every age cohort, except for the 18–22 cohort, in which 67% search for information online about politics and public issues, while having an electoral participation rate at 64%. Furthermore, young people also participated as much, and sometimes more, than those over 35 in a variety of other forms of participation. The question becomes whether such activities replace voting, or if they are simply another expression of politically involved citizens who tend to vote *and* engage in other ways.

Interest, political knowledge, and the various social influences that we have discussed in this paper are all related to various forms of participation, not just voting. For example, those who have a lot of political discussion in their networks are also more likely to participate in various other activities. Civic education also tends to be related to more participation overall, not just more voting.<sup>2</sup>

When we create an index of these various forms of participation (excluding voting) and include it in the full model, as we did in Table 7, we see that overall levels of participation do not seem to have a direct influence on further voting.

## **Conclusion**

Using data from the Elections Canada National Youth Survey conducted in 2015, this report focused on the social and civic sources of electoral engagement, with an emphasis on factors within the family, in broader social networks, and in the classroom. As others have done before, our analysis shows the importance of political interest and political knowledge in determining whether individuals will abstain during elections. While controlling for political interest and political knowledge reduces the positive effect of early socialization, it renders the effect of discussing politics with one's social network, of different media consumption, and among those under 35, civic education non-significant. This suggests that these factors may be promoting participation partly through their influence on interest and knowledge. The propensity to engage in political and civic participation also has no direct effect on voting when controlling for political interest and political knowledge.

Our findings suggest that civic education, particularly among younger voters, has a significant effect on political interest and political knowledge, both of which are important moderating variables for voter turnout. In a similar fashion, university education is expected to have an effect on political interest and political knowledge, while remaining a significant predictor of voter turnout. It is worth noting that gender has a small and significant effect on voter turnout once controlling for interest and knowledge, with these two moderating variables transforming the usual and expected negative effect of being a woman into a positive one. Spousal participation during elections and the perception of participation within one's network remains significant, with a positive effect on turnout. In fact, they are the only significant predictors of voter turnout for respondents over 35 until political interest is taken into account. Turning to respondents under 35, we find that even

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<sup>2</sup> While not shown, simple OLS regressions with the data from the Elections Canada National Youth Survey confirm these relations as well-established in the literature.

once controlling for interest and knowledge, early socialization and perception of network participation remain significant. As a policy intervention, then, our findings suggest it can have an effect on younger voters.

The data shows that while civics courses have a significant effect on knowledge and political interest for younger cohorts, this effect may subside over time. As such, it is important to consider the impact of socialization on youth differently than on the general population. While younger cohorts are more likely to discuss politics within the family and, in most cases, with classmates and are more encouraged to vote by their social network, they are also less likely to discuss politics with coworkers, spouses, and friends. Although socialization and civic instruction have an effect on voting behaviour among the youngest cohorts, they remain the least likely group to vote. Therefore, life-cycle effects need to be taken into consideration. Respondents over 35 show no effect of civic instruction and early socialization, which implies that other variables not studied here may consolidate knowledge and interest, such as the effect of long-standing political preference and attitudes.

Promoting interest in elections is of fundamental importance to policy-makers. Interest has an incremental effect on political life and the socialization of individuals, where young cohorts who find elections uninteresting and abstain will tend to also abstain subsequently (Franklin 2004). Competitiveness in elections and the impression that individuals could have an impact on electoral results help to create interest in elections (Johnston et al. 2007) and likely foster discussions within networks. While it is difficult to mandate competitive and interesting elections, current debates concerning changes to the electoral system may encourage greater interest in electoral politics.

Our analysis of the effect of socialization factors on voter turnout by age groups highlights the importance of political interest and knowledge. Considering the positive effect of civic education on knowledge and interest, our recommendations for policy-makers is to focus interventions on these mediating variables, and our analysis suggests that the most effective interventions will focus not just on the individual, but on the social environments in which one finds oneself. Campaigns that focus on getting groups of people to talk and discuss politics, rather than simply promoting the acquisition of individual's knowledge, may well have longer-term effects.

In conclusion, then, early socialization is linked to an increase in turnout among the youngest cohorts and reflects the beneficial effect of discussing politics at home. Getting people interested and knowledgeable about politics at a young age is the key to ensuring that these citizens participate in the electoral system when they come of age.

## References

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