

**CANADA  
VOTES 2008**

ELECTION DAY

Oct. 14, 2008

## Instilling interest

**These four organizations are helping young and first-time voters cast their vote**

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By Lorianna De Giorgio [CBC News](#)



*K'naan*

*performs at Apathy is Boring's Quebec City concert on Aug. 13, 2008. (Courtesy of Apathy is Boring)***Apathy is Boring**

Ilona Dougherty and her team work year-round to encourage the youth vote.

Since forming in 2004, the national, non-partisan organization has hosted art events, concerts and online and print media campaigns to spread its messages of engaging the disengaged.

For the 2008 election, Apathy hosted four concerts in Quebec City, Halifax and Montreal with performances by a slew of Canadian talent including Jully Black, K'naan and illScarlett.

As well, their website lists tips and information for youth, including a glossary on election terms and links to media coverage of the campaign.

"For us at Apathy is Boring, we really see voting as a first step to civic engagement," says Dougherty, who advocates for a better relationship among the federal government, Elections Canada and youth so young Canadians have a clear understanding of what it means to vote.

"It's not just about voting, it's about being an active member of one's community and understanding

what it means to have a voice as a citizen," Dougherty says.

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## **Youth Text 2008**

Organized by the Dominion Institute's Democracy Project, Youth Text 2008 is an interactive program that mixes youth's thirst for new media with civic engagement.

The program, which debuted in time for the 2004 federal election, allows youth to connect with political parties by sending text messages to each party from their cellphones.

Youth Text's website lists the text numbers of each party, encouraging youth to send the parties any questions or comments they might have. Four parties are involved this year: the Liberals, Conservatives, Greens and NDP.

The parties will respond within 24 hours, says Marc Chalifoux, executive director of the Dominion Institute.

In 2004, 1,800 users participated and 7,000 text messages were sent out. Two years later, 3,000 users participated and 13,000 messages were sent out during the 2006 general election.

Along with Youth Text, the Dominion Institute recently released a national survey on low youth voter turnout.

The survey, which was conducted by Innovative Research Group during a six-day period in September, found that the number of young voters who says they will definitely vote on Oct. 14 is down seven per cent from the last election.

In 2005, 57 per cent of 18-25-year-olds said they would "definitely vote." In 2008, the number dropped to 50 per cent.

"Two of the best indicators of whether someone will vote in an upcoming election are do they know anything about politics and did they vote in the previous election," says Chalifoux. "So, if first-time voters are staying away from the polls by greater number than would, say, turn up, we may be in a few years in a democracy where there are more non-voters than there are actual voters."

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## **Elections Canada**

Elections Canada is doing its part in teaching young Canadians about the importance of voting.

Along with a youth-focused section on its website, where it lists information on how to register, what identification to bring to the polling station and other facts about the federal election, the agency has sent out "Leave Your Mark" cards to approximately 406,000 youth who have reached the legal voting age since the last election but haven't yet registered to vote.

"This mailing is part of a proactive initiative to ensure that eligible voters across the country are registered to vote in federal elections," Elections Canada states on its site. "It is also a major step in

Elections Canada's ongoing commitment to deal with the decline in voter turnout, particularly among youth."

Elections Canada is also the sole financial partner of Student Vote, a non-partisan organization that hosts mock elections for elementary and high school students across the country.

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## Y-Vote

Similar to Apathy is Boring, Y-Vote, a Calgary-based youth-run blog, encourages youth to vote through links to the major parties, Elections Canada voting requirements and the media's coverage of the election.

The blog began after Elections Alberta reported a low voter turnout in the province's provincial election in March. Only 40.6 per cent of voters turned out - the lowest in Alberta history.

"We feel that youth didn't vote in the provincial election because there were many barriers and not enough motivators," says Teang Tang, co-founder of Y-Vote.

The 26-year-old Calgarian says she found it difficult to locate information on the election process and many of the Elections Alberta's polling stations were not accessible for most youth.

"My polling station wasn't close to public transit. Even with a map, I got lost. There also wasn't much signage telling me where the polling station was," she says.

With the hope of increasing youth voter turnout in the upcoming federal election, Y-Vote is asking visitors to the site to add their names to an online petition, "Pledge to Vote," affirming their belief in the value of heading to the polls Oct. 14.

"The federal election represents a huge opportunity to mobilize the power potential of the youth vote and to capture it, not just for 2008, but also for future elections," Tang says.

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