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## Content

[Home](#)[Features](#)[News](#)[Arts & Culture](#)[Sports](#)[Opinion & Editorial](#)[Dear Di](#)[Letters](#)[Log In / Register](#)[Archives](#)

## Announcements

### Vacant Positions

The Fulcrum Publishing Society's Board of Directors is looking for a University of Ottawa student to serve as a

**Disinterested Student Representative** on the Board for the 2009-10 publishing year.

For more information regarding the position please contact Ross Prusakowski, the Society's President at [board@thefulcrum.ca](mailto:board@thefulcrum.ca)

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### Cast your vote

#### Why many youth don't participate in elections

**Hilary Caton - Fulcrum Staff**

WITH THE CANADIAN federal election on Oct. 14, many people are in an indecisive frenzy. Election season can become overbearing at times, as party volunteers spike signs into lawns and political brochures pile up in the mail. But with this election buzz and shameless party promoting encompassing the country, why is it that young Canadians aren't taking notice? Whether youth are swamped at school, overwhelmed with work, simply uninformed, or just don't care, one thing is clear: the majority of Canadian youth are not voting.

#### Exercising your democratic right

As Canadians, voting is a part of our civic responsibility and our exclusive right as citizens of a democratic nation, but according to a recent survey, that sense of duty and responsibility is drastically fading with today's youth.

"Less than 44% of voters under 24 actually cast a ballot in the last federal election and that number will probably go down, rather than up, on Oct. 14. This is extremely troubling," said Marc Chalifoux, executive director of the Dominion Institute, an institute devoted to promoting knowledge of Canadian history. Results of the Dominion Institute poll, published in the Ottawa Sun on Oct. 1, indicated that the number of 18 to 24-year olds who said they would definitely vote on Oct. 14 may drop by up to seven per cent. But why the drop?

"I think it shows the lack of civic education in the high schools. Not all students have taken those courses and therefore are more focused on their specialties," said Michael Behiels, the university research chair in Canadian federalism and constitutional studies at the University of Ottawa (U of O). "They don't develop a better understanding of their civic responsibilities, Canadian history and the Constitution. I think that problem has been there for far too long, and the provincial governments simply have not remedied that situation. As a result, everybody complains about the youth participation rate."

#### Politics pushed aside

"Young people are engaged in political activity, but not in the traditional sense," said Catherine Côte, a political science professor at the U of O. "They buy coffee that is fair trade, they recycle and buy environmentally friendly products. Their politics is more day-to-day and is now a different kind of political activism than the older generations."

More young Canadians are finding their own innovative ways to be politically active through podcasts or blogs, and are moving away from more traditional involvement like reading or watching the news. Youth are more interested in doing their part, whether through petitions or interest groups, by coming together with others who share their concerns. Ilona Dougherty, executive director of Apathy is Boring, a website designed to inform young voters, believes that the use of technology by youth is a great way to stay on top of election news.

"[It's] important to keep [the information] diverse and to use art and technology to get young people involved," she said.

Patrick Fafard, a U of O social science professor, believes that the political parties don't do enough to cater to this new wave of political awareness.

"We know youth are not likely to get their news from the newspaper or television anymore," he said. "To raise the level of understanding in civic literacy or even change the way youth see politics, you have to reach out to [young people] where they are, which is increasingly

online.”

~~Youth today do what they want in their own unique way. This includes politics. They want to transform it into something appealing and fun while continuing to voice their concerns.~~

“[Students] are less interested in traditional ways of being politically active, it doesn’t attract them in the ways that this new form of political activism does. This is a big shift,” states Côte.

“The system itself will have to change and adapt to the way young people are seeing politics and their values; the new generation will help with that.”

Even a single vote in an election counts, contrary to what many believe. Martine Robitaille, the Elections Canada youth coordinator for the U of O, has talked to many students about the elections and the importance of voting.

“People don’t think it matters to vote and they don’t think that by voting they will make a difference,” she said. “That’s basically what I’ve been getting when I talk to students. ‘It doesn’t matter if I vote because it’s not going to make a difference.’ If everybody that says that votes, all the votes put together are going to make a huge difference.”

What many youth seemingly fail to realize is that as adults, they are no longer sitting on the sidelines but play a dynamic role in the everyday lives of Canadians.

### **What can be changed**

Even Canadian celebrities seem to have lacklustre enthusiasm when it comes to promoting the idea of voting. Compared to other countries like the United States, Canada’s celebrities are silent. Getting these celebrities or popular Canadian shows to endorse and emphasize the importance of Canadian elections could be a potential springboard for engaging youth voters in the upcoming election. Spencer Buchanan, a second-year linguistics student, believes this point is incredibly important.

“Celebrities are extremely influential for young people especially; many aspire to be like them so they would probably listen to them if they talked about it,” he said.

This influence is clearly visible in the United States where movie star Leonardo DiCaprio put together a public service announcement concerning registration for the upcoming U.S. election. The ad is made up of celebrities who volunteered their time because they have a strong interest in getting people to vote.

Communication from peer to peer, or, in this case, youth to youth, is another effective way to get the politicians’ election messages across said Caitlin Crowley, a second-year communications student.

“The government should bring back the student assembly, where students were voted into an assembly and were then used as teachers, to inform other youths about the political system in Canada. I think hearing this information from your peers helps.

“The election isn’t really geared towards students. I don’t feel that they are doing enough,” Crowley continued.

Fafard had a similar notion.

“All political parties don’t do a good enough job of explaining how the policy preferences that they advocate are relevant or linked to the real lives of young people,” he said.

### **Appealing to youth**

Media are putting in an effort to reach out to young voters. News sources such as the CBC are using various interactive media forms to get youth excited about voting and the election process. From offering youth-friendly news shows like The Hour with George Strombopoulos to luring young adults online to read news briefs and download podcasts, the CBC is making an attempt to reach out to the 18-25 demographic.

Local universities are also putting on student-run events. The Student Federation of the University of Ottawa (SFUO) hosted Wake Up and Vote on Sept. 26, combining wakeboarding with political awareness. Information tables for four federal political parties were set up so that students could get a general sense of what each party represented.

“Not everyone wants to go to a debate,” said SFUO VP University Affairs Seamus Wolfe. “We’re trying to make the election more fun, trying to add fun to what some people may see as boring.” Fafard agreed with Wolfe.

“All political parties need to experiment with new and different channels of communication and participation to increase civic literacy, knowledge, and understanding of the political process in youths,” he said.

### **Why it is important to vote**

With the election now only days away, politicians are in a frenzy to garner as many votes as possible. Those citizens who wait until the last day to

decide who they'll vote for can make a significant difference.

"If young people don't vote, then the issues that are relevant to them are being decided by people who are a lot older than they are. Basically, our grandparents are making decisions for us about education, about arts and social policies, about the environment, etc.," said Dougherty. "It's not our generation that has a say in that because we don't decide who gets elected. The cool thing is that if young people did vote, we could sway the election. [There are] enough young people in Canada that we could decide who is prime minister, and that's pretty amazing." "If all of the students at [the] U of O voted, that could really change who in that riding gets elected," said Dougherty. "It's amazing to see the change that could happen if we did something rather than just assuming what we do have the power to do doesn't make a difference. "

***Things you need to know to vote***

*Where:* Visit [elections.ca](http://elections.ca) and enter your postal code to determine your polling station.

*When:* **Oct. 14 – 9:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m.**

*How:* Option 1 – Provide one original piece of identification issued by a government or government agency containing your photo, name and address (e.g. driver's licence). Option 2 – Provide two original pieces of identification authorized by the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada. Both pieces must contain your name, and one must also contain your address (e.g. health card and hydro bill). Option 3 – Swear an oath and be vouched for by an elector who is on the list of electors in the same polling division and who has an acceptable piece or pieces of identification (e.g. a neighbour, your roommate).

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