

Subscribe and get
4 free issues of
MACLEAN'S

- [RSS](#)

- [HOME](#)
- [NEWS](#)
- [ADVICE](#)
- [BLOGS](#)
 - [Artificial Intelligence](#)
 - [Coleman on Campus](#)
 - [Jenny's Microscope](#)
 - [Keller's Uniblog](#)
 - [Rybak's Rules](#)
 - [Scott Dobson-Mitchell](#)
 - [That's What Jill Said](#)
 - [The Freshman](#)
- [STUDENT FINANCE](#)
 - [High School](#)
 - [College & University](#)
 - [After Graduation](#)
- [RANKINGS](#)
 - [RANKINGS TOOL](#)
- [COLLEGES](#)
- [SCHOLARSHIPS](#)
- [TAKE THE TEST](#)
- [CAMPUS CHOW](#)
- [CONTACT US](#)

That elusive youth vote...

By [Carson Jerema](#) | October 6th, 2008 | 9:16 am

Few groups are trying to get young people out to vote. It is a welcome change

On Saturday, the *Ottawa Citizen* published a [story](#) about how in contrast to elections past, there are relatively few groups trying to get young people out to vote. "There were probably about 20 organizations encouraging young people in the 2004 election. Now there's only about three," says Ilona Dougherty of [Apathy is Boring](#). In addition to her group, Dougherty cites The [Dominion Institute](#) and [Student Vote](#), as the only organizations who are really trying to get young people engaged.

The decline in youth voter organizations has resulted in fewer news stories being written about the issue. Either that, or the media has simply lost interest as University of Calgary political scientist Brenda O'Neil suggested to the *Citizen*. Whatever the reason for the relative dearth in coverage about how our democracy is going to implode if political institutions don't somehow find a way to make the system more relevant to young people, it is a welcome change in the election narrative. What is a youth issue anyway?

Last fall, the [Canadian Policy Research Networks](#) (CPRN) released a report titled *Lost in Translation: (Mis)Understanding Youth Engagement*. The CPRN argued that, "Youth are not disconnected from politics . . . It is political institutions, practice and culture that are disconnected from youth." Engagement in consumer advocacy, protests, and other forms of non-traditional participation are cited to support the CPRN's claims.

But if you look at the [data](#), people who are engaged in non-traditional forms of political participation are also most likely to vote. As O'Neil told the *Citizen*: "People who aren't voting aren't doing other things." What's more, while the youth demographic as a whole votes in numbers as low as 40-45 per cent, the university educated young vote in numbers as high as 70 per cent.

Nearly everyone who studies participation is in agreement on a few key points. Specifically, people are more likely to vote, in fact as much as 15 per cent more likely, as they age and issues such as taxation become more relevant. There is nothing to suggest that disengaged 20-year-olds will become disengaged 40-year-olds.

But this doesn't account for the reality that younger cohorts in total are about 10 per cent less likely to vote than they were in the 1960s. The CPRN

assures us that this is because they are less politically literate when it comes to traditional politics, but this is misleading.

Part of the answer does lie within the CPRN report, that membership in political parties is much lower than it use to be. While the CPRN takes this to be one of their defining illustrations of the retreat from politics, it is much more likely that this is illustrative of weakened party structures. For instance, people are more likely to vote if candidates speak to them directly but “get out the vote” campaigns and door to door campaigning are not as prevalent as they once were.

Weakened party structures has been accompanied with weakened party identification, meaning that in the past people didn’t necessarily have to think about who they would vote for, they just knew. So, it is entirely possible that young people in the 1960s were just as politically illiterate and unaware as they are today. It is the party system, and party identification that is different.

These icons link to social bookmarking sites where readers can share and discover new web pages.



There Are 2 Responses So Far. [»](#)

1.

Comment by Philippe Marchand on [7 October 2008](#):

“What is a youth issue anyway?”

There is no uniquely “youth” issue. But statistically, young adults will use less the healthcare system than the older voters. Statistically again, they won’t have significant savings, but they could have a larger debt (studies, mortgage, etc.). And through their whole life they will be more affected by global changes to the environment if these become more important with time. It is clear that the impact of government programs and policies is not uniform over generations.

However I find the point about participation not being uniformly low among youth (for example, the university-educated voting more) is important because if there is a campaign to raise this voting rate, they would be wasting (comparatively) their time by focusing on university campuses.

[\(Report comment\)](#)

2. *Pingback by [That elusive youth vote..II : Macleans OnCampus](#) on [9 October 2008](#):*

[...] reiterate my earlier argument, Gilles Duceppe is wasting his breath: Speaking to more than 400 students at Laval University, the [...]

[\(Report comment\)](#)

Post a Response

By posting your comment you agree to the Macleans.ca [terms of service](#).

Name (required)

Mail (will not be published) (required)

Website



Submit Comment

SCHOLARSHIPS



[Search our database](#)

RANKINGS



[Evaluate universities](#)

BUY THE GUIDE



[The A to Z of university](#)

Video OnCampus

The Chronicle of Higher Education takes us inside an essay mill.






[Journey to the Inside of an Essay Mill](#)

•

•

•

• Recent Comments

-  It is highly unfortunate that the flagship of educational institutions for the First Nation communities across Canada is undergoing these ...
S Bellegarde | 29Jun09 | [More](#)
-  Not in a million years! As Dan said, if it were a Pro-Life rally (which a larger portion of the ...
Dr.Dyer | 29Jun09 | [More](#)
-  You answer your own question just a bit earlier in the piece: "UTSU president Sandy Hudson has requested other student ...
Sean Maguire | 29Jun09 | [More](#)
-  I think Dan brings up a good point: why would a student union be involved in a protest in the ...
Will van Engen | 28Jun09 | [More](#)
-  York University had a similar instance recently. The President of the York Federation of Students, Krisna Saravanamuttu, was sanctioned for ...
Silence Dogood | 28Jun09 | [More](#)

• HIGHER EDUCATION LINKS

- [American Educational Research Association](#)
- [Association for the Study of Higher Education](#)
- [Association of Canadian Community Colleges](#)
- [Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada](#)
- [Canadian Association of University Teachers](#)
- [Canadian Society for the Study of Higher Education](#)
- [Canadian University Press](#)
- [Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education](#)
- [Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis](#)
- [Center for International Higher Education](#)
- [Center for the Study of Higher Education](#)
- [Centre for Higher Education Research and Development](#)
- [Chronicle of Higher Education: Daily News Blog](#)
- [Community College Research Center](#)
- [Council of Ministers of Education, Canada](#)
- [Critical Education Theory, Pedagogy and Practice](#)
- [Education Resources Information Center](#)
- [Eurydice \(Education in Europe\)](#)
- [Inside Higher Ed](#)
- [International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education](#)
- [LMI news Blog](#)
- [National Great Teachers Movement](#)
- [Observatory on Borderless Higher Education](#)
- [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development](#)

• STUDENT ORGANIZATION LINKS

- [Alberta College and Technical Institute Student Executive Council](#)
- [Alberta Graduate Council](#)
- [Alliance of Nova Scotia Student Associations](#)
- [Association pour une Solidarité Syndicale Étudiante](#)
- [Canadian Alliance of Student Associations](#)
- [Canadian Federation of Students](#)
- [Coalition for Student Loan Fairness](#)
- [College Student Alliance](#)
- [Council of Alberta University Students](#)
- [Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec](#)
- [Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec](#)
- [New Brunswick Student Alliance](#)
- [Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Students](#)
- [Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance](#)



[ADVERTISE](#) | [IN-CLASS PROGRAMS](#) | [ABOUT US](#) | [SUBSCRIBE](#) | [PRIVACY POLICY](#) | [INTERNSHIPS](#) | [CONTACT](#)

© Copyright [Rogers Publishing Limited](#) 2008.