

Understanding the Decline in Youth Voting



We, as youth, have unprecedented control over our day-to-day existence. From the ability to blog or podcast to international audiences, to choosing the next national idol, youth have never seen this kind of power before! So how come we've given up voting? Our new found command doesn't extend into the realm of politics. Consequently youth are disengaging from this arena. We are seeing record low numbers of youth voters these days. Since 2000, a mere 40% of youth aged 18-25 have voted. That's 6 out of every 10 youth who aren't getting to the polls! The problem is, if we're not voting, we're not being represented, and if we're not being represented, we're going to be more and more alienated! Want to understand this staggering decline in youth voting? Let's take a closer look at three factors involved in the trend.

Rationally Speaking Now, What's the Point?

Human beings are, for the most part, rational. We understand cost and benefit analysis. Most of the time, people won't do something unless it's obvious that the benefits outweigh the costs. Since it's not immediately obvious what the benefits of turning up at the polls are, it's clear that our rationality may dissuade us from making voting a priority. And the less youth vote, the less obvious the point in so doing!

The Generation Gap

Youth and older generations differ in their priorities. If politicians are looking to get the most votes, it's obvious that they will appeal to the greatest potential number of voters. Older generations tend to be interested in the economy and healthcare. Younger generations, on the other hand, care about employment, education, and helping others less fortunate than themselves. If youth aren't getting out there, politicians will be focusing on what's important to their voters, and that won't include us.

Culture Shock

Youth tend to have different values than their older counterparts. While pretty much all citizens want some type of reform, youth want to see action NOW! We want internet voting, we want to make voting compulsory, and we want to see University graduates being paid for a year of community service. Older generations, on the other hand, want to see more traditional reforms. Younger Canadians also see things very differently. We have less respect for the federal government, the media, organized religion, the armed forces and civil service than do people over the age of 40!

We're not Being Represented, Now What?

While throwing up our hands can be tempting, it's not winning us any big changes. No one is going to represent us if we don't represent ourselves! Now that you've seen a breakdown of reasons why youth don't vote, ask yourself: Do I fit into this pattern somewhere? What about my friends? What about my classmates? Most importantly, what can I do to change it?

If you want to read more check out: <http://www.cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=1772&l=en>