Youth Turnout:
New Evidence from the *Ontario Students' Assembly on Electoral Reform*

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Introduction

Declining voter turnout has been most pronounced among young adults. While antidotes remain elusive, we know that voting and abstention are habit-forming (e.g., Blais 2000; Franklin 2004; Gerber, Green, and Shachar 2003; Johnston, Matthews, and Bittner 2006; Plutzer 2002). Initial turnout decisions made between by those aged 18-30, approximately, set a course for their political engagement in adulthood. By implication, the immediate pre-adult years may offer important insight into why young people do or do not vote when they become eligible. Opportunities to examine this segment of the population are rare, because studies tend not to analyze individuals who are under the age of 18.

Our data come from a survey of high-school students in grades ten to twelve that was conducted by the *Ontario Students' Assembly on Electoral Reform*.[1] We focus on two questions. First, do people in the years immediately prior to the voting age – teens – see themselves as future voters? Second, how do adolescents account for their self-perceptions as voters or non-voters? In other words, we examine not only *whether* teens would vote, but also *why* they would vote or not vote. To explain variation in turnout views, particular attention is paid to three types of variables: socialization, knowledge, and attitudes. Finally, we conclude by situating our results within existing scholarship on the political participation of young adults and by suggesting avenues for further analysis.

Youth and Turnout

In this section, we have two tasks. First, we provide a very brief overview of the factors scholars tend to associate with declining youth turnout (as opposed to declining turnout generally, which

[1] The *Students' Assembly* is an independent body parallel to the *Ontario Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform*.

is a separate issue).[2] Our second goal for this section of the paper is to evaluate collective efforts toward genuine understanding of youth turnout decline given that the voting behaviour literature tends to ignore the pre-adult years.

Scholars estimate that turnout among young Canadians born since 1970 is 20 percent lower than turnout among Baby Boomers (born 1945-1959) at the same age (Blais et al. 2004: 225). Similar patterns have been reported cross-nationally (e.g., Blais 2000; Franklin 2004). Explanations for declining turnout among the youngest age group have tended to be framed in terms of a debate between life-cycle, generational, and/or period effects (and primarily between the former two effects). Within this, there are a number of variables known to correlate with the pronounced youth turnout decline: singlehood (Stoker and Jennings 1995); greater mobility (Squire, Wolfinger, and Glass 1987); lower political knowledge (Gidengil et al. 2004; Howe 2006); reaching political adulthood in an atmosphere of political uncompetitiveness (Franklin et al. 2004; Johnston, Matthews, and Bittner 2006); preference for alterative modes of non-electoral political participation (e.g., Norris 2002; c.f., Gidengil et al. 2004; Young and Everitt 2004); value change associated with a "decline of deference" (Nevitte 1996; Inglehart 1990, 1997); and, relatedly, greater partisan dealignment (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000).

Singlehood and increased mobility tend to be classified as life-cycle effects. Lower political knowledge, electoral uncompetitiveness,[3] preference for unconventional participation, value change, and partisan dealignment are thought to be generational effects. While lower turnout and other forms of participation decline among youth tend to be linked with pronounced political cynicism, particularly in popular discussion, youth are actually no more cynical than

[2] This is not a paper about low or declining levels of turnout in general; it is a sustained analysis of youth participation in elections, and discussion will be limited to youth, for the most part.
[3] Uncompetitiveness may also exert a period effect, but in terms of its lasting impression on people who come of age politically in an atmosphere of uncompetitiveness, it is best classified as a generational effect.

other cohorts. In fact, youth may be *less* cynical than older generations (e.g., Nevitte et al. 2000; O'Neill 2001; Pammett and LeDuc 2003). The point here is that there have been a variety of factors linked with declining youth turnout. We revisit the variables typically linked with declining youth turnout later in the paper after presenting analyses of high-school students' attitudes toward voting.

Our contribution to the youth turnout decline debate is rather novel in that we analyze individuals in the pre-adult years. With few exceptions (e.g., Hooghe and Stolle 2004), this has seldom been done in the voting behaviour literature. Indeed, it is worth questioning how our tendency to study people who have already reached the voting age affects our thinking about youth and participation. As Niemi so astutely observes, "political ideas – like the consumption of cigarettes and hard liquor – do not suddenly begin with one's eighteenth birthday" (1973: 117). Political socialization – how individuals become part of their political communities and acquire attitudes toward political objects, actors, symbols, and behaviours – is a process that starts in early childhood and continues into adulthood. Understanding young adults' political behaviour requires more serious attention to the pre-adult years, an age period that political scientists have tended to avoid, even those whose work includes publications on youth and political participation (e.g., O'Neill 2001; Pammett and LeDuc 2003).

It is during the adolescent years that we can identify "empirically founded hints at developmental risks" (Krampen 2000: 278) that may result in lower political interest and participation in adulthood. For reform-minded scholars as well as policy makers, this means that extending our analytical lens to examine youth (younger than 18), not just young adults (18 and above), holds purchase for devising optimal methods for encouraging turnout. Our paper is informed by recent work on the "developmental theory of turnout" (Plutzer 2002), for it holds

that turnout is a function of both "starting point" and "inertia" (41), that is, the likelihood one will vote in the first eligible election and the tendency for initial turnout decisions to become habitual. Our contribution is this initial attempt to sort out the factors related to the "starting point" – specifically, what types of Canadian adolescents see themselves as future voters and why – and to draw out the implications for understanding turnout decline among young adults.

Although our hypotheses are informed broadly by the turnout literature, we have adapted our expectations about youth's attitudes toward voting to incorporate a focus on pre-adult political attitudes and the importance of socialization. To begin, we include three socio-demographic variables in our analyses: gender, grade level, and religion (Catholic or not). We expect no difference in anticipated vote turnout between adolescent boys and girls. While there are gender gaps in myriad political behaviours – such as political interest, political discussion, and campaign donating (e.g., Scholzman, Burns, and Verba 1994) – there has been no gender gap in turnout for decades in Canada or in most advanced democracies (e.g., Everitt 1998; Schlozman et al. 1995). If there is any gender difference in turnout, girls may be slightly more likely to view themselves as future voters (Hooghe and Stolle 2004), a finding that is also reflected in the actual turnout of adult populations (e.g., Carroll 2006; Pattie and Johnson 2001). In their analysis of the attitudes toward future participation among fourteen-year-old Americans, Hooghe and Stolle (2004: 3) speculate that gender gaps are less likely to occur in the adolescent population because political resources such as "time, money, and cognitive skills" are more equitably distributed among individuals in this early age group.

The survey data we analyze was administered to students in grades 10 to 12, and as such, we expect that students in the more senior grades will be more likely to see themselves as future voters than those in more junior grades. Those in more senior grades are quickly approaching

political adulthood, and some have already reached eligible voting age.[4] Therefore, voting may be both more relevant and more meaningful to this group. Additionally, senior students will have completed the grade 10 civics course that is compulsory for high-school graduation in Ontario, so these students may possess both stronger attitudes of civic duty as well as the knowledge of how to vote due to this learning experience in the formal classroom setting.

Our last socio-demographic variable is a religion variable – specifically, whether a respondent is Catholic or not. While we recognize that the growing secularization of society, particularly of younger generations, may render the religious component of Catholicism (or any other religion, for that matter) less relevant, there appears to be something influential in what might be called the cultural legacy of Catholicism that makes Catholics more deferential to hierarchy and authority than their Protestant and other counterparts. In addition, there is also evidence that Catholics are particularly collectivist, at least compared to their Protestant counterparts (van Kersbergen 1999).

We suspect that socialization factors may be very prominent in shaping expectations about future political behaviour. As such, we consider the effects of a range of primary agents of political socialization: family, peers, school, and media (e.g., Hyman 1969; Krampen 2000). In line with the bulk of scholarship on socialization, we expect family and home environments to have a significant influence on whether students see themselves as future voters. Presumably, the actions, attitudes and conversations within students' home environments will have an important effect in shaping their views and expectations about politics and future political involvement. Indeed, political discussion in the home may instill in young people the idea that politics are

[4] Eight percent of our student respondents were eligible voters (i.e., over 18 years old) at the time the survey was administered (Nov.-Dec. 2006). Likely, the bulk of these students were not eligible to vote in the 2006 federal election, and there has not been a provincial election in Ontario since 2003. Thus, of this eight percent that is over 18 years old, it is highly unlikely that any but a small handful of them would have had the chance to exercise their first vote.

relevant to their lives. In general, we expect that the greater prevalence of political discussion in the home will positively influence expected turnout in future elections (Meadowcroft 1986; Westholm 1999).

Our peer socialization variable is operationalized through a survey question that asks students about the extent of group memberships (clubs and groups both in and outside school). While group memberships are thought to have an important linkage with political participation for all age groups – particularly in the social capital literature (e.g., Putnam 2000) – we approach group memberships more so as an opportunity for peer socialization. For adolescents who are particularly involved in groups and clubs, we anticipate a greater likelihood of expected voting. Indeed, these highly active teens are likely embedded within peer cultures that emphasize achievement and motivation, and they may also have a greater sense of self-confidence and personal efficacy gleaned from their school and community mobilization. From a social capital perspective, it is also likely that adolescents who are highly involved in clubs and groups have acquired valuable skills that can be transferred to the political sphere when they reach political adulthood (e.g., Hanks 1981; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995).

Two other plausible aspects of youth socialization include school political learning experiences and media exposure. A potentially important component of youth political socialization comes from in-school learning experiences about politics. While high schools in Ontario offer a mandatory civics course for students in Grade 10, other courses such as history, law, and social studies may also have political relevance. As such, the school socialization argument suggests that students' experiences or impressions formed of politics within these learning environments may have important and potentially lasting effects on future political behaviour. To what extent do these courses pique the interest of the students in politics? To

what degree do these learning experiences shape expectations of future involvement in politics (i.e., voting)? While these effects may not be definitive, our expectation is that positive feelings about political learning in school will have favourable effects on anticipated turnout.

Greater attention to news should be correlated with greater anticipation of voting (Atkin and Gantz 1978). While parents are typically thought to be the most influential (or at least the earliest) socializing agents, media, and particularly news media, provide additional means of integrating youth into their political communities (e.g., Chaffee, Ward, and Tipton 1970). Indeed,

> by providing youngsters with information regarding others' political behavior, mass media exposure … may contribute to the development of long-range predispositions regarding such anticipated political activities as voting and campaign work (Garramone and Atkin 1986: 78-79).

While limited, the available evidence does suggest that people who consume news in adolescence do become more knowledgeable and engaged adults in later years (e.g., Chaffee and Tims 1982; Comstock and Paik 1991). An important caveat is necessary here. The political norms and behaviours transmitted to youth through news media (and indeed other socializing agents) are not necessarily ones that are healthy for democracy. Indeed, it is possible that with the increasing predominance of 'infotainment' news formats and 'gotcha' journalism, attention to news may in fact instill in youth non-participatory attitudes. This is not our prediction, but it is a possibility.

The final set of factors that we consider deals with political attitudes and knowledge of politics. In particular, we consider the effects of political interest and cynicism as important attitudinal drivers of anticipated turnout. In short, we expect higher levels of political interest to be associated with greater levels of anticipated voting – much as it is in the adult population across the industrialized West (Franklin 2004). Cynicism is an important attitude vis-à-vis

politics that has become much more prominent in recent years. While findings suggest that youth are no more cynical than adults and may even be less so (Nevitte et al. 2000; O'Neill 2001; Pammett and LeDuc 2003), it is accepted that there is an important strain of cynicism pervading youth attitudes toward politics. As for the effects of cynicism on political involvement, we expect that the most cynical youths will be least likely to anticipate turning out to vote.

Finally, political knowledge has been demonstrated time and again to have powerful effects on political behaviour. For instance, the more knowledgeable are better able to link their individual and group interests with their issue positions (Althaus 1998; Gidengil et al. 2004) and vote choices (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Johnston et al. 1996). Further, the positive relationship between higher levels of political knowledge and turnout is one of the most robust and enduring in political behaviour literature (e.g., Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Gidengil et al. 2004; Popkin 1991; Popkin and Dimock 1999). As such, we expect that the highly knowledgeable will be much more likely than the least knowledgeable to report an intention to turnout to vote when they reach political adulthood.

Data and Methods

Our data come from a unique survey conducted by the *Ontario Students' Assembly on Electoral Reform*,[5] a process parallel to the *Ontario Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform* and that was designed to provide the latter with input from young Ontarians. Among other events and activities, the organizers of the *Students' Assembly* developed curricula for Ontario secondary

[5] The *Ontario Students' Assembly on Electoral Reform* was a project coordinated by Student Vote Canada, The Students Commission, and The Planning Desk. This venture had the financial support of the Government of Ontario, the Canadian Council on Learning and the Ontario Trillium Foundation. For more information on the *Students' Assembly*, see www.studentsassembly.ca

school teachers to use for teaching modules on electoral reform to high school students. For each classroom that opted to participate, the unit on electoral reform was meant to culminate in a *Classroom Assembly on Electoral Reform.* The data we analyze in this paper come from a survey designed by us and was administered by the *Students' Assembly* organizers to high school students as part of the in-school unit on electoral reform. For the most part, students completed the questionnaire at the end of the unit on electoral reform. In total, over 800 high school students representing 21 ridings from across the province completed the survey.[6]

These data have limitations. First, the sample is not a representative cross-section of Ontario high-school students. The participation of classes/schools in the survey was at the discretion of individual high-school teachers. Second, the context in which the survey was conducted may have differed from one classroom to another. While the *Students' Assembly* organizers provided a set of recommendations for conducting the survey, there was no central oversight to ensure uniformity in administration of the survey. As a result, we exercise caution about our results and the extent to which they can be generalized to the high-school population at large.

The survey was designed to provide data on a range of attitudes about politics, as well as meeting the objectives envisioned by the organizers of the *Students' Assembly* process. As such, the survey included questions on basic respondent information (gender, grade level, religious affiliation) as well as involvement in clubs and groups. A range of questions considered attitudes towards politics, politicians, the political system, trust, school-based learning about politics, and political involvement (including prospective turnout and other forms of activity). Finally, a

[6] The 103 students who participated in the three-day *Student's Assembly* also completed the survey. However, given that their unique experience with this process will inevitably bias their attitudes, experiences and judgments, we deemed it reasonable to conduct all analyses on the subset of respondents who did not participate in the *Students' Assembly* process.

battery of questions assessed respondents' levels of political knowledge and political values (such as the importance of equality).

Our empirical analyses build on the theoretical discussion developed in earlier sections of the paper. The central dependent variable is anticipated turnout to vote. The survey question used to measure this intention among respondents asked: "If there was a provincial or federal election tomorrow and you were eligible to vote, would you vote?" This question gives us a picture of whether adolescent respondents see themselves as future voters. Most analyses of turnout deal with a dichotomous variable reporting whether respondents turned out or not. The survey administered as part of the *Students' Assembly* process provided three response categories: 'yes', 'no' and 'don't know'. The 'don't know' option was included due to the possibility that students may not have previously considered whether or not they would vote and, therefore, may have no opinion on the matter. However, for purposes of coding the dependent variable, the 'don't know' response option introduces a dilemma. Are 'don't knows' to be coded as 'no', a middle category between 'yes' and 'no', or removed from analyses entirely? We have decided to code 'don't know' responses as 'no' responses.[7] This gives us a dependent variable that represents whether respondents see themselves as future voters categorized into two response groups: 'yes' and 'no' (or, more accurately, 'not yes').

[7] We code 'don't know' as 'no' for three reasons. First, we are interested in understanding the correlates of a positive intention to turnout among youth. A "don't know" response does not provide an unambiguous positive expression of intention to vote. Second, with a limited sample size, coding 'don't know' as 'no' allows us to maintain as many respondents in the analysis as possible. Finally, coding the "don't know" responses as a middle category between "yes" and "no" would entail that "don't know" indicates something more substantive than a non-attitude on the question of turnout. As a result, rather than assuming that a "don't know" choice indicates that a respondent may be somewhat more likely to vote (as opposed to clearly voting or not voting), we have decided to take the more conservative approach by not inferring any information about their positive intention to vote from this response. It is noteworthy, as well, that we have experimented with other ways of coding the "don't know" responses (remove from analysis or code as a middle category), but alternative codings do not produce markedly different results.

The future voter model is estimated first as a baseline model that includes only socio-demographic variables: grade level (10, 11 or 12), religion (catholic or not), and gender. Variables representing socialization, political attitudes, and political knowledge are introduced in subsequent estimations of the model.

Socialization variables are included to assess how family, media, peers, and school experiences affect students' attitudes toward potential political involvement. We examine the effects of four socialization agents: family, peers (as measured by group/club membership), news media, and school.[8] For family influences, we include a variable that asks respondents how often they talk about politics with their families. To the extent that political socialization of this sort has an effect, adolescents in families where politics is frequently discussed should be more likely to see themselves as future voters than those where political talk is uncommon. The second aspect of socialization that we assess considers the nature and extent of respondents' group/club involvement. Following the social capital literature, we anticipate that greater involvement with school groups and clubs will be associated with a greater likelihood of future turnout. Third, we assess how self-reported attention to news media[9] affects whether respondents see themselves as future voters. Respondents' attention to news may be a function of access and exposure to various forms of media as well as the decisions of families and friends to emphasize consumption of news media.

Finally, all students are exposed to politics through various aspects of their formal educational experiences in school. These experiences can occur through formal civics classes,

[8] This is not to suggest that political socialization is entirely encapsulated by these four factors, but rather that they are exemplary of the kinds of socialization influences that may shape youth political attitudes and values. Certainly, the family, peers, media, and school are regarded widely as primary agents of political socialization (e.g., Krampen 2000).

[9] This variable measures attention to news media generally, and does not provide information on the particular medium used (television, radio, internet, or newspaper).

which were re-introduced at the grade-ten level in Ontario high schools in the last few years, as well as in history, law, politics, and a variety of social studies classes. While the quality or content of these courses is not evaluated, students' responses to formal education about politics may be an important predictor of their future involvement in democratic practice. To operationalize this concept, we include a variable that asks students to rate their experiences learning about politics in school.[10] Presumably, positive political experiences learning about politics should enhance political participation when youth come of age.

The models are elaborated through testing the effects of attitudinal and cognitive predictors of intention to turnout. In particular, we test how political knowledge, political interest, and political disaffection influence youths' propensity to regard themselves as future voters. Our knowledge index is composed of ten questions.[11] The index was then recoded into low (0 to 3 correct answers), medium (4 to 6), and high (7 to 10) knowledge groups.[12] Our political interest variable is straightforward, categorizing political interest on a 10-point scale from 'not interested' to 'very interested'. Finally, we assess how political disaffection influences whether youth see themselves as future voters. Our models include two types of political disaffection: cynicism toward political parties and cynicism toward politicians. Cynical attitudes towards political parties are measured by responses to the statement: "all parties are basically the same; there isn't really a choice". Similarly, the effect of cynicism towards politicians is measured by responses to the statement: "politicians are ready to lie to get elected". For both variables, response options comprise a scale from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. Given

[10] While these socialization variables are conceptually differentiated, there is correlation between them. Results suggest that that there is statistically significant correlation ($p<.01$) between these three variables ranging from 0.33 to 0.48.
[11] See the appendix for details on knowledge items.
[12] The alpha for the knowledge index is 0.72.

that cynicism toward politics and politicians is relatively widespread, it is likely that intentions to become a voter will be lower among the more cynical adolescents compared to the less cynical.

Because the central dependent variable, expected future turnout, is dichotomous, models are estimated using logistic regression.

Results

a. Distribution of Dependent Variable

Before assessing the results of the turnout model, it is useful to start with the distribution of the dependent variable, hypothetical future turnout. As Table 1 indicates, almost 66% of the students who answered this question indicated a clear affirmative intention to vote, and about 18% indicated that they would not vote if a federal or provincial election were to be held the next day and they were eligible to vote. Interestingly, almost as many students (16%) indicated that they were not sure whether they would vote ('don't know'). The second column of Table 1 provides the relative frequencies for hypothetical turnout among students who expressed a clear intention – a 'yes' or a 'no' – leaving the undecided students out. Among students with clear intentions toward anticipated turnout, over 78% thought that they would vote -- which is in line with findings reported among 14-year old Americans (Hooghe and Stolle 2004) – while 22% said they would not vote.

(Table 1 about here)

Of immediate interest is the strong expression of anticipated turnout among the portion of the sample that indicated a clear 'yes' or 'no' response. While one reading of this distribution could be optimism for ameliorating turnout decline among youth, this optimism should be tempered. Over-reporting of turnout is a perennial problem for election surveys (e.g., Karp and

Brockington 2005), due primarily to perceptions that voting is a socially desirable behaviour. For example, among respondents to the 2006 Canadian Election Study, about 90% indicated that they voted in the federal election. However, based on results from Elections Canada, we know that actual turnout was just under 65%.[13] Hence, a high reported turnout (or intention to turnout in the future) does not always correspond with actual practice.

A second reason to be cautious about the high positive response to future turnout in our data concerns the context in which the survey was conducted. For the most part, the students who completed the survey did so after receiving a unit of classroom instruction about politics, the conduct of elections, and electoral reform in Ontario. In this environment, it is entirely possible that these students were primed to think about political participation, and the unit on electoral reform may have stimulated interest in politics that does not otherwise exist among the adolescent population in Ontario. While this potential bias is important to bear in mind for our data analyses, in the larger scenario, if political instruction does stimulate participatory attitudes among adolescents, civic education may offer some benefit in reversing youth turnout decline. Indeed, this has been part of the rationale behind the (re)introduction of high-school civics classes in various provinces in the last few years, including Ontario.

b. Future Voter Models

Results from regression analyses are included in Table 2. As previously discussed, the estimations proceeded in three stages whereby socio-demographic variables, socialization variables, and cognitive/attitudinal variables are sequentially introduced as blocs. Starting with the impact of grade level, Model 1 suggests that our prediction is correct. Grade level is

[13] From Elections Canada website: http://www.elections.ca/scripts/OVR2006/default.html. Accessed on May 7, 2007.

significant, indicating that students in higher grades are more likely to report that they would vote if a hypothetical election were held tomorrow for which they were eligible. Specifically, an increase of one grade level (from Grade 10 to Grade 11, for instance) is associated with a 28 percent increase in the likelihood of seeing oneself as a future voter. This result may reflect an anticipation of nearing voting age. In other words, older students may have a greater sense that politics is relevant to their lives. In addition, the senior students – those in grade 11 and 12 – had completed the mandatory grade-10 civics course by the time our survey was administered, and this course may have boosted norms of civic duty among these older students.

At this stage of the analyses, neither gender nor religion has significant effects on the future turnout. Finally, the very small pseudo-R^2 (0.01) for this model indicates that it explains very little variance in the dependent variable.

(Table 2 about here)

Model 2 introduces the next bloc of variables. These variables are those associated with socialization experiences: family political discussion, attention to news media, membership of clubs and groups, and positive attitudes toward political instruction in the formal education system. In brief, each of the socialization measures has a statistically significant and positive correlation with students' anticipated turnout. Predictably, habitual political discussion in the family has the strongest effect on whether students see themselves as future voters, which is in line with our expectations that family is the earliest and most influential agent of political socialization (e.g., Hyman 1969). While choosing to vote is ultimately an individual matter, patterns of political behaviour learned through familial interactions can have a prominent role in influencing the direction of individual decision-making later in life.

Results also clearly demonstrate that the family is not the only important agent of political socialization, for attention to news, belonging to groups and clubs, and positive political learning experiences in school all have positive independent effects on students' propensities to see themselves at the ballot box. In addition to significant effects, these variables significantly improve the model fit ($R^2 = 0.17$).

Students who are involved in three or more school/community groups are 75 percent more likely (based on the odds ratio) to see themselves as future voters than those involved in fewer than three groups. This result indicates the potential importance of associational activities for fostering civic awareness and a willingness to participate in the collective life of organizations outside of their immediate circumstance, a finding in line with work on social capital and the potential for non-political organizations to politicize (Putnam 2000; Erickson and Nosanchuk 1990).

Another aspect of the socialization process is the influence of news media in all its formats. While our measure of 'attention paid to news' is imperfect, it permits estimation of the role of increased news attention on anticipated turnout in future elections. A one-unit increase (on a 0 to 3 scale) in news attention increases the likelihood of anticipated turnout by 56 percent (based on the odds ratio). This result suggests that incorporating news media into adolescents' informational environment has positive effects on turnout intent. How this variable operates may be a function of a number of factors. In the first instance, school environments may provide access to news media. Activities such as classroom subscriptions to newspapers or discussion of current events in school are likely to foster exposure and attention to news media. At home, newspaper subscriptions or watching the evening news may be a part of the environment in which news media are available and accessed by youth. Finally, of their own accord and perhaps

as an expression of more general interest in politics, news may be consumed by youth through the above mechanisms as well as through internet sites and the radio. Therefore, the effects of news media consumption may be a result of both accessibility and interest.

A final component of youth's socialization is their experiences learning about politics in school. Presumably, all things being equal, an enjoyable experience with civic education or other forms of 'political learning' in school should (hopefully) positively dispose one to becoming politically involved when reaching political adulthood.[14] For each one-unit increase (on the four-point scale) in learning enjoyment, the likelihood of seeing oneself as a future voter increases by about 39 percent (based on the odds ratio). This result is interesting for a few reasons. First, it demonstrates the importance of school experiences on the development of political attitudes and behaviours. Indeed, this result suggests that positive exposure to politics during high school may boost political involvement. The finding is important, as well, from a public policy perspective, as school experiences may have important implications for teens' later political involvement. As such, addressing the quality and nature of high-school political learning experiences may be a pivotal means for increasing future turnout among today's youth.

The final regression model incorporates a bloc of attitudinal and cognitive variables (Model 3). With the addition of these new variables, each of the socialization variables continues to work in virtually the same magnitude and in the same direction. Popular discussion of turnout decline tends to focus on disaffection and cynicism toward politics. Our results partially support this notion, for disaffection towards political parties has a prominent negative effect on anticipated future voting while cynical attitudes towards politicians has no effect. For each one-unit increase in cynicism towards political parties, the likelihood of expressing future turnout

[14] By 'political learning' we refer to other classes of potential 'political' relevance such as social studies, law, or history.

intent declines by 27 percent. [15] By contrast, levels of cynicism toward politicians have no independent effect on anticipated turnout among students. These contrasting results are interesting and deserve some further discussion.

In the first instance, general cynicism towards political parties is not greater than cynicism toward politicians. On a 0 to 3 scale (where '3' is most cynical), the mean score for cynicism towards political parties is 1.03 and the mean for cynicism towards politicians is 2.14. This clearly suggests that these youth are much more cynical toward politicians than they are of political parties. However, what appears to drive declining intentions to vote is not cynicism writ large or cynicism of politicians, but rather attitudes towards political parties. As such, the youth who are most cynical toward parties are also the least likely to express an intention to vote. Why do cynical attitudes toward parties, but not politicians, play such an influential role in anticipated turnout among youth? One answer may be that youth feel that none of the parties adequately addresses the issues most important to youth, giving youth a sense that the parties are "all the same" in their relative neglect of young people.

Predictably, those youth who are most interested in politics are also more likely to see themselves at the ballot box in the future. Moving up one unit on the political interest scale (coded 1 to 10, representing ascending levels of interest), the likelihood of seeing oneself as a future voter increases by about 21 percent. While socialization likely precedes political interest (particularly among youth), higher levels of political interest increase anticipated voting, controlling for all other variables in the model and independent of prior socialization effects.[16]

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[15] This result does not mean that youth are particularly disaffected or that disaffection from or cynicism toward politics has a stronger effect on youth turnout attitudes than those of older generations of voters. Indeed, ample work demonstrates that youth are no more cynical than those of older cohorts (Blais et al. 2004; Gidengil et al. 2004; Nevitte et al. 2000; O'Neill 2001), despite popular assumptions to the contrary.

[16] Political interest is positively and significantly correlated with each of the socialization measures. In particular, the correlation coefficient is above 0.46 (and significant $p<.001$) between political interest and each of political conversation with family (0.59), news media consumption (0.46) and positive in-school political learning (0.50).

Political knowledge produces unexpected and confusing results. Most work demonstrates that knowledge has an important effect on political behaviours, and boosting turnout is one of the most consistent effects of high political knowledge (e.g., Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Gidengil et al. 2004; Popkin 1991; Popkin and Dimock 1999). Our data show no significant effect of knowledge on students' assessment of their future turnout. Results from our last model suggest, rather, that knowledge has no statistically significant effect on anticipated turnout among youth. To restate, this result is both surprising and potentially disconcerting for those (like us) who see the acquisition of knowledge as an important component of political literacy and involvement.

(Table 3 about here)

Ancillary analyses may indicate the likely reason for this surprising result. In the first instance, a cross tabulation of knowledge and anticipated turnout reveals that a robust relationship exists between rising levels of knowledge and anticipated turnout among adolescents. As Table 3 indicates, compared to only 52% of students in the low knowledge category, almost 82% of the high knowledge students see themselves as future voters. Therefore, if the expected relationship does exist in tabular analysis, we suspect that the lack of knowledge effect in the regression model is due, in part, to the high degree of inter-correlation between knowledge and socialization variables such as family, school and media exposure to politics as well as political interest.[17] As a result, the positive effects of knowledge on turnout intent that fail to materialize may be captured by the collective explanatory effects of prior socialization variables and political interest.[18]

[17] The correlation coefficients for knowledge and socialization range from 0.10 (group membership) to 0.39 (family political discussion) and 0.45 with political interest. All correlations are significant at $p<.01$ levels.

[18] An alternative reason for the null effect of knowledge could be related to the presence of multicollinearity in the model. Post-estimation diagnostic tests suggest that this is not the case as the mean variance inflation factor (VIF)

As a final means of considering the correlates of future turnout, a series of post-estimation predictions were conducted to provide greater clarity on the marginal effects on expected turnout of various socialization (family political discussion, schooling political learning) and attitudinal variables (cynicism about political parties).[19] These results are presented in Graphs 1 through 3.

(Graph 1 about here)

Graph 1 presents the effects of family political discussion on turnout. The predicted probability of expected turnout for an otherwise average respondent who never discusses politics with her family is 0.64, keeping in mind that the anticipated turnout variable is coded 0 for 'would not vote' and 1 for 'would vote'. By contrast, the predicted probability of future turnout for those who regularly discuss politics with their families is 0.82. This difference of 0.18 is statistically significant at $p<.001$.

(Graph 2 about here)

Results in Graph 2 consider the effects of cynicism about political parties on the expected likelihood of turning out. For otherwise average students (i.e. holding all other variables to their means), the predicted probability of voting if all respondents "strongly disagreed" with the statement that "all political parties are the basically the same" is 0.77. By contrast, the predicted probability of expected vote is decreased by 0.15 if all respondents "strongly agreed" with the statement that all parties are basically the same. The difference between the predicted probabilities is statistically significant at $p<.001$.

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for the model is 1.31 which is well below the threshold of '10' commonly used as the level establishing the presence of multicollinearity.

[19] This method of generating predicted probabilities of turnout was conducted using the 'predict' command in Stata. Using this command, all other independent variables in the model are held at their means, and the researcher can then manipulate the values of the independent variable of particular interest. As a result, this method allows one to consider the marginal impact (increase or decrease) on the probability of voting when responses are shifted from one response category to the next (i.e. 'somewhat agree' to 'strongly agree' with statement X) and/or from the lowest to highest response categories (i.e. 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree' with statement X).

(Graph 3 about here)

Finally, Graph 3 presents the effects of increasingly positive experiences with learning about politics in school on the likelihood of future turnout. For otherwise average respondents, if all respondents strongly disagreed with the statement that "learning about politics in school has been enjoyable", the predicted probability of voting is 0.65. By contrast, under the same conditions, if all respondents strongly agreed with this statement, the predicted probability of voting rises by 0.15 to 0.80. The difference is statistically significant at $p<.001$.

c. Why Vote? Why not Vote?

In addition to future turnout among youth, the survey administered by the *Students' Assembly* also included questions that reached deeper, asking students what their main reasons might be for choosing to vote[20] or not vote[21] if they were eligible. This section presents tabular data on the reasoning behind students' anticipated turnout decisions.

(Table 4 about here)

Table 4 shows the distribution of responses to these follow-up questions. Among the roughly 500 students who indicated that they thought that they would vote, two reasons stand out as most influential in this decision. First, over half of the students (51%) indicated that the main reason for intending to vote was as "a way to affect how specific issues will be decided". While

[20] For students who answered that they would vote, the next survey question asked was "If yes, why would you vote? Voting is a responsibility or duty, I don't want to be thought of as a slacker or a bad citizen, voting is a way to affect how specific issues will be decided, voting would make me feel good, most of my friends/family are voters, none of the above." Again, students were asked to select the option that best reflected their opinion.

[21] For students who answered that they would not vote in a hypothetical election held tomorrow, the next survey question asked was "If no, why would you not vote? I'm not that interested in politics, I don't have time, there is often no difference between candidates or parties, I'm not informed enough about the issues to make a decision, I can make more of a difference by volunteering in my local community, I dislike politics and government, my one vote is not going to make much of a difference, I don't know how to vote, and none of the above". Students were asked to choose the option that best reflected their opinion.

voting may not always be an effective vehicle for affecting issues – particularly given the relative insignificance of a single vote – a simple majority of future voters felt that this was the primary reason why they would vote. The second most popular reason for voting was that it is a "responsibility or duty". Indeed, just over one-third (34%) of respondents selected this reason as their main motivation for intending to go to the polls. Other explanations for the decision to turnout received nominal support, and these included the fact that parents or friends would vote (2.5%), the desire to avoid being seen as a "slacker or bad citizen"/ voting would make them feel good (4.5%) and other reasons (8%).

(Table 5 about here)

Among the 220 respondents who indicated that they would not vote, Table 5 presents distributions of three types of reasons for non-voting: apathy, lack of knowledge, and cynicism. Over 35% of these non-voters suggested that they were either uninterested in politics or did not think that they would have time to vote, which we group together under the category 'apathy'. By contrast, just over 32% of these non-voting youth indicated that a lack of knowledge was the main reason behind their intention not to vote. In this case, the students either felt that they were not informed enough about the issues to make a decision or that they did not know how to vote, although we do not know how many were suffering from each type (or both types) of knowledge deficit. The third reason for not intending to vote can be categorized as cynical attitudes towards the political system. Just under 20% of respondents indicated that the main reason for not intending to vote was agreeing with one of the following statements: "often no difference between candidates or parties", "can make more of a difference volunteering in the community", they "dislike politics and government" or that their "one vote isn't going to make a difference". Interestingly, despite popular discourse that assigns cynicism a prominent role in declining

turnout among younger voters, cynicism does not drive anticipated non-voting among students in our sample. Apathy and a lack of confidence in informational preparedness for voting are far more important determinants of anticipated abstention.

Discussion and Conclusions

In this section, we cast our discussion widely in order to explore the implications of our findings, an interesting exercise given that this paper is our first attempt at giving heightened attention to the pre-adult years – "the period of maximum change", according to Niemi and Hepburn (1995: 7). Inevitably, we raise a series of questions that we are not (yet) equipped to answer and propose some avenues for further research. In doing this, we hope to generate momentum and gather feedback for this important research agenda.

In terms of adolescents' overall anticipated turnout levels, our findings are virtually the same as those of others (Hooghe and Stolle 2004): nearly 80 percent of adolescents who express a clear opinion about their anticipated adult political behaviour see themselves as future voters. We have to keep in mind that turnout tends to be over-reported – by about 30 percent, on average, although over-reporting tends to be lower in countries with low turnout (Karp and Brockington 2005). If we discount Ontario students' reported future voting by 20 percentage points – given Canada's low and declining rate of turnout over the past two decades – this still places students' anticipated turnout at nearly 60 percent, at least for those who have a clear sense of their future political behaviour. By comparison, Elections Canada's estimates of young adults' turnout in the 2004 Canadian federal election indicate much lower actual turnout among young adults than that anticipated by our student sample.[22] The youngest group of electors (18-21.5

[22] The following discussion of young adults' turnout in the 2004 Canadian federal election is based on: Elections Canada. Estimation of Voter Turnout by Age Group at the 38th Federal General Election (June 28, 2004). Final

years old) turned out at a rate of 39 percent in 2004. Turnout was even lower for the next age group (21.5-24 years old) at 35 percent of eligible citizens in this group. Among those in the 25-29-year old age group, turnout rates were higher at 46 percent, but this is still much lower than the anticipated turnout of our high-school sample, as well as that of other studies of adolescents (e.g., Hooghe and Stolle 2004). Indeed, the average actual turnout among Canadians aged 18-29 was 40 percent in 2004, which is 20 percent lower than the discounted anticipated turnout of Ontario high-school students (60 %).

Why are teens' rates of anticipated turnout so much higher than the actual turnout of Canada's youngest electors in recent years? This is an important question, for the discrepancy seems to suggest that young adults want to vote and, in fact, intend to vote once they become eligible. Yet, when the time comes, young adults have abstained in surprisingly great numbers.

Our findings also raise questions about the correlates of turnout. Our most curious result is the virtual irrelevance of political knowledge as a predictor of anticipated turnout. Voluminous amounts of work in recent years have established political knowledge as one of the strongest and most consistent predictors of participation (e.g., Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Gidengil et al. 2004; Howe 2006; Popkin 1991; Popkin and Dimock 1999). Attesting to its central role in political behaviour, Delli Carpini and Keeter claim that "political information is to democratic politics what money is to economics; it is the currency of citizenship" (1996: 8). The conventional wisdom is that people with more information are better equipped to make political decisions, but this does not seem to be the case among adolescents. In fact, this may serve as a caution to researchers against assuming that explanations for adult political behaviour can be applied automatically to non-adults. In terms of the lack of relationship between political

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Report. December 2005. Available at: http://www.elections.ca/content.asp?section=loi&document=report38&dir=rep&lang=e&anchor=p14&textonly=false#p14. Accessed on May 17, 2007.

knowledge and anticipated turnout, there may be several plausible explanations. First, it may be the case that cognitive resources are less important to anticipated turnout in the pre-adult years compared to actual turnout in the adult years. Perhaps values and socialization experiences have a greater bearing on adolescents' likelihood of seeing themselves as future voters, a proposition supported by the strong effects exerted by all four agents of socialization that we include in our models (Table 2). This is not to say that students are unconcerned about how well-equipped they are to sort out the informational demands attending the decision to vote or abstain. Our survey indicates that feeling uninformed about politics is the second most popular explanation for anticipated abstention (Table 5).

As for the role of socializing agents, we find that family political discussion, group involvement, attention to news media, and positive experiences learning about politics in the classroom all boost anticipated turnout among students. The last factor, learning about politics in school, may suggest that the (re)introduction of civic education in Ontario was a positive measure that has instilled participatory values in youth. Our analyses of the different socializing agents are rudimentary, to be sure, and future research should be directed in particular toward the interactive effects of each. For example, the extent to which families watch news together or participate together in community groups, or perhaps the extent to which classroom-based political education encourages news media attention among teens, may be fruitful avenues for enquiry into the reinforcing and interactive effects of different socializing experiences.

Perhaps one of the most important points to emphasize as we move forward with this research agenda is the idea that 'socialization' as a concept is politically neutral. While 'socialization' as a concept does tend to be thought of in normative terms as boosting healthy attitudes toward democracy and participation, it is possible that young people are exposed to

negative forms of socialization that encourage apathy and cynicism toward politics (Gimpel, Lay, and Schuknecht 2003: 13). While our socialization variables might be more aptly described as 'positive socialization experiences', negative political socialization experiences are possible and likely discourage anticipated political behaviour among youth. Negative attitudes toward politics can be acquired in homes where politics is discussed frequently, from news that trivializes or criticizes the political system or portrays politics as little more than a horserace, or from peers who send messages that earnest political engagement is 'uncool'.

Moving to our cynicism variables, cynicism about politics does play a role in anticipated abstention, as it does for the adult population. Yet, it is cynicism toward the parties – specifically, the feeling that all parties are basically the same – that decreases anticipated turnout, not cynicism toward politicians. Certainly, adolescents are cynical about politicians, but their cynicism about politicians does not deter them from seeing themselves as future voters. The finding that cynicism toward parties suppresses anticipated turnout raises several possible explanations. First, it may be the case that political discourse in Canada does not reflect adolescents' interest in issues such as the environment, post-secondary education, and so on. In other words, youth may not see themselves as future voters because parties' platforms over the past decade have tended to focus on the same policy fields such as health care, tax cuts, and debt/deficit reduction. These are not exactly 'hot button' issues for teens. If youth feel alienated from popular political discourse in Canada, however, things may change in upcoming years given the growing focus on issues such as the environment and environmental sustainability more generally.

Another possible explanation for the effect of party cynicism may be the uncompetitiveness hypothesis (Franklin, Lyons, and Marsh 2004; Johnston, Matthews, and

Bittner 2006). Socialized during a period of sustained political uncompetitiveness in which the Liberal Party dominated federal government from 1993 to 2004, today's youth may have a sense that it makes no difference whether parties offer a range of distinct platforms, because Canada is prone to periods of one-party rule. Certainly, this changed with the Conservative minority returned after the 2006 federal election, which may throw a small 'kink' in the explanation, but the point is still valid. The adolescents in our sample experienced late-childhood and early-adolescence in a period of one-party dominance at the federal level. While we are unable to test this hypothesis directly, our results may be suggestive of an uncompetitiveness effect.

Moving forward, we hope this paper generates discussion about the value of moving backwards from a focus on initial turnout decisions made by new political adults to consider more seriously the pre-adult roots of participatory attitudes and behaviours. If initial decisions to go to the polls become path dependent behaviours resistant to change later in life (e.g, Blais 2000; Franklin 2004; Gerber, Green, and Shachar 2003; Johnston, Matthews, and Bittner 2006; Plutzer 2002), the years immediately preceding the vote appear to take on new significance.

Table 1: Distribution of Anticipated Turnout

	All Responses	Clear Intent
Yes	66% (508)	78% (508)
No	18% (140)	22% (140)
Don't Know	16% (127)	-
Total	100% (775)	100% (648)

Table 2: Logistic Regression of Anticipated Turnout among High-School Students

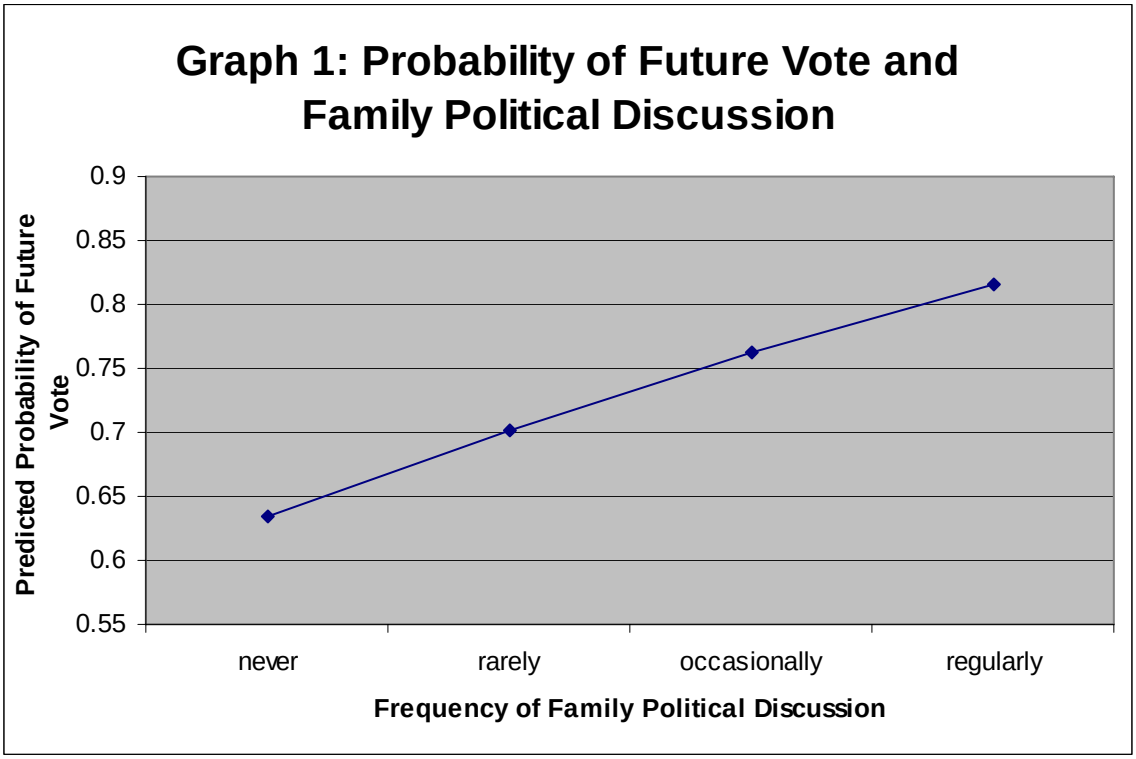
		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Socio-Demographics	Female	-.21 (.16) *.81*	-.03 (.18) *.97*	.05 (.22) *1.05*
	Catholic	.23 (.15) *1.26*	.37 (.18)** *1.45*	.45 (.22)** *1.57*
	Grade	.24 (.11)** *1.28*	.02 (.13) *1.02*	-.07 (.16) *.93*
Socialization	Group Member	-	.56 (.22)*** *1.76*	.51 (.26)** *1.66*
	Family	-	.66 (.11)*** *1.93*	.38 (.15)*** *1.46*
	News	-	.45 (.11)*** *1.56*	.39 (.13)*** *1.48*
	Learn	-	.33 (.10)*** *1.39*	.31 (.12)** *1.36*
Cognitive/Attitudinal	Parties Same	-	-	-.31 (.12)*** *.73*
	Politicians Lie	-	-	.03 (.12) *1.03*
	Interest	-	-	.21 (.05)*** *1.22*
	Knowledge	-	-	-.01 (.17) *.99*
	Constant	.24 (.24)	-1.56 (.34)***	-1.44 (.51)
		n = 756 Pseudo R^2 = 0.01	n = 719 Pseudo R^2 = 0.17	n = 586 Pseudo R^2 = 0.22

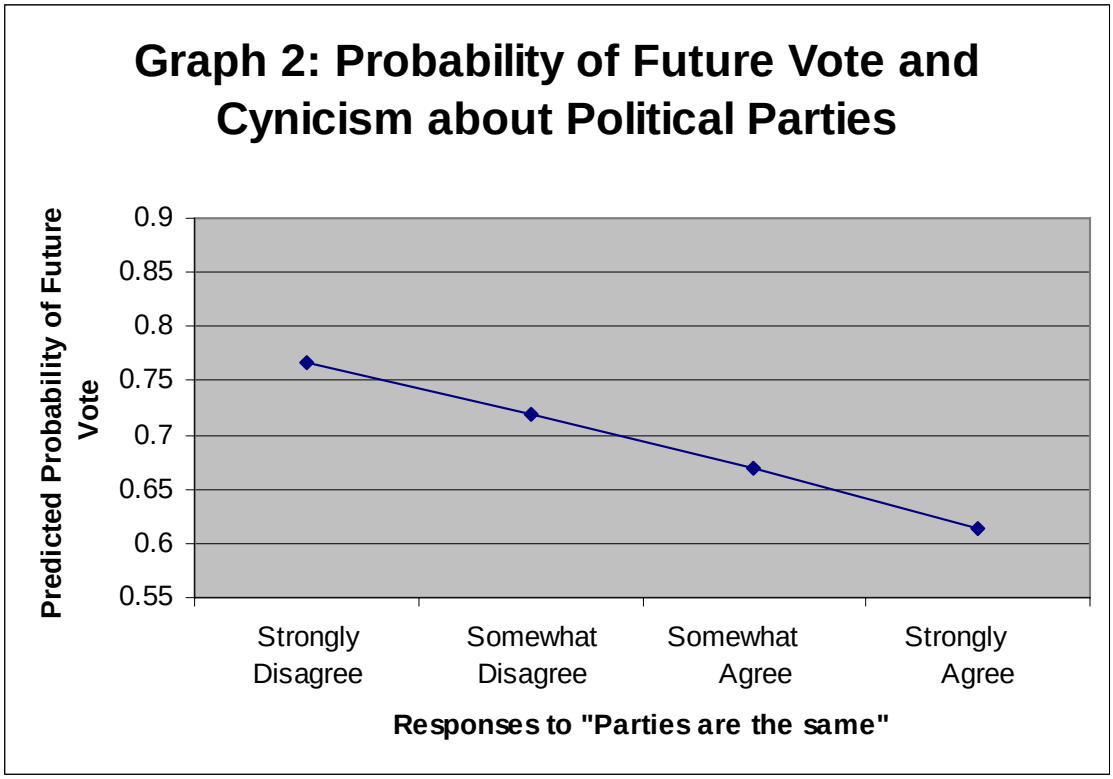
Note: Dependent variable is whether students would vote in a hypothetical federal or provincial election if they were eligible. Cells contain coefficients from binary logistic regression, standard errors in parentheses, and odds ratios in italics.
*** p<.01 ** p<.05 * p<.1

Table 3: Cross-tabulation of Knowledge and Expected Turnout

Vote	Low Knowledge	Mid Knowledge	High Knowledge	Total
No	48.0% (85)	37.4% (142)	18.4% (40)	34.5% (267)
Yes	52.0 (92)	62.6 (238)	81.6 (178)	65.5 (508)
Total	100 (177)	100 (380)	100 (218)	100 (775)

Significant at $p<.001$
Pearson's Chi Sq = 40.90
Cramer's V = 0.23


Graph 1: Probability of Future Vote and Family Political Discussion
Predicted Probability of Future Vote
0.9
0.85
0.8
0.75
0.7
0.65
0.6
0.55
never
rarely
occasionally
regularly
Frequency of Family Political Discussion


Graph 2: Probability of Future Vote and Cynicism about Political Parties
Predicted Probability of Future Vote
0.9
0.85
0.8
0.75
0.7
0.65
0.6
0.55
Strongly Disagree
Somewhat Disagree
Somewhat Agree
Strongly Agree
Responses to "Parties are the same"

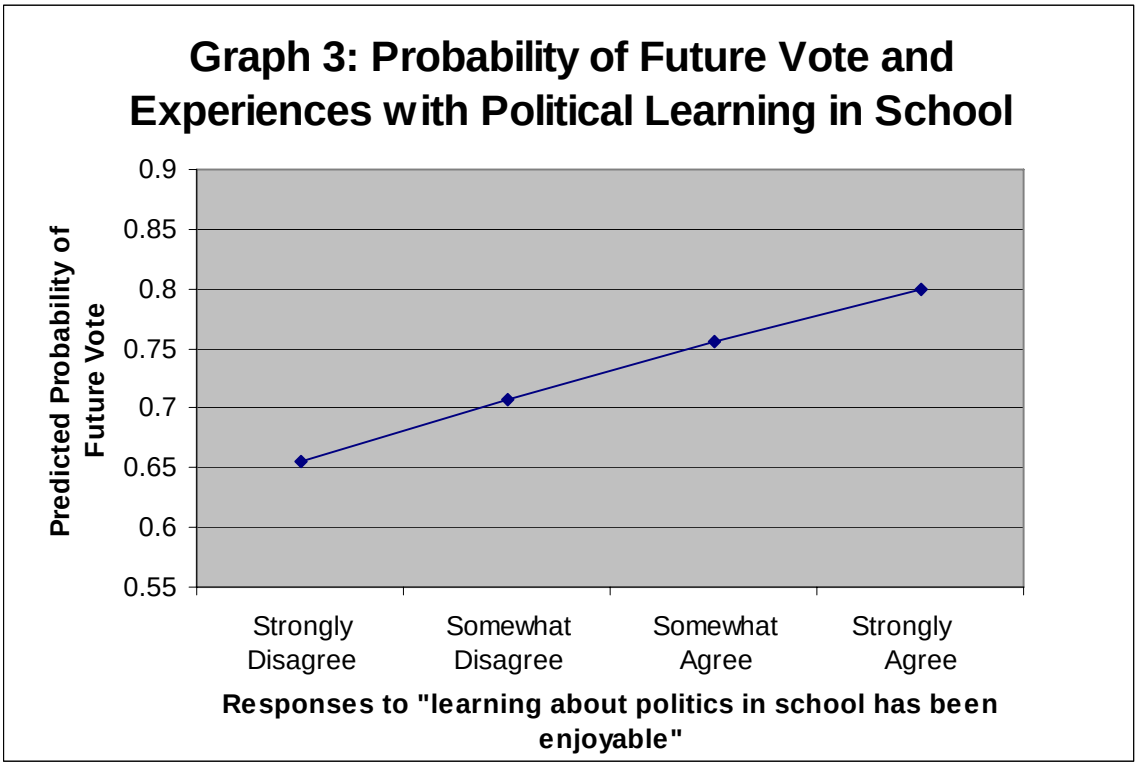


Table 4: Reasons for Anticipated Turnout

Reason	N	%
To Affect Issues	259	51.5
Duty	171	34%
Other	38	7.6%
Feelings	22	4.4
Family/Friends Vote	13	2.6
Total	503	100

Table 5: Reasons for Anticipated Abstention

Reason	N	%
Apathy	78	35.5%
Lack of Knowledge	71	32.3
Cynicism	43	19.6
Other	28	12.7
Total	220	100

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Appendix

Socio-demographic Variables:
Gender: female=1 and male=0.

Grade Levels: Grade 10=1, Grade 11=2, Grade 12=3

Catholic is based on a question which asked respondents "What is your religion, if you have one?" Catholic=1 and all others (including no religion)=0

Socialization Variables:
Group/Club Involvement: Respondents were asked if they were apart of any groups/clubs and if so, how many. Responses were recoded into 'three or more'=1 and 'less than three or no involvement'=0.

School Learning Experiences: Responses to "On the whole, learning about politics in school has been enjoyable" coded as 'Strongly Agree'=3, 'Somewhat Agree'=2, 'Somewhat Disagree'=1 and 'Strongly Disagree'=0.

Family Political Discussion: Responses to "How often do you talk about politics with your family?" coded as 'Regularly'=3, 'Occasionally'=2, 'Rarely'=1 and 'Never'=0.

News Media Consumption: Responses to "How often do you read or watch the news (on TV, internet, in the newspaper, etc.)?" coded as 'Regularly'=3, 'Occasionally'=2, 'Rarely'=1 and 'Never'=0.

Attitudinal and Cognitive Variables:
Cynicism about Political Parties: Responses to "All parties are basically the same; there isn't really a choice" coded as 'Strongly Agree'=3, 'Somewhat Agree'=2, 'Somewhat Disagree'=1 and 'Strongly Disagree'=0.

Cynicism about Politicians: Responses to "Politicians are ready to lie to get elected" coded as 'Strongly Agree'=3, 'Somewhat Agree'=2, 'Somewhat Disagree'=1 and 'Strongly Disagree'=0.

Political Interest: Responses to "How interested in politics do you usually feel?" are on a 0 (not interested) to 10 (very interested) scale.

Knowledge: Index composed of correct answers to ten knowledge questions. These questions asked respondents about their knowledge of the current number of political parties in the Parliament of Canada; whether Canada participated in the Iraq war; what kind of political system is (e.g. constitutional monarchy or republic); which level of government has primary responsibility for health, education and social welfare; what the letters 'MPP' stand for; which office has the authority to name federal cabinet ministers; select the false statement from five choices about the electoral system in Ontario; name the American President; name the capital city of the United States; select the non-democratic country from a list of four countries. The alpha for this index is 0.72. The mean number of correct answers is 5 out of 10.