

Shared Perspectives

OUSA
Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance

2026

A Joint Publication on
Civic Engagement

British Columbia Federation of Students
Canadian Alliance of Student Associations
College Student Alliance
Ontario Student Voices
Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance

Table of Contents

Message From the Partners	1
Who We Are	2
Is Canada Failing Its Young Voters? Global Lessons for National Change- <i>An International Perspective on Youth and Student Voter Participation</i> <i>By Hannah Hunter (she/her) and Wasiimah Joomun (she/her)</i> Canadian Alliance of Student Associations	4
Community First: How Students Help Each Other Stay Civically Engaged <i>By Octave Andrade-Dixon (they/them)</i> Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance	10
Beyond the Ballot: Empowering Ontario College Students for Lifelong Civic Engagement <i>By Alex Nguyen (she/her)</i> Ontario Student Voices	14
Engaging the Disengaged: Ontario’s Citizens’ Assembly on Electoral Reform as a Model for Youth Inclusion <i>By Olivia Villeneuve (she/her)</i> College Student Alliance	19
Youth Voter Turnout: It’s Not an Apathy Crisis— It’s an Access Crisis <i>By Arielle Reid (she/her)</i> The British Columbia Federation of Students	24

Message from the Partners

Over the past eight years, student advocacy organizations across Canada have joined together to release Shared Perspectives. This publication raises awareness about student-facing issues in our post-secondary sectors. Previous editions have discussed a wide range of post-secondary topics, including affordability (2024), sector sustainability (2023), student financial aid (2022), COVID-19 (2021), student employability (2019), and gender-based and sexual violence prevention and response (2018).

These issues aim to address specific problems within the post-secondary sector that directly affect students. This year's edition is no different and addresses an issue that has been top of mind for many in recent years: civic engagement. As the future of post-secondary education continues to evolve, it is equally integral that students are aware that their civic efforts, from voting to lobbying to protesting, are essential democratic tools to further change, and that elected officials recognize the importance of the student voice. Maintaining the student voice through student engagement in policy making and electoral politics is essential for a collaborative future.

In the last five years, there have been at least one election in every province and two federal elections. In some provinces, like Ontario, parties in power maintained their provincial leadership status, while others, like Manito-

ba, found new parties in power. With every election, with old parties and new, come policy changes that affect the lives of citizens daily. From housing infrastructure and cost of living provisions to tuition and student financial aid, provincial and federal policy directly impacts the lives of all students. However, there has been growing sentiment across voter groups that votes and other involvement in formal civic processes feel less impactful.

Contributors this year have aimed to interrogate what factors influenced this pervasive feeling of disenfranchisement and how it can be challenged. This included discussions about the structural barriers to engagement with civic duties, procedural improvements that have lowered barriers, movements that have organically increased voter engagement, and the different ways students mobilize each other to maintain civic engagement. With provincial and national organizations from the university and college sector, this year's contributors aim to provide a glimpse of civic engagement nationwide.

There is no one solution to increasing student engagement in civic matters, but we hope readers find this edition insightful and a productive contribution to the conversation. Student engagement is essential not only for the legitimacy of Canadian democracy but also for the generations following them that will feel the impacts of their actions.



Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance



Who We Are

British Columbia Federation of Students (BCFS)

The British Columbia Federation of Students is a provincial alliance of more than 170,000 students at 14 universities, colleges, and institutes in every part of BC. Together we work to provide students with an effective and unified voice to influence access to education.

The British Columbia Federation of Students is located on the unceded territory of the Qayqayt First Nations. We would also like note that our 14 member locals are located on the unceded territories of many different nations. We give this acknowledgement as a sign of gratitude but also to remind ourselves of our collective responsibility to do our part working towards Reconciliation.

Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA)

The Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA) is a non-partisan, not-for-profit advocacy organisation representing students at 25 student associations across the country. Through our partnership with the Quebec Student Union/Union étudiante du Québec (UEQ), CASA represents 365,000 students across Canada. CASA advocates for accessible, affordable, innovative, and high-quality post-secondary education in Canada. For

29 years, CASA has done so successfully through policy and research development, awareness campaigns, government relations efforts, and partnerships with other stakeholders in the education sector. Part of this work is ensuring that conversations surrounding post-secondary education are undertaken with the most up-to-date information and with direct feedback from students and other leading advocacy stakeholders across the country.

CASA is located on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishnaabeg People.

College Student Alliance (CSA)

As a not-for-profit, non-partisan organization, the College Student Alliance (CSA) collaborates with college students, post-secondary education (PSE) stakeholders, and government to enhance the college experience. Representing approximately 30,000 full-time college students across Ontario, we work alongside student leaders to advocate for their interests at the provincial level. Our advocacy approach is rooted in developing student-driven, evidence-based policy recommendations that seek to uplift the student experience on campus, in the classroom and in the community.

As a virtual organization historically based in Toronto/GTHA, the College Student Alliance (CSA) acknowledges that we are situated on the traditional territory of many Indigenous nations, including the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, the Mississaugas of the Credit, Huron-Wendat, and First Nations. We recognize the impact of assimilation, displacement, and settler-colonization on Indigenous communities, and commit to advocating for reconciliation, especially seeking to support and uplift Indigenous college students. We honor the resilience of Indigenous Peoples who have shaped this region for centuries and strive for a more equitable future.

Ontario Student Voices (OSV)

Established in 2022, Ontario Student Voices is a non-profit provincial advocacy organization representing over 160,000 college and polytechnic students across Ontario. Our mission is to engage, connect, develop and refine research-driven policy and amplify student voices through advocacy at the provincial level. We champion student concerns by engaging with a wide range of stakeholders and advocating for meaningful policy changes.

Our vision is a post-secondary system in Ontario that prioritizes success, accessibility, affordability, and quality for all students - domestic and international. We are committed to ensuring that student voices shape the policies and decisions that affect their lives and education.

As a provincial organization, Ontario Student Voices (OSV) recognizes that the work we carry out takes place on the traditional territories of many nations, including the Anishinaabe, Algonquin, Odawa, Cree, Delaware, Potawatomi, the Haudenosaunee peoples and are now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. We

acknowledge and appreciate the contributions of many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples whose traditional territories cover the land known as Ontario today.

As we work toward addressing barriers to civic engagement for our students, OSV further recognizes the role of culture in uniquely shaping civic participation within Indigenous communities. While Indigenous cultures differ from nation to nation, “Indigenous culture[s] [are] inextricably linked to land/place, [where] a collectivist sense of community and self-emerges from this place-based understanding.” Therefore, OSV believes that addressing barriers to civic participation must also include supporting the advancement of Indigenous Peoples’ right to self-determination, as outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and reaffirmed in the UNDRIP Act (2021). Indigenous Sovereignty must be upheld and reaffirmed as a key pathway to restoration and reconciliation in Canada.

We pay respect to the elders, past and present, and the descendants of this land.

Chi-Miigwetch.

Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA)

The Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA) represents the interests of approximately 160,000 professional and undergraduate, full-time, and part-time university students at nine student associations across Ontario. OUSA’s approach to advocacy is based on creating substantive, student-driven, and evidence-based policy recommendations. Our professional government relations practices ensure that we have the access to decision-makers we need in order for our members’ voices to influence provincial legislation and policy.

The Home Office of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance is situated on the traditional territory of the Huron-Wendat, the Haudenosaunee, and most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit River, and is covered by Treaty 13 of the Upper Canada Treaties. We acknowledge that this settlement, Toronto, was founded on the genocide, displacement, and manipulation of Indigenous Peoples through settler-colonialism, and that this wide-reaching harm continues to impact communities today, including Indigenous students on their post-secondary campuses. We also celebrate and honour the resilience, accomplishments, and strengths of Indigenous Peoples who are reclaiming their culture and dismantling barriers.

Is Canada Failing Its Young Voters? Global Lessons for National Change

An International Perspective on Youth and Student Voter Participation

By Hannah Hunter and Wasiimah Joomun (CASA)

Author Note:

In July 2025, after this article was completed, the UK Government announced plans for a major election reform bill. The proposed legislation aims to lower the voting age in general elections to 16 and to introduce an automatic voter registration system. In light of the issues discussed in this article, it will be interesting to observe how these changes affect youth and student voter turnout.

The Youth Vote in Canada

Young Canadians consistently vote at lower rates than older age groups in federal elections (see Fig. 1). Researchers cite several recurring themes to explain this gap: distrust in the political system, barriers to voting, a weaker sense of civic duty, and lack of engagement with political issues.¹ This matters because voter turnout shapes who gets elected, and youth turnout helps bring forward leaders who prioritize youth and future-oriented policies. Voting is also habitforming, so a high voter turnout among youth can predict higher overall voter turnouts in the future.² Research also links civic engagement, including voting, to better mental health, educational outcomes, and social belonging for young people.³

1 Library of Parliament, Hill Studies: Youth Voter Turnout in Canada, No. 2016-104-E (Ottawa: Parliamentary Information, Education and Research Services, 2023), <https://bdp.parl.ca/staticfiles/PublicWebsite/Home/ResearchPublications/HillStudies/PDF/2016-104-E.pdf>.

2 Elections Canada. "Youth Voting Trends in Canada." Elections Canada Last modified April 2023. <https://electionsanddemocracy.ca/canadas-elections/youth-voting-trends>

3 Government of Canada. "The state of youth civic engagement and its impacts on social cohesion and mental health." Social Sciences and Humanities

To better understand what's behind these trends, and how we might start to reverse them, it helps to zoom out and see how Canada compares internationally.

How Does Canadian Youth Turnout Compare Internationally?

Canada is far from alone in facing a youth voter turnout problem. Around the world, young people tend to vote at lower rates than older demographics. However, there is significant variance between nations, and diving into these differences can be illuminating for understanding and improving youth voter turnout in Canada. In this article, we will focus on countries with similar conditions to Canada, setting aside nations with compulsory voting and those with well documented electoral irregularities.

Research Council. Last modified 6 June, 2025. https://www.sshrcrsh.gc.ca/societe-societe/community-communitite/ifca-iac/evidence_briefsdonnees_probantes/emerging_asocial_society-emergence-societe-asociale/abdelaal-eng.aspx

Our three key findings are as follows:

1. *Youth turnout is higher in nations with more representative democracies*
2. *Youth turnout improves when youth-focused politicians are on the ballot*
3. *Barriers to registration and voting make a difference*

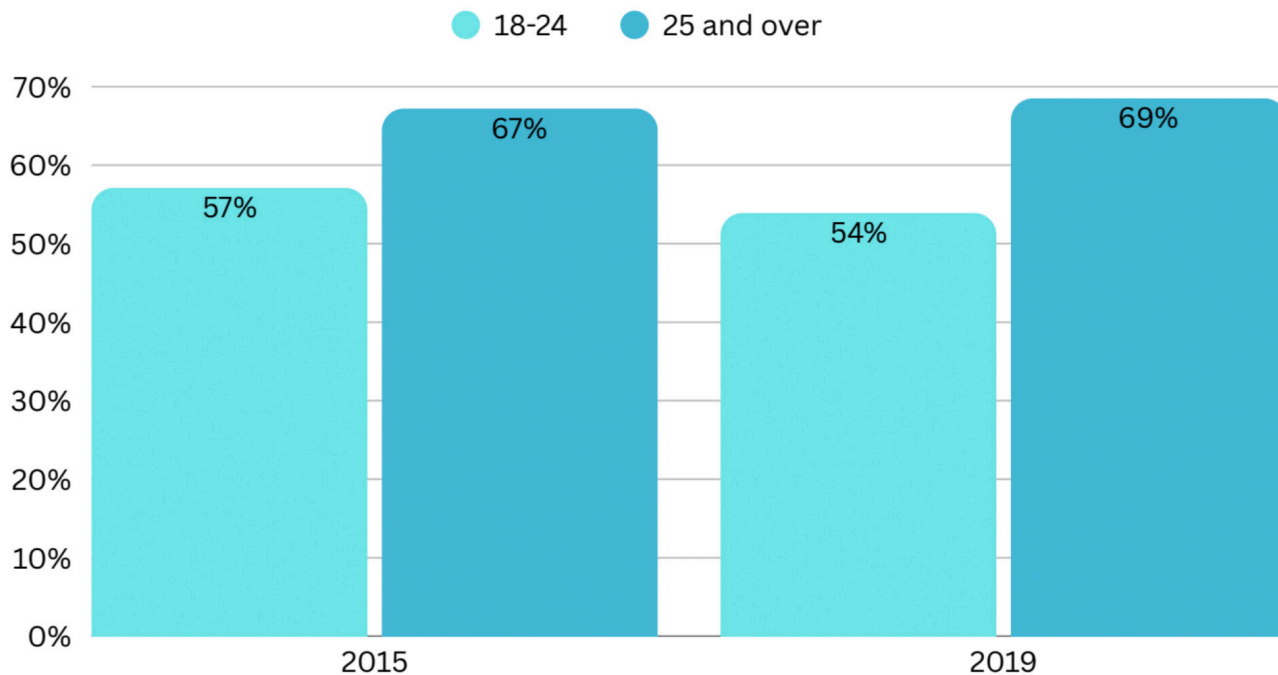


Fig. 1: The Estimated Youth Voter Turnout Gap in Canada, calculated based on the voter turnout by age group and estimated population weightings available via Elections Canada.⁴

Note: For consistency and international comparison, this article uses Elections Canada figures, which administrative data matched with birth dates, rather than Statistics Canada rates.⁵

Youth Turnout is Higher in Nations With More Representative Democracies

Among comparable democracies, what stands out is the difference in youth turnout depending on the voting system. Countries like Sweden, Germany, and Denmark, which all use forms of proportional representation (PR), have significantly higher youth turnout rates, as well as smaller gaps between youth voter turnout and the rest of the population, than countries like Canada or the United States, which use First Past the Post (FPTP). In PR systems, seats in parliament are allocated based on the proportion of votes each party receives. In contrast, FPTP awards seats to the individual candidate with the most votes in each local riding,

often leading to outcomes where many votes do not contribute to the final result. The youth gap still exists in PR systems, but it's narrower, and overall participation is higher. While there are exceptions (in 2014, for instance, New Zealand had a relatively low youth turnout despite using PR, though this has since risen), the trend is clear: more representative electoral systems seem to foster greater youth engagement.⁶ When young people feel their votes translate more directly into political power, they're more inclined to participate.

Youth Turnout Improves When Youth-Focused Politicians Are on The Ballot

Beyond the electoral system, though, what other factors are at play? A useful point of comparison to understand how Canada is doing is the United Kingdom. Both countries share FPTP systems, parliamentary democracies, and similar demographics.

⁴ Elections Canada. "Voter Turnout by Sex and Age." Elections Canada. Accessed July 3, 2025. <https://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=res&dir=rec/eval/pes2019/vtsa&document=index&lang=e>

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Electoral Commission NZ. "2014 General Election." Electoral Commission NZ. Accessed July 3, 2025. <https://elections.nz/democracy-in-nz/historical-events/2014-general-election/voter-turnout-statistics-for-the2014-general-election/>; Electoral Commission NZ. "2023 General Election." Electoral Commission NZ. Accessed July 3, 2025. <https://elections.nz/democracy-in-nz/historical-events/2023-general-election/voter-turnout-statistics/>

Though key differences—like physical geography, colonial legacies and electoral frequency—do exist, examining these countries’ youth

voting trends side by side can still reveal valuable insights. Let’s take a look at what’s happened in these countries’ recent elections.

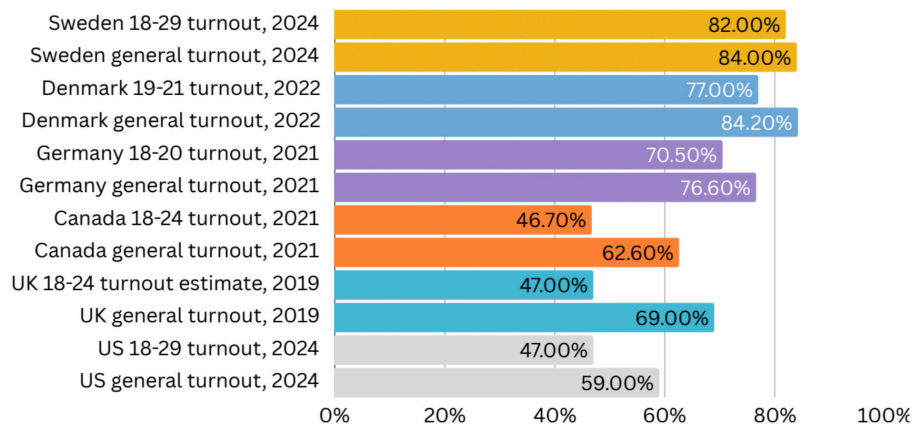


Fig. 2: Approximate youth and general voter turnout in comparable democracies ^{7 8 9 10 11}

Canada Election Year	Canada 18–24 Turnout (% of eligible population)	Canada General Turnout (% of eligible population)	UK Election Year	UK 18–24 Turnout (% of resident population)	UK General Turnout (% of resident voters)
2011	38.8%	61.1%	2010	44%	65%
2015	57.1%	66.1%	2015	43%	66%
2019	53.9%	67.0%	2017	54%	63%
2021	46.7%	62.6%	2019	47%	67.3%
2025	Unknown	69.5%	2024	37%	59.8%

Fig. 3: Estimated youth and general voter turnout in national elections in the UK and Canada since 2011. ^{12 13 14 15 16 17 18}

7 European Commission. “Sweden: 5.2 Youth participation in representative democracy.” European Commission. Last modified May 20, 2025. <https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/sweden/52-youth-participation-in-representative-democracy>

8 European Commission. “Denmark: 5.2 Youth participation in representative democracy.” European Commission. Last modified March 20, 2024. <https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/denmark/52-youthparticipation-in-representative-democracy>

9 European Commission. “Germany: 5.2 Youth participation in representative democracy.” European Commission. Last modified November 28, 2023. <https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/germany/52-youth-participation-in-representative-democracy>

10 Elections Canada. “Voter Turnout by Gender and Age.” Elections Canada. Last Accessed July 3, 2025. <https://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=res&dir=rec/eval/pes2021/evt&document=ig&lang=e>

11 Gideon Skinner and Roger Mortimore. “How Britain voted in the 2019 election.” Ipsos. 20 December 2019. <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/how-britain-voted-2019-election>

12 Elections Canada. “Youth Voting Trends in Canada.” Elections Canada

Last modified April 2023. <https://electionsanddemocracy.ca/canadas-elections/youth-voting-trends>

13 Elections Canada. “Voter Turnout by Sex and Age.” Elections Canada. Accessed July 3, 2025. <https://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=res&dir=rec/eval/pes2019/vtsa&document=index&lang=e>

14 Ipsos. “How Britain Voted in 2010.” Ipsos. 21 May 2010. <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/how-britain-voted2010>

15 Ipsos. “How Britain Voted in 2015.” Ipsos. 26 August 2015. <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/how-britainvoted-2015>

16 Gideon Skinner and Roger Mortimore. “How Britain Voted in the 2017 election.” Ipsos. 20 June 2017. <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/how-britain-voted-2017-election>

17 Gideon Skinner and Roger Mortimore. “How Britain Voted in the 2019 election.” Ipsos. 20 December 2019. <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/how-britain-voted-2019-election>

18 Gideon Skinner et al. “How Britain Voted in the 2019 election.” Ipsos. 20 December 2019. Ipsos. 26 July 2024. <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/opinion-polls/how-britain-voted-in-the-2024-election>

There are a few things to take away from this comparison. To start with, there are a lot of similarities. Both countries have consistently large, but fluctuating, lags in youth voter turnout, and both have one particular exception to this. The countries saw spikes in specific elections: the 2015 Canadian federal election and the 2017 UK general election. These upswings were a result of similar reasons: in both instances, youth engagement surged in a context of charismatic candidates with youth-focused platforms. In the UK, Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party captured young voters' attention with policies like free tuition and strong digital outreach, resulting in what is known as the "Youthquake".¹⁹ In Canada, Justin Trudeau's platform in 2015 emphasized climate action, gender equality, and democratic reform, which resonated with young voters.²⁰

Barriers to Registration and Voting Make A Difference

When it comes to student voting, however, the comparisons between the two countries may be more different than these numbers initially suggest. Canada has taken important steps to reduce voting barriers for students in recent years. In 2015, the Vote on Campus initiative was launched as a pilot project by Elections Canada, an initiative that was highly advocated for and supported by us at the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA). This program is designed to make voting more accessible for students and young Canadians. One of its key features is the use of special

ballots, which allow students to vote for a candidate in their home riding, regardless of where they attend school, a key feature CASA advocated for to empower young voters. Temporary on-campus polling stations are set up at colleges and universities across the country, typically open for several days before election day to provide added convenience. The program also offers flexible identification options, enabling students to use alternative forms of ID or digital proof of address. By holding the vote during the academic year and ensuring a non-partisan, supportive environment, the initiative helps eliminate logistical barriers and encourages greater youth participation in federal elections.

As a result, first piloted in 2015 on 39 campuses, the Vote on Campus initiative drew over 70,000 voters. By 2019, the program expanded to 109 campuses, with more than 110,000 students voting on campus.²¹ Although paused in 2021 due to the pandemic, Vote on Campus was slated for a return in 2025 at approximately 120 campuses after the Government of Canada proposed amendments to the Canada Elections Act to formalize the Vote on Campus program in March 2024. While not the only factor at play, as explored above, this initiative aligns with notable shifts in turnout: the 2015 pilot coincided with a significant rise in youth voting, while the 2021 pause saw the lowest youth turnout in a decade.

In contrast to Canada's automated, accessible, and flexible registration, including same-day registration, Vote on Campus initiatives, and advance voting at any Elections Canada office, the UK is said to have one of the most difficult voter registration processes of any liberal democracy in the world.²² The UK employs an individual opt-in system that requires one to re-register every time they move, with

19 Patrick Sturgis and Will Jennings, "Was There a 'Youthquake' in the 2017 General Election?" *Electoral Studies* 64 (2020): 102065 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2019.102065>

20 Liberal Party of Canada. "A New Plan for a Strong Middle Class." Federal Liberal Agency of Canada. 2015. <https://liberal.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/292/2020/09/New-plan-for-a-strong-middle-class.pdf>

21 Elections Canada. "Vote on Campus Program." Elections Canada. Accessed July 3, 2025. <https://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=vot&dir=bkg&document=campu&lang=e>

22 Eleni Courea. "Britain has one of most difficult registration processes, report finds." *The Guardian*. Tuesday 6 May, 2025. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/06/britain-has-one-of-most-difficult-voter-registration-processes-report>

“Low youth voter turnout is not an inevitability: systems, structures, and messages make a real difference.”

registration closing weeks before election day. This is a particular problem for students, who tend to move a lot, and for whom the voter registration system is unfamiliar.

While Figure 3 shows turnout as a percentage of eligible or resident voters—helpfully controlling for low registration—they don’t reflect demographic differences within age groups. This matters, because registration rates vary significantly by life circumstances. For example, only about 39% of UK eligible voters who have moved in the past year (a common situation for post-secondary students) are correctly registered to vote.^{23 24}

We know that roughly two thirds of 18–24 year olds in the UK are registered to vote, and we can estimate that around 56% of those voted in the 2024 election (based on the 37% turnout of eligible voters in this age group) if we apply that same turnout rate to those who moved in the last year, we can estimate that only around 22% of eligible voters in that group likely cast a ballot. Given that students tend to be young, and therefore, have a lower voter turnout anyway, the turnout among students who moved in the last year was likely even lower.

23 Peter Walker. “Labour to bring in automatic voter registration under plans to boost franchise.” *The Guardian*. Wednesday 26, 2024.

24 Eleni Courea. “Britain has one of most difficult registration processes, report finds.” *The Guardian*. Tuesday 6 May, 2025. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/06/britain-has-one-of-most-difficult-voter-registration-processes-report>

25 Emilie Lussion, Geneviève Gosselin, and Michael Dewing. “Youth Voter Turnout in Canada.” Library of Parliament. Last updated February 16, 2023.

26 Apathy is Boring. “Better Democracy Roadmap.” Apathy is Boring. Accessed July 3, 2025. https://www.apathyisboring.com/better_democracy_roadmap

27 Darren Major. “Trudeau says abandoning electoral reform is his biggest regret. Here’s how it happened.” *CBC News*. January 9, 2025. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/trudeau-electoral-reform-biggest-regret1.7426407>

If we compare this to Canada’s 2019 youth voter turnout (47%), and the fact that students have been found to vote at a very similar rate to non-students in their same age group,²⁵ this suggests that voter turnout among young students specifically may actually be significantly lower in the UK than it is in Canada.

Conclusion

This international comparison makes it clear that low youth voter turnout is not an inevitability: systems, structures, and messages make a real difference.

Many advocates for youth voting, including Apathy is Boring, have long championed electoral reform as a response to youth disengagement.²⁶ As discussed above, when young people believe their vote has a real impact, they are more likely to cast it. Electoral reform was a central 2015 campaign promise of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, though no changes followed—a failure he has since described as his greatest regret in office.²⁷

While electoral reform feels out of reach in the near term, two priorities stand out in its absence: reducing barriers to participation and ensuring political leaders address the issues that matter to young people. Tools like flexible voter registration, Vote on Campus, and advanced voting options across ridings make the process more accessible—particularly for students and young people who move frequently. When these supports are in place, as in 2015, youth turnout improves. When they are absent, as in 2021, it drops. The staggeringly low estimated turnout of eligible

student voters in the UK offers a cautionary tale of what happens without the automation and flexibility offered by Elections Canada.

At the same time, policy and leadership matter. Spikes in youth turnout in both Canada and the UK happened when candidates offered clear, youth-oriented platforms and messages. Political parties cannot simply expect young people to show up—they must give them a reason to.

Grassroots mobilization matters, too. At the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA), we've long worked to boost student participation in federal elections. Since 2015, CASA has collaborated with Elections Canada, New Majority, and other partners to run the Get Out The Vote campaign—an initiative aimed at mobilizing on-campus student leaders and volunteers across Canada. These non-partisan teams organize events, conduct outreach, and launch digital campaigns to engage their peers in the democratic process. In our 2015 campaign, we got 42,000 students to pledge to vote for the federal election, coinciding with an 18% increase in voter turnout among Canadians aged 18 to 24 since the previous election. Though there were other factors at play, as explored above, these results demonstrate that targeted mobilization

empowers young people to exercise their democratic rights.

There is no silver bullet. The path forward requires a mix of political strategy, structural reform, and genuine attention to the lived realities of young voters. We must make voting not only easier, but more meaningful. A more representative electoral system would help. So would leaders that are prepared to engage with young people's priorities, not just during elections, but in how they govern.

Young Canadians are not inherently apathetic. Their high levels of civic engagement throughout means (e.g. community recreation, social media, and grassroots campaigns) make that abundantly clear. If we want to see that energy reflected at the ballot box, we must meet young people where they are: with meaningful access, responsive leadership, and a political system that values their participation.

“The path forward requires a mix of political strategy, structural reform, and genuine attention to the lived realities of young voters. We must make voting not only easier, but more meaningful.”

Community First: How Students Help Each Other Stay Civically Engaged

By Octave Andrade-Dixon (OUSA)

Civic engagement has been a longstanding point of discussion for Ontarians, especially among the youth demographic. Among the past 10 provincial elections, 2022 and 2025 had the lowest voter turnouts.¹ There were many factors that contributed to lower turnout across age groups. Akin to any major event, elections require notice and adequate time to spread awareness amongst the general public. Outreach in areas with post-secondary institutions is often lower due to the longstanding mischaracterization of youth. However, on campuses across Ontario, students are finding ways to stay engaged in Canadian politics at all three levels of government. Students ensure their peers are informed through youth organizations, student unions, campus newspapers, individual students, and word of mouth. This article will explore the ways that young people maintain political engagement at OUSA member schools by examining stories from two students and interrogating the various ways they could be reached more effectively by political candidates.

The first student whose experience we'll be highlighting is from Brock University:

The Brock University Students' Union (BUSU) promotes civic engagement among students through a handful of initiatives. During both the recent provincial and federal elections, BUSU promoted the convenience of facilitated on-campus voting via social media. In mid-March, BUSU also hosted a "Pizza with Politicians" event intended for students to

network with local politicians. Upon review of their social media, the provincial election was promoted via 3 videos on their feed.

Similarly, for the federal election, BUSU only posted one video to their feed on election day. BUSU did, however, participate in the #OUSAVotes campaign through a couple of stories and one main feed post.

My perspective is also shaped by my own civic involvement as a canvasser for the New Democratic Party (NDP) during the 2022 Ontario provincial election. I got involved through a friend who was connected to the local MPP candidate and encouraged me to join the campaign team. At 17, this experience gave me a firsthand look at the importance of voter outreach and the impact that young voters can have on shaping political outcomes. I spoke with hundreds of constituents, most of whom were students, who felt disconnected from politics or were unaware of how to vote. It became clear to me that strong civic engagement efforts on campuses like Brock University could play a transformative role in increasing youth participation. In contrast, BUSU's limited campaign efforts missed the opportunity to meaningfully empower and mobilize student voters. Having seen the difference that authentic, consistent engagement can make, I believe there is significant room for BUSU to grow in this area.

As the student discussed, civic engagement is not limited to the polls and opportunities such as canvassing have greater appeal to youth. Unlike previous generations, youth today are less inclined to believe voting is

¹ Elections Ontario, "Elections Ontario Results Overview," n.d., <https://results.elections.on.ca/en/dataexplorer?fromYear=1990&toYear=2025&electionType=GE;%20https://globalnews.ca/news/11052258/ontario-election,-2025-voter-turnout/>.

a civic duty, however, they recognize that voting is an important tool to make a difference.² According to a study conducted by Democracy Check Ups, although students share different sentiments on voting, they remain civically engaged through other avenues, both online and in person. Respondents ages 18-23 reported volunteering for a political party or candidate (18.2%), attended a rally or participated in a protest or demonstration (32.7%), boycotted or bought products for ethical, environmental, or political reasons (51.8%), signed a petition in person or online (68.5%) and volunteered for a group or organization like a school, religious organization, or sports or community association (57.6%); the highest of the three surveyed age categories.³

Increasingly, youth also maintain their civic engagement and political knowledge through digital platforms. Youth are most likely to engage with political information, news, or content online; use social media to discuss politics or political issues; and are second most likely to follow elected officials and candidates on social media.⁴ However, federal Bill C-18, the Online News Act, poses significant barriers. The Act aims to improve profit sharing for traditional news outlets whose articles and content were being shared over social media. While the federal government had negotiated a remuneration agreement with Google, Meta, the owners of Facebook and Instagram, continues to ban all Canadian news content on their platforms.⁵ In the digital age, this acutely affects youth voters. Therefore, while BUSU could have published

more content related to the past elections, it is now faced with the limited ability to leverage other valuable resources, like the on-campus newspaper and external news outlets. Student groups must find creative ways to get more informative content to students that is reflective of the political climate. While school newspapers can be an accessible form of reporting and promotion, it is important that student unions have access to reputable news sources through the platforms they are most connected to as well.

These challenges are faced across university campuses and tackled in various ways.

The second student whose experience we'll be highlighting is from Wilfrid Laurier University:

Although there has been improvement in civic engagement, Wilfrid Laurier University struggles in this regard. During the provincial and federal elections, as part of my role at the Wilfrid Laurier University Students' Union (WLUSU), I held booths to bring awareness to the elections. Many students were unaware of how to vote (ie. where to go, what to bring) and the fact that they could vote in either the electoral district of their home address or the district of the address where they are attending school. Additionally, some students did not know much about political party platforms and their respective candidates.

In January of every year, Laurier holds Local Advocacy Week (LAW) where the Government and Stakeholder Relations department has discussions with political stakeholders about important student issues. To better understand what issues were important to students, we held booths and posted questions on Instagram to gain their input and bring them to discussions.

2 Laura Stephenson et al., "Understanding and Advancing Youth Civic Engagement in Canada" (Max Bell Foundation, February 2025), <https://www.maxbell.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Youth-CivicEngagement-in-Canada-A-Study-in-Three-Parts-ENGLISH.pdf>.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Dana Cramer, "When Youth Don't See the News - Friends of Canadian Media," Friends of Canadian Media - Standing up for Canadian Voices in Canadian Media, August 19, 2024, <https://friends.ca/dalton-campessay/when-youth-dont-see-the-news/>

“...students often lack the basic information to engage in formal civic engagement processes. Notably, youth are more likely to participate in accessible grassroots initiatives rather than electoral politics.”

We also have campus clubs that are affiliated with the four major political parties in Ontario. These clubs promote some aspect of civic engagement as they have opportunities to canvass and participate in phone banks for candidates during election seasons. Laurier’s Brantford campus also holds a “Mayor’s Lunch,” which includes the mayor, various city departments, and fun activities. By making civic engagement “fun” and holding events such as this, it may be more appealing to students to become more actively engaged. Lack of awareness is one of the contributing factors limiting civic engagement. Since many students are on social media, creating fun, personable social media content could be a way to engage students rather than relying on infographic posts.

This student’s story highlights that students often lack the basic information to engage in formal civic engagement processes. Notably, youth are more likely to participate in accessible grassroots initiatives rather than electoral politics because they view it as accessible and a direct avenue to make a difference.⁶ Initiatives like boothing, as the student described, help students who are often deeply occupied by other facets of their academic and extra-

curricular life gain access to information in a central on-campus location that they already frequent. LAW is another great example of WLUSU connecting effectively with students to demystify issues being brought forth during the election. Using Instagram’s semi-anonymous question box allows students to learn in a judgment-free zone on a platform they are already familiar with, lowering barriers to engagement. Discussing student issues – which are often neglected in political platforms – ensures students feel considered in electoral politics and that their interest is valued. WLUSU’s Mayor’s Lunch extends this ethos of student-centred engagement at the municipal level, where students often have the most interaction when they are away at university. Similar to Brock’s student experience, direct party engagement through clubs, canvassing, and phone zaps allows students’ civic participation to extend beyond the polls.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As illustrated, students and youth have a myriad of ways in which they participate in civic engagement in their communities. While electoral politics are just one facet of staying involved, it is integral that the electoral system works to ensure all citizens can meaningfully participate. There are a few ways this could be achieved:

⁶ Rideau Hall Foundation, “Understanding Youth and Child Civic Engagement in Canada - Rideau Hall Foundation,” November 23, 2022, <https://rhfrh.ca/media-releases/understanding-youth-and-child-civicengagement-in-canada/>.

1. The Expansion of The *Vote On Campus* Program to Ontario's Provincial Elections

The Vote On Campus initiative runs during federal elections and allows students to vote for representatives in their home riding from their universities. This program is active at 15 universities and 17 campuses across Ontario.⁷ Normally, at the provincial level, students can vote in their home riding or the riding of their address while attending school, with on-campus voting limited to students living on campus. To expand accessibility of polling stations, Elections Ontario should adopt the Vote On Campus model and lower barriers to voting for those who may not be registered in their institutional riding.

2. Ensure Mpps From All Parties are Connected to Campuses Throughout The Year

Civic engagement does not start at the polls; it is fostered through ongoing relationships and community engagement. Although many students split their time between their home riding and their institutional riding, students remain a part of the fabric of their university towns. Maintaining relationships with university campuses and speaking to students directly is a great way to increase political awareness and engagement amongst students. Through collaborations with student groups, events like Pizza with Politicians and Mayor's Lunch could happen at campuses across the province. The participation of all parties would help student unions maintain a trusted non-partisan channel for student engagement.

⁷ Elections Canada, "Vote on Campus," October 7, 2025, <https://www.elections.ca/content2.aspx?section=stu&document=votcamp&lang=e>.

3. Advocate to The Federal Government to Attempt Negotiations With Big Media Companies Again to Allow News Outlets on Social Media Platforms.

Meta's decision to ban Canadian news on its platforms to avoid remuneration towards news outlets has significantly damaged the ability to access information from reputable sources, especially for youth. The Ontario government can advocate to the federal government to reenter negotiations with Meta or take further actions to bring the news back to Canadians on some of the most used social media platforms.

“ While electoral politics are just one facet of staying involved, it is integral that the electoral system works to ensure all citizens can meaningfully participate.”

Beyond the Ballot: Empowering Ontario College Students for Lifelong Civic Engagement

By Alex Nguyen (OSV)

Introduction

Civic engagement is a cornerstone of a healthy and vibrant democracy. Yet, like many Western democracies, Canada continues to face challenges in getting its young people to the polls.¹ In Ontario, this trend mirrors the national pattern with voter turnout gradually declining since the first general election in 1867.² The province hit a historic low in the 2022 general election, with only 44.6% of eligible voters casting a ballot.³ While the 2025 general election saw a slight increase of 1%, voter turnout (45.4%) remains critically low.⁴

Unfortunately, Elections Ontario does not publish voter turnout data disaggregated by age, nor data specific to Ontario college students making it difficult to fully assess the scope of youth civic engagement in the political realm in provincial elections.⁵ However, voters aged 18 to 34 have historically had lower turnout rates than older groups in federal elections, and many advocates believe similar trends exist provincially.⁶

Lower voter turnout does not necessarily

mean that young people are totally disengaged from civic life. For instance, according to the 2018 General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating conducted by Statistics Canada, the rate of formal volunteering was highest among youth aged 15 to 30, with 46% volunteering their time.⁷ In fact, Ontario youth volunteer at a higher rate of participation in community, cultural, recreational or school-related organizations and activities than any other group in the rest of the population.⁸ According to Statistic Canada 2018 data, Ontario youth aged 15 to 24 had the highest volunteer rate at 54.5% in the province, meaning one in two young people were engaged in formal volunteer work.⁹ Likewise, Statistics Canada also found that young people are more likely to participate in other forms of political engagement, from volunteering for a political party, boycotting particular products for ethical reasons, signing petitions, to participating in marches and demonstrations.¹⁰ To better translate their broader civic engagement, it is essential to identify and address the specific barriers preventing Ontario college students from full participation in civic life.¹¹

1 Elections Canada. "Youth Voting Trends." Elections and Democracy, last updated April 2023. <https://electionsanddemocracy.ca/canadas-elections/youth-voting-trends>.

2 Elections Ontario. General Election Results: Official Report, June 2, 2022. Toronto: Elections Ontario, 2022. <https://results.elections.on.ca/api/report-groups/45/report-outputs/947/pdf/en>.

3 Elections Ontario. General Election Results: Official Report, June 2, 2022. Toronto: Elections Ontario, 2022. <https://results.elections.on.ca/api/report-groups/45/report-outputs/947/pdf/en>.

4 Rodrigues, Gabby. "Ontario Election: Voter Turnout Higher Than Expected in 2025, Early Data Shows," Global News, February 28, 2025, <https://globalnews.ca/news/11052258/ontario-election-2025-voterturnout/>.

5 Sharp, Morgan. "Did Young Voters Turn Up in the Ontario Election?" Canada's National Observer, June 8, 2022. <https://www.nationalobserver.com/2022/06/08/news/did-young-voters-turn-ontario-election>.

6 Sharp, Morgan. "Did Young Voters Turn Up in the Ontario Election?" Global News, June 8, 2022. <https://globalnews.ca/news/8906211/young-voters-ontario-election/>

7 Statistics Canada. "Volunteering in Canada, 2018." The Daily, January 27, 2020. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/200127/dq200127b-eng.htm>.

8 Statistics Canada. "Table 45-10-0039-01: Volunteer Rate and Average Annual Volunteer Hours, by Definition of Volunteering and Age Group." Last modified 2025. <https://doi.org/10.25318/4510003901>.

9 Statistics Canada. "Table 45-10-0039-01: Volunteer Rate and Average Annual Volunteer Hours, by Definition of Volunteering and Age Group." Last modified 2025. <https://doi.org/10.25318/4510003901>.

10 Arriagada, Paula, Farhana Khanam, and Yujiro Sano. "Portrait of Youth in Canada: Data Report. Chapter 6: Political Participation, Civic Engagement and Caregiving among Youth in Canada." Statistics Canada, July 19, 2022. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/42-28-0001/2021001/article/00006-eng.htm>.

11 Nour Abdelaal, Chloe Kemeni and Karim Bardeesy. (November 2022). "Knocking on the Door": Youth Civic Engagement and Its Impact on Social Connectedness and Wellness <https://www.ryersonleadlab.com/youthcivic-engagement>

Barriers to Civic Engagement

Research highlights persistent systemic barriers that influence how and when young people can participate. Moreover, Ontario's college students represent a sizable and diverse portion of the province's youth, facing unique obstacles that extend beyond the ballot box.

Lack of Time

For many Ontario college students, the barrier to civic engagement is a lack of time. Structural factors like long commutes and packed schedules significantly limit their capacity to participate. College students in Ontario frequently juggle academic workloads, part-time or full-time jobs, and long commutes, especially as affordable housing becomes increasingly out of reach. For instance, a report by *StudentMoveTO* found that one-third of post-secondary students in the Greater Toronto Area spend two or more hours commuting on school days, with one-quarter living at least 20 kilometres away from campus.¹² This reality is especially true for college students, who often travel between multiple campuses or off-site training locations due to limited program capacity. For example, nursing and skilled trades students may split their time between classrooms, labs, and external placements like hospitals or training centres while balancing part-time work and academic workload. Studies further show that students with longer commute times are less likely to engage in on-campus activities.¹³ When academic demands, part-time work, and extended travel times compound, students are left with limited time and energy to engage civically, whether that's voting, volunteering, or attending town halls.

12 University of Toronto. "Long Commutes Mean Fewer Choices for University Classes, Campus Life: StudentMoveTO." U of T News, October 17, 2018. <https://www.utoronto.ca/news/studentmoveto>.

13 Allen, Jeff, and Steven Farber. "How Time-Use and Transportation Barriers Limit on-Campus Participation of University Students." *Travel Behaviour and Society* 13 (October 1, 2018): 174–82. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tbs.2018.08.003>.

“When academic demands, part-time work, and extended travel times compound, students are left with limited time and energy to engage civically, whether that’s voting, volunteering, or attending town halls.”

Challenges in Digital Civic Engagement

When it comes to election time, the rise of digital avenues for civic engagement is a double-edged sword. Social media platforms have become powerful tools for capturing young people's attention and mobilizing them around issues, especially for college students with limited time and competing responsibilities who may turn to these platforms as a main source of information. However, relying predominantly on online spaces for civic participation can expose youth to significant risks.

A 2021 survey by Abacus Data and Apathy is Boring found that 65% of Canadian youth encountered disinformation online at least once a week.¹⁴ Additional findings from an Abacus poll commissioned by the Cable Public Affairs Channel (CPAC) revealed that 39% of young adults in Canada do not consume news from traditional media sources, relying instead on

14 Apathy is Boring. Revisiting News Consumption and Democratic Engagement. Abacus Data, 2019. https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/apathyisboring/pages/687/attachments/original/1629743211/Abacus_Report_Data_2021_EN_v4.pdf?1629743211.

social media, search engines, or peers.¹⁵ This shift in information consumption increases their exposure to misinformation and makes it harder to verify credible sources, especially when there are gaps in Canadian youth digital literacy, making impactful digital civic engagement even more challenging.¹⁶

Likewise, Elections Ontario echoed these concerns, reporting that nearly three quarters of electors believed false information influenced the outcome of the 2022 provincial election.¹⁷ If left unaddressed, these digital risks can compromise young people's safety, reduce trust, and discourage deeper civic engagement beyond the digital realm.

Lack of Accessible On-Campus Voting Infrastructure

A more direct and often overlooked barrier to student civic engagement is the lack of accessible voting infrastructure on post-secondary campuses. In 2015, Elections Canada launched *Vote on Campus* as a pilot program across 39 campuses to address the logistical barriers postsecondary students who made up a significant portion of young voters faced.¹⁸

The initiative led to an unprecedented 18.3 percentage point increase in voter turnout among 18- to 24-year-olds—from 38.8% in 2011 to 57.1% in 2015—the largest increase

for this age group since Elections Canada began tracking demographic trends in 2004.¹⁹ Although the program was paused in 2021 due to the pandemic, advocacy organizations successfully pushed for its reinstatement in the 2025 federal election, resulting in polling stations being installed at more than 100 universities and colleges across Canada.²⁰ This revival underscores growing recognition of the unique challenges students face in accessing the ballot, particularly when their time on and off campus is tightly structured by inflexible, pre-set academic schedules and institutional policies.

Under the *Canada Elections Act*, employers must provide time off if an employee's schedule does not allow for three consecutive hours to vote on Election Day or during advance voting.²¹ However, this provision does not apply under post-secondary context where students' schedules are pre-determined, inflexible without institutional accommodations.

These challenges are not limited to the federal level. In Ontario, many college students face similar logistical barriers due to rigid class schedules, off-campus placements, and long commuting between multiple campuses. The absence of convenient voting options, especially during the most recent provincial election, exacerbates this accessibility challenge. Without accessible on-campus voting options and institutional accommodations, Ontario students, especially those juggling studies, work, and long commutes, continue to face disproportionate and unique obstacles to civic engagement.

19 Grenier, Éric. "Youth turnout way up in 2015 federal election, Elections Canada says." CBC News. June 15, 2016. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/grenier-youth-turnout-2015-1.3636290>.

20 Elections Canada. "Students and Young Electors." Elections Canada. Accessed June 23, 2025. <https://www.elections.ca/content2.aspx?section=stu&document=votcamp&lang=e#ON>

21 Elections Alberta, "Time off for Voting," Elections Alberta, accessed June 23, 2025, <https://www.elections.ab.ca/voters/how-to-vote/time-off-for-voting/>

15 Nour Abdelaal, Chloe Kemeni and Karim Bardeesy. (November 2022). "Knocking on the Door": Youth Civic Engagement and Its Impact on Social Connectedness and Wellness <https://www.ryersonleadlab.com/youthcivic-engagement>

16 Abdelaal, Nour, Chloe Kemeni, and Karim Bardeesy. "Knocking on the Door: Youth Civic Engagement and Its Impact on Social Connectedness and Wellness." Ryerson Lead Lab, November 2022. <https://www.ryersonleadlab.com/youth-civic-engagement>.

17 Elections Ontario. Post-Election Research Provincial Election 2022. Leger, 2022. <https://www.elections.on.ca/content/dam/NGW/sitecontent/2022/reports/2022%20General%20Election%20-%20Post-Event%20Report.pdf>.

18 Elections Canada. "Vote on Campus Program." Last modified 2024. <https://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=vot&dir=bkg&document=campus&lang=e>

“ socioeconomic and demographic factors such as income, education, racial background, and geographic location influence a young person’s ability to access information, navigate voting systems, and feel represented in political discourse.”

Unequal Access to Civic Engagement

Another systemic barrier to civic engagement is the unequal access experienced by different groups of young people, particularly when it comes to voting. In the 2019 federal election, only 37% of Indigenous youth, 33% of Black youth, and 37% of visible minority youth reported voting, compared to 49% of youth overall. These disparities highlight that civic participation is not equally accessible.²² Research shows that socioeconomic and demographic factors such as income, education, racial background, and geographic location influence a young person’s ability to access information, navigate voting systems, and feel represented in political discourse.²³ For many Ontario college students, especially those from equity-deserving backgrounds, these barriers are further compounded by challenges such as financial strain, work-study balance, and lack of culturally relevant civic education or outreach that can significantly hinder their ability to participate in civic activities. However, it is important to note that despite lower voting rates, many marginalized youth remain civically active in other ways.²⁴ Engagement in non-traditional political activ-

ities such as protests, boycotts, and petitions remains strong, with 44.3% of Indigenous youth and 42.3% of Black youth participating, compared to 41.8% of youth overall.²⁵

Recommendations

Recognizing and supporting the full spectrum of youth civic engagement is essential to breaking down systemic and structural barriers faced by Ontario’s college students. To that end, we advocate for the following recommendations:

1. Reinstating On-Campus Polling Stations

Elections Ontario and **Elections Canada** should expand and standardize on-campus polling stations across all post-secondary institutions to ensure equitable and consistent voting access for students in both provincial and federal elections.

2. Improving Data Collection and Transparency

Elections Ontario should collect and publicize demographic data on voter turnout, including age and student status, to better understand and address civic participation gaps.

22 Heritage, Canadian. Canada’s First State of Youth Report: For Youth, with Youth, by Youth. 11 Aug. 2021, <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/state-youth/report.html>.

23 Abdelaal, Nour, Chloe Kemeni, and Karim Bardeesy. “Knocking on the Door: Youth Civic Engagement and Its Impact on Social Connectedness and Wellness.” Ryerson Lead Lab, November 2022. <https://www.ryersonlead-lab.com/youth-civic-engagement>.

24 Abdelaal, Nour, Chloe Kemeni, and Karim Bardeesy. “Knocking on the Door: Youth Civic Engagement and Its Impact on Social Connectedness and Wellness.” Ryerson Lead Lab, November 2022. <https://www.ryersonlead-lab.com/youth-civic-engagement>.

25 Heritage, Canadian. Canada’s First State of Youth Report: For Youth, with Youth, by Youth. 11 Aug. 2021, <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/state-youth/report.html>.

3. Supporting Civic Engagement on post-secondary level

The Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence Ontario, in coordination with post-secondary institutions, should invest in civic education that values both traditional and nontraditional forms of engagement, such as volunteering, organizing, and advocacy, by recognizing these activities as opportunities for professional skill development and creating incentives like academic recognition or certificates to encourage post-secondary student participation.

4. Addressing Logistical Barriers

Post-secondary institutions should address scheduling and commute-related barriers by adopting flexible class policies during elections, including excused absences or designated voting windows.

Conclusion

To truly address the barriers to student civic participation, we must acknowledge that engagement doesn't begin or end at the ballot box. Instead, it requires year-round infrastructure, education, and accessible opportunities that empower students to shape their communities, before, during, and between elections.

As a provincial student advocacy group, OSV works to empower students and amplify their voices in policy decisions that affect their lives. We believe civic engagement in all its forms is a key pathway to ensuring students are active participants in shaping their campuses, communities, and, in turn, a stronger, accessible, affordable, and high-quality post-secondary system here in Ontario for all students.

Engaging the Disengaged: Ontario's Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform as a Model for Youth Inclusion

By Olivia Villeneuve (CSA)

Ontario's Electoral System and the Youth Vote Gap

For decades, voter turnout in Ontario's provincial elections has steadily declined. Voter turnout in the 2022 provincial election was 44%, marking the lowest in the province's history.¹ Preliminary data from the 2025 election suggests only a slight improvement, with 45% of eligible Ontarians casting a ballot.² These figures underscore a broader trend of disengagement from the electoral process among Ontarians.

Ontario does not publish official age-stratified voter turnout data for provincial elections, however federal data and surveys consistently show that youth (aged 18 to 24) have the lowest turnout of any age group. In the 2021 federal election, only 47% of youth voters cast a ballot, well below the overall turnout (62%).³ Despite facing pressing provincial issues like student debt and housing affordability, many young Ontarians remain disengaged; citing mistrust in political institutions and lack of representation in platforms.⁴

Ontario's use of the first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system has long been criticized for its lack of proportionality. Under FPTP, a party can secure a majority government (and all

legislative power) with less than half the popular vote. For instance, in 2022, the Progressive Conservative Party won a majority government with just 41% of the vote, in an election where fewer than half of eligible voters cast ballots.⁵ The resulting disconnect between the popular vote and legislative outcomes can leave large segments of the electorate feeling that their votes do not count, further discouraging participation. Research has shown that countries using proportional electoral systems tend to have higher voter turnout rates compared to those using the FPTP system.^{6,7,8} New Zealand serves as a notable example, having successfully transitioned from FPTP to a proportional representation system in 1996.⁹ Following this change, the country not only saw an increase in voter turnout from 78% in 1993 to 81% in 1996, but also experienced greater diversity among its elected officials.^{10,12}

In response to these challenges, Ontario has experimented with both top-down and bottom-up approaches to civic engagement and

5 Elections Ontario, Graphics & Charts, Election Results Map, 2025, <https://results.elections.on.ca/en/graphics-charts>.

6 André Blais and R. K. Carty, "Does Proportional Representation Foster Voter Turnout?", *European Journal of Political Research* 18, no. 2 (March 1990): 167–81, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.1990.tb00227.x>.

7 Dylan Difford, "Does Proportional Representation Lead to Higher Turnout?", *Electoral Reform Society*, February 10, 2022, <https://electoral-reform.org.uk/does-proportionalrepresentation-lead-to-higher-turnout/>.

8 Daniel M. Smith, "Electoral Systems and Voter Turnout," in *The Oxford Handbook of Electoral Systems*, ed. Erik S. Herron, Robert J. Pekkanen, and Matthew S. Shugart (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 193–212, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190258658.013.17>.

9 Difford, "Does Proportional Representation Lead to Higher Turnout?"

10 Dylan Difford, "What Can We Learn from New Zealand's Successful Electoral Reform?", *Make Votes Matter*, 2023, <https://makevotesmatter.org.uk/news/2023/10/10/what-can-we-learn-from-new-zealands-successful-electoral-reform/>.

11 Tova Wang, "What Other Countries Can Teach Us About Turnout," *Institute for Responsive Government*, 2024, <https://responsivegov.org/research/what-other-countries-can-teachus-about-turnout/>.

12 Dylan Difford, "What Can We Learn from New Zealand's Successful Electoral Reform?,"

1 Elections Ontario, "General Elections Statistics from the Records", 2025

2 Gabby Rodrigues, "Ontario Election: Voter Turnout Higher Than Expected in 2025, Early Data Shows," *Global News*, 2025, <https://globalnews.ca/news/11052258/ontario-election2025-voter-turnout/>.

3 Elections Canada, "Post-Election Evaluation: 44th General Election – Executive Summary," 2021, <https://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=res&dir=rec/eval/pes2021/evt&document=p1&lang=e>

4 Emilie Lussion, Geneviève Gosselin, and Michael Dewing, "Executive Summary – Youth Voter Turnout in Canada," *HillNotes*, 2023, <https://hillnotes.ca/2023/07/06/executivesummary-youth-voter-turnout-in-canada/>.

electoral reform. The Ontario Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform stands out as a top-down initiative aiming to involve citizens directly in policy-making. This article will outline the differences between top-down and bottom-up initiatives, present a case study of Ontario's Citizens' Assembly, and discuss insights to inform strategies to boost youth voter turnout and engage youth in Ontario's democracy.

Top-Down vs. Bottom-Up Pathways to Civic Engagement

Top-down approaches, led by government institutions, aim to engage the public in policy decision-making through methods such as consultations, citizen panels, and juries. While these initiatives carry a sense of legitimacy, research indicates growing dissatisfaction and distrust toward government actors among younger people, which can discourage their involvement.¹³ Additionally, top-down initiatives are often criticized for over-representing highly educated and politically active individuals.¹⁴

In contrast, bottom-up approaches are initiated by citizen groups, often at the local level. These efforts typically arise in response to perceived shortcomings of top-down strategies and seek greater autonomy.¹⁵ However, they may still depend on government resources and legitimacy. Bottom-up pathways are generally more successful at engaging individuals from diverse backgrounds and are particularly effective at building trust, empowering individuals, and mobilizing civic participation within marginalized communities.¹⁶

13 Yunyi Qin, "Grassroots Governance and Social Development: Theoretical and Comparative Legal Aspects," *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 10 (2023): 331, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-01830-8>.

14 Ingmar van Meerkerk, "Top-Down versus Bottom-Up Pathways to Collaboration between Governments and Citizens: Reflecting on Different Participation Traps," in *Collaboration and Public Service Delivery: Promise and Pitfalls*, ed. Anka Kekez, Michael Howlett, and M. Ramesh (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2019), 149–67, <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781788978583.00019>.

15 Ingmar van Meerkerk, "Top-Down versus Bottom-Up Pathways to Collaboration between Governments and Citizens: Reflecting on Different Participation Traps,"

16 K. Goverdhan, "Bridging the Gap: The Role of Grassroots Leadership in

Both bottom-up and top-down civic engagement methods have their respective strengths and limitations. A key distinction is that community-led initiatives often succeed more in engaging diverse audiences, including greater youth participation and higher levels of trust. To bridge this gap, one effective strategy is to establish a "mini-public" within top-down initiatives.¹⁷ By randomly selecting members of the public for government consultations, it is possible to create a more inclusive, representative, and non-partisan cross-section of society, as demonstrated by the Ontario Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform.

Ontario Citizens' Assembly: Bridging Top-Down Reform and Public Participation

In 2003, the Liberal Government of Ontario established the Secretariat of Democratic Renewal, a government agency tasked with engaging youth voters, promoting open debate on electoral reforms, and encouraging transparency.¹⁸ This agency then oversaw the formation of the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform in 2006: an independent panel of citizens charged with examining Ontario's long-standing FPTP electoral system, exploring alternative models, and making recommendations for reform.¹⁹ The initiative was modelled after the 2004 British Columbia Citizens' Assembly and reflected a desire to adopt a more representative electoral method.²⁰

Enhancing Political Awareness and Civic Participation," *International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews* 5, no. 6 (June 2024): 6153–6159, <https://www.ijpr.com/uploads/V5ISSUE6/IJRPR30535.pdf>.

17 Ingmar van Meerkerk, "Top-Down versus Bottom-Up Pathways to Collaboration between Governments and Citizens: Reflecting on Different Participation Traps,"

18 Laura Stephenson and Brian Tanguay, "The 2007 Ontario Electoral System Referendum: Information, Interest, and Democratic Renewal," paper presented at the Canadian Political Science Association Annual Conference, June 2008, <https://cpsa-acsp.ca/papers-2008/StephensonTanguay.pdf>.

19 Lawrence LeDuc, Heather Bastedo, and Catherine Baquero, "The Quiet Referendum: Why Electoral Reform Failed in Ontario," paper presented at the Canadian Political Science Association Annual Conference, University of British Columbia, 2008, <https://cpsa-acsp.ca/papers-2008/LeDuc.pdf>.

20 British Columbia Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, *Making Every Vote Count: The Case for Electoral Reform in British Columbia* (2004), https://citizensassembly.arts.ubc.ca/resources/final_report.pdf.

“The Ontario Citizens’ Assembly on Electoral Reform demonstrated that ordinary citizens, when provided with time, resources, and expert guidance, are capable of engaging with complex policy issues and making informed recommendations.”

The Assembly was composed of 103 randomly selected citizens, one from each electoral district in Ontario.²¹ Every registered voter was eligible to participate, with the exception of elected officials. The selection process was managed by Elections Ontario to ensure independence from government influence. The Assembly was balanced by gender (52 women and 51 men) and included at least one self-identified Indigenous member.²² However, other dimensions of diversity – such as racial identity, sexual orientation, and disability – were not explicitly considered. While the intent was to create a representative cross-section of Ontario society, the lack of attention to broader identity factors, combined with the self-selection process, likely resulted in the overrepresentation of certain demographics, including those already more politically engaged.

From September 2006 to April 2007, the Assembly members met twice monthly, engaging in a structured process of learning, consultation, and deliberation.²³ An Academic Reference Group and the Secretariat of Democratic Renewal provided educational resources, including readings, slide presentations, and an animation, to support members’ understanding of complex electoral systems.²⁴ Public consultations were held across the province, with hundreds of Ontarians

providing input through meetings and written submissions. Ultimately, the Assembly recommended that Ontario adopt a mixed member proportional (MMP) system, which would allow voters to cast two ballots: one for a local representative and one for a party list.²⁵ In October 2007, a public referendum was held alongside the provincial election and the MMP system was rejected by 63% of voters.²⁶ Despite the lack of reform, the Assembly stands as an advanced effort in Ontario to make citizens a part of the policy-making process and experiment with new models of democratic engagement.

Successful Civic Engagement, Limited Public Awareness

The Ontario Citizens’ Assembly on Electoral Reform demonstrated that ordinary citizens, when provided with time, resources, and expert guidance, are capable of engaging with complex policy issues and making informed recommendations. The Assembly’s design ensured a more diverse and representative deliberative body than traditional top-down consultations, and the use of expert-led learning sessions empowered members to develop a strong understanding of electoral systems. It set a precedent for non-partisan, independent, and evidence-based citizen engagement in major policy decisions.

21 Jonathan Rose, “The Ontario Citizens’ Assembly on Electoral Reform,” *Canadian Parliamentary Review* 30, no. 3 (2007): 7–11, https://www.revparl.ca/30/3/30n3_07e_Rose.pdf

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Lawrence LeDuc, Heather Bastedo, and Catherine Baquero, “The Quiet Referendum: Why Electoral Reform Failed in Ontario,”

“...democratic renewal is not only about reforming political institutions, but also about cultivating a more engaged, informed, and representative society.”

A survey of 15 youth members (under 35) who participated in the Assembly revealed that all respondents reported voting in elections, indicating a strong sense of political efficacy among this small group. While this 100% turnout rate is notably higher than the general youth turnout rate of 25-30% in the subsequent federal election, the small sample size limits direct comparisons to the broader youth population.²⁷ Young Assembly members were more likely than their peers to feel that their values were represented by politicians, and they demonstrated a heightened sense of civic responsibility, with 76% believing they had a role in fixing societal problems. Only 29% of Assembly youth participants believed that politicians have lost touch, in contrast to 79% for the broader youth population studied. In addition, a Students' Assembly on Electoral Reform, funded by the Provincial Ministry of Education and the Trillium Foundation, was developed as a parallel process targeting high school students.²⁸ The Students' Assembly served as an early example of intentional youth engagement, offering young people a platform to learn about electoral

27 Ibid
28 Ibid.

systems, debate alternatives, and contribute their views to the official process.

Despite these positive impacts on youth participants, public awareness was extremely low; over 80% of Ontarians reported knowing little or nothing about the Citizens' Assembly.²⁹ Without robust, well-funded outreach and education campaigns, the broader impact on civic engagement and voter turnout was limited. This case underscores the importance of ongoing public engagement and clear government follow-through on citizen input. It highlights both the promise and the pitfalls of deliberative democracy - aimed at creating opportunities for discussion and debate - offering valuable insights for future efforts to involve citizens in reform.³⁰

Blending Top-Down and Bottom-Up Youth Engagement

The Ontario Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform stands as a powerful example of how deliberative top-down initiatives can foster participation and produce thoughtful recommendations for reform. It showed that democratic renewal is not only about reforming political institutions, but also about cultivating a more engaged, informed, and representative society. However, the Assembly's limited public visibility demonstrates that even the most successful government-led efforts can fall short without broad outreach and education. Leveraging bottom-up, community-driven approaches, including comprehensive youth civic education, is essential to ensure these messages reach all Ontario youth. Such grassroots efforts can offer greater outreach, build trust, and engage populations that traditional government-led methods often miss. By combining the strengths of both strategies, On-

29 Ibid.

30 Crossing Boundaries National Council, *Getting to Ground: Democratic Renewal in Canada*, 2005, https://www.crossingboundaries.ca/wpcontent/uploads/2019/05/democratic_renewal_vol_5_eng.pdf.

tario can create a more inclusive and participatory democracy that empowers all citizens to have a meaningful voice in shaping their future.

Recommendations

1. Collect and Publish Descriptive Voter Data

The Government of Ontario should collect and release detailed voter turnout data by age group, including voting information from campus polling stations, for provincial elections. This would provide the transparency needed for evidence-based decision-making, program development, and impact assessment of targeted youth civic engagement initiatives.

2. Launch a Youth-Focused Deliberative Assembly on Electoral Engagement

Establish a new Citizens' Assembly - or similar deliberative body - specifically for postsecondary students to study barriers to youth electoral participation and recommend reforms, following a proven model of expert-guided deliberation. Require the inclusion of young people representing a wide range of identities - including, but not limited to, varying income levels, Indigenous youth, racialized students, youth with disabilities, and youth from both urban and rural communities - to ensure diverse and meaningful representation.

3. Commit to Considering and Acting on Assembly Recommendations

The government should pledge to consider and act on, if appropriate, the recommendations of any youth-focused Citizens' Assembly, with a clear pathway for implementation. This commitment would empower participants and

signal to all students that their voices matter in shaping democratic processes.

4. Adopt a Hybrid Approach to Civic Engagement

Combine top-down government leadership with community-driven engagement, incorporating comprehensive civic education for youth as a foundational element. The government should initiate and support deliberative processes while empowering students and communities to set priorities, lead outreach, and shape recommendations. This hybrid model fosters legitimacy, builds informed participation, and leverages the energy and trust of grassroots networks.

Youth Voter Turnout: It's Not an Apathy Crisis— It's an Access Crisis

By Arielle Reid (BCFS)

For decades, low youth voter turnout in Canada has been misdiagnosed as a crisis of apathy. Each election, the blame lands squarely on young people, with them being portrayed as unmotivated, under-informed or disinterested. In reality, young people care deeply about political issues. The fundamental issue underpinning low youth voter turnout isn't motivation— it's access. Young voters consistently face systemic challenges, including being less likely to receive voter information cards and rarely being addressed by candidates or political parties. A more effective approach is shifting the focus from perceived apathy to exploring genuine, deep engagement of youth as important stakeholders in the democratic enterprise.

This is not disengagement— it is disenfranchisement.

A History of Gatekeeping Democracy

Historically, the right to vote has been intertwined with judgments about who deserves political participation. Prejudices persist beyond legal enfranchisement, as electoral systems often fail to structurally adapt to facilitate participation of newly enfranchised groups. For example, Indigenous peoples in Canada were explicitly barred from voting in federal elections until 1960, and even after legal enfranchisement, significant systemic barriers remained, including limited access to polling locations, language barriers, and lack of appropriate voter information.¹ Newly

enfranchised groups were often blamed for lower voter participation, despite systemic nonresponsiveness. While explicit legal barriers like land ownership requirements and mental health restrictions have been removed from the Canada Elections Act, systemic obstacles persist. For example, homeowners still vote at significantly higher rates than renters, yet renters are not blamed for their lower turnout.² Attitudes like “you don't get to complain if you don't vote” ignore the human instinct to resist participation in systems that feel exclusionary or unjust. Lower voting rates among rural, disabled, Indigenous, and non-student or unemployed youth should thus be viewed as indicators of persistent systemic barriers rather than personal failings. Such exclusionary attitudes continue to negatively influence perceptions of youth voter turnout today.

Youth Apathy: A Tired, Harmful Narrative

How society defines a problem shapes perceptions and dictates solutions. Regarding low voter turnout among Canadians aged 18 to 34—a demographic that includes many first-time voters—public discourse often obstructs meaningful reform due to misdiagnosis. Solutions that focus exclusively on civic education or “getting people to care” are bound to fail; and in the case of youth, their recalcitrance

¹ en/article/indigenous-suffrage.

² Statistics Canada, “Study: Factors associated with voting”, The Daily (Statistics Canada. 2011), archived website <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/120224/dq120224a-eng.htm>. Canvassing in multifamily dwellings during elections is particularly challenging, as canvassers have the legal right to access multi-family dwellings but there is no mechanism for them to access units without being buzzed in. This is an example of how a critical piece of the election process underserves non-homeowners outside of singlefamily dwellings currently.

¹ John F Leslie, “Indigenous Suffrage | the Canadian Encyclopedia,” The Canadian Encyclopedia, April 7, 2016, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/>

is to blame for not getting better results. Although voter turnout has declined across all demographics in Canada since 1958, a pattern mirrored in other industrialised countries,³ youth turnout is uniquely pathologized.

Every provincial and federal election, narratives in the media and public discourse often portray youth voters as uninformed and unmotivated, viewing voting as optional rather than essential, and failing to grasp what is at stake. These narratives are inaccurate and suppressive because individuals, not systems, are the focus of reforms.

What the Data Tells Us about Access

Despite evidence of broader motivational barriers across all demographics, Statistics Canada consistently frames low youth turnout as a motivational or political-interest issue.⁴ However, their data from surveys conducted in 2015,⁵ 2019,⁶ and 2021⁷ demonstrate that non-voters struggle with the same access issues that disproportionately affect youth. The 2015 National Youth Survey (NYS) clearly identifies structural barriers that more accurately explain lower youth participation:

- Only 76% of youth received a voter information card (vs. 94% of older adults)
 - Among Indigenous youth: 66%
 - Among unemployed youth: 67%
 - Among youth under 23: 69%

3 Elections Canada, Explaining the Turnout Decline in Canadian Federal Elections: A New Survey of NonVoters, (Elections Canada, March 2003), 4, <https://www.elections.ca/res/rec/part/tud/TurnoutDecline.pdf>

4 "Youth voting trends in Canada" Electionsanddemocracy.ca, (Elections Canada), last modified April 2023, <https://electionsanddemocracy.ca/canadas-elections/youth-voting-trends>

5 Statistics Canada, "Reason for not voting in the federal election, October 19, 2015", The Daily (Statistics Canada. February 22, 2016), archived website: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/dailyquotidien/160222/dq160222a-eng.htm>

6 Statistics Canada, "Reason for not voting in the federal election, October 21, 2019", The Daily (Statistics Canada. February 26, 2020), archived website <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/dailyquotidien/200226/dq200226b-eng.htm>

7 Statistics Canada, "Reason for not voting in the federal election, September 20, 2021", The Daily (Statistics Canada. February 16, 2022), archived website <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/dailyquotidien/220216/dq220216d-eng.htm>

- Only 34% of youth were aware of voting options beyond Election Day polling stations (versus 65% of adults over 35).
- 8% of youth found it difficult to locate information on when and where to vote, but this number rose among marginalized youth with 19% of Indigenous youth and 13% of youth with disabilities reporting difficulty.
- Only 29% of youth were contacted by a political party or candidate (compared to 59% of voters over 35).⁸

Taken together, these statistics paint a clear picture: youth are not apathetic, but overlooked and under-engaged by the very institutions meant to facilitate participation. These conditions are not incidental, they are structural. While non-voters apathy or disinterest in politics is similarly low among youth and older non-voters alike, framing youth turnout solely as apathy obscures these structural realities.

Reframing the Conversation: Elections in B.C.

The discrepancy between the prevalent narrative and the realities about youth voters needs to be reframed and refocused to address the barriers to access, and this informs the get-out-the-vote campaigns by the British Columbia Federation of Students (BCFS). The Generation Vote Now and Shape the Vote campaigns provided students with the tools they needed to cast a ballot during elections, including information on online voter registration, advance polls, vote-by-mail options, vote-on-campus opportunities, and voting reminders. These campaigns mobilised young voters by providing accessible, digestible voting information that is relevant to the student experience, provided by students.

8 Statistics Canada, 2015 National Youth Survey, prepared by Nielsen Consumer Insights, May 6, 2016, <https://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=res&dir=rec/eval/pes2015/nys&document=p3&lang=e>

Youth respond positively to messaging about mobilization and genuine engagement. Research reinforces this: in 2019, BCFS published a report highlighting that youth turnout significantly rises when candidates discuss relevant issues and when young voters organise around key concerns, such as affordability, housing, and climate change.⁹ Negative messaging suggesting youth votes are ineffective represents a form of voter suppression that undermines genuine participation.

The BCFS also challenges negative public narratives through media interviews conducted during the federal and provincial elections. In both elections, the BCFS used media coverage to remind the public that youth aged 18–35 represent one in five eligible voters, making them Canada’s (and the province’s) largest voting bloc.¹⁰ In emphasizing that fewer than 100 votes decided several ridings, this demonstrates the significant potential impact of youth voters.

British Columbia has consistently enjoyed a higher turnout of eligible voters than the national average for federal elections, and this trend is mirrored in the eligible voters aged 18 to 34:

- 2015, 63% of eligible voters aged 18–24 years voted, and 59.7% of eligible 25–34-year-olds voted. This compares to 57.1% and 57.4% in the same age ranges nationally.
- In 2019, the numbers were 53.9% and 58.4% nationally, compared with 52% of 18–24-year-olds and 57.7% of 25–34-year-olds.

“Negative messaging suggesting youth votes are ineffective represents a form of voter suppression that undermines genuine participation.”

Provincially, the same is true. Voter turnout data from the 2017,¹¹ 2020,¹² and 2024¹³ provincial elections demonstrate a strong showing by youth, even amid low voter participation during COVID-19 pandemic. In the 2024 election, youth turnout surged. Among 18- to 24-year-olds, turnout jumped by 14.5%. For those aged 25 to 34, it rose by 18.46%. Meanwhile, turnout among voters 55 to 64 and those over 75 only saw 3.6% and 3.8% increase, respectively, and turnout among voters aged 65 to 74 declined.

Along with reframing and advocacy work of the BCFS, there were structural changes that influenced turnout in the 2024 election. The modernization reforms to the province’s Election Act in 2019 had two interesting features for youth, the introduction of a “List of Future Voters”, which allows youth not of voting age to be automatically added to the voter registry when they come of age, and; the use of technology that facilitates voting outside of the riding of residence, making on-campus voting for all BC voters possible. These two features, along with the advocacy efforts of stakeholders like the BCFS, resulted in the

⁹ British Columbia Federation of Students, *The Youth Vote: Why Youth Voters Can’t Be Ignored* (BCFS, September 2019)

¹⁰ “Push for more young voters to head to the polls this election”, interview by Darya Zargar, aired on September 22, 2024, on Global News, <https://globalnews.ca/video/10769139/push-for-more-young-votersto-head-to-the-polls-this-electionInterviews from; Speak Up! “Playlist for 10/03/2024”>, interview by Hyago, aired October 3, 2024, on CFSR 90.1 F, <https://www.cjsf.ca/contents/speak-playlist-10032024>

¹¹ Elections BC, “Report of the Chief Electoral Officer: Provincial General Election”, (Elections BC, March 12, 2018), 56, <https://elections.bc.ca/docs/rpt/2017-General-Election-Report.pdf>

¹² Elections BC, “Report of the Chief Electoral Officer: 42nd Provincial General Election”, (Elections BC, October 20, 2020), 54, <https://www.elections.bc.ca/docs/rpt/2020-provincial-general-election-report.pdf>

¹³ Elections BC, “Report of the Chief Electoral Officer: 43rd Provincial General Election”, vo.1: Administration, (Elections BC, May 27, 2025), 72, https://www.elections.bc.ca/docs/rpt/Report_of_the_CEO_PGE2024.pdf

surge of 20,000 new youth voters added to the Provincial Voters List, and the 16% of early registration by voters being youth.¹⁴ None of this would have been possible, however, without a commitment by Elections BC to “consistent efforts to reduce administrative barriers for younger voters.”¹⁵

Recommendations to Improve Access

Reframing low youth turnout as a crisis of disenfranchisement, rather than apathy, is essential. Misrepresenting low turnout as a personal failing overlooks the structural realities young voters face. In addition to having their voting numbers turned into a personal failing, youth are often misrepresented as a monolithic group, when in fact they are the most diverse voting age block in Canada.¹⁶ Political institutions often approach youth voters without accounting for generational, social, or economic differences—further disenfranchising them by not being responsive enough to their needs and concerns.

Youth aren’t disengaged; they’re facing real barriers to participating. Addressing access, not just motivation, is key to improving youth voter turnout. Our recommendations are as follows:

High-Priority Reforms:

- Implement a vote from anywhere model, similar to British Columbia’s provincial system, enabling transient young voters to vote conveniently.

¹⁴ Ibid, 29

¹⁵ Ibid, 72.

¹⁶ Statistics Canada, Census in Brief: A generational portrait of Canada’s aging population from the 2021 Census, Catalogue no. 98-200-X issue 2021003, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/censusrecensement/2021/as-sa/98-200-x/2021003/98-200-x2021003-eng.cfm>

- Establish polling stations on every post-secondary campus. These locations serve large numbers of young voters and are often well connected to public transit, making them ideal for improving access for all voters.

Immediate Practical Steps:

- Collaboration between Elections Canada, colleges, universities and students’ unions to ensure voter information cards and clear election information reach students.

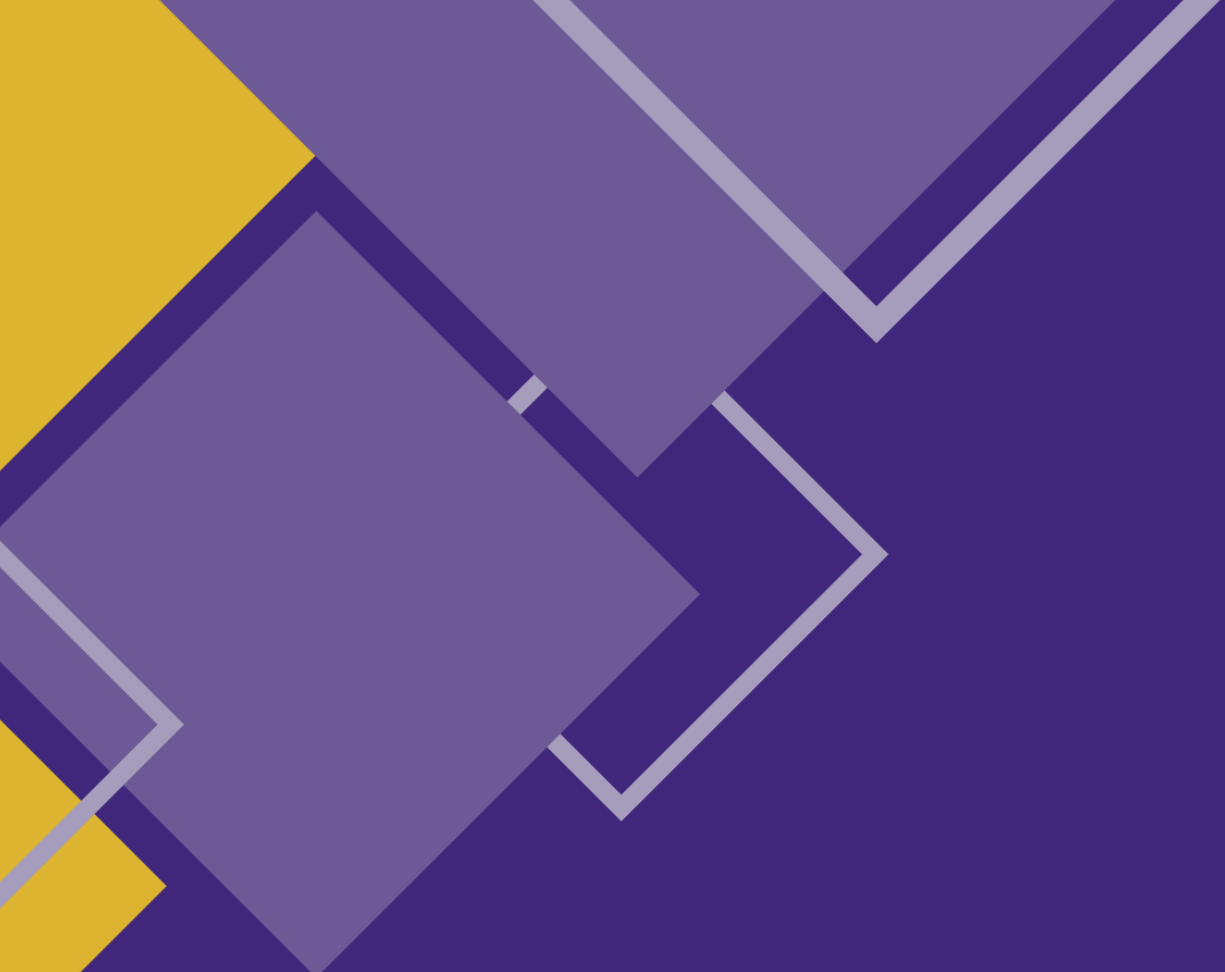
Meaningful Engagement:

- Increase youth participation and representation. Political parties must move beyond performative gestures and invest in genuine youth engagement. This means consultations where young people can raise issues, share concerns, and propose solutions. Engagement must be intentional, regular, and structured.

Relentless Advocacy:

- Student groups and community organizations must continue to advocate to ensure governments and political parties engage earnestly with youth voters, while working to address the barriers that keep youth and marginalized communities from voting. This means holding institutions accountable, not just for voter turnout outcomes, but also for an equitable and accessible voting process.

“Political parties must move beyond performative gestures and invest in genuine youth engagement.”



OUSA

Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance