Youth Engagement and Mobilization in the 2010 Toronto Municipal Election

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May 2011

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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of a mixed-methods research project undertaken by Apathy is Boring during the 2010 Toronto municipal election. The report focuses on the electoral engagement patterns of youth in Toronto, as well as the nature and impact of youth mobilization initiatives. The key findings include the following:

- There are substantive differences in engagement among youth that are linked to residential and lifestyle factors, such as living with a parent or living in the city centre.

- Most youth do not recall receiving a voter information card, which implies they are either not registered or inaccurately registered as voters. The likelihood of receiving these cards is tied to residential patterns, so that certain groups are more likely to be missed.

- Commuters in the amalgamated suburbs face significant barriers to voting because of opening hours of polling stations for municipal elections.

- There is a relationship between unsolicited mobilization activity – specifically, being contacted by a candidate – and voting in the election.

- Organizations invest a significant amount of effort into organizing election debates, yet these do not appear to be particularly effective at reaching or mobilizing unengaged youth.

- Organizations seeking to mobilize youth are modifying resources from elections agencies to better suit their needs. There is also a clear need for outreach resources with information about candidates and their platforms.

- The non-partisanship policies of government agencies appear to cause concern among partner organizations and may contribute to limiting mobilization activity.

- Community and non-profit organizations responded positively to Toronto Elections' youth initiative and want to see more comprehensive youth mobilization in future elections.

Pursuant to these findings, the report includes a series of research and outreach recommendations that all stakeholders – including community organizations, outreach workers, candidates and election agencies – can use to better engage young voters.

Acknowledgements

Apathy is Boring would like to express our appreciation to Elections Canada for supporting research into youth electoral engagement in Canada, including this project.

Apathy is Boring would also like to thank the City of Toronto for its partnership in this project. The city made a significant commitment to reach youth during the 2010 municipal election. Toronto Elections brought together a network of partner organizations seeking to engage youth, connected us with those organizations for interviews and helped promote our survey to youth across Toronto. This research would not have been possible without their cooperation and support. Apathy is Boring also wishes to specifically express our appreciation to Monika Matel-Sousa and Carole Boughannam for their assistance.

Apathy is Boring would also like to thank André Blais, Delia Dumitrescu and Peter Loewen for contributing their time and expertise to this project.

And finally, we would like to thank all of the organizations that participated in and helped support this project, including:

ArtsVote
Centennial College Student Association
Malvern Action for Neighbourhood Change
Malvern Family Resource Centre
Malvern Votes
Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants
Operation Black Vote
Ryerson Students' Union
Scadding Court Community Centre
Scarborough Campus Students' Union
Scarborough Centre for Healthy Communities
Scarborough Civic Action Network
Schools Without Borders
Seneca College
Student Association of George Brown College
Toronto Community Housing
Toronto Public Library
Toronto Youth Priority Symposium
University of Toronto Centre for Community Partnerships
University of Toronto, Hart House
University of Toronto Office of Government, Institutional and Community Relations
University of Toronto Students' Union
Youth Action Network

About Apathy is Boring

Apathy is Boring is a national charitable organization that uses art and technology to educate youth about democracy.

Apathy is Boring accomplishes its work through four program areas:

- Concerts and events that create an opportunity for dialogue between community leaders and youth on issues of concern to young people;

- A Youth Friendly program comprised of workshops, tools and resources to engage youth in decision-making and educate decision-makers about how to engage youth;

- Web sites (www.apathyisboring.com and www.citizenfactory.com) that provide youth with information on how to get involved;

- Election campaigns that reach out to youth and give them the information they need to cast an informed vote.

Apathy is Boring aims to reach Canadians aged 18–35 who are currently unengaged in the democratic process. The work Apathy is Boring does is critical and noteworthy because it is the only youth-led, non-partisan, year-round, Canadian charitable organization that offers educational resources and programming tailored to young people about how they can become active citizens. Apathy is Boring has distinguished itself as a leader by reaching hundreds of thousands of young Canadians since 2004.

Introduction

The goal of this report is to provide a more detailed picture of youth mobilization initiatives and youth engagement during a Canadian municipal election. Using survey data collected during the 2010 Toronto municipal election, it compares the levels of engagement and campaign contact among youth across the city. The report also summarizes the findings from a series of interviews with representatives of organizations involved in youth mobilization during this election.

The nature of this report is more practical than academic: it seeks to provide information that all stakeholders – including community organizations, outreach workers, candidates and election agencies – can use to better engage young voters.

The data were collected immediately before and after the 2010 Toronto municipal election. This was a salient and competitive election: there was no mayoral incumbent running and overall turnout was 51%, up from 39% in the 2006 municipal election. The City of Toronto also launched a new youth electoral outreach initiative for 2010, including the creation of a network of partner organizations seeking to engage youth.[1]

First, this report presents an overview of responses from our survey of youth in Toronto. This includes a discussion of engagement and activity patterns, with a particular focus on life-cycle effects. This is followed by a multivariate analysis of factors that influence four key dependent variables: turnout, civic engagement, campaign contact and receiving a voter information card. The independent variables considered include age, being a student, being an immigrant, living with a parent, residential mobility, and where one lives in the city.

Second, this report presents an overview of the data collected from organizations involved in youth mobilization initiatives, along with a basic assessment of their impact. This is followed by the findings from a series of qualitative interviews conducted with representatives from Toronto Elections' partner organizations. These findings include descriptions of the partners and their activities, as well as their feedback for election agencies.

Finally, this report includes a series of recommendations for election stakeholders. The first set of recommendations addresses both needs and opportunities for further research into youth electoral engagement. The second set of recommendations includes practical advice for improving youth mobilization initiatives and increasing youth participation in future elections.

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[1] Municipalities in Ontario do not collect age-segmented turnout data, so only overall turnout rates are available.

1. Research Design and Methodology

Turnout in Canadian elections has been declining for decades, and this decline is being driven by youth. As they become eligible to vote, fewer and fewer young Canadians are choosing to cast a ballot (Blais et al. 2004). Similar declines have been observed in most industrialized democracies over the last half-century (*Ibid*.).

In spite of this, information on the nature and causes of low youth turnout is relatively scarce. In Canada, the premier dataset for research into voting behaviour is the Canadian Election Study (CES), a national survey fielded for every federal election since 1965. However, even the CES gathers limited information about youth. For example, of the 4,495 Canadians who responded to the CES campaign-period survey in 2008, only 213 were aged 18-24 (Canadian Election Study 2008). Even when respondents from multiple surveys are pooled to create a larger sample, making useful comparisons between youth sub-populations (e.g. rural, urban and suburban) can be difficult.

Even less information is available about youth participation in Canadian municipal elections. Most municipal authorities do not collect age-segmented turnout data, which precludes the most basic form for analysis. The minimal data available suggest that youth turnout is low. For example, Ward 27 in downtown Toronto contains much of Ryerson University and the University of Toronto's campuses. Overall turnout in the ward was 56% for the 2010 municipal election, while turnout in the four subdivisions covering the university campuses was 35% (City of Toronto 2010).[2]

Over the last decade, research into voter mobilization and Get Out The Vote (GOTV) initiatives has burgeoned in the United States, largely thanks to the adoption of field experiments to study turnout. The most consistent finding of these experiments is that face-to-face contact with a potential voter is the most effective way to mobilize them (Green and Gerber 2008). When they are contacted, young voters are equally responsive to these appeals (Nickerson 2006). In short, the evidence shows that youth mobilization matters.

For anyone seeking to engage youth during Canadian elections, the shortage of information about youth can be a challenge. Faced with limited resources, organizations wishing to mobilize youth during elections benefit from information about how and where to target their efforts. This translates into two basic research questions: How does electoral engagement differ among youth sub-populations? And what is the impact of existing youth mobilization initiatives?

The 2010 Toronto municipal election provided an opportunity to begin answering these questions. The City of Toronto decided to launch a new outreach initiative for 2010, including a focus on youth. As part of this initiative, Toronto Elections brought together a network of partner organizations from across the city seeking to engage youth, including community groups, NGOs, youth-serving organizations, and post-secondary institutions.

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[2] The four subdivisions and their respective individual turnout rates are: Subdivision 16 (41%), Subdivision 29 (37%), Subdivision 52 (43%), and Subdivision 67 (28%).

Apathy is Boring took this opportunity to conduct a survey of youth in Toronto, as well as a study of Toronto Elections' partner organizations. This mixed methodology approaches the research questions from two directions: an organizational analysis of real-world youth mobilization initiatives, as well as a quantitative analysis of what is happening on the ground.

1.1 Survey of Youth in Toronto

Sample and Distribution

The Toronto Youth Election Survey was conducted on-line both before and after the 2010 Toronto municipal election. The final sample for the survey was 796 eligible voters in the city of Toronto between the ages of 18 and 35. The survey sample was not randomly selected. Rather, the survey was promoted to the public and respondents chose to participate.

Random selection from a population is the preferred approach for any survey. However, when the population in question is youth, traditional survey methodologies typically involve high costs or significant shortcomings. For example, most telephone surveys only reach Canadians with landlines. However, the most recent Residential Telephone Service Survey by Statistics Canada, conducted in 2008, found that "34.4% of households comprised solely of adults aged between 18 and 34 rel[ied] exclusively on cell phones. Among all other households the rate was 4.5%" (Statistics Canada 2008). Although it is possible to construct a sample that includes both cell-only and landline households, this adds to the already prohibitive cost of trying to reach youth with telephone surveys.

Given these shortcomings and the focus of this research, an on-line survey was used. The survey questionnaire was available to the public, with respondents screened for eligibility before they could begin the questionnaire. To encourage participation, Apathy is Boring promoted the survey in conjunction with Toronto Elections and their partner organizations. Links to the survey were distributed through e-mail newsletters, social media, partner Web sites, and posters. To increase the survey's appeal to youth at large, it was incentivized with a contest to win one of several free iPods. This incentive was featured prominently in promotional materials.

As the respondents chose to participate, the survey sample exhibits a self-selection bias. Youth participating in the survey are more likely to be engaged than their peers, which limits external validity. The value provided by this survey comes from making relative comparisons within a sample of youth from a specific city, with respondents who tend to be more engaged than average.

Two-wave Design

The survey used a two-wave design with both waves administered on-line. The first questionnaire was available to the public from October 4 to 22 (one day before the election). The day after the election, participants received a follow-up questionnaire by e-mail. The direct e-mail system matched respondents' pre- and post-election responses, thus treating both questionnaires as a single survey case. Of the 796 first-wave respondents, 443 (56%) completed the follow-up questionnaire.

A two-wave design was chosen to schedule the initial distribution during the municipal election campaign. Respondents are more likely to complete surveys that they perceive as timely and relevant to current events (Cook, Heath and Thompson 2000). The two-wave design involved distributing the first questionnaire at the height of the election campaign, when it was most timely, while also collecting post-election information such as turnout. The two-wave design was also chosen to potentially allow for a quasi-experimental analysis in conjunction with the other information collected, although this analysis was not ultimately conducted for this report.[3]

Survey Questionnaires

The survey questionnaires were developed in conjunction with Elections Canada and Toronto Elections. Along with standard socio-demographic indicators, the survey included questions that spoke to both of our research questions. The questionnaire included measures of civic duty, community activity, political knowledge and political interest, to assess respondents' patterns of engagement. It also included indicators to assess election outreach and mobilization programs, ranging from contact with an election campaign to receiving a voter information card in the mail.

Election surveys face a number of limitations, the most notable being that they consistently overestimate turnout (Karp and Brockington 2005). This occurs for two main reasons. First, there is a selection bias: respondents who are willing to participate in a survey are also more likely to vote than non-responders.

Second, there is a social desirability bias: some respondents will falsely report voting on surveys because of positive social norms surrounding voting (Bernstein, Chadha and Montjoy 2001). Misreported turnout is particularly problematic for surveys because it has been associated with other respondent traits. For example, respondents who falsely report voting also report higher levels of education, civic duty and political attentiveness than honest non-voters (Presser and Traugott 1992; Karp and Brockington 2005).[4]

To compensate for misreporting, the survey uses an adaptation of the American National Election Studies' turnout question, which offers respondents several socially acceptable reasons for not voting. This question wording has been shown to attenuate turnout over-reporting (Duff et al. 2007). However, like most election surveys, this one has an inflated turnout rate. Overall turnout in the 2010 Toronto municipal election was 51%, whereas 71% of survey respondents reported voting.

Election surveys are also limited by their use of self-reporting to measure exposure with campaigns. Survey respondents may be unable to remember contact, or falsely remember contact where there was none. To compensate for these limitations, the questionnaire included a battery of 14 different campaign contact indicators, which collect information on the relative rates of different contact methods.

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[3] See Appendix A for an explanation of the quasi-experimental analysis and why it was not conducted.

[4] Karp and Brockington also found a weak relationship between age and false reporting, but it did not appear to have a significant impact on the results of regression analysis using self-reported turnout versus actual turnout.

1.2 Interviews and Mobilization Assessment

Setting and Sample

Toronto Elections assembled a network of more than 40 partner organizations seeking to engage youth directly during the 2010 municipal election.[5] This network included youth-serving organizations, community organizations, post-secondary institutions, student unions and other non-profit organizations. Representatives from each organization first came together at City Hall on July 22, 2010, to discuss their plans and opportunities for collaboration around the election.

Representatives from 43 of the partner organizations were invited to participate in post-election interviews and a mobilization assessment program. Twenty-two representatives did not participate, with nine of them declining because their organizations ultimately were not active during the election. The final sample of 22 interview participants is therefore skewed towards the more active organizations in the network.[6]

Post-election Interviews

Each participant was contacted by an Apathy is Boring staff member for an interview after the election. The goal of these interviews was to secure qualitative feedback from each organization about their work during the election.

Fifteen interviews were conducted in-person in mid-November and the remaining seven were conducted by phone in the following month. Many of the participants represent organizations that rely on funding from government agencies and departments. To encourage honest responses, the interviews were conducted on a semi-anonymous basis: by default, no comments were attributed to specific organizations or individuals. Participants also had the option to make any of their comments fully anonymous.

Each interview included a consistent set of 14 questions to secure information about each organization's election mobilization activities, as well as to solicit feedback and best practices.[7] Given that the sample included some of the most active organizations in terms of youth mobilization, we wanted to identify common characteristics and patterns. Along with information on the planning and deployment of youth mobilization initiatives, the interviewer asked for background information about each organization. Participants were explicitly asked to identify any challenges they faced and to make suggestions for consideration by election agencies.

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[5] These organizations were also part of Toronto Elections' network of 121 communication partners.

[6] ArtsVote Toronto, an organization from outside of Toronto Elections' partner network, was included as the 22nd participant because a number of survey respondents reported contact with their campaign.

[7] See Appendix B for the full list of interview questions.

Mobilization Assessment

Representatives were asked to record their organization's mobilization activity during the election in a standardized format. Each activity was recorded individually, along with its time, date, location and estimated reach.[8] For example, some organizations reported organizing election debates, while others reported canvassing specific streets or hosting workshops.

For the final mobilization assessment, only activities tied to specific geographic locations were included in the analysis. Although some information was collected on printed materials and on-line outreach, it was impossible to reliably assess their dissemination, and they were therefore excluded from the analysis.[9]

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[8] This information was originally supposed to be tracked by all participants with a standardized tracking spreadsheet. However, few participants complied with the full protocol. As a result, most of the data was compiled after the election through personal follow-ups and organizational records.

[9] The printed materials were distributed passively (e.g. on newsstands) throughout the city, so the only reliable information available was the number of copies printed. Similarly, few organizations had reliable or consistent metrics for their on-line outreach.

2. Survey Findings

2.1 Profile of Respondents

Table 1 presents a summary of survey respondents' socio-demographic characteristics. Previous work in both international and Canadian contexts has linked the life cycle – including transitions such as moving out and entering the workforce – to youth electoral participation (Howe 2007; Blais and Loewen 2009). We divide respondents into two subsamples, aged 18–21 (n = 425) and 22–35 (n = 363). By the age of 22, most respondents have been out of high school long enough to complete a four-year college or university degree. This scheme therefore serves as a convenient way to examine the transition to adulthood and independent living.[10]

Table 1: Socio-demographic profile of survey respondents		
	18–21	**22–35**
Male	35.4%	39.3%
Born in Canada	75.3%	75.6%
Some post-secondary education	51.1%	94.2%
Completed college or university degree	5.0%	64.8%
Student	87.0%	41.9%
Employed full-time	2.1%	47.4%
Moved in the last year	36.8%	43.3%
Live in city centre	27.1%	46.9%
Live with a parent	65.9%	40.5%

The sample as a whole is disproportionately female (61%), with men being even less prevalent in the 18–21 age group. Immigrants are consistently represented throughout the sample; about one quarter of all respondents were born outside of Canada, with similar proportions in both age groups.

These age groups exhibit major differences in terms education and employment. The overwhelming majority (94%) or respondents aged 22–35 have completed some level of post-secondary education, and almost two-thirds (64%) have either a college or university degree. Among respondents aged 18–21, about half (51%) have completed at least one year of post-secondary education, and very few (5%) hold any kind of post-secondary degree.

We attribute these differences to the life cycle, as a larger proportion of older respondents have completed their education and entered the workforce. Younger respondents are much more likely to currently be enrolled at a post-secondary institution (87%) than working full-time (2%), whereas older respondents are more evenly divided between students (42%) and full-time employees (47%).

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[10] Conducting the analysis with 23 as the dividing age yields similar results, with the 18–23 subsample living independently and scoring slightly higher on indicators of engagement. This reinforces the imputation of the differences between these subsamples to life-cycle effects.

Older respondents also have more independent lifestyles. Those aged 22–35 are less likely to live with a parent (41%) and more likely to have moved in the past year (43%) than their younger counterparts (66% and 37% respectively). Similarly, respondents aged 22–35 are much more likely to live in Central Toronto (47%) than those aged 18–21 (27%).

These findings paint a portrait of two relatively distinct groups, which we refer to as "recent adults" and "young independents." Recent adults are youth who have graduated from high school within the last four years. Most of them are pursuing some type of post-secondary education, and they are more likely to still live with a parent. Young independents, by comparison, are more likely to have entered the workforce and moved away from home, often to the city centre. Of the young independents who are students, almost half (45%) already have some type of post-secondary degree.

2.2 Engagement Indicators

The differences between recent adults and young independents extend beyond socio-demographic factors. Table 2 compares the two groups based on a series of civic and political engagement indicators.[11] Older respondents score higher on the majority of these indicators, regardless of whether they are related directly to electoral engagement.

Table 2: Engagement indicators for survey respondants		
	18–21	**22–35**
Voted in 2010 municipal election	62.9%	79.4%
High interest in politics	25.4%	45.6%
High interest in municipal election	31.1%	46.5%
Believe voting is a duty	51.8%	61.3%
Satisfied with democracy	72.2%	59.8%
Follow news and current events daily	27.6%	47.5%
Correctly answered all four knowledge questions	43.7%	56.3%
Contacted a politician or government official	19.0%	39.0%
Volunteered for a campaign	12.9%	19.6%
Made ethical or political purchases	50.2%	61.3%
Attended a public demonstration	28.2%	37.4%
Volunteered in their community	68.6%	66.7%

Respondents aged 18–21 are less interested in politics. They are less likely to express high levels of interest in politics generally (25%) and in the 2010 municipal election (31%) than those aged 22–35 (46% and 47% respectively). Similarly, younger respondents are much less likely to follow the news and current events on a daily basis (28%) than their older counterparts (48%).

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[11] Both questionnaires included civic duty and political interest indicators. Where possible, we present responses from the pre-election questionnaire, which had a larger sample (n = 796). There were no significant pre-to-post differences among respondents who completed both questionnaires.

Given their higher levels of interest, it comes as no surprise that older respondents also perform better on a test of general political knowledge: 56% of those aged 22–35 answered all of four of the survey's knowledge-testing questions correctly, compared to 44% of those aged 18–21.

In terms of turnout, respondents in the older group are significantly more likely to report having voted (79%) than those in the younger group (63%). Respondents aged 22–35 are also more likely to believe that voting is a duty (61%) than those aged 18–21 (52%). In spite of this, younger respondents appear to be more satisfied with the democratic process itself. When asked how they feel about the way democracy works in Canada, 72% of those aged 18–21 described themselves as "very" or "fairly" satisfied. Only 60% of those aged 22–35 responded similarly.

The gap between these groups narrows for other forms of engagement. The survey asked respondents about their involvement in five activities during the last year, ranging from contacting a politician to volunteering in the community. Respondents aged 22–35 are more likely to contact a politician (39%) or attend a demonstration (37%) than those aged 18–21 (19% and 28% respectively). However, respondents from both groups are unlikely to volunteer for a political campaign, and they volunteer in their communities at similar rates: 69% for those aged 18–21 and 67% for those aged 22–35.

Young independents are clearly more engaged on the whole, particularly in politics and elections. The gap between them and recent adults is largest for traditional political engagement: contacting politicians, following the news daily, and general interest in the political system. For civic or alternative political activities such as volunteering or public demonstrations, the gap is smaller.

As for the puzzling finding that those who tend to participate less in the democratic process (i.e. younger respondents) express more satisfaction with it, we have no clear explanation. Perhaps, as Aesop said, familiarity breeds contempt. The relationship between political attitudes and the life cycle certainly deserves further study, as discussed in the Recommendations section.

2.3 Election Indicators

The differences between the two groups are smaller for election-specific indicators, as summarized in Table 3. Young independents still score higher than recent adults in terms of seeking out information about the election, but this is hardly surprising, given their higher levels of political interest.

In early October, the City of Toronto sent a voter information card (VIC) to all registered voters in the city. Roughly half of all respondents recalled receiving a VIC in the mail prior to the election, and the likelihood of receiving a card does not differ significantly between the two age groups (47% versus 48%).

Table 3: Election indicators for survey respondents

	18–21	22–35
Received a voter information card	47.1%	47.9%
Remember Toronto Elections youth slogan	36.4%	29.3%
Called 311 hotline about election	14.6%	14.4%
Read election brochure or flyer	61.6%	66.5%
Visited Toronto Elections Web site	69.2%	79.4%
Encouraged to vote by family	58.9%	50.7%
Encouraged to vote by friends	49.8%	61.7%

Younger respondents are somewhat more likely to remember seeing the slogan for Toronto Elections' youth outreach campaign (36% versus 29%). The slogan – "Your vote is your voice. Speak up 10/25/10." – was chosen through a public contest for Torontonians aged 14–24, which likely accounts for this finding. On the other hand, respondents aged 22–35 are more likely to get information from election brochures (67%) or the Toronto Elections Web site (79%) than those aged 18–21 (62% and 69% respectively). On the whole, these distinctions are less pronounced than the socio-demographic and engagement gaps discussed earlier.

In a similar vein, respondents aged 18–21 are more likely to be encouraged to vote by their family (59%) than by their friends (50%). The reverse is true of those aged 22–35, who are more likely to be encouraged by friends (62%) than family (51%). This difference can be attributed to residential patterns, as younger respondents are more likely to live and socialize with their parents.

2.4 Contact Indicators

The post-election questionnaire included a battery of 14 contact indicators: the survey asked respondents whether or not they had been encouraged to vote by either a candidate or an organization during the election, as well as how they had been contacted. The results are summarized in Table 4.[12]

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[12] Because the questionnaire recorded contact by candidates and other organizations separately, all of the indicators in this table are dichotomous composites (i.e. respondents contacted "by phone" include those who received a phone call from a candidate, from an organization, or from both). Table 10 (in Appendix C) provides a summary of candidate and organization contact rates.

Table 4: Campaign contact for survey respondents		
	18–21	**22–35**
In person	45.8%	57.2%
At an event	21.7%	29.7%
By phone	45.3%	38.3%
By mail	50.0%	65.3%
By e-mail	26.3%	38.1%
By text message	1.5%	3.9%
Through social media	37.6%	53.8%
By a candidate	70.7%	80.9%
By an organization	59.7%	62.2%

On the whole, respondents aged 22–35 are more likely to be contacted by almost every method. The sole exception was contact by phone, with those aged 18–21 being more likely to receive a phone call (45%) than those aged 22–35 (38%). Contact rates by text message are extremely low for both age groups, with only 3% of the entire sample receiving any election-related text messages.

A trend emerges when we consolidate the indicators based on the source of the contact. 76% of all respondents recall being contacted by a candidate, while 61% recall being contacted by another organization. Younger and older respondents are equally likely to be contacted by other organizations prior to the election (62% and 60% respectively). However, respondents aged 22–35 are more likely to be contacted by a candidate (81%) than those aged 18–21 (71%). The predictors of campaign contact, as well as the impact of contact on turnout, are discussed further in the next section of this report. The discussion includes an examination of the different contact methods and their impact on respondents.

3. Multivariate Analysis

Comparing recent adults to young independents is a helpful way to show the links between the life cycle and electoral engagement, as age is a convenient proxy for life-cycle changes. However, to make recommendations for future youth mobilization initiatives or research, more information is needed about the specific factors that influence youth engagement.

To that end, we conducted a multivariate analysis using logistic regression.[13] Five socio-demographic factors, all of which are relevant when identifying youth sub-populations for outreach and mobilization, were identified as key independent variables: being a student, being an immigrant, living with a parent, residential mobility, and where one lives in the city.

This section includes regression analyses of four dependent variables: receiving a VIC, being contacted by a campaign, civic engagement, and turnout. The first two variables are indicators of how effectively the City of Toronto and other election stakeholders are reaching youth. The latter two are indicators of which youth are most engaged. [14]

3.1 Receiving a Voter Information Card

The first dependent variable is whether or not respondents received a VIC in the mail. This variable is a proxy for registration: only registered voters with up-to-date addresses receive a card.[15] The VIC also serves as a basic source of information about polling times and locations for voters. Given that less than half of survey respondents (48%) remember receiving a VIC, the distribution of these cards is worth examining.

The results in Table 5 show both positive and negative predictors of receiving a VIC. Respondents who live with a parent are much more likely to receive a card, whereas those who live in Central Toronto are less likely to receive one. There is also a slight positive relationship between age and receiving a VIC.

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[13] See Appendix D for a brief explanation of multiple regression analysis.

[14] All of the dependent and independent variables were coded as dichotomous dummy variables, with the exception of age in years. Respondents were also divided into four residential regions (Central Toronto, Etobicoke, Scarborough, and York), with Etobicoke as the excluded category for the regressions. Sample sizes for the regressions vary based on the number of complete responses for the variables in question.

[15] The City of Toronto compiles a list of registered voters in collaboration with the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation, a non-profit corporation created by the Government of Ontario. The VIC is sent to all voters on this list in early October. The survey questionnaire prompted post-election respondents with an image of a VIC as a memory cue, and asked if they remembered receiving one.

The association between moving in the last year and receiving a VIC does not immediately appear to be significant, which is counterintuitive. However, this is due to the negative relationship in our sample between residential mobility and living with a parent.[16] If we conduct a similar regression, but omit living with a parent as a factor, the negative relationship between residential mobility and receiving a VIC becomes significant (B = -0.3219, p < 0.05). The overall finding is clear: youth who move away from home are significantly less likely to receive a VIC.

Table 5: Determinants of receiving a voter information card			
	B	S.E.	p
Age	0.0768*	0.03	0.03
Student	-0.0829	0.27	0.76
Immigrant	-0.1488	0.28	0.60
Lives with a parent	1.1871**	0.27	0.00
Moved in last year	-0.0793	0.17	0.64
Central Toronto	-0.7947*	0.39	0.04
Scarborough	-0.2341	0.42	0.58
York	-0.6008	0.41	0.15
Constant	0.6611	1.11	0.21
N	374		
Pseudo R^2	0.0479		
Log likelihood	-237.20183		

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01

3.2 Campaign Contact

The second dependent variable is contact with an election campaign. The post-election questionnaire included a battery of 14 contact indicators. Factor analysis shows a relatively high degree of internal consistency among these indicators (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.73$). We therefore reduce them to a single dependent variable for the purposes of this analysis, to see which respondents receive the most contact overall.[17]

None of the socio-demographic indicators in Table 6 are significantly related to composite campaign contact. There is a positive association between being a student and being contacted by a campaign, although it does not reach the traditional threshold of significance (p > 0.05). Given this lack of a clear relationship, campaign contact is examined in more detail as an independent variable related to turnout later in this analysis.

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[16] This is not surprising, as parents tend to move less than youth. There is a clear negative correlation between living with a parent and moving in the last year (r = -0.396, p < 0.01).

[17] In this case, we created the composite variable by taking the average number of methods by which a respondent was contacted. This provides us with a continuous measure, which is more suitable for examining the overall distribution of campaign activity.

Table 6: Determinants of being contacted by a campaign

	B	S.E.	P
Student	0.0609	0.03	0.06
Immigrant	-0.0211	0.04	0.58
Lives with a parent	-0.0466	0.04	0.20
Moved in last year	-0.0065	0.02	0.79
Central Toronto	0.0080	0.05	0.88
Scarborough	-0.0900	0.06	0.11
York	0.0329	0.06	0.55
Constant	0.7086	0.08	0.00
N	406		
Adjusted R^2	0.0203		

$p > 0.05$ for all factors

3.3 Civic Engagement

The third dependent variable is a composite measure of civic engagement. The first survey questionnaire included five indicators of respondents' civic and political activity during the past year (see Table 2). Due to their relatively high degree of internal consistency (Cronbach's α = 0.61), we take the mean of these five indicators to create a single variable for analysis.

Table 7: Determinants of civic engagement

	B	S.E.	p
Student	-0.0482*	0.02	0.04
Immigrant	-0.0080	0.03	0.75
Lives with a parent	-0.0253	0.02	0.31
Moved in last year	0.0128	0.02	0.44
Central Toronto	0.0853*	0.04	0.02
Scarborough	0.0389	0.04	0.32
York	0.0326	0.04	0.39
Constant	0.3999	0.05	0.00
N	714		
Adjusted R^2	0.0193		

*$p < 0.05$

Table 7 shows the independent effects of socio-demographic factors on civic engagement. Being a student has a slight negative association with civic engagement, whereas living in Central Toronto has a stronger positive association. No other factors appear to significantly influence civic engagement. In terms of civic activity and engagement, there appears to be a gap between Toronto's urban core and the amalgamated suburbs.

3.4 Turnout

The final dependent variable is turnout, as reported on the post-election questionnaire. This regression includes two additional independent variables: age and campaign contact. Age is a well-established predictor of turnout (Blais et al. 2004), and we include it to compensate for the strong relationship between age and being a student in our sample.[18] There is also a well-established positive relationship between campaign contact and turnout in elections (Green and Gerber 2008), which we consider here.

Table 8: Determinants of turnout			
	B	S.E.	p
Age	0.1236*	0.04	0.00
Student	-0.1295	0.32	0.68
Immigrant	-0.5297	0.29	0.07
Lives with a parent	0.9891*	0.31	0.00
Moved in last year	0.1979	0.20	0.32
Central Toronto	1.0125*	0.39	0.01
Scarborough	0.2222	0.41	0.58
York	0.5919	0.41	0.14
Campaign contact	-0.5874	0.43	0.16
Constant	-1.8856	1.30	0.14
N	400		
Pseudo R^2	0.0864		
Log likelihood	-210.36109		

*$p \leq 0.01$

Table 8 shows the results of our first turnout regression. Age, living with a parent, and living in the city centre are all positively related to voting, all with high levels of significance. Being an immigrant also has a negative association with turnout, but it does not attain conventional levels of significance ($p > 0.05$).

The contact indicator has a negative but insignificant association with turnout, which runs contrary to expectations. However, this is due to our use of a composite indicator. Although the individual contact indicators can be scaled together for some analytical purposes, the distinctions between them are meaningful when examining turnout. When we conduct bivariate analyses of all 14 contact indicators, we find a number of positive correlations between contact and turnout – but only for contact that was initiated by candidates.

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[18] When age is excluded from the regression, being a student appears to have a strong negative relationship to turnout. However, this is an artifact of the sample's age distribution, which showed a strong negative association between age and student status ($r = -0.495$, $p < 0.01$).

The low impact of organizational contact can be attributed to two factors. The first is self-selection: many respondents were directed to the survey questionnaire by non-profit and community organizations. Therefore, they are more likely to already be in contact with these organizations. Campaign contact with these respondents should therefore have less of an impact on turnout, as they are already more likely to vote and be engaged.

Second, most non-profit and community organizations in Toronto do not have election-specific mandates. As a result, much of their work during the election was not explicitly focused on voter mobilization.[19] We would expect this contact to have less of an impact than candidates' GOTV efforts, particularly in a municipal election with a highly competitive mayoral race.

Table 9: Determinants of turnout, including candidate contact			
	B	S.E.	p
Age	0.1131*	0.05	0.02
Student	-0.1921	0.34	0.57
Immigrant	-0.2113	0.31	0.49
Lives with parent	0.6733*	0.33	0.04
Moved in last year	0.2971	0.29	0.31
Central Toronto	0.9310**	0.34	0.01
Etobicoke	-0.0702	0.43	0.87
Scarborough	0.0107	0.36	0.98
Contacted in person	0.3628	0.31	0.25
Contacted by phone	1.0767**	0.32	0.00
Contacted by mail	0.0584	0.27	0.83
Contacted by e-mail	-0.0234	0.47	0.96
Contacted at an event	0.0927	0.46	0.84
Contacted through social media	0.5003	0.33	0.13
Constant	-2.7726	1.24	0.03
N	370		
Pseudo R^2	0.125		
Log likelihood	-196.25914		

*$p < 0.05$;**$p \leq 0.01$

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[19] See Interview Findings. The organizational indicators appear to be recording contact that is not explicit voter mobilization. For example, when asked to name the organizations that contacted them, seven respondents identified Apathy is Boring, whose involvement in the election was limited to fielding this survey.

[20] Note that York was the excluded residential region for this regression.

This analysis therefore focuses on candidate contact. As described earlier, this is a self-selected sample: youth who volunteer to complete an election survey will obviously tend to be more engaged in the election. That means there is less potential for campaign contact to increase turnout. It also affects the contact rates for several indicators, as respondents will be more likely to self-select into a campaign mailing list, Facebook group, or event.

However, the impact of self-selection effect should vary between contact methods. For example, respondents are unlikely to receive campaign e-mails unless they signed up for a mailing list. On the other hand, traditional GOTV tactics – such as canvassing, phone calls and direct mail – are typically unsolicited. We therefore conduct another analysis with the individual candidate contact indicators.[21]

The results in Table 9 show a strong positive relationship between receiving a phone call and turnout. There is also slight positive association between face-to-face contact and turnout. If we conduct another regression but omit the self-selected contact indicators (e-mail, events and social media), this relationship comes close to significance (B = 0.4835, p = 0.11).

These findings should be interpreted with caution, but they suggest that unsolicited campaign contact is effective at mobilizing youth to vote. They also recall past findings that stranger-to-stranger contact is more effective at boosting turnout than peer-to-peer contact (Nickerson 2007). The relatively low impact of face-to-face contact versus phone calls is surprising, given that other studies have typically found more personal forms of contact to be more effective (Green and Gerber 2008). However, this may be a limitation of the survey contact indicator, which does not distinguish between different types of face-to-face contact (e.g. solicited or unsolicited).

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[21] Candidate text messages are omitted from the analysis due to the extremely low contact rate (< 1%).

4. Youth Mobilization Assessment

This section includes a brief quantitative analysis of the overall contact rates for on-the-ground youth mobilization activity. The characteristics of organizations that were successful at mobilizing youth are also discussed later in this report (see Interview Findings).

4.1 Summary of Mobilization Activity

The partner organizations that participated in this research provided us with information about their mobilization activity leading up to the election. This information was collected in a standardized format, including the location and estimated reach of different activities (see interview design and methodology for details). The large majority of recorded activity took place in late September or October.

This analysis considers only on-the-ground mobilization activities such as election events or canvassing. Although some information was collected about print and on-line activity, it is excluded from this analysis because there was no consistent way to assess their reach. Interview participants provided us with contact estimates for on-the-ground activities, based on either event attendance or the number of people approached.

Figure 1: Estimated number of eligible voters reached by contact type
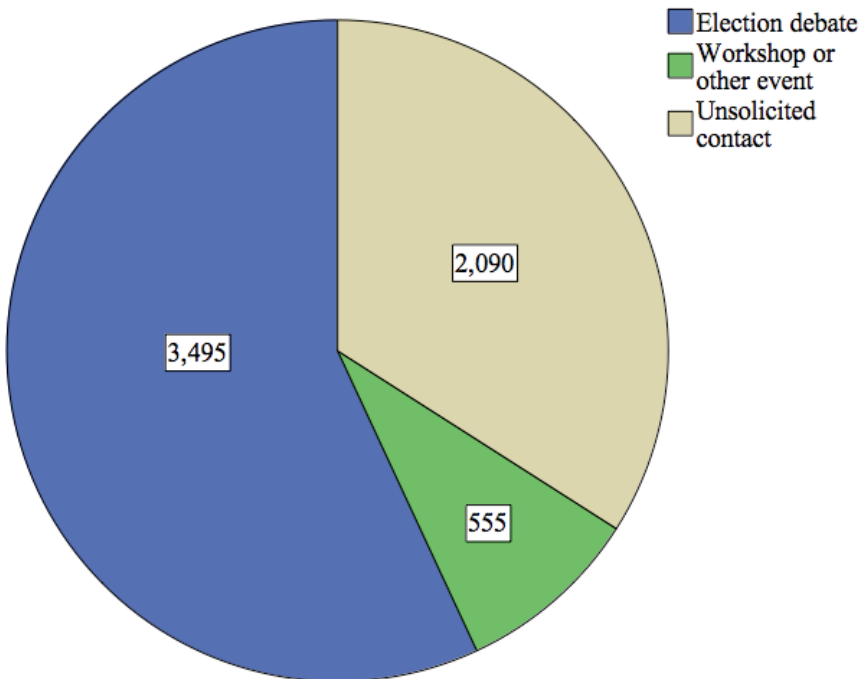
Altogether, these on-the-ground activities reached an estimated 6,140 voting-age Torontonians.[22] Figure 1 shows this mobilization separated into three categories: election debates, workshops or other events, and unsolicited contact. The first two categories are self-explanatory. Unsolicited contact is defined as any public activity that does not have a self-selected audience, such as canvassing a neighbourhood or speaking to a classroom of college students.

The distribution of this contact is somewhat surprising, as the number of people contacted does not correspond to the amount of effort put into each type of activity. Of the 17 different organizations active in these areas, 12 held workshops or events, nine were involved in organizing debates, and four engaged in unsolicited personal campaigning.

By their nature, workshops tend to be smaller, more personal and more resource-intensive than debates. Their attendance is therefore likely to be relatively low. However, attendance for debates varied significantly, ranging from 30 to 350 in most cases.[23] The mean attendance for debates was 184 but the median was 90. The three largest debates account for more than half of all attendees, with most debates drawing relatively few people. Far fewer organizations were involved in unsolicited personal campaigning, yet they reached a comparable number of people.

There are many reasons to host an election debate, such as encouraging dialogue and ensuring that certain issues or community interests are part of the agenda during an election. However, these findings show that most debates draw small crowds. Given that organizing a debate requires a relatively large amount of time and resources, and that those who attend are already likely to be engaged, debates should be approached with caution when used as a mobilization tool.

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[22] Some organizations also provided us with information about their outreach to school-aged youth, which we excluded for the purposes of this analysis.

[23] The sole outlier was the ArtsVote debate hosted at the Art Gallery of Ontario, which drew a total of approximately 1,250 people (though not exclusively youth).

5. Interview Findings

Representatives from 22 different organizations involved in youth mobilization participated in the interview process.[24] This section begins by providing a profile of the organizations represented and then presents the findings from the interviews.

Along with collecting feedback from the participants, the interviewer asked them to describe the planning and execution of their mobilization work during the election. The interview findings are presented as they relate to six topics: Toronto Elections' youth outreach network; non-partisanship; election information and resources; regional and demographic patterns; and the characteristics of successful organizations during the election.

5.1 Organizations and Interview Participants

Twelve of the 22 organizations have youth-specific mandates or represent typically young communities (e.g. student unions). The other 10 organizations have broader mandates, but were involved in youth mobilization during the election. Figure 2 shows the distribution of different organizations based on their mandates. Non-profit organizations with general mandates are distinguished from those that focus either on electoral engagement or on specific geographic communities.

Figure 2: Interview participants by organization type

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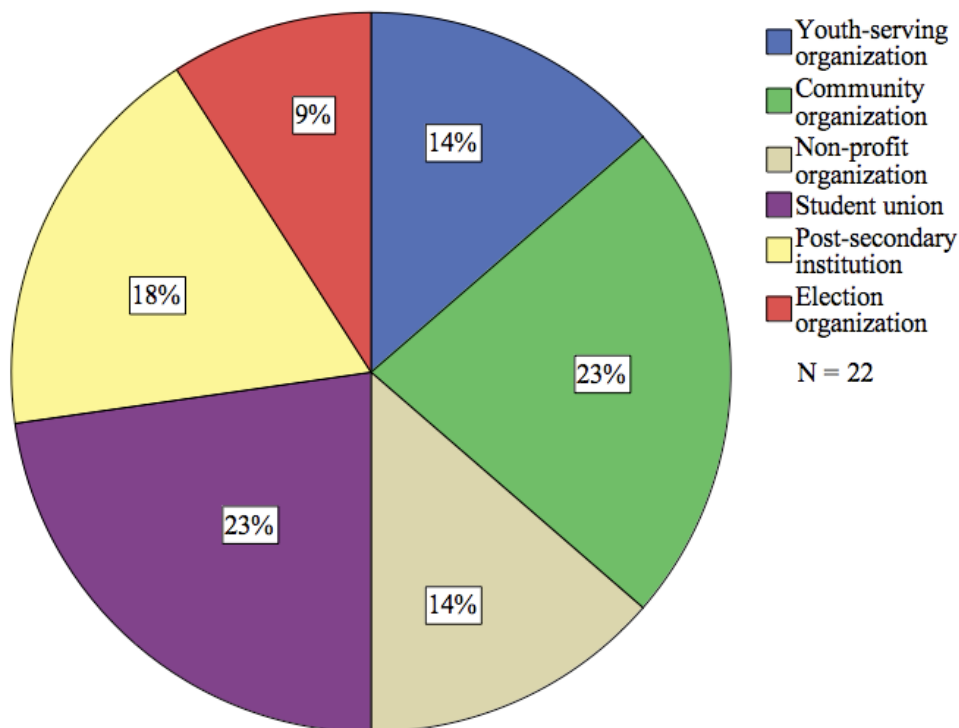
[24] Two of the participants represented different community organizations that worked together for the 2010 municipal election as part of the Malvern Votes campaign.

The participants also represent organizations from across Toronto, as summarized in Figure 3. Six of the organizations are located in Central Toronto, eight are located in amalgamated suburbs, and another eight have city-wide or provincial mandates.

Figure 3: Interview participants by organization location
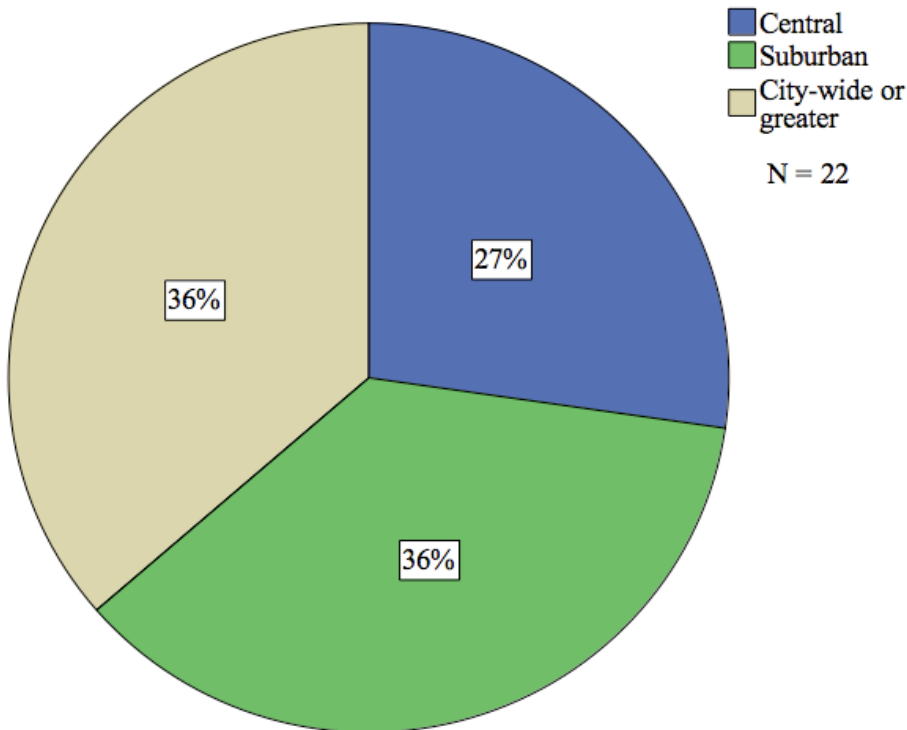
The organizations' activities outside of the 2010 municipal election are also varied. Of the 22 organizations represented, only eight had previously been directly involved in electoral mobilization. As shown in Figure 4, seven of the organizations are involved in lobbying and policy advocacy, whereas a third provide civic education programming to their communities.

5.2 Toronto Elections' Youth Outreach Initiative

The response to Toronto Elections' youth outreach initiative and the creation of a network of partner organizations was overwhelmingly positive. Participants were particularly enthusiastic about connecting with other organizations at the meetings held by Toronto Elections. "I am so grateful," said one participant. "Because of that [meeting of partner networks], I am doing so many things that I am passionate about, and they're coming to fruition because of that."

In terms of improvements, participants generally said that Toronto Elections could have been more proactive. The two most common recommendations are described below: approaching partners earlier in the year and developing a more extensive mobilization campaign.

Figure 4: Organizational activities outside of the 2010 Toronto municipal election
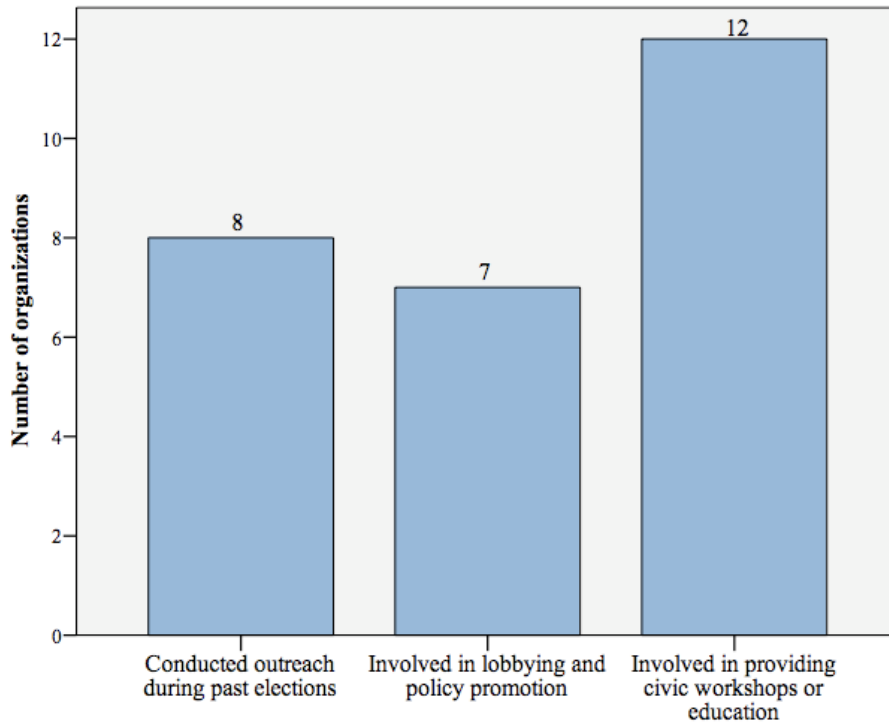
Time and Planning Constraints

Several participants complained that Toronto Elections approached them too late in the year. Of the 21 participants from the youth partner network, five specifically identified this as an area for improvement. Some organizations had either already made their plans before meeting with Toronto Elections, while others did not have enough time to develop plans between the first meeting on July 22, 2010, and the election. "[Toronto Elections] needs to articulate what they're going to do earlier on in the process," said one participant.

This feedback came from each type of organization. "Get into the universities early," said one university representative. "Sometimes it's hard to figure out who the right person to speak with is, but there will be a person who is keen to develop that programming. It's just a question of finding them." Similarly, student union and community organization representatives identified spring or early summer (approximately six months before the election) as a better time to start planning for a fall election.

Mobilization Activity and Capacity

When asked to suggest improvements, 10 of the 22 participants said that election agencies should be more involved in directly contacting and mobilizing youth.

Participants' intuitions in this area often echoed the existing research around GOTV and personal contact. "I felt the one-on-ones I had with people were really the strongest," said one student union representative. "They actually come back to you and say 'I voted.'" Another participant said that the Toronto Elections youth campaign relied too heavily on print media: "A flyer? That's not really enough. Especially when you're dealing with youth, that's not enough to make a youth go out and fill out a ballot."

Five participants emphasized the need for more outreach by Toronto Elections through social media, and for adopting a flexible approach to these media. "These things have to be done on the fly, it has to be responsive," said one participant. "Tomorrow there could be another version of Twitter or Facebook, and you need to embrace that."

Several participants also suggested that the city engage in capacity-building for youth mobilization initiatives. One participant recommended that Toronto Elections "actually send out representatives to different schools, to different organizations, to coach the youth workers themselves – on different approaches, different methods, different strategies to talk to youth about elections." Another proposed that Toronto Elections create "a youth action team that might be able to go around the city and deliver workshops for young people, by young people."

5.3 Non-partisanship Policies

Although none of the organizations selected for interview had partisan affiliations, five participants expressed concerns with the non-partisanship policies of the City of Toronto and other levels of government.

Relationships with Government and Funders

Most of the organizations represented in our sample, as well as most of the organizations in Toronto Elections' partner network, rely to some extent on government funding for their operations. Many of them also receive funding from foundations and organizations that are non-partisan and hold charitable status. Three interview participants explicitly identified these relationships, and the perceptions of partisanship surrounding election mobilization, as an obstacle to their work during the 2010 municipal election.

One participant described an incident from the 2006 municipal election, where a candidate filed a formal complaint against a local non-profit organization. Although the organization was cleared of any wrongdoing, they were forced to devote a significant amount of resources to dealing with the complaint. The participant reported hearing similar concerns expressed by other local organizations, which make them reluctant to engage in elections: "There's this culture of fear that has been created around election time, where organizations say 'You know what? It's not even worth it for us. We don't want to engage our participants on any level at all when it comes to elections.'"

Two other participants described a non-partisan organization whose application for funding was rejected by a federal ministry, as their focus on visible minority voters was considered overly political. "Because they're trying to get a certain ethnic group – a certain population – to vote," one participant said, "the understanding [within the government] is 'If [that population does] vote, they're not going to vote for us, so why should we support this group?' There's that element. And you might find that controversial … but definitely that's an issue."

These concerns can be summarized as two different challenges. The first is that some non-political organizations who engage in youth mobilization believe their mandates are perceived as implicitly political. As one participant put it, "It's really interesting: when you say that 'I want to support youth,' you become partisan, because the right automatically assumes that you are now assisting the left."

The second challenge is a lack of clarity around non-partisanship policies and regulations. Participants received mixed signals about what activities were considered non-partisan depending on which officials they spoke with. As one respondent put it, "I think there needs to be more of a dialogue with public funders – with the municipal, provincial, federal level – [and] the organizations they fund, to let them know this is what is allowed and this is what isn't allowed. There's a lot of miscommunication."

These concerns also reveal a blind spot in this analysis: by virtue of how the interview sample was selected, it only includes organizations that were active during the election. There is no way to estimate how many other organizations avoided election mobilization altogether because of similar concerns involving partisanship and funding. The topic warrants further attention.

City Non-partisanship Policies

Several participants described Toronto Elections' non-partisanship policy as limiting their effectiveness at youth mobilization. One repeated criticism was that Toronto Elections staff would not attend events where candidates were present. As one participant explained, "because [Toronto Elections] has to be so, so non-partisan, they had a policy about not coming to events where there were going to be any candidates. And I feel that's very limiting. … For events where all of the candidates are being invited and the event itself is non-partisan, I'm not sure why the city can't have a presence."

Another participant expressed frustration with the support Toronto Elections could provide for organizers trying to mobilize youth. When the participant asked for help planning issue-specific youth mobilization activities, city officials responded that providing that advice fell outside of their mandate. "Sometimes I feel that limits [Toronto Elections] in the way they can actually help organizations," said a participant. "They've done well in their very neutral stance, but they can do a lot more in aggressively trying to help people connect to issues and connect to things."

Practical concerns with non-partisanship extend beyond Toronto Elections. Another participant who organized several election events and debates had difficulty securing space from the Toronto District School Board. Although the board provides free space to non-profit organizations through the Priority Schools Initiative, applications to use this space for youth workshops and debates were rejected because these activities were election-related.

5.4 Election Information and Resources

Providing information to voters is a central part of Toronto Elections' mandate. During the 2010 municipal election, the city ran a traditional media campaign, maintained a social media presence, distributed print materials and provided information on the city's Web site. Along with these resources, flyers, posters and other promotional materials were also created specifically for the Toronto Elections youth outreach campaign.

On the whole, interview participants responded positively to these resources: of the 22 participants, 16 reported using the city's print materials in their work. Participants also gave specific feedback on election information that was needed for their work. The interview questions did not explicitly solicit this feedback, which suggests that respondents were identifying a significant gap in the election resources currently available.

Candidate and Platform Information

The single most-requested resource during the interviews was more information about candidates and their platforms. Specifically, participants identified a need for resources that present and compare candidates and their platforms in a consistent manner.[25]

Participants from community and student organizations identified this as a barrier to their work. Two representatives from student unions explained that students would frequently ask about where candidates stood on specific issues, and the representatives were unable to provide a response or direct them elsewhere. Other participants identified this as a general shortcoming of the Toronto Elections Web site. As one participant put it, "You can find out who's registered to run in each ward and for mayor, but it's just a name and it doesn't mean anything to anybody."

Perhaps the most telling were the three organizations that developed candidate information sheets or report cards of their own. This suggests that information about candidates and their platforms is an appreciable need for organizations seeking to mobilize youth.

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[25] This finding is consistent with Apathy is Boring's internal Web analytics. For the 2008 federal election, ApathyisBoring.com provided information about civic engagement, how to vote, and platform summaries for all of the political parties. During the month prior to the election, platform summaries were by far the most popular form of content, accounting for 43.7% of all pages viewed on the Web site. Similarly, of youth who opened an election-day e-mail with links to this content, the majority (51.1%) navigated to the party platforms, compared with much smaller proportions who chose general election information (12.2%) or information about how to vote (6.3%).

Accessing Candidate Contact Information

A lack of accessible information about candidates was also an obstacle for some organizations. The Toronto Elections Web site does not consistently provide contact information for candidates. Because of this, participants had to travel to city offices and pay for photocopies of candidate lists in order to organize election debates.

"We're in an age where there's really no excuse for not having this stuff on the Internet," said one participant who was involved in organizing debates. "If you don't have an e-mail address, you probably shouldn't be running for city councillor. Get an e-mail address, put it on-line and make sure you're accessible. That's part of the democratic process."

Adaptation of Election Resources

During the interviews, 11 of the 22 of the participants reported adapting resources from Toronto Elections. The most common approach was for participants to copy information from the city's Web site, revise it for their target community and then integrate it into their organization's outreach materials. This behaviour pattern was remarkably common and consistent, and its implications are discussed in the Recommendations section of this report. One participant aptly summarized the consensus from the interviews: "Resources are great, but you have to take these resources and make them your own."

5.5 Regional and Demographic Patterns

As in the case of survey respondents, several interview findings pertain to specific regions or demographic groups. In particular, suburban residents, immigrants, and students in residence faced unique accessibility issues during the election.

Polling Station Opening Hours

Youth in the amalgamated suburbs face different barriers to voting than those living in the city centre. Participants from the colleges and universities with suburban campuses consistently identified commuter culture as a general barrier to engagement, as students were often less engaged in campus activities.

Commuter culture was also a challenge for community organizations working in the suburbs. Three participants explicitly identified the opening hours of polling stations as a barrier to participation. Polling stations in Toronto were open from 10:00 a.m. until 8:00 p.m. on election day, which leaves only a narrow window in the evening for commuters with traditional schedules to vote. One participant identified this as the "number-one complaint" from residents in their community.

Citizenship and Immigrant Communities

Two participants identified a separate category of challenges surrounding citizenship and immigration. These participants work with communities that have large immigrant populations. In the course of their election outreach, one participant discovered that the majority of youth their organization was targeting had immigrated to Canada as young children, but never applied for citizenship. The interaction between immigration issues and youth engagement is beyond the scope of this report, but it certainly warrants further attention.

Students in Campus Residences

During the 2010 municipal election, the City Clerk's Office cooperated with several post-secondary institutions and student unions to provide letters of attestation for students living in campus residences, as many lack any other proof of address.[26] All of the student union and administration representatives involved in this program responded positively to it. Two student union representatives we interviewed also identified the distribution of these letters as an opportunity for personal contact with students, although in one case they were prevented from doing so because of a university policy preventing canvassing in residences. The relationship between post-secondary institutions' policies and campus mobilization warrants further attention from stakeholders.

5.6 Characteristics of Successful Organizations

As described in the Youth Mobilization Assessment section, the size and scope of organizations' mobilization activity varied considerably. The extent to which organizations met their own goals for voter mobilization also varied significantly.

Based on the survey, mobilization, and interview data collected, we identified three highly successful organizations participating in this research. In this case, we defined successful organizations as those that were generally able to meet their own goals and that were also described as having the largest impact by other interview participants. We identified similarities in the mobilization plans and activities of these organizations, which may be linked to their success.

Starting Early

The three organizations we identified started planning early, from four months to a full year before the election. Almost all of their mobilization activities still took place in September and October, but they developed specific plans well in advance of implementing them. For example, one organization was forced to postpone their activities with high school students until after the summer vacation. Given that the organization started their planning in March, they were able to cope with a three-month delay.

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[26] See Appendix E for a sample letter of attestation.

Leveraging Existing Relationships

All three organizations collaborated with other groups, which was representative of the sample as a whole. However, most of these collaborations appear to have originated from personal connections. All of the participants relied primarily on existing connections within their communities, rather than approaching new partners. Two of these three organizations also secured funding (albeit in limited amounts) for their election work, again through existing relationships. When asked to recommend best practices, one of the participants aptly summarized a pattern: "Start early and find as many allies as you possibly can."

Another interview participant echoed this comment, emphasizing the value of partnerships to bypass obstacles and reach new communities. "Collaborate as much as possible, because the more you collaborate, the less work you have to do yourself," said the participant. "If you don't really know the community [you are trying to reach], don't try to get to know the community. Just go in and allow the people who actually know the community to do that part of the work. Collaborate with them."

Defining Narrow Strategies

All three organizations also developed relatively "narrow" strategies prior to the election, in terms of choosing to restrict the scope of their goals and activities. Each organization started by identifying limited goals for the election, such as increasing participation in a specific neighbourhood or raising awareness around a specific issue. The organizations then developed plans specifically to meet these goals and excluded other activities from their plans. This stands in contrast to other participants who described more complex and original plans for the election, many of which did not come to fruition.

6. Recommendations

This section includes two sets of recommendations: suggestions for further research in the field of youth electoral engagement, as well as best practices for youth mobilization initiatives. Although these recommendations are framed in the context of youth electoral engagement, many of them can be applied to voters of all ages. Conducting field experiments, collecting turnout data, providing election information and increasing accessibility are relevant to the electoral engagement all Canadians, particularly in an era of continually declining turnout.

6.1 Research Recommendations

I. Election agencies should commission field experiments that use actual turnout records to study youth mobilization.

There is a need for field experiments that use actual turnout records to directly measure and compare the effectiveness of different youth mobilization strategies. Additional survey research into youth engagement is also needed, particularly in Canada (see next recommendation). However, when the dependent variable is direct participation in an election, there is no substitute for real-world turnout data.[27]

With proper implementation and data collection, there are a limitless number of turnout field experiments that can be conducted. Appendix F describes three experimental protocols that could serve as starting points for a turnout research program in Canada:

- Testing different methods of delivering letters of attestation to students living in campus residences

- Holding festivals at polling stations on election day

- Variations of traditional door-to-door canvassing for young voters

II. Election agencies should commission and conduct additional research into the lifestyles and attitudes Canadian youth.

The survey results presented in this report show the significant impact of life-cycle effects and residential patterns on engagement. Other studies have shown the large impacts of the transition to adulthood on turnout, sometimes on the order of 20 percentage points (Bhatti and Hansen 2010). These effects warrant further attention, particularly because the first few years of eligibility may be a critical period in the formation of voting behaviours (Johnston, Matthews and Bittner 2007).

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[27] Researchers in other jurisdictions, such as the United States and United Kingdom, are also able to use validated voting records in their experimental research. Because these records report turnout at the individual level, they make it much easier to study the behaviour of specific groups such as young voters. Similar data is not currently available in Canada.

II.1 Conduct research with large, randomly-selected samples of youth. Many of the findings described above could not have been identified using smaller samples or less detailed indicators. Large, representative samples allow for finer distinctions between subsamples based on age, place of residence, etc., while securing results that accurately represent the population as a whole.

II.2 Gather longitudinal data about attitudes among youth. Studies such as this one use age as a proxy, comparing younger respondents to older ones to assess the impact of life-cycle changes. However, by observing the same group of respondents over time, researchers can more precisely link changes in attitude to changes in behaviour.

II.3 Gather more information about the whereabouts of youth. Several key findings in this report involve the residential patterns of youth in Toronto. In order to better target youth during elections, be it for mobilization campaigns or the distribution of VICs, more information is needed about where young Canadians live and spend their time. Residential patterns differ from city to city, as well as between urban and rural communities. Understanding these patterns is crucial for any initiative that seeks to reach and mobilize youth.

II.4 Gather more information about immigrant communities. Two interview participants described issues surrounding citizenship as barriers to youth participation. More information about these communities is needed in order to properly assess these barriers and determine how they can be addressed.

III. Election agencies should collect consistent, age-segmented turnout data for all Canadian elections.

This research could have had a broader scope and more robust findings – without any substantial change in the budget or labour required – if consistent, age-segmented turnout data had been available. Patterns of youth engagement in different areas of the city, as well as the impact of mobilization activities and campaigns, could be analyzed in far greater detail with real-world turnout information.

Canada has an abundance of elections. In 2011, there will be six provincial or territorial elections, dozens of municipal elections in another three provinces, and Band Council elections across the country. Unfortunately, most provincial and municipal election authorities do not record turnout by age. What little data they do collect often lacks detail and cannot be compared to other jurisdictions due to methodological inconsistencies.

Consistently collecting turnout data has several advantages. One unintended consequence of a federal system is that it creates natural experiments: election agencies across Canada operate in a variety of contexts and under a variety of regulations. Consistent turnout data would open the door to countless comparative analyses. Researchers could analyze the influence of many factors on youth turnout, including registration systems, ID requirements, polling dates, ballot types, on-line voting, electoral competitiveness and more.

Elections Canada has already developed a secure and reliable procedure for gathering age-segmented turnout data during Canadian federal elections (Elections Canada 2010) The implementation of similar procedures for other elections would be a boon to the study of turnout in Canada and provide an invaluable source of longitudinal data about young voters.

6.2 Electoral Engagement Recommendations

IV. Election agencies should plan and publicize their youth strategies earlier.

The youth mobilization conducted during the 2010 Toronto municipal election was a remarkable achievement. In the space of about three months, Toronto Elections brought together a network of youth partners from across the city, including many organizations that had never before been involved in electoral mobilization. Given the overwhelmingly positive response from interview participants, election agencies should continue this approach.

However, interview participants repeatedly said that their organizations could have been more active if they had been given more time to prepare. Election agencies should ensure that other stakeholders are aware of their youth strategies and have sufficient time to coordinate with them.

V. Stakeholders should adopt mobilization strategies that target unengaged youth.

The survey findings in this report suggest than unsolicited forms of personal contact mobilize youth to vote. This reflects similar findings in GOTV research, as well as the qualitative input of the interview participants. These findings suggest that organizations seeking to engage youth in elections should reconsider their mobilization strategies.

V.1 Election debates are not a highly effective mobilization tool. They may further other policy or educational goals, but the people who attend debates are also more likely to already be engaged. Debates also draw relatively small crowds given the relative commitment of time and resources.

V.2 For organizations seeking to mobilize youth, traditional activities such as canvassing may be more effective. For those still wishing to host events, integrating the election into an event that appeals to unengaged youth (e.g. a music event or community festival) may be a more promising approach.

V.3 Narrower mobilization strategies appear to be more effective. Our survey findings show significant differences between recent adults and young independents in terms of lifestyle, engagement, and residential patterns. Furthermore, youth who either live with a parent or have moved to the city centre report higher levels of civic and electoral engagement.

A one-size-fits-all approach to youth mobilization is unlikely to be effective at contacting these diverse groups. Youth who live independently in the city centre, for example, will have different needs and lifestyles than those living independently in the amalgamated suburbs (with the latter group being less engaged on the whole). Furthermore, the organizations that were most effective at mobilization in the 2010 municipal election focused on specific communities. Youth

mobilization initiatives that are less ambitious and tailored for specific sub-populations may prove to be better investments.

These findings are relevant to all election stakeholders; the targeted strategies described above can just as easily be integrated into partisan campaigns as non-partisan ones, and they are also relevant when mobilizing groups other than youth.

VI. Election agencies should support non-partisan youth mobilization networks that convene, coordinate, and educate stakeholders.

When asked to provide feedback for election agencies, 10 interview participants recommended more on-the-ground mobilization. Others asked for more guidance and leadership from Toronto Elections. Given that most of these organizations do not have election-specific mandates, it is unreasonable to expect them to spontaneously develop large and highly effective electoral mobilization campaigns. They need an outside source of expertise, coordination and support.

The activities election agencies are willing to undertake are limited. As described in the interview findings, these limitations had a negative impact on Toronto Elections' ability to mobilize youth in the 2010 municipal election. If election agencies are sincere in their commitment to increase youth turnout in Canada, they need to collaborate with other youth stakeholders and support more effective mobilization initiatives.

Below, we recommend steps to be taken in order to provide the necessary expertise, coordination and support through a non-partisan youth mobilization network. This plan builds on Toronto Elections' recent youth initiative by creating a more structured network that is better able to meet the needs of youth and community organizations. Election agencies should support the creation of one of these networks in an upcoming election to serve as a test and proof of concept.

VI.1 Help youth and community organizations implement effective youth mobilization strategies. When asked for a subjective evaluation of the impact of their work during the 2010 municipal election, most interview participants vacillated. They described it as unknown or impossible to assess. This uncertainty suggests a general lack of confidence among organizations in their youth mobilization plans.

The primary role of a youth mobilization network would be to help organizations develop and deploy effective mobilization campaigns. Political operatives and social scientists may think extensively about turnout, but youth and community organizations do not. They are unlikely to be familiar with the research into voter mobilization strategies and their effectiveness. A youth mobilization network can share this specialized knowledge with organizations and help them apply it.

VI.2 Coordinate the work of youth and community organizations. Interview participants repeatedly cited collaboration as a best practice in their work, and a lack of preparation time as a barrier to being more active during the election. These organizational challenges affected the Toronto Elections partner network even though the date of the 2010 municipal election was fixed years in advance. They can only be aggravated for elections that occur on short notice.

A youth mobilization network is a long-term initiative. It would build trust and maintain links with partner organizations before and after the election campaign, rather than repeating the process of outreach, relationship-building and coordination each time an election is held. It falls outside the traditional mandate of election agencies, but a stable network is a more effective way to engage stakeholders from the community and non-profit sectors.

The coordination of non-partisan mobilization through a network has additional benefits. First, it helps to reduce duplication of effort among the members of the network. Organizations can share resources they have developed, collaborate, or find partners to host events and plan activities. This is precisely the type of behaviour that occurred within the Toronto Elections network, and it should be supported.

Convening a network also provides a way for member organizations to give feedback to and start a dialogue with election agencies. Many of the findings and comments contained in this report could have been secured through a conversation between election agencies and interview participants. However, for this type of conversation to happen, there must be a relationship with mutual trust.

VI.3 Expand knowledge of youth mobilization among all stakeholders. As identified in the research recommendations, there is a need for more real-world data about how to engage youth in elections. Youth mobilization networks should gather this information and disseminate it to other electoral stakeholders. For example, a coordinated network could easily implement any of the experimental designs discussed in Appendix F.

There are limits to the systemic impact of non-partisan mobilization initiatives. Elections are ultimately about partisan competition. Political parties and candidates will always be the primary source of mobilization in elections. Unfortunately, partisan organizers are not always far-sighted: their priority is to gain a relative advantage over opponents in the current election. Although youth are the largest untapped group of voters in Canada today, the conventional wisdom is that campaigns should focus on persuading known voters rather than reaching out to new ones.

However, the self-interest of parties and candidates can also be harnessed to mobilize non-voters. By testing and refining cost-effective youth mobilization strategies, other stakeholders can impact the system as a whole. As Green and Gerber (2008) have articulated, political campaigns have an interest in this type of information:

> Our perspective on how to raise voter turnout is rather different. Examine a range of GOTV tactics and figure out which ones are effective and cost-efficient. By demonstrating what works (and what does not), this investigative approach provides an important signal to those engaged in electoral competition. If the market for campaign services learns from a reliable source that a particular GOTV tactic is a more cost-effective way of garnering votes, we eventually will see campaigns allocate more resources to this tactic.

Even with the limitations of our survey dataset, this research found that certain forms of contact from a candidate made youth more likely to vote. Supporting the creation of a pilot youth mobilization network will produce more comprehensive and robust research.

VII. Election agencies should improve youth coverage in the voters' list.

Youth are less likely to receive a Voter Information Card (VIC). An Ipsos Reid survey commissioned by the City of Toronto for the 2010 election found that 65% of Torontonians recalled receiving a VIC at their current address, whereas 26% responded that they did not receive a card (Ipsos Reid 2010). That compares with 48% and 47%, respectively, in our sample. Given that these cards serve as a basic source of information about the election for voters, this relatively low coverage of youth is troubling.

Our findings show that youth who live independently, reside in the city centre, or changed addresses recently are less likely to receive a VIC. To supplement the existing process for municipal elections, targeted enumeration could be conducted in communities that have younger and more mobile populations. The success of any efforts to engage or inform potential voters hinges on a reliable knowledge of that population.

VIII. Non-partisan stakeholders should clearly define non-partisanship policies and their implications.

The interview process revealed a significant amount of confusion and concern surrounding non-partisanship policies during elections. Further attention to this topic is certainly warranted, as it was never part of this project's research design and its impact may be underplayed.

VIII.1 Stakeholders in elections should clarify their definitions of non-partisanship. For example, what makes an election event non-partisan? Do all candidates have to be present? Or should no candidates be present? Clearly, there is no litmus test for non-partisanship. However, organizations that rely on government support would benefit from clearer guidelines and articulations of policy in this area, particularly when concerns surrounding funding are at play.

Discussion: Managing risks related to non-partisanship

Several participants identified potential negative consequences associated with the perceptions of youth mobilization. As this report includes a number of recommendations concerning youth mobilization, a discussion of how to mitigate these risks is appropriate.

These risks are to some extent inevitable. By nature, every election produces both winners and losers. Commentators and interested parties attribute these results to a variety of causes: the weather on election day, the tone of media coverage, etc. Initiatives that mobilize youth, and particularly those that prove effective, are not exempt from this type of commentary and speculation.

The simplest way for any youth mobilization initiative to mitigate negative perceptions is to be both non-partisan and transparent. For example, the youth mobilization network proposed earlier

should not be linked to any partisan stakeholders, be it through membership, funding, or other affiliations. It should operate independently, with member organizations formally committing to non-partisanship in their electoral activity.

Similarly, any organization involved in non-partisan youth mobilization should publicly and proactively disclose their membership, strategy, and plans for the election. This provides others with the opportunity to raise any concerns before activities take place.

These steps can help to address perceptions of partisanship or impropriety when mobilizing youth. Beyond that, any negative response is tied to youth engagement itself. However, if any election stakeholders genuinely disagree with the notion that more young Canadians should vote, surely the onus is on them to show why election agencies and other organizations should share that view.

IX. Election agencies should provide adaptable and redistributable election information.

Fully half of the interview participants described taking on-line resources from Toronto Elections and modifying them to suit their organizations and campaigns. Election agencies should encourage this adaptation of resources by election stakeholders. There are two immediate steps that can be taken in this direction.

IX.1 Public information about elections should be provided with a Creative Commons or comparable license. This would encourage others to adapt the information without fear of infringing on any copyrights, while still requiring them to properly attribute the source of the information. Given that the practice is already widespread, this would serve primarily as a symbolic gesture.

IX.2 Public information about elections should be provided in open and editable formats. This eases the actual process of adaptation and sharing by removing the inconvenience of extracting information from a "closed" resource.[28] Similarly, public election information should be provided on-line whenever possible – a problem that was identified by debate organizers in the 2010 Toronto municipal election.

There is a perceived risk in using open formats, as the information provided may be reproduced inaccurately. However, the practice of third-party adaptation and dissemination is already widespread with closed formats. It is also unpreventable: in the Internet era, election agencies cannot monopolize information about voting. By responding to this practice, rather than ignoring it, election agencies can engage with those who are adapting information and secure their cooperation in reproducing it accurately and attributing it properly.

X. Stakeholders should provide information about candidates and their platforms.

If unsolicited feedback indicates a clear need, then this recommendation deserves special attention. Interview participants repeatedly identified a need for more information about

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[28] A useful rule of thumb is to never provide a public resource as a PDF. If the goal is to share and diffuse the information in a document, it should be provided in an editable format.

candidates and their platforms. They also identified this as a challenge of their work, as they were often unable to answer questions about candidates in the election.

Information about candidates, parties and platforms should be compiled and distributed as a public service. This information should come from a reputable, non-partisan source. Political parties and candidates, for obvious reasons, tend to provide skewed descriptions of their platforms. Yet in order for this information to be trusted by those involved in non-partisan mobilization, it must be compiled by an organization with no interest in the outcome of the election.

Unfortunately, providing this information is likely to be deemed too risky by election agencies. However, a number of organizations, including Apathy is Boring, already develop platform summaries on an ad hoc basis. Similarly, on-line voting compass projects ask voters to identify their priorities and, based on information compiled by experts in the field, provide analyses of how an individual's opinions relate to the positions of different candidates. These non-partisan initiatives already exist, but they require consistent external support to expand the scope and improve the quality of this work.

XI. Election agencies and other stakeholders should increase voting accessibility.

XI.1 Polling stations should be open longer during municipal elections. Interview participants from the amalgamated suburbs raised concerns with polling station hours for the 2010 Toronto municipal election. This was a significant issue in their communities, as most residents commute to work or school, leaving only a narrow (and therefore crowded) window in the evening for them to vote.

XI.2 Students living in campus residences should receive letters of attestation. During the 2010 municipal election, the City Clerk's Office cooperated with several university administrations and student unions to provide these letters, as many students in university residences lacked another proof of address. Interview participants responded positively to this program, and we recommend that it be continued in future elections. Distributing these letters also provides an opportunity to mobilize students, which requires further discussion and coordination between all stakeholders, including college or university administrations and student unions.

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Appendix A – Quasi-experimental Analysis

Apathy is Boring's original intention, as described in the Research Design and Methodology section of this report, was to conduct a quasi-experimental analysis using data collected from both the survey and Toronto Elections' partner organizations.

In a true experiment, researchers assign subjects to treatment and control groups, typically through random assignment. In a quasi-experiment, researchers are observing an existing phenomenon. Groups are identified as "treatment" or "control" based on their exposure to the phenomenon in question. In both cases, the analysis is then conducted by comparing results from the treatment and control groups.

The initial survey questionnaire collected postal codes from respondents. Our goal was to conduct a quasi-experimental analysis by combining this with the mobilization data, using respondents' proximity to mobilization activities as a proxy for exposure. However, as explained below, this form of analysis was not possible for youth mobilization in the 2010 municipal election. The report therefore presents a simpler analysis of the data.

Limited Scale of Mobilization Activity

Due to the scale of youth mobilization during the election, it is impossible to develop a treatment scheme for a quasi-experimental analysis. This problem is best explained with a specific example: consider Ward 42 in the city of Toronto. This ward had the largest amount of recorded mobilization activity before the election. In total, approximately 1,952 voting-age residents of the ward – though not exclusively youth – were approached by volunteers or attended election-related events organized by partner organizations.

A back-of-the-envelope calculation demonstrates the analytical challenge. In 2010, there were 44,136 registered voters in Ward 42 (City of Toronto 2010). For argument's sake, let us make two generous assumptions about the mobilization activity being analyzed: that there was no duplication of contact, and that everyone person contacted was a registered voter.

Given these assumptions, 4.4% of registered voters in Ward 42 either attended an event or encountered a volunteer. The survey sample includes 27 respondents from the ward, 18 of whom completed the follow-up questionnaire. This creates the challenge of using a sample with fewer than 20 respondents to assess the impact of a campaign that contacted less than one twentieth of the population from which they are drawn.[29]

This issue occurs despite the tremendous amount of activity in Ward 42, where almost a third of all recorded contact in our dataset took place. Whatever the effectiveness of youth mobilization in the 2010 Toronto municipal election, its overall scale is too small for a quasi-experimental analysis.

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[29] Changing the unit of analysis does not resolve this issue. Some neighbourhoods have higher contact rates than the wards in which they are located, but they also have fewer survey respondents.

Appendix B – Post-election Interview Questions

The questions below were used for the qualitative interviews with representatives from Toronto Election's network of youth outreach partners. Where appropriate, the interviewer prompted participants to provide further details

1. Can you briefly tell me a bit about your organization, and the role you play in it? What kind of work does the organization do?

2. Has your organization been involved in voter outreach or mobilization during previous elections?

3. Has your organization been involved in other civic or political engagement projects?

4. What was your organization's plan for the 2010 municipal election? Can you tell me when and how was it developed?

5. Were there any factors that made your organization alter its original plans for the 2010 municipal election?

6. Can you give me a brief summary of the outreach and mobilization activities your organization conducted during the election?

7. Can you tell me about the impact, as you saw it, of these activities?

8. Can you tell me about the impact, as you experienced it, of the activities other organizations conducted during the election?

9. Did you collaborate with any other organizations during the election?

10. Did you get election-related information or resources from any other organizations?

11. As you saw it, can you describe the involvement of your organization's members or community in the 2010 municipal election? How were they engaged? What obstacles to engagement did they face?

12. What was the greatest challenge your organization faced in your work during the 2010 municipal election?

13. In terms of best practices, did you learn anything from your experiences during the election that you would like to share?

14. Do you have any feedback for Toronto Elections or other election authorities to consider in future elections?

Appendix C – Candidate and Organization Contact Rates

This table summarizes contact rates by method and type as reported by survey respondents.

Table 10: Contact rates for survey respondants by type		
	Candidate contact	**Organization contact**
In person	35.3%	34.1%
At an event	16.8%	19.2%
By phone	38.2%	18.0%
By mail	52.9%	23.5%
By e-mail	17.3%	23.4%
By text message	0.8%	1.8%
Through social media	31.0%	33.3%

Appendix D –Multiple Regression Explained

Multiple regression is a statistical technique that examines the relationship between a dependent variable (e.g. height) and a number of independent variables (e.g. parents' height, diet, exercise and gender). Rather than comparing the relationship between height and all of its possible causes separately, multiple regression considers all these causes at the same time and determines the independent effect of each.

The estimated effect of each factor is represented by a regression coefficient. Coefficients tell us how strongly an independent variable is related to the dependent variable. Coefficients are accompanied by a p-value that tells us how sure we can be that the relationship between the two variables is not due to chance. The larger the regression coefficient, the more important its effect. The smaller the p-value, the surer we can be that the relationship is real and not due to chance. We say that a relationship that is not due to chance is statistically significant.

Returning to the example of the determinants of height, imagine if we found that the only statistically significant predictors of height were parents' height and gender. This would tell us that diet and exercise do not matter after we control for parents' height and gender. It would also tell us that parents' height and gender matter individually, such that a brother and sister could expect to be of different heights (because despite sharing the same parents, they are of different genders). Likewise, two women with different parents could expect to be of different heights, provided their parents were not of the same height.

Appendix E – Sample Letter of Attestation

This is an example of the letters of attestation issued to students living in residence by the University of Toronto for the 2010 municipal election.

Date

Student Name
Residence Address
Toronto, Ontario
Postal Code

Dear Student:

The next Toronto municipal election will be held on Monday, October 25, 2010. Your residence located at <residence address> is in ward<no.>, and students who are eligible to vote are encouraged to exercise this right.

The *Municipal Elections Act* states that a "person may have residences in two local municipalities at the same time if the person lives in one of the local municipalities in order to attend an educational institution, but not with the intention of changing his or her permanent lodging place". Therefore students may vote both in the municipality where they live to attend school and the municipality where their permanent home is located.

In order to vote, you must:

1) be a Canadian citizen
2) be at least 18 years old
3) live in the City of Toronto or own or rent property in Toronto or be the spouse of a person who owns or rents property in Toronto
4) not be prohibited from voting under any law

Eligible voters must show acceptable identification at the voting location in order to receive a ballot. Present either one piece of ID showing your name, Toronto address and signature, or two pieces of ID, the first showing your name and signature and the second showing your name and Toronto address. For the full list of acceptable identification, visit http://www.toronto.ca/elections/voters/acceptable-identification.htm

This letter can be used as proof of your name and Toronto address for the purposes of the Toronto 2010 Election.

Your voting location is: <voting location address>

If you have any questions about this process or want more information about the election, contact Toronto Elections during regular business hours at 416-338-1111, visit www.toronto.ca/elections, follow Toronto Votes on Facebook or @torontovote on Twitter. If you require TTY service, call 416-338-0889.

Sincerely,

Your name
Your title
Your residence/College

VOTE 10.25.10   YOUR CITY. YOUR VOTE.   CALL 311   WWW.TORONTO.CA/ELECTIONS

Appendix F – Field Experiment Protocols

The three protocols described below were all identified as promising ways to study youth electoral engagement in the Canadian context with turnout field experiments.

Campus Residence Letter Delivery

Election agencies and university administrations already work together to produce letters of attestation for students living in campus residences, as they lack another proof of address. During the partner organization interviews, student union representatives identified the delivery of these letters as an opportunity for outreach. It also provides an opportunity for a field experiment.

Students in residences can be randomly assigned into two groups: a treatment group whose letters are delivered personally by a volunteer encouraging them to vote, and a control group whose letters are delivered impersonally. When students go to vote, they present their letters of attestation as proof of address.

This experimental protocol relies on creating a slight cosmetic difference between the letters delivered to the treatment and control groups, which allows researchers to count how many of each letter is presented. By comparing the rates of use for the two letters, we can analyze the impact of personal or impersonal delivery on turnout. This protocol is a variant of traditional canvassing (discussed below) and is similarly flexible in terms of testing different tactics and messages.

Polling Station Festivals

Holding a public festival adjacent to a polling station on election day has been found to be an effective (and cost-effective) way to increase voter turnout (Addonizio, Green and Glaser 2007). By turning the polling station into a place where people can socialize and have fun, these events provide a social incentive that is absent when voting is a solitary act.

This protocol has several features to recommend it. The first is that the character and scale of events can easily be adapted and modified. To target young voters, a festival can include musical performances that appeal to youth. Similarly, festivals can be held in neighbourhoods to target specific populations, or on college and university campuses. A field experiment in this area can serve as a model for future community-organized election festivals.

This experimental protocol has also been proven: non-partisan election festivals can be organized successfully, and it is possible to measure their impact on turnout. Of course, there are legal restrictions on the types of activity that can occur near polling stations. However, these can be taken into account when planning the events. Given that election officials in nine different US states have sanctioned these types of events, there is no reason to believe the same cannot be done in Canada.

Canvassing

Many mobilization experiments simply involve knocking on someone's door and encouraging them to vote. Door-to-door canvassing is a traditional approach that has been proven effective in a variety of contexts, including elections where the outcome is predictable (Green, Gerber and Nickerson 2008). This type of contact is also effective at mobilizing young voters, although traditional political campaigns may have difficulty targeting them (Green and Gerber 2001; Nickerson 2006).

Canvassing is a very flexible protocol for field experiments. It can be conducted on large or small scales, and the treatment can be randomized at different units of analysis, ranging from individual addresses to electoral districts. Similarly, experimenters can test the effectiveness of different tactics and messages within the same canvassing campaign.

Testing tactics and messages is particularly useful because there are many open questions concerning the relationship between personal contact and youth mobilization. For example, Bennion (2005) found that the impact of a non-partisan, student-led mobilization campaign was greatest for voters under the age of 30. This echoes the finding that Latino canvassers are more effective at mobilizing Latino voters (Michelson 2005). Groups with traditionally low turnout may be more receptive to appeals from canvassers with whom they have certain characteristics in common.

Similarly, the content of interactions with potential voters may also be important. Asking potential voters to verbally describe their plans on election day (e.g. when they will vote and how they will get to the polling station) appears to dramatically increase turnout, but only in single-voter households (Nickerson and Rogers 2010). Mobilization messages that emphasize high turnout may also be more effective than messages that emphasize low turnout (Gerber and Rogers 2009).

All of these findings have potentially significant implications for youth mobilization initiatives. They also come from research conducted in the United States, which raises questions as to how they apply to the Canadian context. These research questions can all be asked – and answered – with experimental protocols.