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The Democracy Defibrillator: The Decline of Canadian Voter Turnout in Federal Elections, and Suggestions for Revitalisation

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The Democracy Defibrillator: The Decline of Canadian Voter Turnout in Federal
Elections, and Suggestions for Revitalisation

By

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"The Democracy Defibrillator: The Decline of Canadian Voter Turnout in Federal Elections, and Suggestions for Revitalisation"

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ABSTRACT

This Major Research Paper analyses the decline of voter turnout in Canadian federal elections since 1988, looking at some of the reasoning for this and discussing some solutions for the growth of turnout in the future. As well as analyzing the issue of youth voting in particular, the paper discusses several possibilities to fix the system, utilising case study to find concepts that worked elsewhere.

Specifically, the extension of the minimum voting age to 16 years old, changes to the voting system (in terms of moving away from First Past The Post) and mandatory voting laws are discussed as possible remedies to the issue. The paper demonstrates how these concepts have worked in countries analogous to Canada and ideas for how they might be applied here.

The paper builds on the work of many political scientists, most prominently Henry Milner, to marry discussions on how to improve democracy with discussions on how we engage potential voters, under the thought process that the answers should largely be the same: we do so by making the system more representative of the will of all Canadians of voting age. There is no one way of doing this, but by applying several measures that have worked when applied to the most analogous cases we can find, we can have the best chance of revitalising Canada's democracy for this generation and all the generations after.

Canadian democracy is not dead. We are not in a crisis. That is precisely why now is the proper time to fix this problem, to put a jolt, as it were, into the system so that we can make changes before the problem gets so big that it cannot be ignored. With that, I present The Democracy Defibrillator.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

For almost as long as there has been such a thing as democracy, the issue of democratic reform has been a prominent one. The central problem of democratic reform is that while it is an issue that is easily debated, it is not one where progress is easy. It forces the paradox of a government that was elected under a certain system making steps to change that system, and thereby challenging the method by which they were elected. A cardinal rule of politics is not to mess with a winning formula, so this might explain why governments have been reluctant to make any changes in the method by which they are elected.

But, arguably, democracy in Canada, at least on the federal level, has needed revitalisation for decades. Voter turnout, while it did make a comeback in the 2015 general election[1], has been on the decline since the election of 1988. This represents a possible threat to Canadian democracy as we move beyond our sesquicentennial year. While the battle over voting systems is much more widely publicised, it seems that a much rarer, and a potentially much more rewarding, question has been left relatively dormant. Where have all the voters gone, and just how do we get them back? This paper looks to confront the problem, figure out how Canada got into this situation, and eventually make suggestions for how we, as a country, extricate ourselves from said situation. The thesis of the paper is as follows: Because of the significant downturn in participation in federal elections, especially among the young and the low-income working class, Canada faces a problem of democratic legitimacy.

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[1] "Report on the 42nd General Election of October 19, 2015." Elections Canada. Elections Canada, 3 Feb. 2016. Web. 05 Aug. 2017.

Of course, a factor that must be taken greatly into account is the segments of voters that are declining. Chief among these, and likely the most important of them, is the youth vote (although youth has several definitions, for the purposes of this paper, it will be defined as the cohort from 18-25), the decline of which has been worryingly steep. As recently as 1972, around 70% of youth were active voters[2]. That number dropped by nearly half by 2004,[3] and statistics show that this has a great deal to do with perceived disconnect to politicians.[4]

Another segment of the electorate that must be prioritised involves low-income voters, who tend not to vote for several reasons that will be elaborated upon shortly. In a Statistics Canada study on results in the 2011 general election, employed voters were found to have turned out 9% more than their unemployed counterparts, while home ownership, a good indicator of income, boosted likelihood of voting by 27% over those that rented homes.[5] Lack of resources might form some explanation of this phenomenon. If one cannot get to a polling station, then they simply will not vote, but this also might be explained by the Monday election day, or by a lack of knowledge of advance polling. For example, in the riding of Windsor West (the riding which contains the University of Windsor), among a voter base of 86,032, only 6,335 advance poll ballots were cast, for 7.35% of the overall registered voter total.[6] Overall, just under 20.8%

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[2] Margaret Adsett (2003) Change in Political Era and Demographic Weight as Explanations of Youth 'Disenfranchisement' in Federal Elections in Canada, 1965–2000, Journal of Youth Studies, 6:3, 247-264

[3] "Estimation of Voter Turnout by Age Group at the 38th Federal General Election (June 28, 2004)." Estimation of Voter Turnout by Age Group at the 38th Federal General Election. Elections Canada, Feb. 2005. Web. 5 July 2017.

[4] Pammett, Jon H., and Lawrence LeDuc. "Confronting the Problem of Declining Voter Turnout Among Youth." Electoral Insight 5.2 (2003): 3-8. Web.

[5] "Factors Associated with Voting." Statcan.gc.ca, Statistics Canada, 27 Nov. 2015, www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75-001-x/2012001/article/11629-eng.htm#a4.

[6] "Election Results-Ontario-Windsor West." Official Voting Results, Elections Canada, 3 Feb. 2016, www.elections.ca/res/rep/off/ovr2015app/41/10021e.html.

of ballots cast in 2015 were cast using this method, with just under 41.9% of those ballots (over

1.3 million) coming from Ontario, the most populous province in the country, and a historically

wealthy one (although it has ceded ground in this sense).[7] If someone is part of the working poor,

then they also might be unlikely to avail the mandatory four hour break for voting, because they

are trying to work all they can to keep a job.

The mobilisation of all these groups is hugely important. Youth voters comprise

Canada's future, and low-income voters are, sadly, a large part of Canada's present. Youth voters

(that is, voters between the ages of 18 and 24), made up 11.7% of the Canadian electorate in

2011[8]. Low income voters, as defined by Statistics Canada, accounted for just over 14.9% of the

electorate in that same year[9].

The biggest danger here is that the most consistent voting demographic are older voters,

especially those 55 years old and above[10]. Of course, voting is never a bad thing, and it is

certainly the last thing we want to do to discourage anyone from exercising their democratic

right. The simple fact remains, however, that these voters are not going to be around much

longer. We face the very real threat of a continued serious decline in voter turnout over the next

10-20 years if the aforementioned groups cannot be mobilised to replace the elderly as they

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[7]"Forty-Second General Election 2015." Official Voting Results, Elections Canada, 3 Feb. 2016, www.elections.ca/res/rep/off/ovr2015app/41/table5E.html.

[8] Coletto, David. "THE NEXT CANADA: Politics, Political Engagement, and Priorities of Canada's next Electoral Powerhouse: Young Canadians." Abacus Data, Abacus Data/Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, 19 Apr. 2016, abacusdata.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/CASA_Next-Canada_Report-FINAL.pdf.

[9] "Persons in Low Income after Tax (In Percent, - 2007 to 2011)." Statistics Canada, Government of Canada, 27 June 2013, www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/famil19a-eng.htm?sdi=low%2Bincome.

[10] Stockemer, Daniel, and Francois Rocher. "Age, Political Knowledge and Electoral Turnout: A Case Study of Canada." Commonwealth & Comparative Politics 55.1 (2017): 41-62. Web. 20 July 2017

expire. A paltry 58.8% was the lowest turnout in a Canadian federal election, that turnout occurring in 2008[11]. Of that vote, the biggest deficit comes in voters in the 18-24 age range, where only 35.6% of the eligible electoral population voted. Meanwhile, while older voters also saw a decline in turnout, it was much more muted in these upper demographics, with the 55-64, 65-74, and 75+ ranges turning out 65.6%, 68.4%, and 67.3% of eligible electoral populations, respectively. These three age ranges were the only three that turned out over 60.0% of their eligible electoral populations in 2008. If we do not address the problems we have, then even lower turnouts are a real possibility.

Granted, youth turnout is on the rise, with 57.1% of eligible youth voting in 2015 compared to 38.8% in 2011[12]. But we need to ensure the stability of that growth long term as opposed to letting short term trends artificially spike those numbers. A great deal of measuring turnout is watching long term trends, and it does nothing to call the job done after one rise that might well be isolated to one single issue or candidate that will not keep the same relevance.

Stockemer and Rocher explain a great deal of what the operative issues are, especially with young voters. The three biggest determinants of voter turnout are: political knowledge, education, and income. Stockemer and Rocher also mention gender as a factor, but there is no literature (at least none that I have been able to find) that suggests that gender has any statistically significant effect on voting. Young voters are usually going to have none of those three things going for them, having no (or very little) experience with voting, generally having

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[11] Mann, Ruth M., Samia Abbas, Michael Burton, Greg Gauder, Maureen Jones, and Ryan Lafleur. Exploring Voter Turnout in the 2008 Federal Election Among University of Windsor Undergraduates: A Qualitative Study. 48-310 2009 Youth Voting Report For Dissemination. University of Windsor, Winter 2009. Web. 28 June 2017.

[12] "Historical Voter Turnout in Canadian Federal Elections & Referenda, 1867-2011." Historical Voter Turnout in Canadian Federal Elections - 1867-2011, Simon Fraser University, www.sfu.ca/~aheard/elections/historical-turnout.html.

low incomes, and being mostly in the process of getting an education. Low income voters, meanwhile, are strongly correlated with lower-level educational attainment, as exemplified by an MIT report from David Autor[13] , and the political assimilation of immigrants, logically, would depend on those three factors.

Thus, we look towards two paths, either doing what we can to educate voters further, or finding a way to reach voters that can succeed regardless of these three factors. This paper will endeavor to look at potential answers for both paths and find what would be most successful between those answers through various criteria, including, but certainly not limited to, effectiveness and overall cost to the voter.

This paper is divided into four chapters, with this introductory volume serving as Chapter 1. In Chapter 2, the theoretical basis for the work will be covered. The obvious major theoretical basis is institutionalism, as we are going to be spending a great deal of time looking at how the institution of voting and democracy at large in Canada works, identifying flaws, and finding ways to improve it. The work also operates on a very institutional concept; that an institution without significant outside support is a weak one. There will also be time spent here discussing behaviorism, the reason people (in this case, voters) act the way they do. Bringing back lapsed voters is not something that can be done with only one side of the problem in mind, and it will be of great use to look at why voters do and do not vote.

Chapter 3 will cover previous attempts at democratic reform in Canada, of which there is a long history. Just because Canada has not made huge, fundamental changes in the way it

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[13] Autor, D. H. "Skills, Education, and the Rise of Earnings Inequality Among the 'Other 99 Percent.'" Science 344, no. 6186

approaches elections to date, does not mean that these attempts have not resulted in positive changes. For example, the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing (referred to colloquially as the Lortie Commission), presented in 1992, sought to explore issues of democratic reform and campaign finance, and ended up inspiring the National Register of Electors[14]. These efforts have continued into the modern day, most recently (at the time of this writing) with the Special Committee on Electoral Reform, which last reported in December of 2016, recommending a system which better seeks to align voter intent with seat distribution (in short, to enhance proportionality) in the most equitable manner possible[15]. Chapter 3 will go into greater detail about these efforts and others that might help improve our turnout. Chapter 4 will summarise the findings of this paper.

Why should people care? Why should we compel voters to come out to the polls, when they obviously have not shown the passion to do so? Isn't it better that people who don't care about the system remain uninvolved in it? This is an argument that is sometimes heard, but it is a problematic one.

For every paycheck a Canadian gets, there are deductions made. That's the amount of money that that Canadian gave the province and the country. While Canadians are never going to get to go make budget decisions in Ottawa (but for a very select few), that is still very much their budget, and casting a federal ballot is deciding who gets to make that budget. If a person isn't okay with somebody walking into their house and making up a budget totally ignorant to their

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[14] Black, Jerome Harold. From Enumeration to the National Register of Electors: An Account and An Evaluation. Quebec: Institute for Research on Public Policy, 2003.7

[15] Scarpaleggia, Francis, et al. "ERRE Committee Report." Committee Report No. 3 - ERRE (42-1) - House of Commons of Canada. Government of Canada, 1 Dec. 2016. Web. 03 July 2017. Page 144

needs, they have no legitimate reason not to vote. We can cite many other reasons, but nothing makes the point as plainly as that one does. If you don't vote, you're signing a check, covering your eyes, handing it to someone and hoping for the best.

The health of a democracy connects directly to the participation of its citizens. If people are not voting to the point that only a third of the electorate staying home is good news, there's obviously a reason; whether it is the candidates being run, the policies being put up, the nuts and bolts of the system (like how elections are set up, things like where polls are and how long a wait is to vote). The solution to issues like this is not to just sigh and dismiss these people from the democratic process, it is to confront the problem and provide a real, viable solution to it.

Changing the voting system, so that complaint that "my vote doesn't matter" suddenly holds a lot less water, might have a lot of merit to it. Perhaps Canada could add a "None of the Above" option to the ballot, so that if the electorate really don't like anybody running, we as a country can quantify and use that to change things so that we can run people that Canadians are willing to put their support behind. Reforms designed to make politicians are a lot more accessible to the people, and to make finding out what a politician stands for as simple as watching a video on Youtube, might make those citizens care about the electoral process again by engaging citizens on their level, to stimulate voting and the legitimacy of our system.

There are any number of changes that can be made to the system. This paper discusses some that might stand to make a significant impact on how we conduct democracy in Canada. We do that because it is all well and good to look down our collective noses at people that don't vote and dismiss them. It's all well and good to just bat a hand and trivialise the problem, and let a system go whereby you could, theoretically, elect a majority government with very few checks

on its power with the biggest minority of votes. You can get complacent if you want and say there's no problem. But doing that does not make the reality of the problem any less true.

As an aspiring political scientist and a Master's candidate, I hold paramount the belief that politics shouldn't be the domain of the elite, that more everyday Canadians, more shopkeepers and librarians and farmers, and fewer buttoned-up lawyers, should be involved in the system. We shouldn't have a system that just muddles through. Canada is a nation unparalleled in the world for its beauty, its culture, the care it puts into its citizens, but it puts me in memory of Ross Perot's speeches in the leadup to the 1992 US Presidential campaign, how he likened the country to a car.

Canada is not where Perot said America was 26 years ago, needing a total overhaul. We're in the tune-up stages right now. But it is far better to do the tune-up when you can still drive than to do the overhaul after you hear that big bang from the engine. Canada's democracy isn't dead by any means, but it is at a momentary bounce on a worrying trend that we have been on for much of the last three decades. In calling my country to action on this issue, one quote from Perot sticks out to me: "The activist is not the man that says the river is dirty. The activist is the man who cleans up the river." This paper, in itself, is not about activism. It is research showing the reader and the listener the problem and how we solve it. It is my hope, however, that my research might inspire the actions of which I speak. I love my country, and it is that love that fuels my desire and ambition to make it better.

In closing this opening chapter, I reiterate the thesis statement that will guide writer and reader alike through this paper. Because of the major downturn in voters, especially new immigrants, the young, and the low-income working class, Canada faces the threat of further losses in voter turnout, potentially even below 50%, which enables the possibility of a Prime

Minister securing a majority with the support of 25% or less of eligible voters, and therefore must employ countermeasures to avoid further voter loss. Canada stands at a crossroads, where we must either continue inaction and watch our voter turnout drop to dangerously low levels or act now to secure a strong voter base into the next generation and beyond.

CHAPTER 2: THEORY

The topic of declining voter turnout is one that, understandably, causes great

consternation among political scientists, so it is certainly no surprise to see that it has been

covered extensively in other academic studies. The vast majority covers the broader topic of

voter turnout worldwide, and, as can be expected, there is no shortage of American material

available. However, the first work I would like to reference in this mostly literature review

chapter is much older, and very Canadian, coming out of McGill, that paper being "Generational

Change and the Decline of Political Participation: The Case of Voter Turnout in Canada".[16]

The writers, Andre Blais and Richard Nadeau of the Universite de Montreal, Elisabeth

Gidengil of McGill, and Neil Nevitte of the University of Toronto, are still deeply respected

political scientists (and, except for Nadeau, who went on to serve as an MP, all still serve at

those institutions), which makes the paper all the more important.

The paper discusses track rates of nonvoting for four demographics: the pre-baby

boomers (born before 1945), the baby boomers (born between 1945 and 1959), generation X

(born between 1960 and 1969), and finally post-generation X (born since 1970). Obviously, pre-

boomers are far less prominent a demographic 15 years later, although still present. If one can

get past this, there is a wealth of solid information present in the work.

The two theories discussed, generational and life-scale, are still the most prominent in the

study of voter turnout. To give a quick primer, generational theory suggests that non-voting

varies by generation, that some generations are simply more inclined to vote than others,

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[16] Blais, André, et al. "Generational Change and the Decline of Political Participation: the case of voter turnout in Canada." Citizenship on Trial: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Socialization of Adolescents, Montreal (2002).

meaning that age demographics will fluctuate. Life-scale theory suggests just the opposite, that certain age groups are simply going to vote or not vote based on characteristics of the age group alone.

The paper favors the life-cycle notion, noting that demographic behavior remained relatively static, and points the finger of blame at the youngest voters they studied, those born post-1970, who would have been first eligible to vote in 1988 or thereafter, especially those without post-secondary education. It does state that post-secondary drastically boosts the chance of voting, noting that in that youngest demographic, a post-secondary education boosted voting rates by 50%. Also of great interest is the fact that the paper looks at non-voting electoral engagement as well, although it concluded that young people had very little interest in it at the time. Keep in mind, however, that this is 2002, when non-voting engagement was limited almost exclusively to interest groups.

This paper would be an interesting one to update in several ways. First, 2002 was just before social media became a prominent part of our lives, making non-voting political engagement much easier, and giving rise to the concept of "slacktivism"-the idea of hashtag campaigns or the like that create awareness without creating action. Politics is much more accessible now than it was in 2002, and it would certainly be interesting to see the effects of this on actual voting.

Secondly, more young people are getting post-secondary education now than at almost any point in the past, with increased specialisation limiting opportunities for workers with a high school education or less. Yet, even with the effect the authors discussed, voter turnout among youth remains low. This would be an excellent point to elaborate upon.

Joao Cancela and Benny Geys help my own literature review process greatly with their 2015 work, "Explaining Voter Turnout: A Meta-Analysis of National and Subnational Elections".[17] The work builds on a similar piece produced by Geys in 2006, which looked at 83 studies on voter turnout. The updated version adds 102 new studies, written from 2002-2015, to the previous 83, and makes very clear that literature on the issue is massively on the rise.

Their theoretical findings are no less interesting, concluding that population size, concentration, stability, and homogeneity all have more power in subnational than national elections. Although Canada's electoral system is composed entirely of subnational elections, and there are no truly "national" elections (with even referenda being conducted on a province by province basis) this does explain a great deal.

For example, Prince Edward Island led the country in voter turnout in 2015, with 77.4% of Islanders registered to vote showing up to the polls.[18] This is not a new phenomenon-indeed, Islanders have had stellar provincial voter turnouts for as long as Elections Prince Edward Island has kept track of the figure, which dates to 1966, with their lowest recorded turnout at 76.5%, in 2011.[19]

This trend tracks very well with what Cancela and Geys' findings state. Of Prince Edward Island's four federal ridings, the largest, Cardigan, represents only 36,005 people, as of

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[17] João Cancela, Benny Geys, Explaining voter turnout: A meta-analysis of national and subnational elections, In Electoral Studies, Volume 42, 2016, Pages 264-275, ISSN 0261-3794, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2016.03.005.

[18] "P.E.I. Leads Canada in Voter Turnout for Federal Election." CBC News, CBC/Radio Canada, 20 Oct. 2015, www.cbc.ca/news/canada/prince-edward-island/p-e-i-leads-canada-in-voter-turnout-1.3279625.

[19] "Statistics on General Elections from 1966 to 2011." Statistics on General Elections from 1966 to 2011, Elections Prince Edward Island, 8 Nov. 2011, www.electionspei.ca/pdfs/statistics.pdf.

the 2011 census.[20] Provincially, the legislature contains 27 seats, meaning that, using the 2016

population count for the province, each MLA represents an average of only 5,293 people.

Certainly, it must be a positive that a representative in one of these ridings would be quite

accessible to constituents, even very likely to be known to most of them, and a small number of

votes would mean every vote would mean that much more.

But small ridings are not at all a guarantee of high voter turnout. Labrador, the smallest

riding in Canada at only 27,197 residents,[21] has typically dismal voter turnouts, dipping as low as

38.6% in 2008.[22] Nunavut, which is also a small riding at 35,944 residents,[23] despite

encompassing the entire territory, also frequently has awful voter turnouts, with the worst being

only 43.9% in 2004.

The most obvious discrepancy is size. Labrador is a very large area, but it is very sparsely

populated. Nunavut is the largest electoral district represented by a single member in the world.

The extreme size of Nunavut, particularly, cannot be underestimated, with the landmass being

comparable with the entirety of Western Europe. That particularly speaks to the power of

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[20] "Census Profile." Census Program, Statistics Canada, 31 May 2016, www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=FED&Code1=11001&Geo2=PR&Code2=11&Data=Count&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All.

[21] "Census Profile." Census Program, Statistics Canada, 31 May 2016, www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=FED&Code1=10004&Geo2=PR&Code2=10&Data=Count&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All.

[22] "Official Voting Results Fortieth General Election 2008." OVR / ROS, Elections Canada, 2 Feb. 2009, www.elections.ca/scripts/OVR2008/default.html.

[23] "Canada's Federal Electoral Districts." Elections Canada, Elections Canada, 29 June 2017, www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=res&dir=cir%2Flist&document=index338&lang=e.

population concentration in conjunction with population size and might hold some clues on how we might be able to increase turnout without resorting to mandatory voting.

This does leave a lingering question. What of the urban ridings, with small landmass, and highly concentrated large populations? Why do they not turn out as well as ridings in P.E.I.? Cancela and Geis, as well as Alan Gerber, Mitchell Hoffman, John Morgan, and Collin Raymond in "One in a Million: Field Experiments on Perceived Closeness of the Election and Voter Turnout"[24] both discussed a commonly considered answer to that question: the perceived closeness of the election. Both works, however, more or less dismissed closeness as a factor, although the former study does note that it would be slightly more a factor in a national, rather than a subnational, election.

The latter study studied closeness in a gubernatorial race in 2010, using polling data from RealClearPolitics. However, there is some weakness to the process. First of all, media is much more a factor in American than Canadian races, simply because Americans are often able to spend more in that direction. Unless Canadians consciously involve themselves in looking for election-related media, it will not be a great factor, lacking the ubiquity of American media coverage of politics.

A variation of this thinking is the idea of "safe" ridings. If voters do not feel that their candidate could possibly win, or that a certain candidate has no chance of losing, then, theoretically, they will not turn out at all. This does not need theory to be proven true, because parties already believe it, and it is a major part of politics worldwide. In the United States, this can be seen most clearly in Presidential elections, wherein candidates will only make

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[24]Gerber, Alan, et al. One in a Million: Field Experiments on Perceived Closeness of the Election and Voter Turnout. No. w23071. National Bureau of Economic Research, 2017.

appearances in marginal states that could be won by influencing undecided or independent voters. In Canada, candidates will commonly only canvass areas within a riding that they believe they can win votes from. This is less of a proven theory than a self-fulfilling prophecy, but it does explain some loss of turnout.

That is discussed by Blais, Nadeau, Gidengil, and Nevitte again in "Measuring Strategic Voting in Multiparty Plurality Elections",[25] in which they measured the effect of strategic voting in the 1997 federal election. Their findings indicated that while perception of the closeness of the local race did affect the vote, perception of who would form government and Official Opposition did not, only finding that 3% of voters cast a strategic vote. This is somewhat flawed in that it was the 1997 election, where it was reasonably certain that Jean Chretien's Liberals would win an easy, albeit likely reduced majority and Preston Manning's Reform Party would supplant the Bloc Quebecois as Official Opposition. Of all the elections to cast a strategic vote for a certain result federally, this wasn't high on the list. Nonetheless, it is interesting to see the closeness effect on the local races that, after all, do decide Canadian elections.

Henry Milner compares the civic knowledge of American and Canadian young people in "Political Knowledge and Participation Among Young Canadians and Americans",[26] asking sample sizes of both a short list of survey questions (identifying a cabinet secretary, identifying a party as conservative or right wing, naming a permanent member of the UN Security Council, and the like). While Canadians fared significantly better than their American counterparts, their

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[25] Blais, André, et al. "Measuring Strategic Voting in Multiparty Plurality Elections." Electoral Studies, vol. 20, no. 3, 8 June 2001, pp. 343–352., doi:10.1016/s0261-3794(00)00017-2.

[26] Milner, Henry. "Political Knowledge and Participation Among Young Canadians and Americans." IRPP, Institute For Research on Public Policy, 15 Nov. 2007, irpp.org/research-studies/working-paper-no2007-01/.

knowledge was still fairly lacking, with 43% of the Canadians surveyed unable to identify

citizens as the category of people having the right to vote. The study provides evidence that

while young Canadians are well placed in terms of civic engagement among their peers in North

America, they have a long way to go to stack up worldwide.

Milner continues this point in "Are Young Canadians Becoming Political Dropouts?",[27]

which refers more generally to the phenomenon of declining Canadian voter turnout and

especially youth voter turnout, but breaks it down in a very interesting way that many researchers

ignore; he looks at voters who are politically literate and just choose not to vote (or "political

protesters") versus voters who feel they cannot vote because they are not politically literate (or

"political dropouts). The dropout tag is particularly harsh given Canada's wealth of well-

educated young people and high post-secondary education rate. However, Milner's statistics do

not lie, and in another study, he finds that the political knowledge of the sample group of

Canadians lagged behind Sweden, Germany, Italy, and France's equivalent sample groups,

finishing just under the United Kingdom. It serves to further hammer home Milner's consistent

point-young Canadians are not politically literate enough.

In the Elections Canada penned study "Explaining the Turnout Decline in Canadian

Federal Elections: A New Survey of Non-voters",[28] compiled by Jon Pammett and Lawrence

LeDuc, the issue with turnout decline was called out as early as 2003. They come right out and

say age is the biggest factor in decline, and Milner's points years later were in concurrence with

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[27] Milner, Henry. "Are Young Canadians Becoming Political Dropouts?" IRPP, Institute For Research on Public Policy, 13 June 2005, irpp.org/research-studies/choices-vo11-no3/.

[28] Pammett, Jon H., and Lawrence LeDuc. "Explaining the Turnout Decline in Canadian Federal Elections: A New Survey of Non-Voters." Explaining the Turnout Decline in Canadian Federal Elections: A New Survey of Non-Voters, Elections Canada, Mar. 2003, www.elections.ca/res/rec/part/tud/TurnoutDecline.pdf.

those expressed by Pammett and LeDuc here, that most of the reasoning for that had then and has now to do with a lack of political literacy. They go into several ways of remedying this, identifying specifically an underreported problem in the failure to register new voters, which can potentially skew data, as some bodies count turnout by registered voters and some by eligible voters. The study also points out that not only should youth get more education about politics, they actively want it. Their numbers significantly point to apathy as the reason for not voting, which even further emphasises the need for political literacy.

Microtargeting is gaining more and more prominence as data becomes easier to collect. That means that a party can easily find out the demographics most likely to vote for their candidate and endeavor to get those people out to vote. But there is a major issue with this situation, as Kyle Endres and Kristin Kelly point out in "Does microtargeting matter? Campaign contact strategies and young voters".[29] The study finds that young people are less likely to be targeted for contact, lending credence to the concept that young voter turnout is less of a systematic issue and more of a self fulfilling prophesy.

Again dealing with the age gap in turnout, we return to the contributions of Blais, Gigendil, and Nevitte, this time joined by Daniel Rubinson and Patrick Fournier, in "Accounting for the Age Gap in Turnout".[30] Published in 2004, it uses the 2000 Canadian federal election to partially debunk the age gap theory. To be sure, that is far from total, there is an age gap, and the writers freely acknowledge that. What they aim to prove is that this gap is much smaller than previously considered, using various secondary factors that have more bearing on voting choice

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[29] Endres, Kyle, and Kristin J. Kelly. "Does microtargeting matter? Campaign contact strategies and young voters." Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties 28.1 (2018): 1-18.

[30] Rubenson, Daniel, et al. "Accounting for the age gap in turnout." Acta Politica 39.4 (2004): 407-421.

than age (political affiliation, socioeconomic status, and et cetera) to nearly half the perceived

gap. The aim is to fight the old perception that "young people don't care". That isn't entirely

false, but there are a lot of other factors at play besides age that might lead them to not care.

Moving on, we look towards a topic that will be reflected at some length later on in the

paper: proportional representation. Several papers argue for it and champion its positive effect on

voter turnout; Ko Maeda's 2016 study "Voter turnout and district-level competitiveness in

mixed-member electoral systems"[31] from the University of North Texas being one, and Carlos

Sanz of Princeton argued between PR systems in local Spanish elections in "The Effect of

Electoral Systems on Voter Turnout: Evidence from a Natural Experiment",[32] finding that open-

list PR yielded marginally better turnout than closed. The main disagreement in the PR debate is

which form of PR is the best. Maeda's study focused on Mixed-Member Proportional but did not

find much in the way of results.

To be sure, PR does come with pitfalls. As Zoe Lefkofridi, Nathalie Giger, and Aina

Gallego state in "Electoral Participation in Pursuit of Policy Representation: Ideological

Congruence and Voter Turnout",[33] PR does lead to extremists voting in greater numbers when

extreme ideologies are on the ballot, and those voters do tend to not turn out if those choices are

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[31] Maeda, Ko. "Voter Turnout and District-Level Competitiveness in Mixed-Member Electoral Systems." Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties 26.4 (2016): 452-69. Web. 24 Oct. 2017

[32] Sanz, Carlos. "The Effect of Electoral Systems on Voter Turnout: Evidence from a Natural Experiment." Political Science Research and Methods 5.4 (2017): 689-710. Print.

[33] Lefkofridi, Zoe, Nathalie Giger, and Aina Gallego. "Electoral Participation in Pursuit of Policy Representation: Ideological Congruence and Voter Turnout." Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties 24.3 (2014): 291-311. Web.

taken away. Mert Moral similarly finds that voter polarisation is a positive contributor to voter turnout.[34] Extremism is a pitfall of higher turnout, to be plain.

Extremists have been elected in mandatory voting systems, such as in Australia, and they do tend to get elected in PR systems, as seen in the 2017 German election, where the far-right Alternative for Germany finished third. The best that can be said is extremists from both sides of the political spectrum get attention, and hopefully, they cancel each other out. It is useful to remember that extremists are, definitionally, not the majority, and represent ideologies hard to reconcile with any mainstream view, making their seizing government quite unlikely.

Returning to mobilisation, also of interest is John Aldrich, Rachel Gibson, Marta Cantijoch, and Tobias Konitzer's joint paper on the effects of social media on mobilisation, entitled "Getting out the vote in the social media era: Are digital tools changing the extent, nature and impact of party contacting in elections?"[35] In short, the answer is absolutely, as seen prominently in the campaigns of Barack Obama, particularly in 2008, Justin Trudeau in 2015, Donald Trump in 2016, and Jeremy Corbyn in 2017. This is the most viable vision for increasing youth voting in the future; reaching out to youth on their terms. Using their platforms, does seem to have a positive effect, and the effects can be seen in more than youth. Social media could mean a transparency and a level of interactivity unlike we have ever seen before, truly a new frontier for the study and practice of politics as we know it.

The greatest threat to growing voter turnout is almost certainly corruption. Corruption makes voters almost irreparably jaded, far from the idea of throwing out the corrupt politicians

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[34] Moral, Mert. "The Bipolar Voter: On the Effects of Actual and Perceived Party Polarization on Voter Turnout in European Multiparty Democracies." Political Behavior (2017): 1-31.

[35] Aldrich, John H., et al. "Getting Out the Vote in the Social Media Era." Party Politics 22.2 (2016): 165-78. Web.

and getting a boost in voter turnout that way, as enforced in Daniel Stockemer, Lyle Scruggs and Bernadette LaMontagne's article "Bribes and Ballots: The Impact of Corruption on Voter Turnout in Democracies".[36] Corruption anywhere breaks trust in not a person or a party, but the whole system, having a toxic effect on turnout. The perception of politicians as corrupt has been tough to get past, and it is not hard to consider that the reason why younger generations have so much disconnected to politicians is that this perception has been around for most, if not all, of their lives, particularly in North America after the Watergate scandal in the 1970s, and the increased scrutiny of politicians that followed.

Nadeau and Eric Belanger also tackle this topic in the context of a very interesting time in Canadian history in "Political trust and the vote in multiparty elections: The Canadian case",[37] which might better be called "The Rise and Fall of Martin Brian Mulroney". It examined the three elections that comprised the Mulroney revolution: 1984, 1988, and 1993 campaigns. The former two are the last two Canadian elections to have a turnout higher than 70% (both were at 75.3%), and the latter marks the start of a decade long turnout decline that would not bounce back until 2006. The paper not only examines the distrust cultivated in the Mulroney era, but also its results, not only the Liberal resurgence that spawned the "Gritlock" of the 90s, but the dawn of two new parties, born of revolts in the West and Quebec: Preston Manning's Reform Party, and Lucien Bouchard's Bloc Quebecois, which picked up 56 seats each in 1993. In a roundabout way, this built two aspects of the political climate we know today: turnouts in the 60% range, and a more hardline Conservative party.

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[36] Stockemer, Daniel, Bernadette LaMontagne, and Lyle Scruggs. "Bribes and ballots: The impact of corruption on voter turnout in democracies." International Political Science Review 34.1 (2013): 74-90.

[37] Belanger, E. and Nadeau, R. (2005), Political trust and the vote in multiparty elections: The Canadian case. European Journal of Political Research, 44: 121-146.

To sum up the literature, and how this paper's forward progress will look as a result, we are fighting an ingrained life-cycle effect. That is, to be sure, very much an uphill battle, but we do have some of the tools to fight it. Proportional representation can be generally considered a good development for voter turnout, and the fight for proportional representation will feature heavily in Chapter 3, along with several other proposals to increase voter turnout. Although increasing voter concentration is attractive, to feasibly do that in Canada, one would have to increase the number of ridings, and thereby the number of MPs that have to draw salaries, and that becomes very costly quickly. It is a feasible, but very difficult, prospect to make the population of the second largest landmass in the world fit conveniently in ridings to the extent that real change in that respect would require. Social media and corruption are issues that are not necessarily inherent to the system right now, but they are an integral part of the Canadian political system of the future, and a cardinal responsibility of politicians to keep vigilant on.

CHAPTER 3: PROPOSED SOLUTIONS TO THE TURNOUT ISSUE

We know what the problem is. We know that the problem needs fixing. What we don't know is how we go about doing that, and unfortunately, there are no clear answers to this. There are a number of suggested possible solutions, and they target any number of parts of the system. Do we lower the voting age to 16, as has been done in various countries? Should we change the voting system itself? Or do we go the most severe route of all, and institute mandatory voting laws?

All of these approaches have merit to some extent and have been used in various countries to varying results. This chapter will aim to look at all three of these particular approaches honestly and impartially. I will be refraining from outright endorsing one approach or the other for several reasons. Firstly, while all three of the approaches aim towards solving the same problem, they do so in different ways that are difficult to compare. Secondly, it is a hard thing to have one person make a determination about a policy that will affect the entirety of a nation closing in on 40 million in population. I will admit my limitations-I have never lived in the more remote areas that are most acutely affected by this problem. I am someone who grew up in Nova Scotia, where turnouts are traditionally very good (usually in the mid 60% range), and in Southern Ontario, where turnout is lower than that, but not a great deal so (usually ranging between the high 50% and low 60% range).

There are ridings in Canada below rural, as has been mentioned earlier (that is not in terms of general merit, but accessibility). One cannot ignore the fact of ridings with high Aboriginal populations consistently having poor turnouts. Labrador and Nunavut, as mentioned earlier, post consistently dismal turnouts federally, and just happen to have two of the highest concentrations of Aboriginal voters in the country.

The fact that they are isolated areas also seems to factor in-the Northwest Territories and Yukon also have their own ridings which comprise the entirety of the territory, and also have high concentrations of Aboriginal voters, but post perfectly normal turnouts, though the Northwest had a very large slump through the 2000s. The difference there is that the Northwest and Yukon Territories have both proximity to more populated areas in Canada and strategic importance that makes their ridings worth investing in; with the Yukon sporting a large border, the only one accessible by land, with Alaska, and the Northwest having among the top mining reserves in Canada (especially as one of the world's larger reserves of non-conflict diamonds) in addition to significant oil and gas reserves.

The point is that no matter which of these measures we take, a necessary step needs to be consulting Aboriginal groups and making them a priority in the process. No commission to study this issue should be done without significant involvement from those groups. It is also true that such a commission needs to be balanced. The factors of what makes someone vote in Halifax won't necessarily be reflected in Toronto, Calgary, or Vancouver, and vice versa. Any actions taken need to be done in consultation with the individual groups in this country to make sure they reflect the interests of all Canadians to the greatest extent possible.

The first idea to consider is lowering the voting age to 16 from 18, and it must be noted for the purposes of this paper that we will mostly discuss countries that moved their voting age for all elections. Some, like Germany, Malta, and Estonia, allow 16-year olds to vote in local or state level elections, but not federally. For now, we will discuss full suffrage, but partial suffrage is an idea with merit practiced at the state level by many countries, including Germany. The concept has seen limited traction and has been considered for a relatively short period. The first country to lower their voting age to 16, Nicaragua, did so in 1984, and indeed, there seems to be

two specific geographic areas that have done it, those being Central and South America, and the UK Crown Dependencies, along with Scotland. The most prominent countries to have enacted such measures are Brazil, Argentina, Austria, and Scotland.

Scotland has a very limited sample size (having just extended the vote to 16-year olds in 2016 after experimenting with it in the 2015 Scottish independence referendum),[38] so we will leave that example alone. Brazil and Argentina both use similar implementation. In both countries, citizens from 18-70 are subject to a compulsory vote, and 16 and 17-year-old voters may, optionally, vote as well. Austria has a more standard non-compulsory system.

The positives are less short term and more long term here, because the idea is not to pump voters in to add to numbers now, it is to better establish a voting culture while these people are impressionable and forming opinions. Another prominent argument is that because 16-year olds can work and thus pay taxes, there is something of a moral duty to allow them a say in how that tax money is spent. After all, one of the main arguments of the democratic system is that of no taxation without representation.

The most commonly stated negative towards extending suffrage to 16-year olds was most likely the most commonly stated negative towards extending suffrage to 18-year olds and so on- the idea that 16-year olds don't care about voting. This is a common idea that comes up even in the overarching theme of this paper, but it is factually flawed. It is said over and over again that young people don't care about voting, but if one continues to disparage a demographic by assigning the same attributes to it that every other generation before did, where is the incentive to disprove that line of thinking? What do these people do to reach out on that young person's level?

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[38] Eichhorn, Jan. "Mobilisation through early activation and school engagement–the story from Scotland." Journal of Youth Studies (2018): 1-16.

There is some truth to the stereotype. Certainly, just extending suffrage to 16 year olds does not magically make them all come vote, and there is evidence that the youth turnout tends to be somewhat lacking (although in Austria, it generally tracks along with overall turnout, which is quite good, generally in the high 70% range).[39] The way to solve this is to engage on the voter level-namely, social media. YouTube should be the greatest innovation for campaigns since the advent of TV campaign ads, but parties in Canada have been slow to embrace it, with party YouTube channels mostly acting as repositories for either content already aired on TV, or content that couldn't make TV.

A great social media strategy has to have its first leg on YouTube, with exclusive content (specific, barebones policy speeches of about five minutes would work excellently here). Campaigns could also take a cue from the 1992 Clinton Presidential campaign and use this platform to respond to attacks quickly. While the Clinton campaign could famously respond to attacks within the same day, with YouTube in play, attacks could be responded to in the same hour, so voters can consume the attack and reply back to back in many cases. Twitter and Snapchat also have valuable places in the 21st century campaign, helping candidates respond to news in real time and chronicle any aspect of a campaign. Another very good idea would be a livestream town hall, where voters can send in questions that a candidate can answer in real time while the voter watches.

The second method of affecting change in voter turnout is through democratic reform. Democratic reform in Canada has a long history. While it might not seem that much progress has been made, because Canada's institutions still bear striking similarity to what they were at

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[39] Zeglovits, Eva, and Julian Aichholzer. "Are people more inclined to vote at 16 than at 18? Evidence for the first-time voting boost among 16-to 25-year-olds in Austria." Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties 24.3 (2014): 351-361.

Confederation, many subtle, under the surface changes that the average voter might have little to

no knowledge of have accentuated voting and democracy. The issue of democratic reform has

never left the parliamentary discussion, either. All of the major parties have campaigned, in the

past, on some aspect of democratic reform. This encompassed a myriad of democratic reform

sub-issues, from changing how Canadians vote, to changing how the concept of Canadian

lawmaking works entirely.

One of the more popular methods of electoral reform is at the voting level. Canadians

have debated for decades about changing the manner in which they vote, and the New Democrats

and Greens both have support for some form of proportional representation in their official

platforms. Again, Tories and Liberals have been reluctant to embrace electoral reform, with

oppositions frequently supporting measures in that direction (as Justin Trudeau did in 2015), but

rarely taking real action while in office. Various inquests, reports, and commissions have been

conducted on the subject, but these rarely resulted in direct change, although they did

occasionally result in peripheral changes to the way in which elections were conducted, with the

example being the Lortie Commission of 1992 begetting the National Register of Electors.[40]

Alternative voting methods have already come to the ballots at the provincial level on

five occasions. Alberta and Manitoba did previously use Ontarians roundly rejected a change to

the Mixed-Member Proportional system, a variation of which is used in Germany, in 2007,[41] and

British Columbians would reject a change to the Single Transferable Vote used in the Republic

of Ireland in 2009.[42] Both of these measures failed by an over 60% margin. Granted, in 2005,

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[40] Black, Jerome Harold. From Enumeration to the National Register of Electors: An Account and An Evaluation. Quebec: Institute for Research on Public Policy, 2003.

[41] Perrella, Andrea ML, et al. "The 2007 Provincial Election and Electoral System Referendum in Ontario." (2007).

[42] Leduc, Lawrence. "The Failure of Electoral Reform Proposals in Canada." Political Science 61.2 (2009): 21-40.

British Columbian voters had supported STV,[43] but this failed to achieve a necessary 60%

margin to pass. Prince Edward Island voters considered a change in systems in 2016, and even

gave a majority vote to a Mixed-Member Proportional system,[44] but the turnout was so

uncharacteristically poor (a dismal 36.46%)[45] that Premier Wade MacLaughlin publicly said that

he doubted that the result of the referendum "(could) be said to constitute a clear expression of

the will of Prince Edward Islanders".[46] The province also rejected a change to MMP in massive

numbers in 2005, with 63.58% of voters voting "no".[47]

Do people support a change in how we vote? The answer is actually rather murky. The

Tories have stated that in a survey of over 81,000 people in 59 of their ridings, over 90%

responded that they wanted an electoral reform referendum.[48] A Forum Research poll taken in

March 2017 indicated that most Canadians in every province but British Columbia support the

status quo, but this has to be taken with the largest of asterisks, as the largest margin for FPTP

support was in Alberta, and it was still only 53%.[49] Interestingly, of young voters surveyed, the

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[43] Reid, Scott. "The Road to Electoral Reform." Canadian Parliamentary Review (2005).

[44] McDonald, Mitch. "Prince Edward Islanders Choose MMPR in Electoral Reform Plebiscite." The Telegram, TransContinental Media, 7 Nov. 2016, www.thetelegram.com/news/regional/2016/11/7/prince-edward-islanders-choose-mmpr-in-e-4681472.html.

[45] "Plebiscite Results." Elections PEI: Plebiscite Results, Elections PEI, 8 May 2017, www.electionspei.ca/plebisciteresults.

[46] Sinclair, Jesara. "Premier Calls Plebiscite Results 'Debatable,' Cites Low Turnout." CBC News, CBC/Radio Canada, 8 Nov. 2016, www.cbc.ca/news/canada/prince-edward-island/pei-premier-plebiscite-results-1.3842107.

[47] "Report of the Chief Electoral Officer of Prince Edward Island: Plebiscite for the Provincial Mixed Member Proportional System." Report of the Chief Electoral Officer of Prince Edward Island, Government of Prince Edward Island, 28 Nov. 2005, www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/epei_MMPRplebis.pdf.

[48] O'Malley, Kady. "How Not to Hold an All-Party Committee on Electoral Reform." Ottawa Citizen, Postmedia, 9 Dec. 2016, ottawacitizen.com/news/politics/how-not-to-hold-an-all-party-committee-on-electoral-reform.

[49] "More Canadians Favour Keeping First-Past-the-Post than Don't, except in B.C.: Poll." The Hill Times, Hill Times Publishing, 9 Mar. 2017, www.hilltimes.com/2017/03/09/well-off-highly-educated-voters-lean-towards-electoral-reform-poll/99309.

largest amount supported change, while older voters, especially the eldest age bracket surveyed, were likelier to support the status quo.

Also of note was that high earners ($80,000-$100,000 a year [41%], and $100,000-$250,000 a year [44%]) and those with a greater amount of education (some college or university [51%], completed college or university [44%], and completed postgraduate studies [46%]) were more likely to support reform, with 51% of those earning under $20,000 opposing it, as well as about 50% of those with a high school education or less.

Consider also that, as of 2011, 54% of Canadians aged 25-64 have some postsecondary qualifications,[50] with that number set to only go up, if current trends continue, with the decline of Canadian manufacturing meaning that most jobs that provide a living wage are going to require a college or university education. As the concentration of Canadians with postsecondary qualifications rises, the demographic of voters with high school diplomas or less is going to be rapidly pushed into obsolescence.

This actually bodes very well for a potential referendum. Numbers now are absolutely in a good enough place that with a well-run campaign, a vote for an alternative system is a real possibility, especially because there is support from the right and the center-left, and from parties with traditional support across the country. That support is for both change and in what direction change should go, given that, even though they did not come out with one specific alternative system, the Special Committee on Electoral Reform, which reported in late 2016, did endorse some form of proportional representation. The NDP members of the Special Committee, as well as Green Party Leader Elizabeth May, have since made suggestions of what an alternative might

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[50] "Education in Canada: Attainment, Field of Study and Location of Study." Census Program, Statistics Canada, 15 Sept. 2016, www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-012-x/99-012-x2011001-eng.cfm.

look like, with one of those being a system where two-thirds of MPs are directly elected, and the

remaining third is allocated via a second vote for a party, rather than a candidate, similar to the

German system.[51]

While the Germans do not get what could be called massive voter turnouts, they have

remained consistently higher than those in Canada, with 71.5% of registered voters turning out in

2013. That number was quite low by German standards, but the 2017 election, which had been

speculated in worldwide media to see a decrease in voter turnout, showed growth, albeit

marginal, in turnout, at 76.2%. [52] If we look at the history of the system, though, we can see that

it is capable of producing much more amazing turnouts than this at times since being instituted in

the Western-occupied Federal Republic of Germany (commonly known as simply West

Germany) in 1949, the first election after World War II. German elections 1972 and 1976 both

featured turnouts over 90%, and every one of the ten elections held between 1953 and 1987, the

last before re-unification would pull in a voter turnout above 80%. If the 1987 election is

discounted, then all of those remaining nine elections pulled in turnouts higher than 85%.[53]

Turnout declined after re-unification with the formerly Communist German Democratic

Republic in 1990, but generally settled in the high 70% range until 2009, which posted the

lowest turnout in German history at 70.8%.[54] Turnout remained more or less the same in 2013 at

[51] May, Elizabeth, et al. "NDP and Green Supplemental Report - Special Committee on Electoral Reform." Scribd, Scribd, 1 Dec. 2016, www.scribd.com/document/333021927/NDP-and-Green-Supplemental-Report-Special-Committee-on-Electoral-Reform.

[52] "Bundestag Election 2017." The Federal Returning Officer, Results Germany, 24 Sept. 2017, www.bundeswahlleiter.de/en/bundestagswahlen/2017/ergebnisse/bund-99.html.

[53] Abe, Nicola, et al. "Decline in Voter Turnout in Germany a Danger to Democracy." SPIEGEL ONLINE, SPIEGEL ONLINE, 20 Sept. 2013, www.spiegel.de/international/germany/bild-923081-547149.html.
[54] Alvarez-Rivera, Manuel. "September 27, 2009 Bundestag Election Results - Federal Republic of Germany Totals." Election Resources on the Internet: Elections to the German Bundestag - Results Lookup, Election Resources, 27 Sept. 2009, www.electionresources.org/de/bundestag.php?election=2009.

71.5%, and most predictions had the September 2017 German election turnout being somewhere along these lines, with many Germans unenthused about leaders Angela Merkel and Martin Schulz, and very little difference in their platforms. Though that prediction did not come to be, and turnout did increase, it is still somewhat stagnant compared to past turnouts. The difference is, these numbers, even in stagnation, are still better than the voter turnout Canada had in 2015, our best in over two decades. Canada is not alone in facing turnout problems, but it has suffered from them more acutely than other nations.

The German system embraces a comfortable middle ground-it allows small parties with enough support to have seats they otherwise could not have, eliminating the perception that they are spoilers that split an ideological vote, and disallows extremist parties with small fringe support, by setting a 5% or three constituency standard for extra seats in the Bundestag.[55] This generally, but not always, has allowed five parties to sit (in the post-unification era, previously, this would be three or four parties), just as in Canada, but usually with all parties having enough seats to wield at least limited influence. This would benefit smaller parties the most directly, especially the New Democrats, the only party with a popular vote count in the 2015 election (the last, as of this writing) that exceeds its seat count significantly, in their case, by nearly 7%. The Bloc Quebecois would get a few extra seats, having won 10 constituencies. The Greens finished with under 5% and one constituency in 2015, and hence would be ineligible for additional seats.

Proportional systems also, because they rarely return absolute majorities, encourage coalition building, a process which has long been an unofficial hallmark of Canadian politics, with the New Democrats often in the position of kingmaker. This only serves to improve

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[55] "Electoral System." Electoral System - The Federal Returning Officer, The Federal Returning Officer, www.bundeswahlleiter.de/en/bundestagswahlen/2017/informationen-waehler/wahlsystem.html#fb58bcf2-d73b-4f47-b421-315df733b3de.

political discourse and helps make houses of assembly run much more harmoniously, with less of a partisan divide in play. This somewhat allays the concerns of voters for the New Democrats, in the case of Canada, assuring them that their votes can, at the very least, empower a kingmaker rather than a spoiler. However, we still have other small parties alienated, because under the FPTP system, they have no feasible shot at power. Some voters will respond to this by compromising-voting for the viable party that they can align their views the closest with. But some will respond to this by not voting at all, and this is why electoral reform has to be part of a voter turnout discussion. Even a small amount of voters still represents Canadians that have given up on the process, and that cannot be something we accept.

The entire reason that democratic reform is a goal that has been sought for so long is because first-past-the-post, after a system takes on more than two parties, is a system that systematically disenfranchises supporters of small parties by turning them into spoilers that only serve to elect politicians that have views drastically different from theirs, which tacitly means that if you do not happen to agree with one of the two big parties, your vote does not matter. One argument is to compromise, to grit one's teeth and find the mainstream party one can find the most agreement with. But this goes against the whole point of indirect democracy-to elect a representative that mirrors your views as closely as possible. Direct democracy would be a great thing to have, but our modern world makes that an impossibility in any electorate of size.

To be sure, a great many countries use FPTP, including the United States and United Kingdom, and a major argument comes from the idea that because it is widely used, it works. But just because other nations use the system, that does not mean that it works. The 2016 US election was one long example of how and why Americans have soured on both major parties, and tried to find something different. Love them or hate them, Bernie Sanders and Donald

Trump were protests against how the parties were, and those protests stand to change American

politics for a long time to come. In order to fix politics, to reassure voters that their choice still

matters, reform is an absolute necessity, and that reform may necessitate overhaul at the level of

how we cast our ballots.

Finally, we move to mandatory voting laws. It's an extreme measure, to be sure, and

there will be a fight over it. Civil rights advocates tend to jump on these sorts of things, and even

with a majority Parliament's support, it might have to be a referendum subject because it is a

huge bit of policy. It is always hard to argue things like this, but there is evidence that this policy

does work. 22 countries have some form of compulsory voting law, and they usually work with

some variation of a ticket for not voting. This is generally kept as a lower amount, for example,

Turkey's official fine for the offense is 22 lira[56] (which works out to a little over $5.50

Canadian). Anywhere from $20 to $50 in the native currency is standard.

The key to making this policy work is to make sure you have alternatives. Belgium, for

example, requires that you present yourself at a polling station, but not necessarily to cast a vote.

There is generally also a justification form which, as long as the citizen fills it out previous to the

election, earns the citizen an exemption for any number of reasons, including sickness, distance

from the polling place, and religious reasons. As a further measure, a good idea might be to add a

"none of the above" option to the ballot, so people can still protest, but do it in a constructive and

quantifiable manner. If "none of the above" happens to win, then you can declare a by-election

and pick new candidates. This actually already exists in Canada, it just happens to be done in an

obscure way. Declined ballots are counted in several provinces (Alberta, Ontario, and Manitoba),

and Ontario has a provincial "None of the Above Party". Six other countries do this (India,

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[56] Colomer, Josep M. "Benefits and costs of voting." Electoral Studies 10.4 (1991): 313-325.

Greece, Ukraine, Spain, Columbia, and Bulgaria), and it is also an option in the US state of Nevada.

Protests exist to these laws, even in places like Australia, where they have been on the books for federal elections since 1924.[57] Protests are going to happen, that is an indispensable part of democracy. I have the right to vote for who I want to represent me, and you have the right to go wave a sign on a street corner telling people why that person is terrible. We have to realise that disagreement does not mean the law is bad. We do need to make considerations for people who cannot vote, and even people who don't want to vote. Another criticism is the cost of rounding all that voter information up, but thanks to another civic duty-paying income tax-we already have a functional list that can be utilised at no cost. This, when one factors in fines, is actually a cost-positive measure.

One thing that cannot be questioned-mandatory voting laws work. Argentina has had them since 1912, and but for the first two elections after implementation, have commonly had turnouts over 80% every time since. [58] This comes despite having a highly controversial political history that has seen corruption become common, especially in the form of nepotism, as Argentine politics tends to be rather dynastic, with the Peron family the historic example and the Kirchner family the more modern one.. Brazil likely has the most problematic implementation of these measures, due to their own infamous history with corruption and a democracy that has been rocky at best, destroying public trust in the institution of government. Many Brazilians want the policy to change,[59] but the country still boasts a voter turnout consistently in the high 70%

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[57] Evans, Tim. "Compulsory voting in Australia." Australian Electoral Commission Report (2006).
[58] Szwarcberg, Mariela. "Uncertainty, political clientelism, and voter turnout in Latin America: Why parties conduct rallies in Argentina." Comparative Politics 45.1 (2012): 88-106.

[59] Power, T. J., & Timmons Roberts, J. (1995). Compulsory Voting, Invalid Ballots, and Abstention in Brazil. Political Research Quarterly, 48(4), 795–826.

range,[60] despite that notorious corruption, which continues today to a much greater extent than in Argentina, explaining the disparity in turnout. Australia boasts a strong democracy that consistently pulls 90% turnout,[61] and that is an encouraging sign in a country that resembles Canada in a lot of ways-Commonwealth, large landmass, wealthy but a middle power militarily, large Aboriginal population, and so on. Australia's implementation also paid heavy dividends for the kind of working class people that tend to vote less in Canada.[62]

The biggest question with mandatory voting is whether or not it is right, or more to the point, whether it violates the rights of citizens. After all, freedom of speech naturally suggests freedom from speech if desired. However, with some measures in mind to mitigate these factors like the ones previously mentioned, these concerns can be allayed. As to whether Canada has the right to compel citizens to act, that is not in question. Canada has only once conscripted her citizens to military service and has never since made it mandatory. The one requirement Canadians have is to pay income taxes…in essence, to fund the government. Is it not logical that if Canada were to ask for a second requirement beyond funding the government, it would be to choose who gets to help allocate that money? This is a reasonable request that strengthens the legitimacy of the government's mandate. If people want to protest, let them, but protest does not make that statement less true.

Talking about change is easy. It is well and good to have ideas, but actual change requires the conviction to go and put one's support behind them. Canadians, at every level, have never

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[60] Boulding, C., & Brown, D. S. (2015). Do political parties matter for turnout? Number of parties, electoral rules and local elections in Brazil and Bolivia. Party Politics, 21(3), 404–416.

[61] Louth, Jonathon, and Lisa Hill. "Compulsory voting in Australia: Turnout with and without it." Australian Review of Public Affairs 6.1 (2005): 25-37.

[62] Fowler, Anthony, Electoral and Policy Consequences of Voter Turnout: Evidence from Compulsory Voting in Australia. Fowler, Anthony. 2013. Electoral and Policy Consequences of Voter Turnout: Evidence from Compulsory Voting in Australia. Quarterly Journal of Political Science 8(2):159-182.

had the passion for change to do that, or at least, not the passion for the same change. Something

has to be done, and the three suggestions I have made are just some ideas of many. Change needs

to be preceded by a concrete recommendation, and I would suggest that no actively serving MPs

be on the committee delivering that recommendation. One idea might be to summon a panel of

non-partisan experts from across the country, evenly representing demographics, to devise a

solution. Whatever the solution is, it should be fair, and it should reflect the will of Canadians.

CHAPTER 4: SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

The problem of declining voter turnout in this country is not a problem with one source, so logically, it should have a solution that addresses more than one root cause. Make no mistake, there are a great deal of root causes across the system, from poor civic literacy at the base level to lack of faith in the system as an institution. From people jaded about politicians to people jaded about their vote not mattering. From perceptions about age to age-old perceptions about faith.

The problem of voter turnout in Canada's decline is one with many roots, and an effective solution is one that will address as many as possible. Now, by no means is this meant to be a complete list of factors. It is more of an overview of those more acute and fixable to us, changes we can make to make our system a stronger one. Some are radical, others are just common sense. Nobody's saying they need to be done all at once, either. But they are suggestions, from the perspective of one who has loved politics since walking the halls of the University College of Cape Breton in 1997, on how we might rehabilitate our system.

There is only one province in this country that mandates civics to be taught in secondary school, to the 14-18-year olds that need to hear it most. That province is Ontario, which requires only half a credit in the curriculum. They considered cutting even that in 2016.[63] With no knowledge of the system to go with a generation that thinks them entitled and talentless, what exactly do we expect of our young people when they become old enough to go to the ballot box?

Why are we mandating four credits in English that is of limited use to young people, when they get ten weeks in their entire high school career to learn about the people that can

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[63] Tidridge, Nathan. "Civics Classes May Disappear in Ontario. That's a Mistake." Macleans.ca, Rogers Media, 3 Nov. 2016, www.macleans.ca/news/canada/ontario-ditch-civics-classes-mistake/.

spend their taxes, ask for more at will, and potentially send them to war? I do not suggest here

four credits of civics, but perhaps one full credit split into two halves. And rather than taking the

course in Grade 10 (as most do), why not assign those courses in Grade 11 and 12, when that

curiosity will be at its highest, and when students, in Grade 12, can actually vote in some cases?

This isn't something that will get you 100% turnout overnight, but it helps to lay the groundwork

so young people will care about voting and gives you a dedicated voter base to grow from. It is

great to talk about extending the franchise to 16 year olds (and, as stated in Chapter 3, I do agree

with and encourage that), but it just creates a new jaded voter bloc like every other jaded voter

bloc if you don't use this ready made opportunity to educate them, to know what that X on the

paper means.

Another major factor we need to address is systemic inequality in Canada, not necessarily

in terms of income, but in terms of resources. And while we could apply that to any number of

groups (whether religious, racial, or otherwise), that's most acutely felt in Canada's First

Nations. Nunavut, in particular, is majorly indicative of what could be and what is not. Nunavut,

as stated earlier, consistently posts the worst electoral turnouts in the country, and has more than

once had less than half of all eligible voters show up in federal elections. You could make any

number of arguments for it: that the remoteness makes it hard to get people out to vote, that the

weather is just too bad, that culturally, the First Nations people of that region just don't vote.

Those arguments are false, demonstrably so. How, you ask? Well, when we look at

Nunavut's own general elections, they actually have excellent turnout. 2017 was Nunavut's last

election, and they posted a turnout of 63.3%.[64] That's higher than the turnouts of eight of the

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[64] Rogers, Sarah. "63.3 Per Cent of Nunavut Voters Cast Ballots in 2017 Election." Nunatsiaq News 2017-12-15: NEWS: Three-Quarters of Nunavut Survey Respondents Support Legalizing Pot: Survey, Nortext Publishing Corporation, 8 Nov. 2017, www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/stories/article/6567463.3_per_cent_of_nunavut_voters_cast_ballots_in_2017_election/.

twelve other provinces or territories in their last provincial/territorial election (as of this writing). And that was Nunavut's lowest ever turnout in a general election. They've actually turned out 88% turnouts in their first two general elections, and 72% and 70% turnouts in their next two. Nunavut has the potential to turn out great numbers if they are motivated, but federally, they are not showing up. Is it that these elections are just held at better times in the year? Hardly. Nunavut's five elections have all been held in February or October, hardly the balmiest of times anywhere in Canada. While weather helps, it isn't the factor here. It doesn't explain gaps of as much as 40% between federal and provincial results a year apart. The only explanation is that there's something they don't feel they're getting from the federal end.

That's not to say there's an easy fix to that. There's not. It's going to be long and arduous and more than likely will force the government and the Canadians they represent to face some truths that they might not like to see. But First Nations are Canada, and an action plan to increase the First Nations vote is imperative to real rehabilitation for the system and being the Canada we preach as our identity: a culture of cultures, a nation of nations. A nation that is that starts with a Prime Minister and a government that we can come to a consensus on.

And speaking of that, let's discuss that bigger change, the things we touched on elsewhere in this paper. First Past The Post is a relic, plain and simple. You're handing Canadians a ballot that in most cases has at least four, and usually more, candidates on it, and expecting to get a consensus on a system that rewards the biggest minority and disenfranchises everybody else. But this isn't a clear solution. As said earlier, this has been rejected multiple times, and there's no clear alternative to FPTP. The German system has merits, but it is going to require education that we do not necessarily have the platform or opportunity to give.

A possible solution might be adapting a decidedly American strategy-ballot measures. These referenda conducted concurrently with the federal campaign would avoid the referendum pitfall of poor turnout, but also give the opportunity for education that some might seek out and might even add the potential for a debate with advocates from both sides. If the choice is middling vs. unknown, people aren't going to just pick unknown because it's better than the alternative.

Politics is marketing, you must sell the product. It isn't impossible to sell Canadians on electoral reform, but it is something you must put actual effort into in order to get done. You have to have a simple explanation, quick and concise and understandable. "You now cast two votes, one for the person you like and one for the party you like." Easy enough concept to understand, and not something that has to be overcomplicated. The problem is that because the different systems are supported by different independent groups rather than political parties, they don't get optics or branding in the way parties do. They don't dress up the message any, they just present it very starkly. And because these people are more often than not policy wonks, they're suddenly Wolfgang Puck teaching a 16-year-old to cook. The benefits get lost, and voters default to what is safe and easy. That's not something that is indomitable, but you have to actually have a focus to do it.

The mandatory voting law falls into that too. On the surface, it sounds extreme. But once you start parsing the message and using analogous requirements of other nations on their societies, it sounds a whole lot more reasonable. For example, France (although the program was scaled back significantly in 1996, Emmanuel Macron brought it back in 2018)[65] and Sweden

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[65] Zaretsky, Robert. "Emmanuel Macron Wants YOU for the French Army." Foreign Policy, The Slate Group, 21 Feb. 2018, foreignpolicy.com/2018/02/21/emmanuel-macron-wants-you-for-the-french-army/.

(which similarly reintroduced the program in 2017)[66] are among the many countries that require

mandatory military service, and even the United States requires males (and may expand to

females after the decision of a US District Court judge in Texas)[67] to register with the Selective

Service System.[68] Failure to do so means not only losing out on any hope of a government job or

student loan in the US, but also the possibility of up to five years in prison or a fine of up to

$250,000 (while they are not commonly enforced, those laws are still on the books).[69]

Canada requires little of its citizens. It requires that we obey its laws, respect each other,

and pay income tax. And when it comes to tax burden, we have one of the lowest of any

developed country, coming in 26th out of 34 OECD countries in a study produced in 2014,[70] and

well below not only the OECD average, but our peers, nations like the United States, United

Kingdom, France, Germany, and Australia. The country gives us a lot, too. It is one of the safest

countries in the world from threats both foreign and domestic, has an excellent literacy rate, has

one of the most highly educated populations of any country (second in tertiary education as of

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[66] "Sweden Re-Activates Conscription." Regeringskansliet, Government of Sweden, 2 Mar. 2017, www.government.se/articles/2017/03/re-activation-of-enrolment-and-the-conscription/.

[67] McIntyre, Jamie. "Selective Service Law Must Change after Court Rules Male-Only Draft Unconstitutional, Says Commission Chairman." Washington Examiner, Washington Examiner, 25 Feb. 2019, www.washingtonexaminer.com/policy/defense-national-security/selective-service-law-must-change-after-court-rules-male-only-draft-unconstitutional-says-commission-chairman.

[68] "Selective Service System > Home." Selective Service System, Selective Service System, www.sss.gov/.

[69] "Registration." Selective Service System-Benefits and Penalties, Selective Service System, www.sss.gov/Registration/Why-Register/Benefits-and-Penalties.

[70] "Tax Burdens on Labour Income Continue to Rise across the OECD." The OECD, Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 4 Nov. 2014, www.oecd.org/newsroom/tax-burdens-on-labour-income-continue-to-rise-across-the-oecd.htm.

2017, according to another OECD study),[71] provides healthcare that is among the best in the world, and offers half a continent worth of cultural experiences unmatched anywhere on Earth.

Considering all that Canada offers those within her borders and how little it asks in return, is it really that unreasonable to ask citizens to mark an X every four years? Or even to mark an X next to "None of the above", which should be an option to actually quantify discontent? When the proposed, and most logical, punishment for failing to do this (not for objecting on legitimate grounds like religious belief, which, as in most countries, should be covered in our system) would be a ticket that is analogous to a parking ticket in scope? This isn't a lot to ask. None of this is.

For a system that is meant to be an expression of the will of the people, it is of great importance that people are participating, to show support to the system and add to its legitimacy. That becomes even more important when you're talking about electing the people that make the rules. The people who can raise and lower your taxes, affect your services, send you to war or solve wars altogether, are the people we are talking about electing. Sure, a 90% voter turnout might mean more uninformed votes, but eventually, even those voters are going to have to take the system seriously. We must move the people to meet the system and the system to meet the people.

You can't force someone to care. But when you clearly lay out incontrovertible evidence as to why they should, it becomes very hard not to care. The evidence is there, and it's real. It is long past time that Canada mitigate the slowing heartbeat of its democracy. It is time to bring in the defibrillator.

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[71] "Education Attainment - Population with Tertiary Education - OECD Data." The OECD, Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, data.oecd.org/eduatt/population-with-tertiary-education.htm#indicator-chart.

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