



Electoral Commissioner

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters	
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Joint Standing Committee
on Electoral Matters
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Dear Ms Palmieri

INQUIRY INTO CIVICS AND ELECTORAL EDUCATION

I am writing in response to the letter on this matter addressed to me on 29 March 2006 by Mr Peter Lindsay MP, Chair of the Committee.

I am pleased to enclose the AEC's submission to the Inquiry.

Yours sincerely


Ian Campbell

9 June 2006

AUSTRALIAN ELECTORAL COMMISSION

**SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY BY THE JOINT
STANDING COMMITTEE ON ELECTORAL MATTERS
INTO CIVICS AND ELECTORAL EDUCATION**

9 June 2006

1. Introduction

1.1 On 29 March 2006, the Chair of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, Mr Peter Lindsay MP, wrote to the Electoral Commissioner, inviting the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) to make a submission to the Committee's inquiry into Civics and Electoral Education. This submission is provided in response to that invitation.

1.2 Since its creation in 1984, the AEC has been involved in various forms of support for or implementation of electoral education. It would be impracticable to seek to describe 22 years of activities in detail in this submission. Instead, the submission is organised around, and seeks to highlight key contemporary issues arising from, the following points of focus identified in the terms of reference for the inquiry (reordered slightly), namely:

- the nature of civics education and its links with electoral education;
- the role of the Australian Electoral Commission and State and Territory Electoral Commissions in promoting electoral education;
- the current status of young people's knowledge of, and responsibilities under, the Australian electoral system;
- the content and adequacy of electoral education in government and non-government school programs of study, as well as in TAFE colleges and universities;
- the school age at which electoral education should begin;
- the potential to increase electoral knowledge through outside school programs;
- the adequacy of electoral education in indigenous communities;
- the adequacy of electoral education of migrant citizens;
- the role of Federal, State and Local Governments in promoting electoral education;
- the access to, and adequacy of funding for, school visits to the Federal Parliament; and
- opportunities for introducing creative approaches to electoral education taking into account approaches used internationally and, in particular, in the United States, Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom and New Zealand.

1.3 The submission concludes with some broader observations on the challenges associated with motivating young people to become active participants in electoral processes.

1.4 In line with the AEC's statutory responsibilities as a federal agency, this submission (unless stated otherwise) does not address the activities or responsibilities of State or Territory electoral authorities. It is important, however, to emphasise that the existence of different electoral arrangements for different levels of government significantly complicates the task of conducting effective electoral education and information programs.

2. The nature of civics education and its links with electoral education

2.1 Terms such as "civics education", "voter education" and "voter information" are often used without being clearly defined. The distinctions between these terms are explored in some detail in the ACE online electoral encyclopedia (www.aceproject.org)¹, as follows:

"...some distinction needs to be made between voter information, voter education, and civic education. Certainly, each falls along a continuum of educational activities in support of elections and democracy and is mutually reinforcing. And it would be correct to assume that voter education, for example, should be one component of a broader civic education programme.

But the terms are not necessarily interchangeable and involve some nuanced differences in goals, audience, message, approach, timing, and/or institutional mandates. Briefly:

Basic Voter Information refers to basic information enabling qualified citizens to vote, including the date, time, and place of voting; the type of election; identification necessary to establish eligibility; registration requirements; and mechanisms for voting. These constitute basic facts about the election and do not require the explanation of concepts. Messages will be developed for each new election. These activities can usually be implemented quickly (although sufficient planning is still required). Election authorities are typically required to provide this type of information, although contestants in the election and civil society organizations will also do so.

Basic Voter Education typically addresses voters' motivation and preparedness to participate fully in elections. It pertains to relatively more complex types of information about voting and the electoral process and is concerned with concepts such as the link between basic human rights and voting rights; the role, responsibilities and rights of voters; the relationship between elections and democracy and the conditions necessary for democratic elections; secrecy of the ballot; why each vote is important and its impact on public accountability; and how votes translate into seats. Such concepts involve explanation, not just a statement of facts. Voter education requires more lead time for implementation than voter information and,

¹ The ACE ("Administration and Cost of Elections") Project has been jointly sponsored by seven partner organisations: Elections Canada, the Electoral Institute of Southern Africa, the Federal Electoral Institute of Mexico, IFES (formerly the International Foundation for Election Systems), the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, the United Nations Development Programme, and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs; with the University of Calgary as an "Associate Member".

ideally, should be undertaken on an on-going basis. This type of information is most often provided by election authorities and civil society organizations.

In societies where there have been major changes to electoral systems, processes, and procedures, and in the case of the newly enfranchised and first time voters, both voter information and voter education programmes will need to thoroughly address both facts and concepts.

Basic Civic Education deals with broader concepts underpinning a democratic society such as the respective roles and responsibilities of citizens, government, political and special interests, the mass media, and the business and non-profit sectors, as well as the significance of periodic and competitive elections. It emphasizes not only citizen awareness but citizen participation in all aspects of democratic society. Civic education is a continual process, not tied to the electoral cycle. Voter information and voter education, however, may be part of larger civic education endeavours. Civic education may be carried out through the school and university system, through civil society organizations, and perhaps by some state agencies, although not necessarily the election authority."

2.2 Over the past decade, civics education has become an important component of social education in Australian schools. In 1997 the Federal Government initiated the *Discovering Democracy* program, and at its base was the conviction that "civics and citizenship education" (CCE) is central to Australian education and the maintenance of a strong and vital citizenship, and that to be able to participate as active citizens, students need a thorough knowledge and understanding of Australia's democratic processes. In 1999 *The National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty First Century*, agreed to by all State and Territory Education Ministers, included an emphasis on educating students to understand their role in Australia's democracy. Since the *Discovering Democracy* initiative and the publication of *The National Goals*, all States and Territories have recognised that CCE is central to effective schooling and have incorporated CCE into both curriculum documents and school practices.

2.3 Within the national CCE context, basic electoral issues are introduced in years 5 and 6. This is done as part of the exploration of social systems and structures. Democratic processes, and the concepts of representation and participation, are encompassed specifically in this area. For years 7 to 10, *Study of Society and the Environment* (SOSE - a combination of history, geography and civics and citizenship) covers this content. In NSW, SOSE is referred to as HSIE - *Human Society and its Environment* - but the outcomes are essentially the same as those of SOSE.

2.4 In October 2004 year 6 and year 10 students in schools across Australia took part in the first national sample assessment of Civics and Citizenship. Further sample assessments of Civics and Citizenship will take place every three years. This project aimed to investigate what can be expected of late primary school and late compulsory schooling students in Civics and Citizenship. The AEC understands that a report on this work is yet to be released.

3. The role of the Australian Electoral Commission and State and Territory Electoral Commissions in promoting electoral education

3.1 The AEC being a statutory authority, its role is defined by the Parliament, and its functions are spelt out in section 7 of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*, which provides, among other things, that:

"(1) The functions of the Commission are:

...

(c) to promote public awareness of electoral and Parliamentary matters by means of the conduct of education and information programs and by other means; and

...

(f) to publish material on matters that relate to its functions;

(fa) to provide, in cases approved by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, assistance in matters relating to elections and referendums (including the secondment of personnel and the supply or loan of materiel) to authorities of foreign countries or to foreign organisations;

...

(2) The Commission may perform any of the functions referred to in paragraphs (1)(b) to (f) (inclusive) in conjunction with the electoral authorities of a State, of the Australian Capital Territory or of the Northern Territory.

(3) The Commission may do all things necessary or convenient to be done for or in connection with the performance of its functions."

Section 5 of the Act specifies that:

"**electoral matters**" means matters relating to Parliamentary elections, elections and ballots under the *Workplace Relations Act 1996* and referendums."

and

"**Parliamentary matters**" includes matters relating to the role and functions of the Parliament."

3.2 The AEC's function of promoting public awareness of "electoral matters" was explicitly included in the Act from 1984, and appears to provide ample authorisation for the AEC to engage in "voter information" and "voter education" as defined in paragraph 2.1 above. It is much more doubtful, however, whether "civic education" (as defined there) falls within the AEC's mandate. For that reason the AEC, while not questioning the importance of civics education, has tended to proceed with caution in becoming involved in it, seeking to play a supportive rather than leading role.

Major AEC activities

3.3 Prior to the early 1980s the then Australian Electoral Office undertook very limited activities that could be described as electoral or civics education. Some publications were produced, as was an early schools resource kit. There were also some uncoordinated and largely unrecorded visits to schools by State Office and Divisional Office staff.

3.4 Following the explicit conferring of an education function on the newly-created AEC, a kit was developed for divisional staff to use in school presentations, and a round of training for Divisional Returning Officers (DROs) was provided. This took place in 1985 and 1986. Shortly thereafter activity levels settled around annual totals of participants of the order of 12,000 to 18,000.

3.5 During the late 1980s the AEC engaged in the production of a substantial resource - *People Power* - which was provided to secondary schools nationally. Its development was a major undertaking, which involved, among other things, the production of four videos, a series of booklets, teaching aids, posters, and enlarged photographs. Due to the complexity and scope of the materials the AEC has not, in the past, had the resources available to revise the kit, which is now out of date.

3.6 The first AEC Electoral Education Centre (EEC), in Canberra, was opened in 1987. Numbers of students visiting the Centre rapidly rose to over 50,000 per year, and have increased ever since. The work of the Canberra EEC has been configured in close cooperation with the Parliamentary Education Office (PEO); it was agreed early on that the EEC would cover the process of electing a representative, and electoral issues generally, while the PEO would cover what happens when a representative gets to Parliament, and parliamentary processes generally. Nearly all PEO activities are focussed on parliamentary rather than electoral matters, and most students who visit the Canberra EEC then attend a PEO session at Parliament House. Over the years several joint professional development activities have been undertaken with the PEO.

3.7 During the late 1980s and early 1990s, consideration was given to opening EECs in Melbourne and Brisbane. The Melbourne EEC opened in 1991, while, for a range of reasons including funding constraints, the Brisbane EEC did not go ahead. In 1992, the State Electoral Commission in Western Australia opened an EEC, with the AEC providing a small amount of funding, resources and equipment each year.

3.8 In early 1992 the AEC reviewed its priorities in electoral education, and decided to concentrate on three areas: improving DRO school visits, continuing support for the EECs, and significant support for curriculum and teacher professional development.

- In relation to school visits, over the succeeding three years, new resources were developed, DROs were provided with two days of "classroom skills" training, AEC State Managers were strongly encouraged to give more priority to DRO school visits, and national reporting requirements were increased. This had the effect of raising participant numbers from 12,000 in 1991-92 to

100,000 in 1994-95. Continuing initiatives to support school visits have included a national working party, further development of resources, a peer support network, and additional "classroom skills" training in some States. In 2004-05, AEC officers conducted more than 1400 school and community visits program sessions, involving over 91,000 participants.

- Through the mid 90s, the Canberra and Melbourne EECs continued to operate, but it became obvious that the Melbourne EEC, located in what was then the AEC's storage facility in South Melbourne, was too small, out of the way, and not conducive to attracting clients. In 1997, a new Melbourne EEC was opened in the city's central business district. It made increased use of new technology and displays which, accompanied by intensive marketing, had an immediate effect on participant numbers, which rose from 14,000 in 1996-97 to 27,000 in 1997-98.
- In 1998, an EEC was opened in Adelaide. In 2001, following a successful bid for a Federation Fund grant, a new Canberra EEC was opened in the Old Parliament House. As part of the new Centre a public display area and theatre were also built. In 2004-05, 108,000 visitors participated in the educational programs run by the EECs. Despite the ages of some of the centres, feedback from participants about their experience and learning outcomes has continued to be extremely positive. The AEC intends to build on this goodwill and positive experience in the future development of each of the Centres.
- In support of teacher professional development a national working party of curriculum consultants was formed in 1992 with the aim of developing activities and resources. The end result was the *Your Vote Counts* one-day workshops for practising teachers, and the *Teachers Resource Folder*. Originally, the *Your Vote Counts* program was designed as a full-day course and schools were funded by the AEC to engage relief teachers to cover the participants' absence. Funding for teacher relief ceased in 2000-01 making this group difficult to access for full-day courses. In response, the AEC created an abridged two-hour session to present mainly to pre-service educators through the university system. By the end of this financial year, the AEC will have conducted 54 sessions with almost 1600 participants. This represents an increase from 1350 participants in 2004-05. The AEC is also invited to conferences and workshops to present this abridged version to qualified teachers, but the majority of work is done through the university system.

3.9 During the development of the *Discovering Democracy* program, the AEC provided expert input to and feedback on the materials being developed. The AEC also attended *Discovering Democracy* meetings and activities with the aim of providing teacher professional development in electoral education as part of the national *Discovering Democracy* professional development project. With the AEC's "core educational business" now clearly reflected in the CCE outcomes prescribed in all State and Territory social education curricula, teachers are increasingly looking to the AEC to provide specialist electoral education resources. One of the central resources for educators, the *Electoral Educator Resource for Primary and*

Secondary Schools in Australia is being redeveloped with a major interactive component included. It is expected that this resource will be available in schools in early 2007. Another core AEC resource for teachers is the *Every Vote Counts* video and teaching notes. The video has been specifically designed in short segments for classroom use, and the accompanying teaching notes give primary and secondary educators ideas for discussion, classroom activities, and web based research; as well as a glossary of electoral terms. The AEC believes that these materials taken together will constitute a valuable resource for individual schools and teachers. That having been said, the extent to which they will be drawn upon is beyond the AEC's control and difficult to predict.

3.10 The AEC has also supported civic and electoral education overseas as an element of the international assistance it provides pursuant to paragraph 7(1)(fa) of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*. In particular, the highly-regarded BRIDGE ("Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections") Electoral Administrators' Course has been developed as a major AEC initiative in cooperation with the United Nations Electoral Assistance Division and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. To date some 72 courses using BRIDGE curriculum materials have been conducted in 20 countries, in cooperation with a range of implementing partners. BRIDGE Version 1 has been fully translated into Bahasa Indonesia, and parts of the curriculum materials have been translated into Russian, Tetum, Arabic, French, Portuguese, Georgian, and Dari & Pashto. Detailed information about the course is available at www.bridge-project.org. BRIDGE includes a full module on "Public Outreach", and this was used as a building block for the extremely successful AusAID-funded Village Level Civic Education Programme implemented in the run-up to the recent national election in the Solomon Islands.

Activities of the State and Territory Electoral Commissions

3.11 With the exception of the State Electoral Office in New South Wales, all of the AEC's State and Territory counterparts are mandated by legislation (though in terms which vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction) to undertake some form of electoral education. This reflects a strong consensus that election management bodies are well placed to perform such a function. The AEC sees real benefit in working cooperatively with its counterparts on electoral education, and over the years has made considerable efforts to do so, not least because it is important to ensure that the differences between voting procedures at federal and State/Territory elections, which have been shown to have the potential to cause confusion for voters, are clearly explained. The AEC has in the past had Memorandums of Understanding setting out cooperative arrangements with the Electoral Commissions in Victoria, the Northern Territory and South Australia.

4. The current status of young people's knowledge of, and responsibilities under, the Australian electoral system

Responsibilities

4.1 The major responsibility which the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* places on young people is to enrol and vote. For those over 18, this is the same as for the general populace. There are some variations from State to State: in South Australia, for example, initial enrolment is not compulsory, but once enrolled an elector is required to update his or her enrolment details. These variations are summarised on the website of the Electoral Council of Australia (www.eca.gov.au).

4.2 A person who is 17 years of age is also entitled, though not obliged, to claim "age 17 enrolment", but will only appear on the certified list for an election if he or she will be at least 18 years old on polling day. All State and Territory electoral laws make similar provision for age 17 enrolment.

4.3 There is ample evidence that young people are not meeting to the same extent as older Australians their responsibility to enrol. Recent AEC Annual Reports identify as a target that 95% of eligible people should be enrolled for the correct division. One factor which makes a 95% target reasonable is that the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* enables a person who has changed address to lodge the electoral enrolment form notifying that change up to seven weeks after moving: this means that in any seven-week period there would be significant numbers of people "waiting" to enrol at their new addresses. The target is being met for the population as a whole, but not for people aged 18 to 25.

4.4 Results of a periodic AEC review of a sample of the electoral roll known as "sample audit fieldwork" indicated that in March 2005, approximately 96.3% of the eligible population was enrolled for the correct electoral division. This figure matches a finding of the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO), which found that for the 2001 federal election, the electoral roll was 96% accurate and likely to be 95% complete. Sample audit fieldwork conducted by the AEC in 2004 indicates enrolment participation (i.e. the overall percentage enrolled but not necessarily for the correct Division) at 97.69%, enrolment completeness (i.e. percentage enrolled for the correct electoral division) at 95.18% and overall roll accuracy at 89.51%.

4.5 Enrolment levels of Australians aged 18 to 25 are well below 95%. The AEC's 2004-5 Annual Report flagged this as follows:

"The estimated participation by those eligible in the 18-25 year-old age group at 30 June 2005 was 81.4%, also showing an increase compared with 79.6% at 30 June 2004. The AEC continued to discuss the methods used to derive these figures with the ABS."

4.6 This work with the ABS has continued to be refined and the AEC is able to provide a revised breakdown of the participation rate for young people as at 30 June 2004. The participation rate projects the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) demographic estimates for 2003 forward to 2004, and adjustments are made for

known factors such as deaths. However the proportion of young people enrolled as calculated here is an estimate. Measuring roll-related statistics is problematic for the AEC as there is no single list of persons entitled to be enrolled, for example, a register of Australian citizens (whether born or naturalised), against which electoral rolls can be compared. As such all measurement attempts must rely on methods that are an approximation only and are dependent on the input data, the assumptions made and the formulae used. Therefore the AEC adjusts ABS data for:

- non-citizen residents included in the count (removed)
- residents temporarily overseas (removed)
- eligible overseas electors (added)
- enrolled "British Subjects" (added)
- persons of unsound mind (removed)
- prisoners (removed).

4.7 For all of these components the AEC uses the best available data but it cannot be precise. For example, "persons of unsound mind" relates to those people who have provided medical certificates as required by the legislation and have been removed from the roll. The AEC has investigated the issue of the true number of Australians who can be classed as of "unsound mind" without finding an authoritative figure. The AEC will be continuing to further refine the formulae used to revise the ABS estimate of the eligible population, and the data that populate the formulae, in order to be satisfied that the estimate best reflects reality. Therefore, estimates of the participation rate need to be approached with significant caution.

4.8 The 30 June 2004 figures show that the overall estimated participation rate for 18 to 25 year olds of 81.06% is well below the overall 95% target for the whole population. While there are some minor fluctuations, there is a generally rising trend from a low of 58.29% for 18 year-olds to 89.08% for 25 year olds, as the following table shows.

Age	Revised ABS estimate of eligible population	Actual federal enrolment	Participation rate as % of ABS Estimate
18 year olds	261,927	152,687	58.29
19 year olds	261,373	194,559	74.44
20 year olds	256,903	209,751	81.65
21 year olds	256,157	220,421	86.05
22 year olds	249,831	213,768	85.57
23 year olds	243,892	212,112	86.97
24 year olds	236,210	209,773	88.81
25 year olds	232,427	207,042	89.08
Overall 18-25 year old cohort	1,998,720	1,620,113	81.06

Knowledge

4.9 The pattern of relatively lower levels of enrolment among young people is a long standing one. In September 1983, the then Australian Electoral Office, in its research report entitled *A quantitative assessment of electoral enrolment in Australia*, cited survey figures showing that 30.98% of persons born in Australia or the UK and aged 18 or 19 were not enrolled. The complementary research report entitled *A qualitative analysis of attitudes towards enrolment and voting* stated, on the basis of focus group analysis, that :

"The single most important reason why young people fail to register to vote is because they do not see any direct link between the Government or Government institutions and their own lives. They become apathetic and will not take the steps necessary to become enrolled."

4.10 Against this background, the AEC some years ago initiated a major Youth Electoral Study (YES), a joint project being funded by the AEC and the Australian Research Council and conducted by the Australian National University, the University of Sydney and the AEC. The Study commenced in May 2003 and will run nationally for four years. To date, two reports have been released and an academic seminar held in June 2005. Copies of the reports are at Annexes I and II to this Submission.

4.11 The study is a longitudinal one of young people aged 17-24 to identify attitudes and behaviours towards enrolment, voting and democratic engagement. The main purpose of the study has been to determine why many young people do not enrol and vote, and the impact of disengaged youth on Australian democracy. The study focuses on the links between pro-voting behaviour and family, school and other social and psychological variables. The findings have been used by the AEC to re-focus public awareness target groups, to refine existing educational resources and to develop new ones.

4.12 The second YES project report has shown that the experiences of young adults in secondary school can crucially influence the kind of politically aware and active citizens they become as mature adults. The findings of that report reinforce the AEC's decision taken in 2002 to focus education resources more directly on senior secondary schools so as to target young people when they are closer to enrolment and voting age.

4.13 An issue of ongoing significance is why the estimated 81% of eligible people aged 18 to 25 who are enrolled have done so: was it because of AEC initiatives such as our school and community visits program; because their parents or teachers encouraged them to enrol; because they were stimulated to enrol by activities such as those pursued by the State Electoral Commissions; or, as some of the YES Project research suggests, because "it is the right thing to do"? A cognate question is whether those who have failed to enrol owe that failure to ignorance of their responsibilities, or to a disinclination to meet them. The AEC is researching these matters at the moment.

5. The content and adequacy of electoral education in government and non-government school programs of study, as well as in TAFE colleges and universities

5.1 The four EECs (in Canberra, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth) run by Australian electoral authorities service school groups from both the government and non-government sectors. The professional development provided by the AEC for teachers also spans both government and non-government schools. It can be assumed these groups come to the Centres and attend professional development to increase their capacity to achieve their SOSE/HSIE curriculum outcomes. Subject to the availability of the necessary resources, the AEC stands ready to provide input to the relevant educational authorities to help ensure the quality of electoral education provided in schools.

5.2 While Civics and Citizenship is part of all Social Education curricula in Australian schools, the AEC is not in a position to identify the level of contact that citizens have with electoral education beyond the formal compulsory school system. The tertiary sector is a broad and diverse area of the education sector, and the specialised nature of tertiary courses would make it very difficult to seek inclusion of electoral education elements in any comprehensive way. Electoral issues are of course often addressed in Political Science courses, and more recently Griffith University has offered graduate level courses in electoral governance. The content and emphasis of such courses could be expected to vary considerably across institutions.

5.3 It is a matter of concern to the AEC that there appears in most States and Territories to be a significant time lag between the point at which students encounter CCE, and the point at which they become eligible to enrol and later vote. This time lag cannot but decrease the salience for the students of messages encouraging their participation in elections; particularly given that the "electoral" component of the CCE curriculum is but one element of a substantial body of learning. One way of addressing this problem, in the AEC's view, would be the development of an "electoral education" course unit - not necessarily requiring more than two one-hour classes - which could be delivered to year 11 students (most of whom would be turning 17 close to the time at which they took part in the classes). The content of such a unit would need to reflect the distinctive electoral arrangements in each State and Territory. If the Committee supports this suggestion, the AEC could seek to pursue it in consultation with its State and Territory counterparts, and with the relevant educational authorities.

6. The school age at which electoral education should begin

6.1 The AEC is not in a position to offer an opinion on this issue. Decisions on the points in the educational process at which different types of curriculum content should be introduced need to be made on the basis of expert pedagogical advice on which the relevant educational authorities no doubt have views. However, AEC staff have consistently reported over the years that children in the later years of primary school are much easier to engage and more interested in electoral information than

senior secondary students. This may be exacerbated by the fact that very few of the AEC's divisional staff are trained educators and the problem with engaging senior secondary students is an ongoing one for the AEC.

7. The potential to increase electoral knowledge through outside school programs

7.1 The AEC would see value in making programs of adult education on electoral matters more widely available. While many citizens may be content to operate on the basis of the minimum necessary level of knowledge of electoral processes, it is important that those who are keen to achieve a greater level of civic engagement not be restricted in their capacity to do so by the availability of only limited information on the processes in which they are interested (and to which they are, hopefully, committed). The establishment of such programs would send a strong message that electoral learning is a life-time commitment, not just something that is to be done at school and never again.

7.2 The challenge here is one of resources. The AEC has a network of 150 divisions throughout Australia, and with adequate funding and resources, including appropriate skills, it would be possible to expand the AEC's School and Community Visits Program to cater for outside school programs. There is, however, only so much that can be done "face to face" by a relatively small number of permanent staff with other responsibilities who do not necessarily have expertise in this field. One option which the AEC believes is worthy of consideration would be the involvement in the delivery of adult programs between elections of those who work as polling staff at election time - many of whom are teachers, and/or well respected members of their local communities, who demonstrate through their work as polling officials a personal commitment to the success of the election process.

7.3 The potential client groups for adult programs of any type represent a very diverse snapshot of the community, ranging from indigenous and migrant communities (whose needs are discussed in more detail below) to professional clubs, to groups of people who are seen as socially marginalised (for example, adults with limited literacy skills who might not fully appreciate the opportunity which the law gives them to enrol and vote with assistance). Each group could be expected to have different interests, and different resources might be required to meet each one's needs. (A professional club, for example, might be able to be helped by making available, through the internet resources to enable a club member to provide a presentation on, say, preferential voting; whereas a migrant group might need a face-to-face meeting with a person with appropriate language skills.) The development of a comprehensive plan for the rollout of adult electoral education programs would require detailed analysis of the needs of potential client groups, the resources required to meet those needs, and the relative costs and benefits of different approaches which could be taken.

7.4 In 2005-06, Victorian divisions with high culturally and linguistically diverse populations have been making efforts to increase electoral awareness in communities by offering to conduct information sessions and provide printed materials in community languages about electoral activities. This has involved

writing to all such groups within a Division to make initial contact, and enclosing enrolment forms and translated pamphlets. The response rate to these contacts and to follow up letters has been very disappointing. In one example, there was a nil response to 41 letters and 38 follow-up letters. Subsequently, one enrolment form was submitted as part of this exercise. Divisional Offices are aware that it is often the case that follow-up contact needs to be made with community groups. There can, however, be difficulties in reaching the right people with letters, phone calls and personal visits in cases where organisations are staffed by volunteers who have considerable demands placed upon their time.

8. The adequacy of electoral education in indigenous communities

8.1 From the late 1970s to the early 1980s the then Australian Electoral Office operated the Aboriginal Electoral Education Program, which provided remote area electoral education and enrolment services. This program evolved into the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Electoral Information Service (ATSIEIS), which was the key mechanism for the delivery of electoral services to indigenous clients until 1996. Between 15 to 20 field staff were employed to assist indigenous people to develop an understanding of the electoral process, update enrolments and assist with remote mobile polling. The 1991 Report by the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters on the *Aboriginal and Islander Electoral Information Service* complimented the program's achievements but expressed concern about its focus on remote populations, claiming it was not catering for the majority of the indigenous population who lived in more urban areas. The program was subsequently expanded to cover a broader geographical area, including urban locations. Funding was discontinued for the ATSIEIS program in the 1996-97 federal budget.

8.2 In the past, ATSIC elections were an influential mechanism for engaging the interest of indigenous people in enrolment and for promoting awareness about voting. The elections also enabled the AEC to access funding to conduct enrolment update and public awareness exercises specifically for indigenous people.

8.3 The Australian National Audit Office's Report 2001-2002 on the *Integrity of the Electoral Roll - Australian Electoral Commission* recommended that the AEC

“focus its enrolment efforts on the completeness aspect of the electoral roll by:

- identifying groups where non-enrolment is most prevalent; and
- developing effective strategies to improve enrolment of these groups.”

8.4 The AEC recognises that factors such as literacy levels, school retention rates, health and social conditions as well as the general remoteness of communities impact on enrolment levels as well as electoral awareness and knowledge amongst indigenous communities. As a consequence indigenous Australians remain under represented on the electoral roll and have voter participation rates well below the national average.

8.5 To try to counter this, the AEC conducts a specific program for indigenous communities in the lead up to federal elections. The program is called the Community Electoral Information Officer (CEIO) program. Prior to the 2004 election, the AEC conducted the following public awareness activities for indigenous electors.

- 22 CEIOs visited over 600 indigenous communities and organisations, encouraging enrolment and conducting public awareness sessions.
- An 8-minute long video on enrolling and voting – *Vote, It's Important* – together with a brochure reinforcing the messages contained in the video, was distributed to communities and organisations via CEIOs and AEC State and Divisional Office contacts.
- A variety of printed materials, also with the "Vote, It's Important" theme, were distributed to indigenous communities and organisations via CEIOs and AEC State and Divisional Office contacts. Posters were also inserted in 4 editions of the *Koori Mail*.
- Six "infomercials" on enrolling and voting were included in the *Beyond their Limits* television program on Imparja Television (broadcast from Alice Springs, NT).

8.6 Since the 2004 Federal Election, the AEC has been investigating ways to improve its service to indigenous Australians. As a first step, the AEC is developing a North & Central Australia Regional Electoral Strategy that will cover both public awareness and enrolment activities and is designed to increase electoral knowledge and improve the accuracy of the electoral roll in remote areas of Australia. This may include the expansion of remote mobile polling services and greater community involvement in delivering electoral services and voter education. The strategy will also examine the transient nature of remote indigenous electors to ensure that electoral services accommodate the needs of these electors.

8.7 In the Northern Territory over 30% of the population consists of people who are indigenous and are therefore identified as a target group for electoral education and public awareness activities. Indigenous voters are also significant audiences in the geographically large States (Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia), and education and information programs are combined with enrolment activities to reach these audiences.

8.8 The AEC's Northern Territory office has three field officers whose responsibilities, among other duties, include public awareness activity in specific geographical regions. Field officers utilise indigenous interpreters to assist in delivering the electoral message and, in line with NT operational policy, these field officers explain the obligation an elector undertakes by signing an enrolment form. These sessions take some time to deliver, but mean that indigenous people enrolling on remote communities do so with an understanding of their obligations by law to vote at federal, NT and local government elections.

8.9 Typically electoral education sessions for indigenous clients are delivered at the point of enrolment, in face-to-face sessions with individuals or small groups. The content focuses on the obligation of electors to enrol and vote; the mechanics of completing House of Representatives and Senate ballot papers; the system of voting for candidates by electorate and how this translates into an elected Federal and NTLA government (majority); and the importance and value of voting.

8.10 The AEC attends a number of annual indigenous festivals and sporting carnivals to provide enrolment, voting and electoral education information. AEC staff in several States and Territories deliver education sessions at the annual CROC Festivals, a civics related event, attended by remote young people (a significant percentage of whom are indigenous).

8.11 The AEC also works closely with the Northern Territory Electoral Commission in the conduct of electoral education for indigenous community government elections. These events are seen as key opportunities for consolidating public awareness and electoral education activities, and the programs involve attending local council meetings to explain the electoral process. Topics covered in these sessions include representation, types of voting, the electoral roll, ballot papers and the principle of the secret ballot.

8.12 In urban areas of the Northern Territory the AEC has arrangements with indigenous representative organisations. The delivery of electoral education to urban indigenous people is co-ordinated within these partnerships, using interpreters from these organisations to assist with delivery of the sessions.

8.13 The AEC is collaborating with Centrelink to trial a call centre service using Centrelink's specialist indigenous call centre. The AEC/Centrelink call centre trial will operate for three months (May through August 2006). The success of the trial in meeting its objectives will be measured in terms of the number of customers reached and the number of enrolment forms processed. The longer term objective is also to increase awareness of the Australian electoral system amongst remote indigenous communities.

8.14 The trial will involve call centre information and support services to the selected Aboriginal communities of Galiwinku and Lajamanu. Callers from these communities will be identified using telephony "screen pop" technology, alerting the trained Customer Service Operators (CSOs) from the Palmerston Call Centre in the NT, that they are part of the trial. CSOs will complete the Centrelink business transaction and then prior to finalising the call, will ask the caller whether they can assist them with information on electoral matters or help them update their enrolment. In situations where a caller wants to change their electoral enrolment details, the CSO will complete the relevant information on an AEC form. This form will then be faxed to the relevant Community Agent. Once the form is received by the Agent, they will be required to witness the customer signing the enrolment form and sending the completed form back to the AEC via reply paid mail.

8.15 A two-year project has commenced in North East Arnhem Land (NT) to ensure community ownership of mobile polling, education and enrolment strategies

for the indigenous communities within the region in an effort to improve participation in the electoral process and encourage enrolment.

8.16 For the next federal election, the AEC is planning a CEIO program throughout remote areas of Australia similar to that conducted in 2004. With the changes to the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*, most importantly the proof of identity requirements, the AEC will consider commencing the program earlier in the year than was the case in 2004. The 'Proof of Identity' enrolment provisions will significantly impact on any enrolment drives associated with the program. Public awareness resources that have been developed for indigenous communities will have to be reworked to incorporate the new legislation.

8.17 In South Australia, a network of one stop shops for remote indigenous community services know as the "PYKu Network" (Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjaraku) is being established, auspiced by COAG. This network will bring together a range of resources, services and funding from government and non government organisations to deliver improved services to indigenous people in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands. The AEC has negotiated with the PYKu network to promote awareness of, and to facilitate electoral enrolment, and to assist with electoral roll review activities.

9. The adequacy of electoral education of migrant citizens

9.1 The AEC recognises that for new citizens, whether or not they are proficient in English, learning about a new electoral system is quite difficult; and for some, an Australian election could represent their first experience of voting. The AEC's work to assist migrant citizens in exercising their rights and meeting their responsibilities is illuminated by the AEC's research on factors which correlate with the informal vote: this has been published on the AEC website and provided to the Committee, and need not be reprised in this submission.

9.2 The AEC has some translated materials available on its website and is in the process of producing a series of DVDs explaining the federal electoral system. AEC staff have conducted some public awareness activities with adult education institutions that run citizenship courses and with some "English as a second language" courses. The AEC has worked with the Victorian Electoral Commission and the (Victorian) Centre for Adult Education to develop an electoral education package for adult students undertaking literacy and numeracy studies.

9.3 The AEC is keen to see more information about Australia's electoral systems provided to people contemplating citizenship, and included as content in citizenship courses run by various adult education institutions. The AEC will need to work with the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs to progress this and will need to enhance links with adult education providers.

9.4 The AEC conducts specific election activities for new citizens and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. These activities are around voting services and formal voting information. Election advertising in various languages has been developed for radio and press, and translated television advertising has

been screened on SBS. Information sessions have been conducted with community leaders in New South Wales, and multilingual information on enrolling and voting has been distributed to targeted households and through multicultural associations in New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia. On election day in 2004, and at the Werriwa by-election, multilingual videos were played and multilingual posters were displayed in designated polling places in New South Wales and South Australia.

9.5 The scale of the challenge faced by public authorities in dealing with the considerable diversity (especially linguistic diversity) of modern Australian society needs to be emphasised: an AEC Divisional Office may well find itself dealing with a voter population in which dozens if not hundreds of languages are spoken. To identify areas in which AEC staff should target education/information services at the next election, the AEC has developed a table, by polling place, identifying the languages likely to be spoken by voters there. This information will also be useful for the recruitment of polling staff. The data tables also indicate self-assessed proficiencies in speaking English, by language and by Division. The information is an amalgamation of data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2001 Census of Population and Housing and AEC data captured from the 2004 election. Additional research is underway with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to determine their levels of knowledge about electoral issues and to provide guidance to the AEC on how best to present information on a range of electoral issues.

10. The role of Federal, State and Local Governments in promoting electoral education

10.1 Federal, State and Territory governments have provided significant support for electoral education in the past by funding their electoral authorities to undertake activities in the area. To the best of the AEC's knowledge, the involvement of local government authorities in electoral education has been much more sporadic. This is an area in which the AEC sees the potential for closer collaboration. In particular, if the AEC were to become more involved in adult education activities of the type discussed at paragraphs 7.1 to 7.3 above, there would seem to be the potential to work in cooperation with appropriate community development officers, many of whom are attached to local government bodies. As local government bodies operate under State and Territory laws, such cooperation would also require support from the relevant State or Territory authorities.

11. The access to, and adequacy of funding for, school visits to the Federal Parliament

11.1 This issue falls beyond the AEC's mandate, and is not one on which the AEC can offer any opinion.

12. Opportunities for introducing creative approaches to electoral education taking into account approaches used internationally and, in particular, in the United States, Canada, Germany, United Kingdom and New Zealand

12.1 As the need and demand for electoral education is a universal one in both developing and established democracies, creative approaches will always be being pursued throughout the world, and the potential will therefore always exist for bodies active in the field to learn from each other. At the same time, materials will invariably have to be crafted to reflect the specific electoral circumstances of the country in which they are to be used. The AEC's experience in implementing international programs has been that they proceed most effectively when designed by people who are thoroughly steeped in the culture of the country. The same is likely to be true for programs to be used in Australia; it is self-evident for example, that such programs must take account of the distinctive aspects of Australia's electoral arrangements, such as compulsory enrolment and voting, and preferential voting.

12.2 The AEC therefore looks to other countries not for resources or models which could be adopted unchanged for use in Australia, but rather for ideas and approaches which could be factored into local development work. In that context, the AEC has recently reviewed information and education materials from New Zealand, Canada and the United Kingdom. A sense of the range of resources now available can be gained from the list of websites at Annex III, some of which are drawn from the ACE Project, "that provide non-partisan information, materials - and links to other organisations - in the fields of civic education, democracy building and governance".

13. Challenges associated with motivating young people to become active participants in electoral processes

13.1 It is important to emphasise that the disproportionately low level of engagement of young people in electoral processes is a world-wide phenomenon. As noted at paragraph 4.9 above, the problem was identified in Australia in research commissioned by the then Australian Electoral Office as long ago as 1983. A number of cross-national studies have been undertaken on the subject by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), an international organisation of which Australia was a founding member state. In the Institute's 2002 publication entitled *Voter Turnout since 1945: A Global Report*, a specific chapter on "Youth Voter Turnout" included the following observations.

"Low levels of youth participation are apparent not only in developed democracies but also in emerging democracies, for example an analysis of South Africa's voters' roll revealed that registration for the 1999 election decreased noticeably with age. Those citizens 80 years or older demonstrated the highest rate of registration at 97 percent of potential voters, and the lowest was among first-time voters aged 18 to 20 where not even 50 percent of those eligible registered to vote. As with many other countries, participation rates in the June 1999 election were not disaggregated by age or gender.

However, given the low rate of registration by eligible young people, it is likely that turnout among potential first-time voters was well below 50 percent. However, it should not be concluded that age is the only variable that accounts for low voter turnout. Research has established that turnout is affected by a number of other factors, some relating to the individual micro-level (income, education, interest in politics) and others to the macro-level of the political system (the party system, the electoral system, election procedures). A multi-continental study commissioned by International IDEA (Lagos and Rose, 1999) attempted to assess the extent of young people's political involvement and how their outlook differed from that of older people. Their findings demonstrate that, while older people are more likely to vote than younger people, age is only one variable (albeit important) that affects participation in the political process. Prosperity and education also show a positive correlation with democratic involvement. These conclusions are substantiated by research in other countries, for example the MORI Omnibus survey in Britain found that respondents who were unemployed or living on low incomes were less likely to be politically active than respondents with average or above-average incomes The cumulative effects of age, class and income seemingly influence patterns of political participation.

Macro-level explanations, focusing on institutions and the political environment, go even further in accounting for low turnout among young people. The International IDEA study, Youth Voter Participation highlights a number of factors that may affect participation:

- the nature of the electoral system and whether all votes are seen to have equal weighting in the final result;
- the registration system, if automatic or compulsory, facilitates higher voter turnout;
- the frequency of elections is another factor, as "voter fatigue" increases with the number of elections;
- the competitiveness of elections and the number of parties contesting them may also influence voting patterns. Highly competitive contests tend to increase interest and turnout; and
- Countries with compulsory voting, like Australia, have higher levels of turnout (International IDEA, 1999, 31 - 32).

In 1999, one hundred young people participated in the annual International IDEA Democracy Forum "*What's So Great about Democracy? The Youth Speak Up!*". Key discussions centred on the future of democracy and the challenges and opportunities that confront young people. Participants noted several factors affecting youth participation in politics, from "not understanding how the system works, to a growing distrust of political institutions and leaders, to a lack of time in today's competitive environment". They also emphasized that they are not apathetic about politics but rather that they feel alienated from traditional political processes and are not convinced their participation can make a difference.

Some participants said that they lacked confidence in the system and its leaders and felt that politicians only appeal to them during elections. "This

gap between those who govern and those being governed seems to be getting wider and appears to be a fundamental reason for low participation." Other reasons cited include lack of interest and disillusionment with the political and electoral system, doubts about the effectiveness of their votes, complaints about corruption in politics, and that they were not informed about where or how to vote (International IDEA 1999c, 8, 33). It is also possible that young people take time to develop an interest in politics, as they lack experience with political matters and are less socially and politically integrated.

While traditional party politics may be unappealing to many, this is not to say that young people are not politically active. They are interested in specific issues, such as education, the environment and health care, and are consequently joining interest groups, non-governmental organizations or other associations that address their specific concerns. In turn, they are finding new ways to express themselves politically. However, in order to draw young people into the electoral process, different strategies may be considered:

- *Make it easier to register to vote:* In most countries, registration is a prerequisite for voting. It is therefore strategic to encourage young people to register, through public information campaigns, school visits, information displays, by placing registration facilities in places frequented by young people or by making registration available over the Internet.
- *Facilitate easy voting:* By making voting procedures simple and accessible and by disseminating information widely, young people may be more encouraged to participate.
- *Lower the voting age:* Although considered somewhat controversial, this is one way to encourage the early politicisation of young people as participants in democracy. Minimum voting ages vary from 15 to 21 years, but 18 years is the most common worldwide.
- *Support preparatory exercises like mock elections:* This allows first-time voters to explore the practical workings of electoral procedures (International IDEA, 1999, 42- 56)."

The IDEA report is but one contribution to a large and growing international literature on the subject.

13.2 While every country's circumstances are distinctive, it is notable that a number of IDEA's observations resonate with findings in the YES project reports. In particular, it is clear that the issue of disproportionately low youth involvement in electoral processes has deeper roots than simple ignorance of the type which might be addressed by more and better educational activities. In this context, the well-known decline in political party membership over time in Australia may well also point to a broader disengagement on the part of the populace from the more traditional forms of political activity - which adds to the problem of stimulating electoral engagement.

13.3 The possible strategies identified by IDEA for drawing young people into the electoral process represent a challenge to traditional thinking about how elections should be conducted in Australia. At present, our processes are still, as far as potential enrollees or voters are concerned, very much paper-based, reflecting legislated requirements both federally and at the State and Territory levels. The problem with this is that as electronic transactions become ever more pervasive in society - being increasingly seen as fast, convenient, secure and, indeed, the standard way of interacting with the administrative organs of government - traditional electoral processes may come to be seen as ever-more antiquated and unappealing, particularly to those young people who see themselves as being at the vanguard of the adoption of new technologies.

13.4 Statistics relating to pre-poll voting in Australia give some sense of the potential voter response to the availability of processes which better meet their expectations: the proportion of electors taking advantage of declaration voting is increasing significantly. At the 1993 election 12.26% of all votes cast were declaration votes (absent, postal, pre-poll and provisional votes). By the 2004 election, the proportion of declaration votes had increased to 19.37% of all votes cast (and this represented a 59.62% increase over the number of declaration votes cast in 1993). The most dramatic increase occurred with pre-poll and postal votes, which increased by 99.59 per cent and 95.85 per cent respectively over the eleven-year period. These figures represent a significant trend towards early voting, which is increasingly convenient for electors whose work and lifestyle make attendance voting on a Saturday difficult. But at the same time, early voting relies on attendance at a pre-poll voting centre, itself not always convenient, or a postal system that may not always be timely. It also still requires a comprehension of old fashioned "systems" that may be losing their relevance for younger electors, many of whom now have little experience of completing forms but are highly literate with, and have high expectations of, new communications technologies.

13.5 These points highlight the potential for new technologies (for example the Internet, SMS text messaging and other innovations only now being researched and developed) to revolutionise the way in which enrolment and voting take place. If the potential electoral uses of new technology are not properly taken into account, the electoral system runs the risk of becoming more and more a relic of the past rather than something with which citizens, especially younger ones, will readily engage in the future. This is a challenge that all those involved in the policy making process will have to face up to.

Annex I

Annex II

Annex III - Selected International Resources on Civics Education

American Political Science Association (USA) (www.apsanet.org/section_245.cfm) - This site links to the Association's civic education resources.

America's Development Foundation (USA) (www.adfusa.org/index.htm) - ADF assists civil society organisations to strengthen democratic values, institutions and processes in their countries and develop their communities.

Carter Center (USA) (www.cartercenter.org/default.asp?bFlash=True.htm) - The Carter Center, in partnership with Emory University, is guided by a fundamental commitment to human rights and the alleviation of human suffering; it seeks to prevent and resolve conflicts, enhance freedom and democracy, and improve health.

Center for Civic Education (USA) (www.civiced.org/) - This Center specializes in civic/citizenship education, law-related education, and international educational exchange programs for developing democracies.

Chiesman Foundation for Democracy (USA) (www.chiesman.org/) - This organization promotes and supports greater awareness of democracy and democratic ideals by citizens. It provides a forum and programs supporting civic activity and education.

Civnet (USA) (www.civnet.org/) - This site provides an international resource for civic education and civil society.

Democracy 2000 (USA) (www.democracy2000.org/) - An organisation dedicated to find ways to produce better public policy and engage citizens.

Elections Canada (Canada) (http://www.elections.ca/content_youth.asp?section=yth&document=index&lang=e&textonly=false) - This site provides information for young voters in Canada, and links to other websites relevant to youth engagement in the political process.

Elections New Zealand (New Zealand) (www.elections.org.nz/teachers.html) - This site outlines a range of educational resources and programs developed or supported by the New Zealand Electoral Commission.

Federal Agency for Civic Education (Germany) (www.bpb.de) - In German.

Foundation for Education and Democracy (Poland) (www.human-rights.net/fed/) - This Foundation promote skills necessary to exercise civic duties in a democratic society among teachers and democratic leaders in Poland, other East European countries and Central Asia, through training and publications programs.

Institute for Democracy in South Africa (South Africa) (www.idasa.org.za/) - IDASA's mission is to promote a sustainable democracy in South Africa by building democratic institutions, educating citizens and advocating social justice.

International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development (Canada) (www.ichrdd.ca/site/home/index.php?lang=en) - This Centre works with individuals, organizations and governments in Canada and abroad to promote the human and democratic rights defined in the United Nations' International Bill of Human Rights.

National Curriculum online (United Kingdom) (<http://www.nc.uk.net/webdav/harmonise?Page/@id=6004&Subject/@id=4164>) - This site provides access to the UK national citizenship curriculum.

Partners for Democratic Change (USA) (www.partners-intl.org/index-flash.html) - This organisation works to strengthen communities' ability to manage change, maximize the benefits of diversity, and prevent and resolve conflicts.

Street Law (USA) (www.streetlaw.org/) - This project develops practical, participatory educational materials about law, democracy and human rights.

The Election Game (USA) (www.sec.state.ma.us/ele/elegme/gmeidx.htm) - The Election Game is a package including educational tools to encourage students to register and vote.

The Electoral Commission (United Kingdom) - (www.electoralcommission.org.uk/toolkit/audience-listing.cfm/18) - This page links to a range of materials provided by the UK Electoral Commission which are of particular importance for people in the 18 to 24 age range.

Who Elects The President? (USA) (www.uiowa.edu/~policult/politick/smithson/VoteSum.htm) - This site provides classroom activities and materials for involving students in the democratic process.

YOUTH ELECTORAL STUDY

REPORT 1: ENROLMENT AND VOTING

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December, 2004

REPORT 1: ENROLMENT AND VOTING

Youth participation in the electoral process is of great concern in many democracies today. For many years we have known that young people are less likely to enrol to vote than older groups. The Youth Electoral Study (YES) is a national study attempting to uncover the reasons why this is so and also look at what motivates Australia's young people to participate in voting.

This four year national project is a major investigation into youth voting behaviour led by a team of researchers from the University of Sydney and the Australian National University working in conjunction with the Australian Electoral Commission. The research is funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC), through its ARC Linkage Grants program, with a major contribution from the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) as industry partner. The project is being administered through the University of Sydney.

The Chief Investigators for the project are A/Professor Murray Print (Centre for Research & Teaching in Civics, University of Sydney) and Dr. Larry Saha (Reader in Sociology, ANU), together with Dr Kathy Edwards as Senior Research Associate. The Partner Investigator is Brien Hallett (Assistant Commissioner, Public Awareness , Media and Research, AEC). The Project Officer from the AEC, until recently, has been Ms. Yvonne Harrison (NSW/AEC). The Steering Committee is composed of the following: Brien Hallett , Andrew Moyes (Assistant Commissioner Enrolment and Parliamentary Services, AEC), David Farrell (Australian Electoral Officer for NSW, AEC), Yvonne Harrison, (NSW/AEC), A/Prof Murray Print, Dr. Larry Saha and Dr. Kathy Edwards.

Project Objectives

The principal purpose of the project is to determine why many young people do not register on the Australian electoral roll despite compulsory enrolment and voting provisions in legislation. The AEC estimates indicate that at the 2004 electoral roll close, approximately 82% young Australians (17-25 years of age) were enrolled (compared with 95% of other Australians), on the electoral roll. Apart from the fact that enrolment and voting are compulsory, the under-

registration of eligible young people raises questions about their political interest and commitment to their civic responsibility.

A more fundamental purpose of YES is to investigate the impact of disengaged youth on Australian democracy. Large numbers of non-participating youth have implications for the effectiveness and representativeness of our political system. Should this trend continue, the future viability of the Australian democratic political system may become problematic.

Thus the project is investigating the underlying characteristics of those who do and do not register when they become eligible at age 17, and is focusing on the links between pro-voting behaviour and family, school and other social and psychological variables. The meaning of voting and other forms of active citizenship by Australian youth is being examined. Various current intervention strategies to improve registration will be analysed for their impact and new strategies examined.

Outcomes

The outcomes of the study will be fivefold.

- To better understand the political socialisation process by which young adults become politically informed and engaged citizens;
- To understand why large numbers of young people are increasingly disengaged with democracy as evidenced by non-enrolment and non-voting;
- To identify the specific causes and combination of causes which account for youth non-enrolment in the group aged 17-25 years;
- To investigate intervention programs that encourage youth to enrol and vote, as well as better prepare youth to become enlightened and active citizens as adults;
- To publish and disseminate the results of this research widely both nationally and internationally.

Methodology

The study uses a mixed-method methodological approach to collect both in-depth qualitative and quantitative data. Initially the study utilised existing non-personal data held by the AEC which will establish benchmark indicators of youth, electoral registration, and voting, and will guide the development of two further data-gathering strategies.

Literature

A review of literature on youth participation in democracy and voting has been conducted. Extensive international interest, particularly in Europe, Britain and the United States is evident in addressing the issue of youth disengagement. In countries where voting is not compulsory,

youth enrolment and voting is invariably the lowest of any age group. Most western democracies are aware of the implications should the current youth disengagement continue through to later years and are seeking ways to engage their youth in voting.

Case studies

A key source of data are the 16 electoral divisions (from 150 nationally) selected as case study sites. Our cases covered the main categories of electoral divisions – inner city, mid city-suburban, outer suburban, rural city, rural town and remote. Over a four-year period data will continue to be collected through in-depth group interviews with youth aged 17-25 in school and non-school sites to identify enrolment behaviour and evaluate the effectiveness of various pro-registration and voting interventions. Data collection has been carried out by the principal researchers together with casual research assistants and supported by the Divisional Returning Officers (DROs) of the 16 designated electoral divisions.

Most data in the 16 case studies have been collected through group and individual interviews with students from a range of schools within each of the divisions. These students represent a critical age in terms of enrolment as Australians can enroll at aged seventeen years. Most data have come from focus group interviews with groups of 7-10 students in four schools in each division, usually two government secondary schools, an independent and a Catholic school. In 2003 we interviewed students in year 11 (ages ranged 16-17) and then followed up the same students in 2004 (now aged 16-18). We will contact these students in 2005 and 2006 to determine changes in behaviour and attitudes.

National school survey

The second data-gathering strategy consists of two national cross sectional surveys of Year 12 senior secondary schools in 2004 and again in 2006 to investigate student attitudes towards enrolment and voting and to identify the effectiveness of Civics and Citizenship Education (CCE) programs in schools.

The purpose of the first national survey of Year 12 students conducted during 2004 was to investigate the factors related to youth attitudes towards enrolment and voting. The survey instrument was developed and pre-tested in late 2003 and revised in early 2004. From a national data-base, a stratified random sample of secondary schools was drawn, controlled for state and type of school. A total of 208 schools were drawn, of which, upon inspection, 12 were declared ineligible because they did not completely fulfill the necessary criteria for the survey.

All sampled schools received an invitation to participate in the survey. Following this initial contact, each school was contacted by phone from and negotiations were initiated about participation in the survey. In the end, 154 schools participated at the time of this report, giving a response rate of 78.6%.

An average of 30 students from each school participated, providing a national sample in excess of 4,600 senior secondary students.

In addition to the main questionnaire, each school received a questionnaire which sought information on type of school, enrolments, and the teaching program related to Civics and Citizenship Education. Finally, each teacher whose class was surveyed was asked to complete a form that provided information of the conditions under which the student questionnaire was completed.

Research Findings

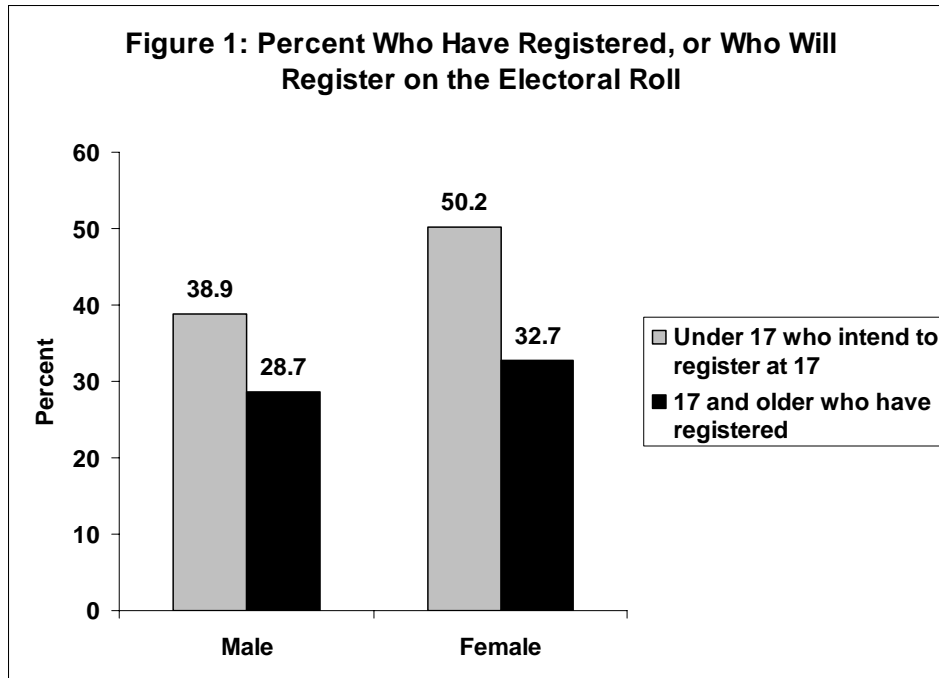
Registering on the Commonwealth Electoral Roll

The first compulsory act in the exercise of Australian citizenship as an adult is to vote in an election. Prior to voting, it is necessary to register on the electoral roll. While voting is compulsory for persons 18 years of age and older, it is possible, and encouraged, for young people who reach 17 years of age to register on the electoral roll.

Two questions were included in the questionnaire to measure the extent to which a person intended to register, if not yet 17 years of age, or who had registered if they were 17 or older. Students were asked:

- “If you are under 17 years of age, do you intend to register on the electoral roll when you become 17?”
- If you are over 17, have you registered on the electoral roll?

The responses to these questions, given separately for males and females, are found in Figure 1 below.



The figure indicates two important findings. First, for both males and females, a higher percentage of those under 17 intend to register on the electoral roll than the 17-and-older students have actually registered. Second, a higher percentage of females both intend to register (for the under 17s) and have registered (for the 17s-and-older) than the males. Thus 38.9% of the under 17 males say they intend to register, while only 28.7% of the 17-and-older males actually have. The similar figures for the females are 50.2% and 32.7% respectively. The differences are statistically significant.

The fact that there is a difference between intention to register and actual registration is not surprising. Our group discussion data showed male students generally less inclined to participate to all aspects of enrollment and voting. Across the range of cases we found females were more aware of voting, more likely to enroll and more likely to vote.

However, in the case studies we found low levels of awareness of enrolling at 17*.

“Can you? Really? Didn’t know that.” (female, 17, NSW)

“Never knew that. Too late now.” (male, 18, NSW)

“I think I heard something about that... don’t remember where.” (Male, 17, WA)

In our survey, when we asked both the under-17s and the over-17s: “Why do you say this?” in response to the former questions we received explicit responses. These are typical quotes written by those who say they WOULD NOT enrol at age 17 #:

- “Laziness is my main reason, nothing else.”

- “Couldn’t be bothered.”
- “Because it doesn’t interest me at all.”
- “I am 17 and I know nothing about it. What’s the point when you can only vote at 18?”
- “I didn’t know it was possible. There has been no information given to me or my school to say this can happen.”

Those who say they WOULD enrol at age 17 typically said:

- “Because I have to sign up anyway so I might as well do it when I’m 17 so I’m on the roll when I’m 18.”
- “Because I feel it is important.”
- “Because I believe there are not enough young people having their say about the future of Australia and surrounding areas, so yes definitely.”

* quotes from group discussions within case studies indicate age, gender and state.

quotes from national survey use bullet points

Those students who were in the over 17s category and who have registered, were also asked “How did you find out about registering on the electoral roll?” Many students mentioned they were told by their mothers or fathers, and in many instances in the case studies, parents initiated action to enrol. However, a few students found out in more unusual ways, including:

- “My boyfriend turned 18 and found out that you can register at 17.”
- “One day in Year 6 people came to our primary school and explained it to us.”
- “A letter to update the electoral roll was sent to the household.”
- “I just always knew, probably from parents.”
- “I was sent a card on my 17th birthday. Yay!”
- “Tertiary expo. There was a place to enrol.”
- “Careers Expo”

Key Points:

- Of the under 17 students, 4 out of 10 males and half of the females intended to enrol at age 17.
- Of the 17 and over students, less than 3 of 10 males and a third of the females had actually enrolled.
- The intention to enrol for the under-17s was higher than actual enrolment for those who were 17 or older.
- Females were higher than the male students in both intention to enrol and actual enrolment.

- Awareness of enrolling at 17 is low.

Intention to vote

The students were asked two specific questions about voting. The first was: “Do you intend to vote in Federal elections after you reach 18?” The results for all students indicate that the vast majority, 87%, either “Definitely” or “Probably” would vote, though there were differences for males and females, with positive responses of 82.7% and 90.2% respectively.

These data are consistent with other AEC data which suggests about 15% of the youth age cohort, when compared with ABS demographic data, are not enrolled.

The second question asked: “Would you vote in a Federal election if you did not have to?” In contrast to the responses to the previous question, only about 50% said they would. When broken down by gender, again the females were more likely to vote than the males, even if not compulsory. The figures are 48.2% for males and 50.9% for females, which is statistically significant for a one-tailed test ($p = .04$).

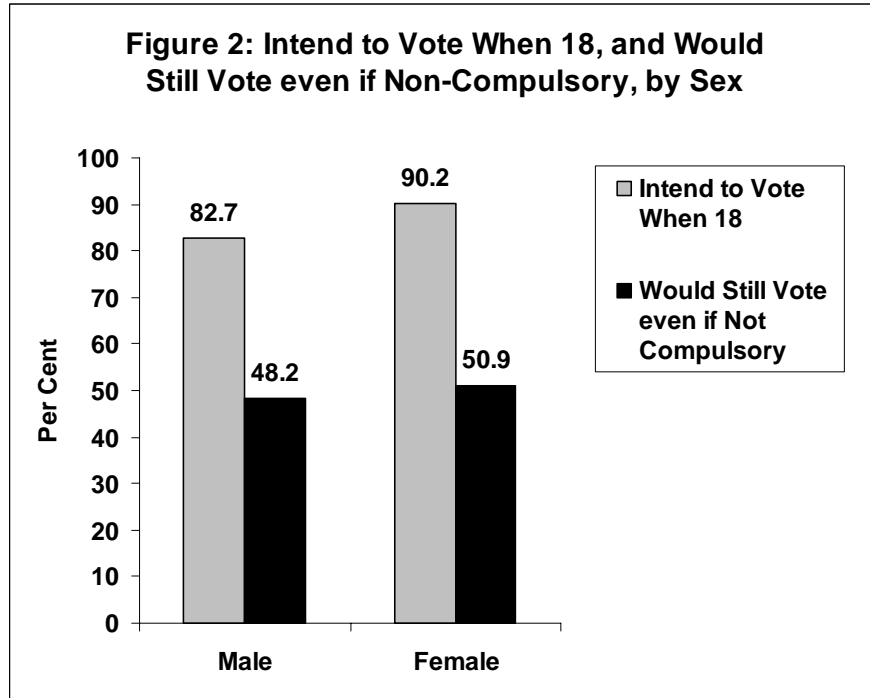
Figure 2 compares the responses of males and females with respect to these two questions and clearly shows the differences between intention to vote at 18 and voting if not compulsory. In the group discussion students made this point very clearly. Half the students or so wanted to vote regardless of compulsion, but many indicated they would vote simply to avoid the fine.

“I can’t see the point. It’s a waste of time.” (male, 17, WA)

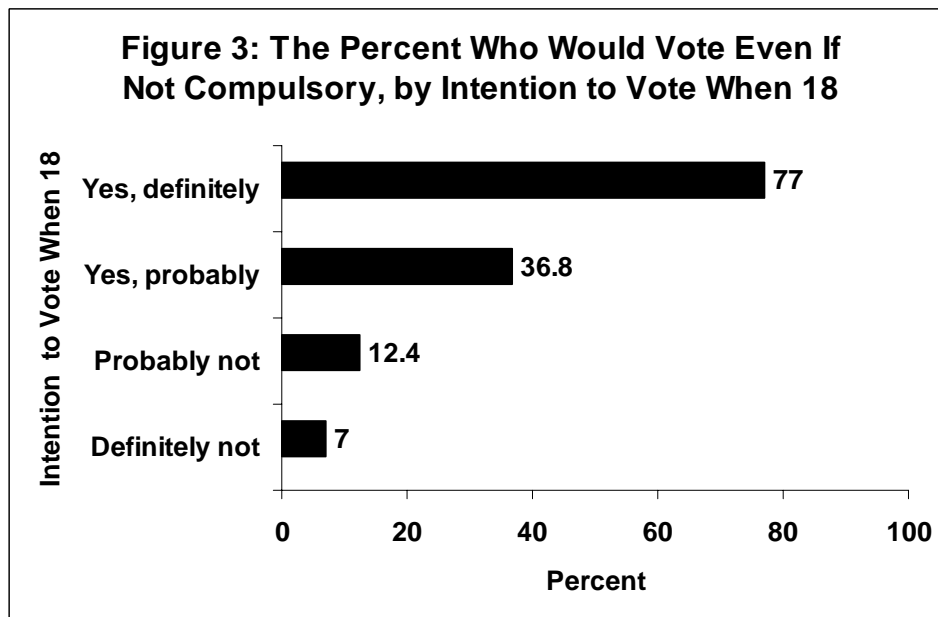
“I definitely want to vote and express my views.” (female, 18, NSW)

“No one takes any notice anyway.” (male, 18, NSW)

“...and I don’t want to get fined, eh? ... and it heaps....\$200?.....\$300?” (male, 18, NSW)



By combining the responses to these two questions, it is possible to measure the level of commitment to voting among this sample of secondary school students. Figure 3 shows the percentage of students who say they would still vote even if it were not compulsory, by their intention to vote when age 18.



The figures indicate that for those students who said they will “definitely” vote when they are 18, 77% said they would still vote even if it were not compulsory. On the other hand, the proportion declines to 36.8% for those who say they “probably” will vote. It declines substantially further for those who are less inclined to vote, namely to 12.4% for those who said they probably would not vote, and 7% for those who say the “definitely” will not vote.

Why do these students say they will or will not vote? In our survey we asked them to write-in their explanation. Those who will vote at 18 said:

- “So I can have a say in the current government. Also the government takes enough of my money as it is. I can do without fines for not voting.”
- “Because unless you vote, you cannot say you have no influence! You can try to have an influence by voting.”
- “Because I think it’s really important that we all get our say, because we’re voting for who will run our country.”
- “Because I will. Everybody needs to vote. If you don’t vote, you don’t have the right to complain about the government.”
- “Well, I am not 18 yet so the excitement is quiet low. But when I am 18, definitely.”
- “I don’t have a choice! Do I? Vote or a fine...nice choice.”

From the group discussions it was clear that all students were aware that voting was compulsory. Ignorance was not an issue. In our survey we also asked the students to explain why they would, or would not vote if they did not have to.

- “Because the government doesn’t affect my day to day life. Therefore I don’t care who gets elected.”
- “Because if it isn’t required by me, then I wouldn’t bother finding out about it. I would leave it to those who know and are passionate about it.”
- “Why would you do anything you don’t like if you didn’t have to?”
- “I don’t really care about politics, and am very disillusioned by the government.”
- “Because either way they don’t care about the youth or young people, which is me and many other important issues. They will do what they want. Their promises mean nothing. So what’s the point?”
- “I don’t think any of the parties have society’s thoughts at heart.....”
- “Waste of a Saturday, time consuming, and I am too lazy. Although I would vote on important issues, such as becoming a republic.”

Key Points:

- A little more than four-out-of-five students say they will vote when they become 18 years old.
- Females are more likely to say they will vote than boys.

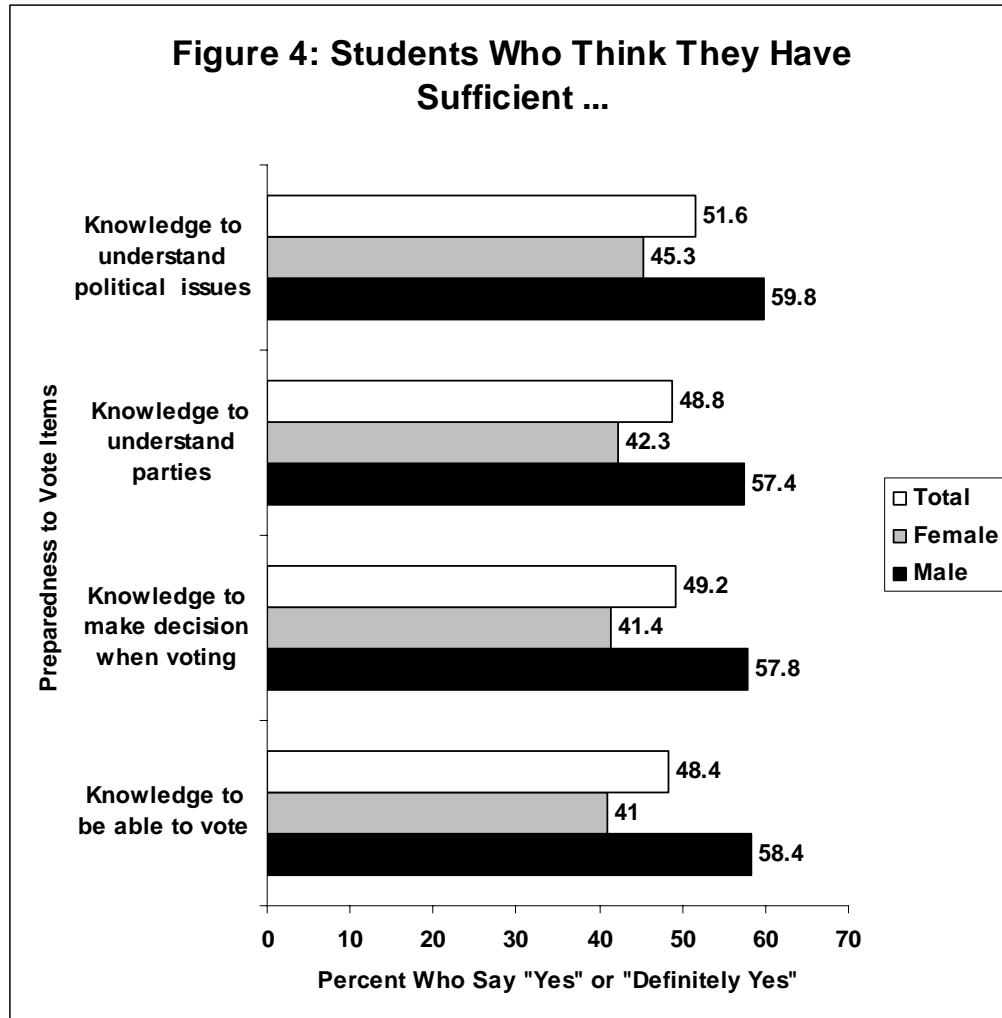
- Only one-out-of-two students would vote at 18 if voting were non-compulsory.
- Females are more likely to say they would vote, even if non-compulsory.
- The percentage who say they would vote even when compulsory is directly related to the strength of their intention to vote at age 18.
- Young people know that voting is compulsory at 18.

Preparedness to vote.

An important precursor to voting and participating in democracy, it can be argued, is the personal preparedness of people to vote in elections. The stem question for the students was: “Do you think that you personally have sufficient knowledge to do the following? (Tick ONE box for each statement.) The response categories were “Definitely No”, “No”, “Yes”, and “Definitely Yes”. In Figure 4, the combined responses of those who said “Yes” or “Definitely Yes” are combined and shown separately for males and females. The number of students who responded to this item ranged from 4647 to 4660 and the gender differences are statistically significant.

Overall, only about half of the students in our sample feel prepared to vote. The figures clearly show differences between the males and females who think they have sufficient knowledge to vote in a meaningful way. For the females between 41% and 45.3% (less than half) thought they had sufficient knowledge on the various items. For the males, the figure ranged from 57.4% to 59.8 % (Slightly more than half). Males clearly feel more prepared to vote than females, yet, as seen in Figures 1 and 2, young males claimed lower levels of intention to enroll, intention to vote and voting if not compulsory.

Preparedness to vote is a multidimensional concept as can be seen in Figure 4. An important aspect relates to the mechanics of voting – do young people understand the voting system? In our group discussions the answer was very clear. Apart from numbering boxes on a ballot paper, few students understood voting and what happened to their vote when counted.



A final, more direct, question was asked of the students about voting, namely: “Do you personally feel prepared to vote in a Federal election?” For all students, the percentage who said “Yes” or “Definitely Yes” was 51.9%. For the male students, 56.4% said “Yes” or “Definitely Yes”, while for the females, the comparable figure was 37%. For this direct question, the gender gap in confidence is even greater.

It is not clear at this stage why males should feel more prepared than females, though the pattern of responses is consistent across related forms of knowledge related to voting. We found similar comments in the group discussions which might reflect young males’ views of themselves as more certain, more ‘in command’. This question will be the subject of on-going research in the project.

Conversely young females, though less confident of their preparedness to vote, are more likely to vote and are more likely to vote than males if voting was not compulsory, as seen in Figures 1 and 2.

Key Points:

- About one-in-two students feel they lack the knowledge to understand the issues, the political parties, to make a decision about voting, and in general to vote.
- Young people do not perceive themselves generally as well prepared to participate in voting
- Generally, young people don't understand the voting system
- Female students feel less prepared to vote, in terms of knowledge, than the males.

Information about voting in elections

If students generally do not feel well prepared to participate in voting, where do they obtain their information about voting in elections? They were asked to identify their main sources of information about voting from twelve sources identified from the research literature, with an additional write-in "other" category. For each source of information, the students were asked to indicate how much information they obtained on a scale of "None", "Little", "Some", or "Most". In Figure 5, the sources of information for the twelve (not including the write-in category) are ranked according to mean score, with "4" indicating the highest source of information and "1" indicating none.

Figure 5 shows that parents are the main source of information about voting, followed by TV and newspapers. Teachers, radio and other adults are other sources with a mean score above two (meaning more than a "little"). The differences between the responses are statistically significant

Those sources scoring less than 2, especially those closer to 1.5, suggest very little use by students as sources of information about voting. Students claim that religious groups, siblings, magazines, books and even friends are not commonly used as information sources. Interestingly, the use of the internet was rated low by students, which is consistent with a growing body of research on youth use of the internet.

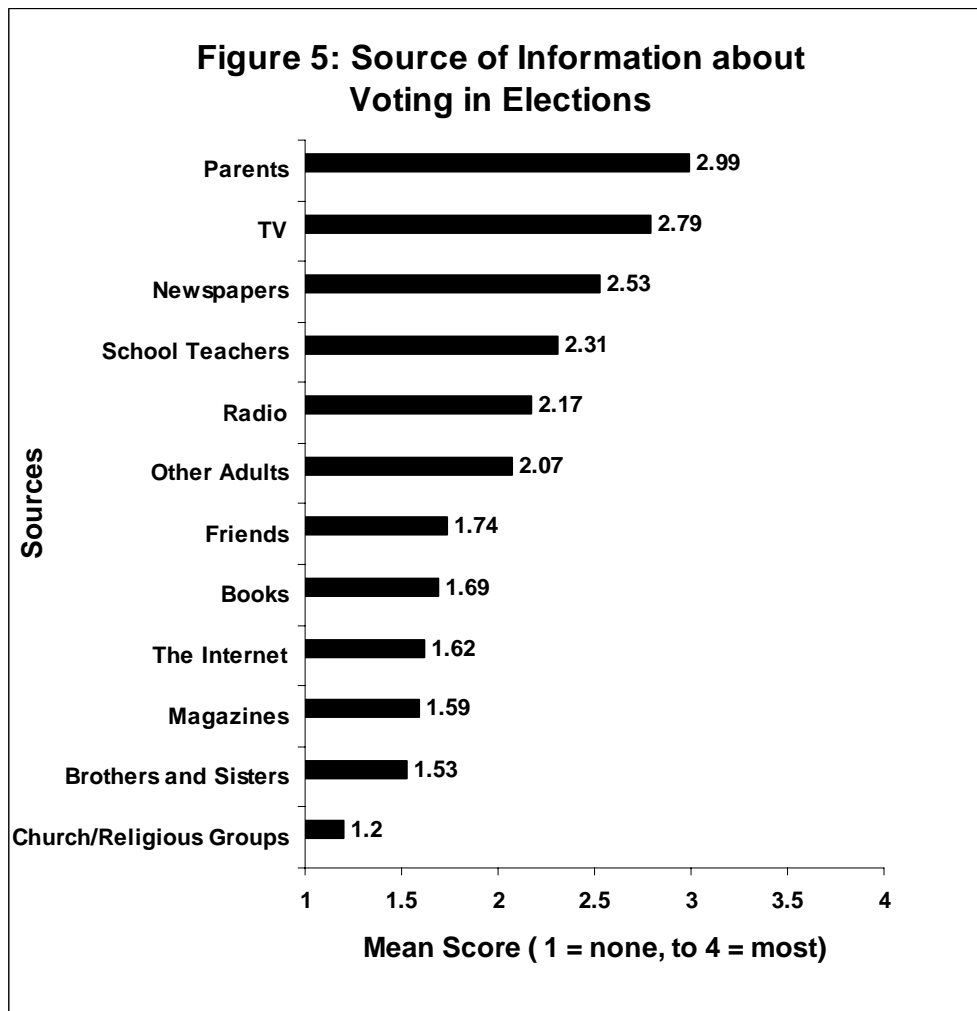
In the groups we found that the use of media as a source of information was limited amongst youth. Media, especially television, was for entertainment! Consumption of media was problematic, being either passive or haphazard.

"I'll watch the news if its on, but I don't plan to watch it." (female, 18, NSW)

"If I'm walking by I may stop and watch a story, but a half and hour of news is way too much."(female, 18, NSW)

"Dad gets the newspaper delivered so I read the headlines...oh, and the sport." (male, 17, WA)

"The media provides good comedy because they surround politicians like seagulls looking for a chip" (female, 18, Tasmania)



Furthermore, students revealed a substantial distrust of media as a source of information. They certainly didn't trust it as a source of impartial knowledge. And any consumption of news is greeted with substantial skepticism.

"Its so biased, you can't trust it. They tell you what they want you to hear" (female, 18, NSW)

"The TV is worst. They don't tell the truth..... (male, 18, NSW)

"The media's reporting of politics just confuses you more" (female, 18, Tasmania)

"We were taught to critically review the media in our English classes. When you do that you see how biased they are, especially television and some newspapers."(female, 18, NSW)

" And Americans are worse..... They actually make up the news!!" (Male, 17, WA)

The importance of parents is not surprising, given the consistency of this finding in other studies. However, they didn't escape unscathed and we identified a wide range of attitudes towards parental input.

[my parents] “just ramble on” (female, 18, Victoria)

[my parents] “just turn it [politics] all into a joke” (male, 18, Victoria)

Yet the clear importance of TV and newspapers, and perhaps even teachers, was somewhat unexpected. What these data suggest is that attempts to inform youth about voting, apart from parents, can be most successful by using TV, newspapers, and of course, education, but probably not much else.

Key Points:

- Parents are regarded by the students as the most important source of information about voting, followed by TV and newspapers.
- Yet television and newspapers are regarded with skepticism
- Church and other religious groups are the least important source of information about voting.
- School teachers are a moderate source of information about voting for the students
- the internet has little impact as an information source on voting for students

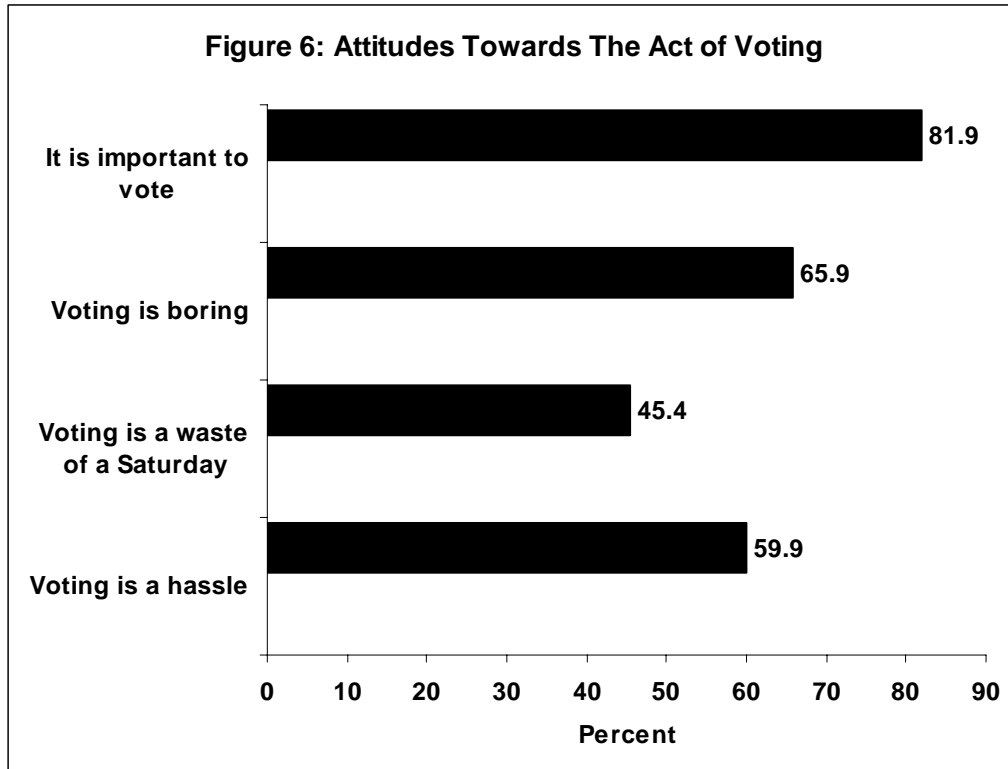
Attitudes towards voting

The intention to vote tells us something about how these young people intend to behave when they have the opportunity to vote and to participate as an adult citizen in a democracy. However it is another matter to ask whether they actually *like* what someday they are required to do as a citizen. To this end, our questionnaire included a set of items intended to measure how youth regarded the act of voting itself.

There were four questions, to which the students had to indicate their level of agreement. One of the items simply asked how important they thought voting was. The response categories were as follows: “strongly agree”, “agree”, “disagree” and “strongly disagree”. These were scored on a scale from 4 to 1 respectively.

Figure 6 gives the percentage of students who either “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with the statement. While students strongly agreed with the statement that it was important to vote (81% agreed with the statement), a majority also agreed that the act of voting itself was boring (65.9%) and that it was a hassle (59.9%). Slightly below half thought that it was a waste of a Saturday (45.4%).

These data reinforce those in Figure 2 that a half of students would not vote if it were not compulsory. Despite the acceptance that it is notionally important to vote, most find voting to be boring, a hassle and a waste of a Saturday. *A strong bond between the idea of voting in a democracy and a citizen’s duty to vote does not exist for most young Australians.*



Many young people *will vote*, not because it is their right, hard-won by their forebears, or because it is their democratic responsibility as a citizen, but because they want to avoid a fine.

We are concerned that many of these statements in Figure 6 are proxies for something deeper, more substantial, and potentially more problematic. This will be the subject of further investigation in the study.

Key Points:

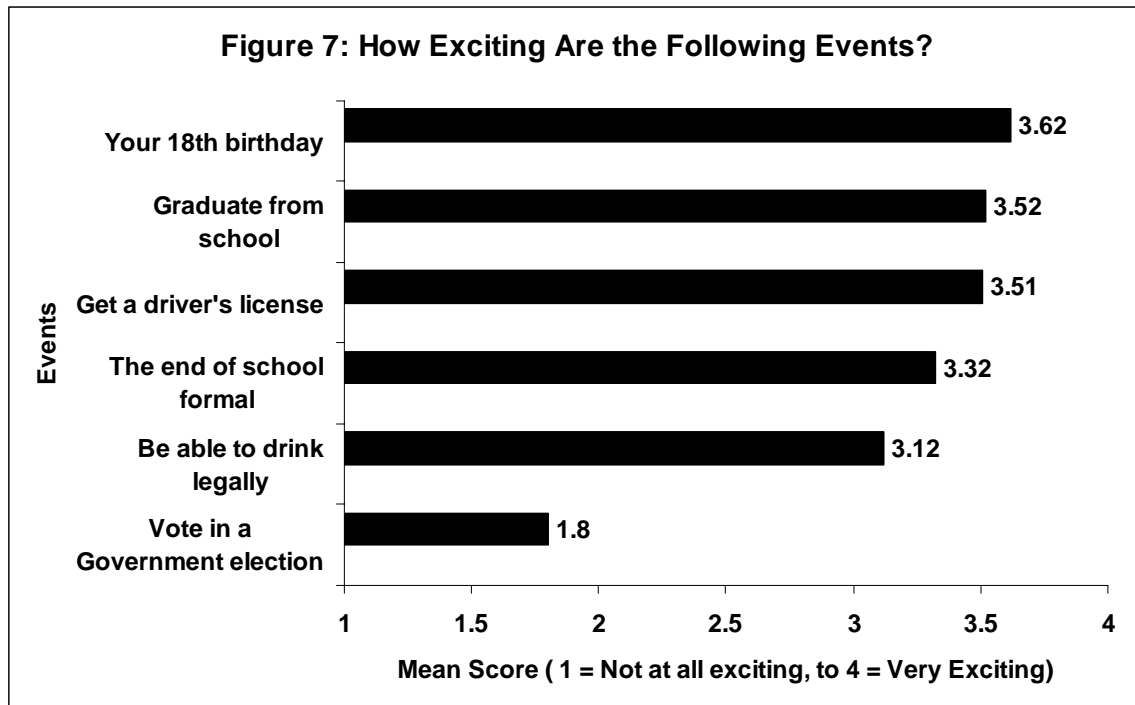
- Most (four-out-of-five) students think that voting is important.
- Almost two-out-of-three students think that the act of voting is boring, and slightly more than one-half think it is a hassle.
- Slightly less than one-half students think that voting is a waste of a Saturday.
- The link between a citizen’s right and duty to vote is not powerful

Rites of passage

What might engage students more in voting? Could voting be seen as more important in the eyes of young people? Students were asked to indicate how exciting they found a number of rite-of-passage events which typically take place in late adolescence. For each event, the students were asked whether they considered the event to be “Very exciting”, “Exciting”, “A little exciting” or “Not at all exciting”. The response categories were

coded 4 to 1 respectively on a scale with a score greater than 3 considered as 'exciting' to 'very exciting'. The results for this question are seen in Figure 7 below.

The figures clearly show that compared to other rite-of-passage events, the ability to vote ranks last when compared to other events. Furthermore, it does not come close to the other events. "Becoming 18", and hence legally an adult, was ranked at the top with a mean score of 3.62. To vote in a Government election was last and far behind with a score of 1.8, which falls between "A little exciting" and "Not at all exciting".



From the group discussions we found that being able to legally drink was "not real big for guys...we do it anyway" (male, 17, NSW), but being legally an adult meant many positives including "clubbing and pubs....they card you all the time so you need to be 18." (female, 17, WA). Voting was not raised as an important issue or rite of passage into adulthood except incidentally.

"yeh, I guess you can vote too....big deal." (male, 18, NSW)

"Voting is no big milestone, I'll think about it when it happens". (male, 17, SA)

"On a list of 100 things voting would come in at number 100". (female, 18, Tasmania)

"Voting feels pretty much like a responsibility, not a rite of passage – you don't have to go to schoolies, you don't have to buy alcohol – but you DO have to vote, and that's pretty much like a major deterrent for any member of our generation". (female, 18, NSW)

Key Points:

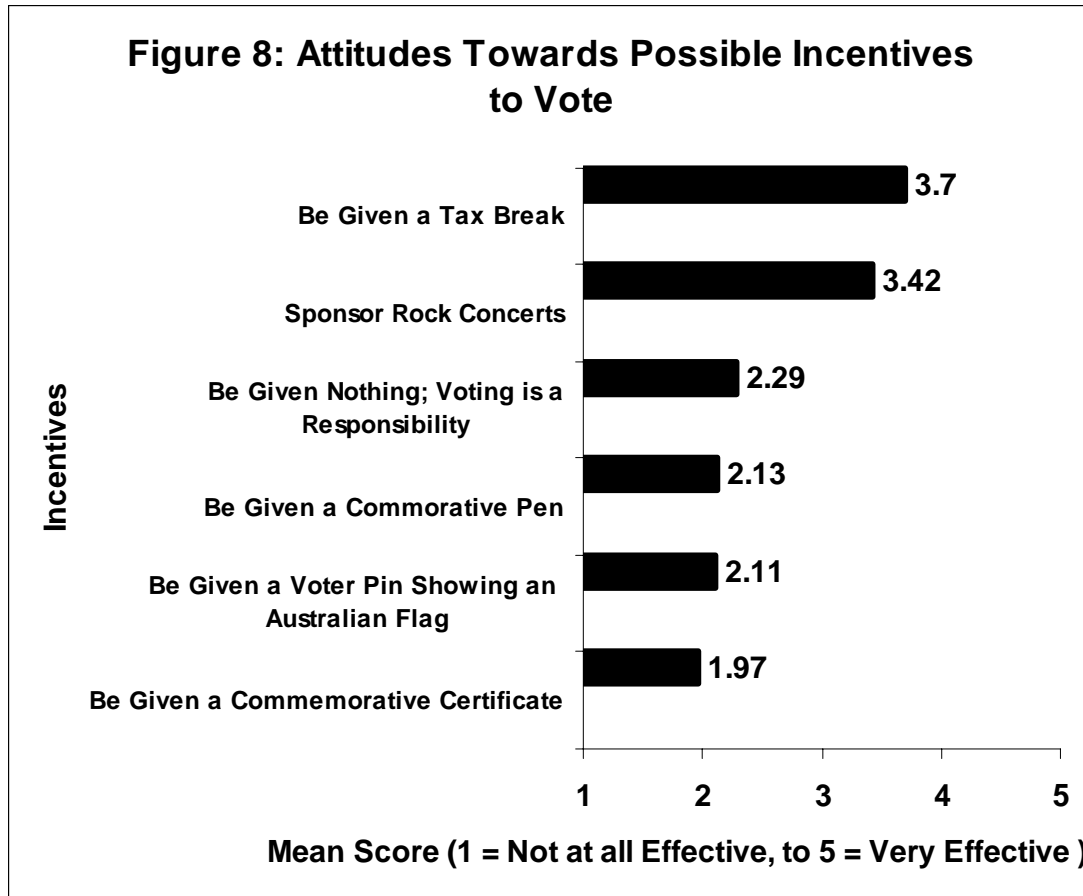
- Students feel that major events that mark their transition to adulthood, like turning 18, are "exciting" or "very exciting".

- By comparison, students feel that voting in an election is quite unexciting.
- Voting ranks last in excitement compared to other youth rite-of-passage events.
- Few students linked voting with other rites of passage.

Incentives to Vote

Could young people be encouraged to enroll and vote? Since one of the aims of the project is to find how to get more young people enrolled and enthusiastic about voting, we asked a number of questions about various incentives which might encourage students to vote. The wording of the question was as follows: “How effective do you think the following activities would be to encourage young people to vote for the first time?” The response categories were on a five-point scale from “Very Effective”, with a value of 5, to “Not at all effective” with a value of 1.

The concept of incentives arose from the early group discussions in 2003. The options indicated in Figure 8 were self-suggested by students during discussions. We excised the alternative “give us money” on the grounds that this was not remotely likely to be taken seriously by governments, though it may enhance democratic participation. In order to compare survey responses, we report the mean scores for each of the incentives in Figure 8 below.



To reinforce Australians’ concerns at our taxation regime, even students who have casual work would prefer a tax break more than any other incentive in order to encourage their first vote. The figures indicate that the students were considerably more positive about a tax break and the use of rock concerts to promote enrolment and voting than any of the suggested incentives, with mean scores of 3.7 and 3.42 respectively. The next most frequent response is that there should be no incentive, since voting is a responsibility. There was little difference between the use of a commemorative pen, a voter pin, or a commemorative certificate.

In the survey we gave students an opportunity to express their own ideas about making voting more interesting for young people, by asking them “What do you think could be done to make voting more interesting for young people between 18 and 25?”

- “To be honest I don’t think you can make it more interesting, Sorry!!” [sad face drawn]
- “Educate young people about how voting will influence their lives.”
- “Nothing. It shouldn’t have to make them interested. If you are responsible, you will make a wise choice. If not, so be it.”

- “Not make voting be on a Saturday - Have colourful boxes.”
- “Beautiful young models wearing bathing suits at Voting Stations.”
- “Have more interesting and relevant information about elections. Have information about what the government is going to do.”
- “More prizes, less corruption, more history in Aussie politics, and more info on what has been done by particular political parties to give us reliable info to judge, than just bias newspapers controlling our society.”
- “Inform them clearly about the objectives of each party. Do not include visits of the party members, as I see them as smiles that last while you are present. They are fake during promotions.”
- “Show the incentives, consequences of, and effects one can have in taking a vote. Take special time eg during uni, on television, in newspaper etc to go through and explain why voting is so necessary and how important your vote is.”
- “Have more information provided on how to vote so we are able to understand what we are required to do. Also provide more easier-to-understand information about each political party.”

Key Points:

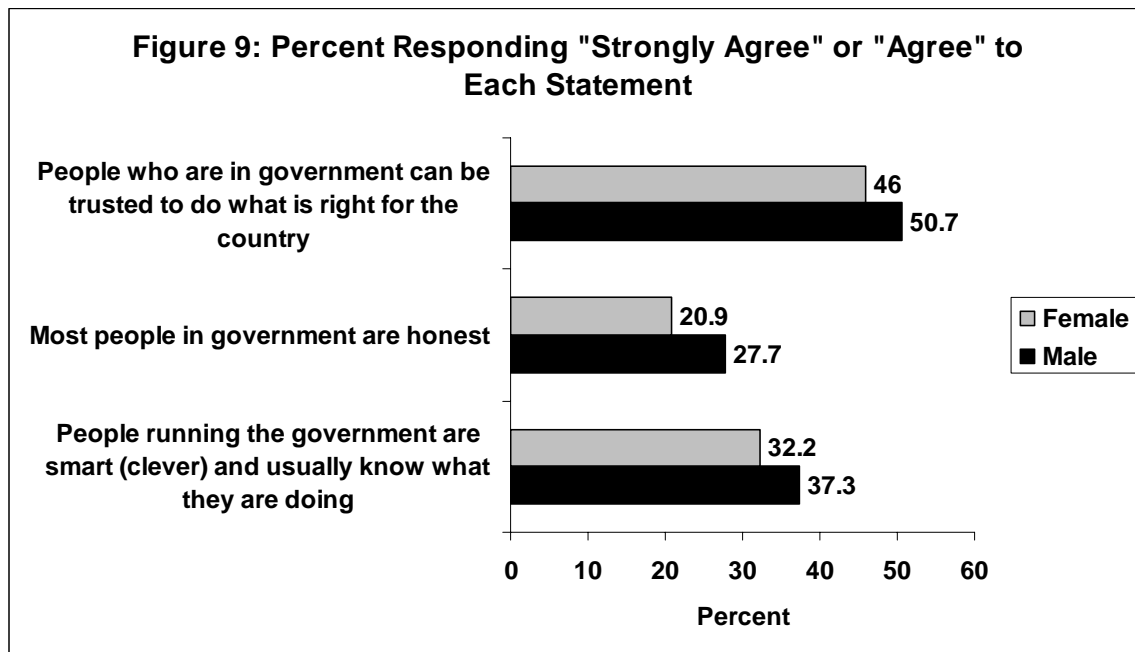
- Students saw a tax break or the use of rock concerts as the most effective incentives to get young people to enroll and vote. This reflects the view that voting is an act requiring substantial incentives rather than a good in its own end.
- There was considerable support for the notion that there should be no need for incentives, since voting is a responsibility that comes with citizenship.

Trust in Government

An essential attribute of successful democracies is the trust of citizens in their elected representatives. Similarly an important variable explaining youth disengagement is the extent to which young people actually trust their political leaders. Research suggests that political trust underlies much of the political attitudes and electoral behaviour of most people, including that of youth.

Generally, young people consider school to be a trustworthy environment. It is perceived to be nurturing and supportive. Teachers are generally seen as highly trustworthy. In such an environment we could expect students to be more positive on any dimensions of trust towards authority than older citizens.

We included four questions relating to political trust. Students were asked the extent to which they agreed with the four statements. Their responses, given separately for males and females, are found in Figure 9. These data show statistically significant differences on gender grounds.



Despite the supportive environment of school, students showed remarkably low levels of trust in their elected representatives. About half of the students felt that the people in government could be trusted to do what is right for the country, with males articulating a higher level of trust than females. However, relatively few students, about one-fourth, agreed that parliamentarians are honest. Finally, about one-third of the students agreed that parliamentarians are smart and know what they are doing in running the government. For both of these latter two questions, the males were more likely to give parliamentarians the benefit of the doubt than the females.

It seems from these responses that the students make a distinction between “trust” and “honesty”. While they might “trust” someone with the task of running the government, they do not necessarily believe that they are “honest”. But even with this distinction, the levels of trust, and the levels of attributing honesty, and of intelligence to parliamentarians are low.

The survey findings are strongly supported by student comments in the group discussions. Politicians were not to be trusted, they were not interested in young people and they behaved badly in parliament. Politicians were seen as promise-breakers, liars and as people who say one thing and do another.

Key Points:

- Young people do not trust politicians
- Politicians are seen as liars and promise-breakers

- Only about one half of the students agreed that parliamentarians could be trusted to do what is right for the country, with males more “trusting” than females.
- Only one-fourth agreed that parliamentarians are honest, with males more likely to agree than females.
- About one-third of the student agreed that parliamentarians were smart and knew what they were doing when running the government.

Conclusions

This report addresses the first phase of the YES research. It is investigating why so many young Australians do not enroll and vote in elections. Given that voting is a minimal contribution to democratic society, why are so many youth disengaged from Australia’s democratic system? And what are the longer term implications of non-enrolment and a less engaged youth cohort?

As a first phase in this research we conducted a national survey of Year 12 students and many group discussions with students and non-students across the country. At this time we report the following major findings.

Most young people will register on the electoral roll, mostly because they believe it is the right thing to do. However, few were aware that they could enroll at 17 years.

Females were more likely to enrol both in intention and actual behaviour, and more likely to say they will vote than males. In addition, more females than males say they would vote if it was not compulsory. But only a half of all those surveyed would vote if it was not compulsory.

About half the students feel they lack the knowledge to understand the issues, the political parties, to make a decision about voting, and in general to vote. Given that most of the students in our study could enrol and many could vote, this insecurity with voting is problematic. This situation raises major questions about the role of formal education in preparing young people to become active citizens.

While parents are the most important source of information about voting and political matters, television and newspapers are also important as are teachers. Other sources, including the internet, are considered unimportant. This offers opportunities for schools

and media to perform a more prominent role in preparing Australia's youth to be engaged citizens.

While most students believe that voting is important, the majority also think voting is boring, a hassle and a waste of a Saturday. Clearly for these students the link between a citizen's right and duty to vote is not powerful.

And voting is not seen as part of transition to adulthood by students. Turning eighteen, attending 'schoolies', obtaining a drivers license and leaving school are all far more important rites of passage.

Despite this situation, there were some incentives that would attract a first vote. Students saw a tax break or the use of promotional rock concerts as the most effective incentives to get young people to enroll and vote. However there was some support for the notion that no incentives are needed, since voting is a responsibility that comes with citizenship.

A major disincentive to participate in Australia's democracy, particularly through voting, is the lack of trust in political leaders. Young people widely characterized politicians as liars and promise-breakers. Only half agreed that parliamentarians could be trusted to do what is right for the country, while barely a quarter agreed that parliamentarians are honest.

Youth are typically stereotyped as politically apathetic. That is not what we found. They were interested in political issues, what to them were *real* issues, though not political parties and politicians. The need and challenge is to find meaningful ways to engage young people more constructively so they want to participate more directly in voting and to sustain Australian democracy.

The second report in this series on youth voting and participation is available on the [AEC Website](#)



Youth Electoral Study

REPORT 2: YOUTH, POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AND VOTING

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Youth Electoral Study

Research Report 2:

Youth, Political Engagement and Voting

The YES Project

Youth participation in the electoral process is of great concern in Western democracies today. For many years we have known that young people are less likely to enroll to vote than older groups. This national study is attempting to uncover the reasons why this is so and also look at what motivates Australia's young people to participate.

This four year research project is a major national study by a team of researchers from the University of Sydney and the Australian National University working in conjunction with the Australian Electoral Commission. The research is funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC), through its ARC Linkage Grants program, as well as the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC). The project is being administered through the University of Sydney.

The Chief Investigators for the project are A/Professor Murray Print (Centre for Research & Teaching in Civics, University of Sydney) and Dr. Larry Saha (Reader in Sociology, ANU), together with Dr Kathy Edwards as Senior Research Associate. The Partner Investigator is Brien Hallett (Assistant Commissioner, Public Awareness, Media and Research, AEC). The Steering Committee is composed of the following: Brien Hallett , Andrew Moyes (Assistant Commissioners, AEC), David Farrell (NSW/AEC), A/Prof Murray Print, Dr. Larry Saha and Dr. Kathy Edwards.

Project Objectives

The principal purpose of the project is to determine why many young people do not register on the Australian electoral roll. It has been estimated that there are approximately 300,000 young Australians, 18-25 years of age who do not vote in elections because they have not registered. Apart from the fact that voting is compulsory, the under-registration of eligible young people raises questions about their political interest and commitment.

A more fundamental purpose is to investigate the impact of disengaged youth on Australian democracy. Large numbers of non-participating youth have implications for the effectiveness and future of the Australian democratic political system.

Thus the project is investigating the underlying characteristics of those who do and do not register when they become eligible at age 17, and is focusing on the links between pro-voting behaviour and family, school and other social and psychological variables. The meaning of voting and other forms of active citizenship by Australian youth is being examined. Various current intervention strategies to improve registration will be analysed and new strategies will be proposed and developed.

1. Political engagement and “Active Citizenship”

Enrolment and voting are behaviours which are normally associated with “active citizenship”, particularly if they are voluntary and not compulsory. Furthermore, in most discussions of citizenship voting is seen as a minimum requirement in fulfilling one’s responsibilities as a citizen, but it is not seen as the only activity which qualifies as citizenship behaviour (Saha, 2000a).

But can one be an active citizen without voting?

Most researchers recognise that there are many political behaviours that can be included in the notion of “active citizenship” which are more community-oriented and policy-oriented, such as volunteer work and other projects designed to eliminate community problems. For example, in her survey of 18-34 year-old Australians, Vromen (2003a) adopted a broad conceptualisation of political behaviour that included 19 “participatory acts” which, by means of principle components analysis, were reduced to four scales: “individualistic”, “party”, “communitarian” and “activist”. Vromen found that her young Australians were more politically active than many people recognise (almost all had participated in at least one activity) and that: 1) women were more active in communitarian and activist activities, 2) those with more education were more active overall, and 3) individualised activities were more numerous than collective activities. Voting, however, was not one of the 19 activities, and while these findings are important in their own right, we still need to understand the link between forms of political activism and voting.

Westheimer and Kahn (2004) argued that there are three types of citizen and labeled them as: 1) Personally responsible citizen (obey laws, contributes to good causes, recycles, gives blood, etc; 2) The Participatory citizen (volunteers for community work, joins community or social groups, helps organise programs to help others etc; and 3) The Justice-oriented citizen (critically assesses the causes of social problems, and works actively to alleviate them). After their study of two civics education school projects, they concluded that these three types of citizenship behaviour may be discreet and that they can be taught separately in civics and citizenship classes in schools. Once again, Westheimer and Kahne included behaviours such as political interest, and intention to volunteer; they did not include the intention to vote or voting.

Some researchers argue that “active citizenship” behaviours are linked and overlap (Youniss & Yates, 1999), and further, that they are related to voting. For example, Verba

and his colleagues (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995) found in their study of American adults that voting and community activity tended to go together. In addition, they found that many adult “active citizens” had already been active while still in school. But the question of voting and citizenship takes on a different perspective in the Australian context given that voting is legally required and therefore compulsory for citizens (Hallett, 1999). In other words, do people vote merely to obey the law, or do they vote because they want to be participative citizens?

The many behaviours included in the above research, whether at the individual or community level, are usually regarded as forms of political engagement and also include activities such as signing petitions, writing letters and even participating in forms of public display of consent or dissent with government policies or actions. These latter activities occur in the form of rallies or demonstrations connected with various social movements, and have sometimes been referred to as the “politics of the future” (Jennett & Stewart, 1989) or “new politics” (Pakulski, 1991).

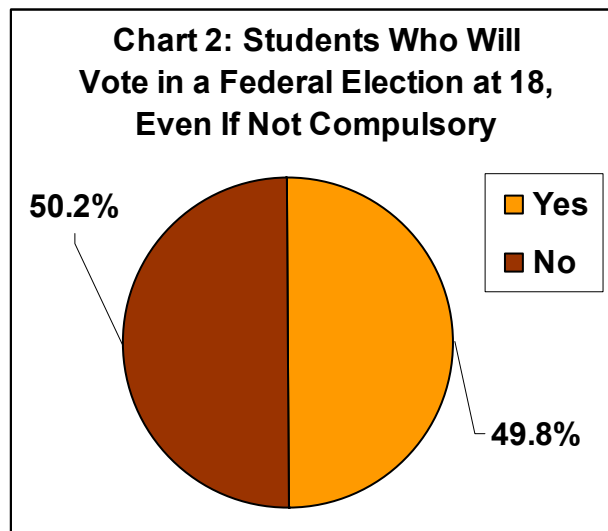
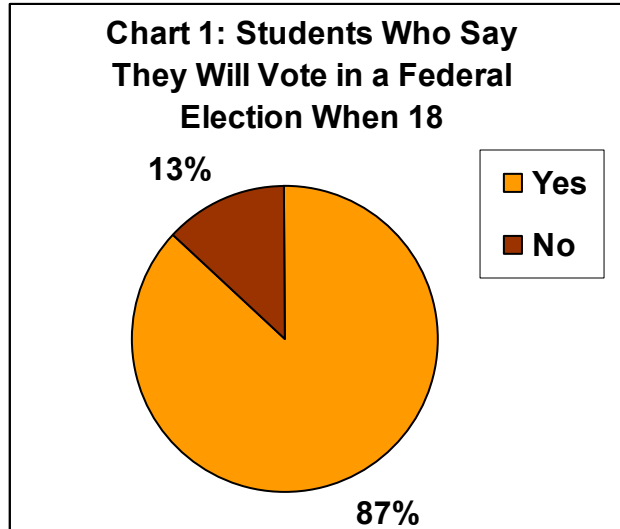
In this report we focus on the link between various forms of political activity reported by Australian youth, and their intention to vote. In addressing this issue, we highlight some of our findings from the 2004 national survey of 4855 senior secondary school students, from 153 schools, drawn randomly from an inclusive national list. The response rate of targeted schools was 74%. We also utilise the group interview data collected from sixteen electoral divisions. (See Print, Saha and Edwards, 2004 for a more detailed description of the YES project.) We focus specifically on the behaviours which we define as indicating political engagement among Australian youth, and we examine how these behaviours are related to their voting intentions.

As voting is compulsory in Australia for federal and state elections, there are two items in the YES questionnaire which measure voting intention. The first simply asks the student if he or she will vote when they reach 18 years of age. The second asks whether they would vote in a Federal election if they did not have to. In our first YES report, we pointed out that while 87% of the students said they would vote in a Federal election, only 50% said they would still vote if it were not compulsory. (Print, Saha, & Edwards, 2004)

The difference between the responses to the two questions is clearly seen in Chart 1 and Chart 2 below. The survey question which is displayed in Chart 1 is:

Do you intend to vote in Federal elections after you reach 18? (The response categories were: “Yes, definitely”, “Yes, probably”, “Probably not”, “Definitely not”)

In Chart 1, the two “Yes” and two “No” responses are combined.



The question in the survey represented in Chart 2 was as follows:

Would you vote in a Federal election if you did not have to? (The response categories were “Yes” or “No”)

We think that this second question about the intention to vote, even if it were not compulsory, is a better measure of the level of commitment to carry out citizenship responsibilities. It means that the students say they will vote, not because they feel they will have to, but because they want to.

It is the responses to this second question that we use to relate political engagement activities to voting intentions throughout the remainder of this report.

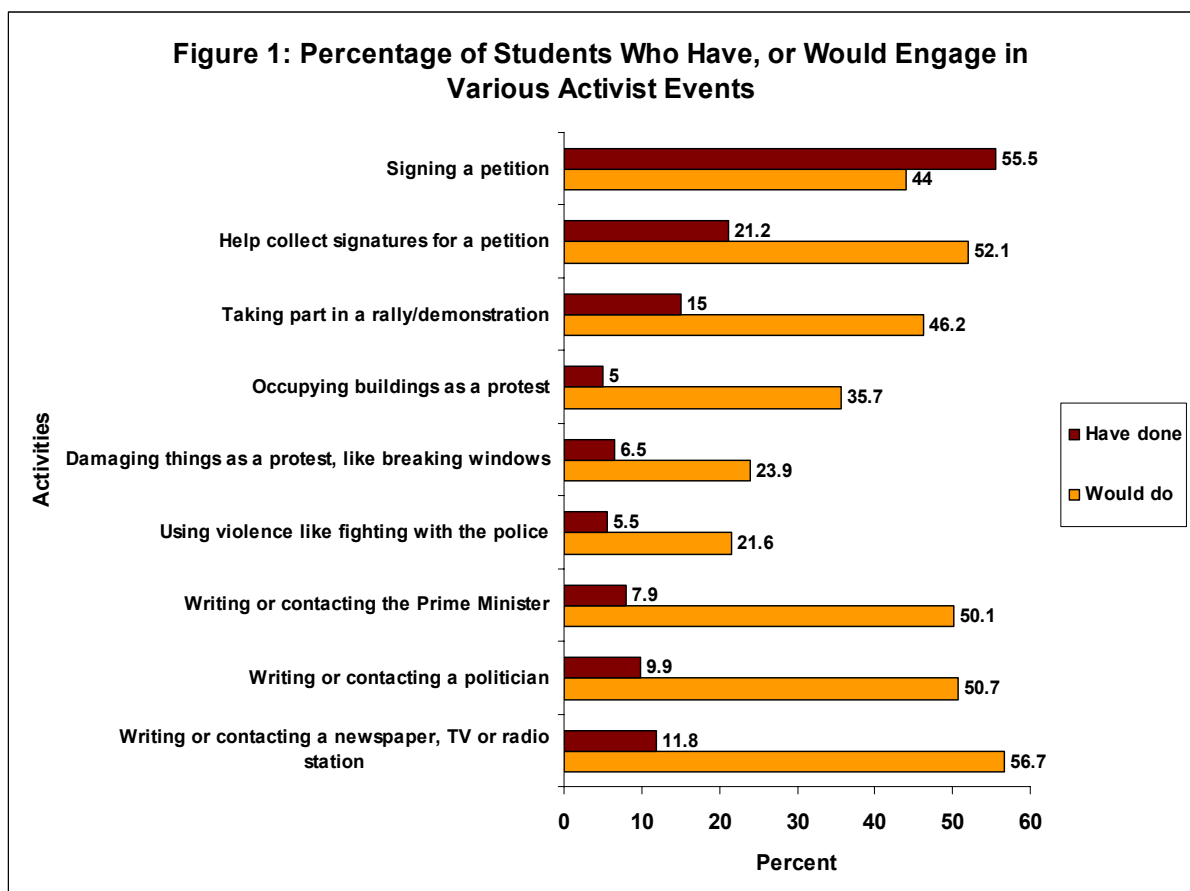
2. School Students and Political Engagement

1) Student Political Actions

In the questionnaire we listed a number of activities which we called “forms of political action”. The activities were meant to replicate those used frequently in previous surveys regarding youth political socialization (Saha, 2000b). We asked the students to tick the relevant box as to whether they had, or would engage in these actions. The question is as follows:

*“Given below are some different forms of political action in Australia that people in Australia have taken. Which of the following best describes you? Tick appropriate boxes for **BOTH** (a) and (b). Boxes under (a) were labeled “Have done it”, and Boxes under (b) were labeled “Would do it”.*

Figure 1 displays the results from this item, and gives the per cent for both “Have done it” (upper bar), and “Would do it” (lower bar).



The percentages in Figure 1 show that by far the most common activity experienced by the students in our sample has been the signing of a petition, with over 55% reporting that they had done it. Other less common experiences included collecting signatures and taking part in a rally or demonstration, with 21% and 15% respectively. Contacting or writing letters formed a third cluster of activities, ranging from 8% to 12% for the Prime Minister or the media respectively. These activities can be considered “normative” insofar as they fall within the scope of acceptable behavior in Australian society. They are legal and they do not involve violence.

However there is another cluster of activities included in Figure 1 which consist of more controversial forms of action and which might be considered “non-normative”, and these are occupying buildings, damaging things during protests, and using violence in protests.

These activities sometimes can violate laws and can be considered illegal. Some argue that these and similar kinds of activities, such as xenophobic and hate-related activities, are not really “political” in the citizenship sense, and “clearly fall in a separate category” (Youniss et al., 2002). There was a small percentage of students who reported having engaged in these three forms of action in the questionnaire, ranging from 5% to 6.5%.

The percentages also indicate the difference between those who had engaged in these activities, and those who would, or could see themselves doing them in the future. With the exception of signing petitions, much larger percentages of students said they “would” engage in these behaviours, with writing letters and collecting signatures being the most common with over 50%. Also noteworthy and perhaps disconcerting are the relatively large percentages, 35.7% to 21.6% who say they would engage in the three “non-normative” actions, namely occupying buildings, and resorting to damage or violence.

2) Gender Differences In Political Actions

Do male and female students differ with respect to these political activities?

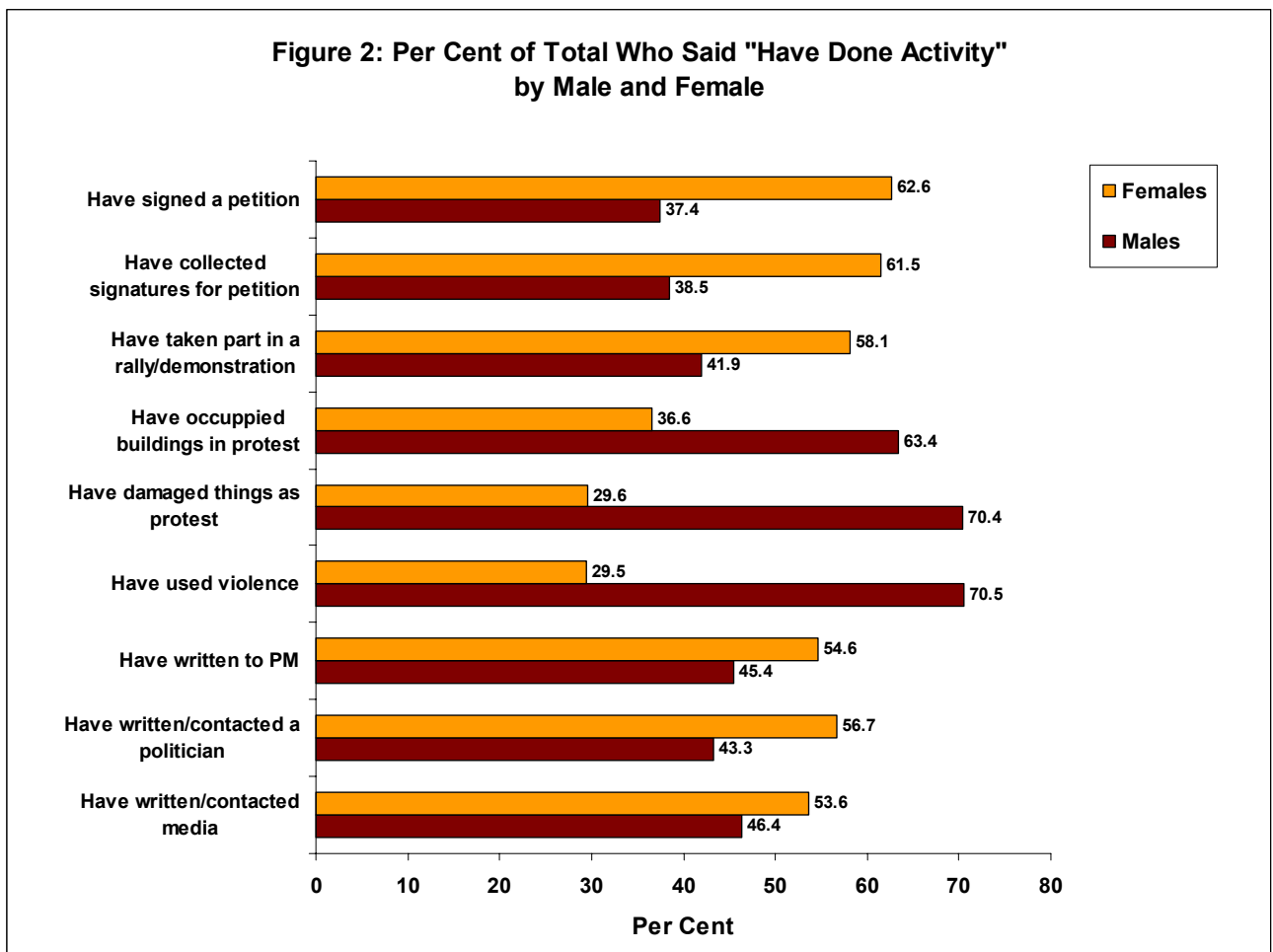
Current research suggests that young females have become more prominent in various forms of political activity, and this is a trend which has been increasing since the late 1970s (Loeb, 1994). In Australia, Vromen found that women tended to be more participative than men for two of her four scales, the activist and the communitarian, while males were marginally more likely to participate in Party activities (however, not statistically significant) and neither sex was predominant for individualist activities.(Vromen, 2003a; 2003b).

Saha found that female secondary school students were more likely than males to say they would join protests in favour of social movements (Saha, 2004a). Furthermore, in his study of six domains of political culture, he found that female secondary school students tended to engage more in political activism and were more committed to human rights than males, but males scored higher on political knowledge, attention to politics,

and were more committed to political freedoms. There were no differences in feelings of political efficacy (Saha, 2004b).

Gender is clearly a relevant factor in understanding differences in youth political engagement. In their analysis of the Australian IEA data, Mellor, Kennedy and Greenwood emphasise its importance and say it is an “untapped” area for civic education research (2001). There is thus good reason to focus on gender differences in the political behaviours and voting in the YES survey and interview data.

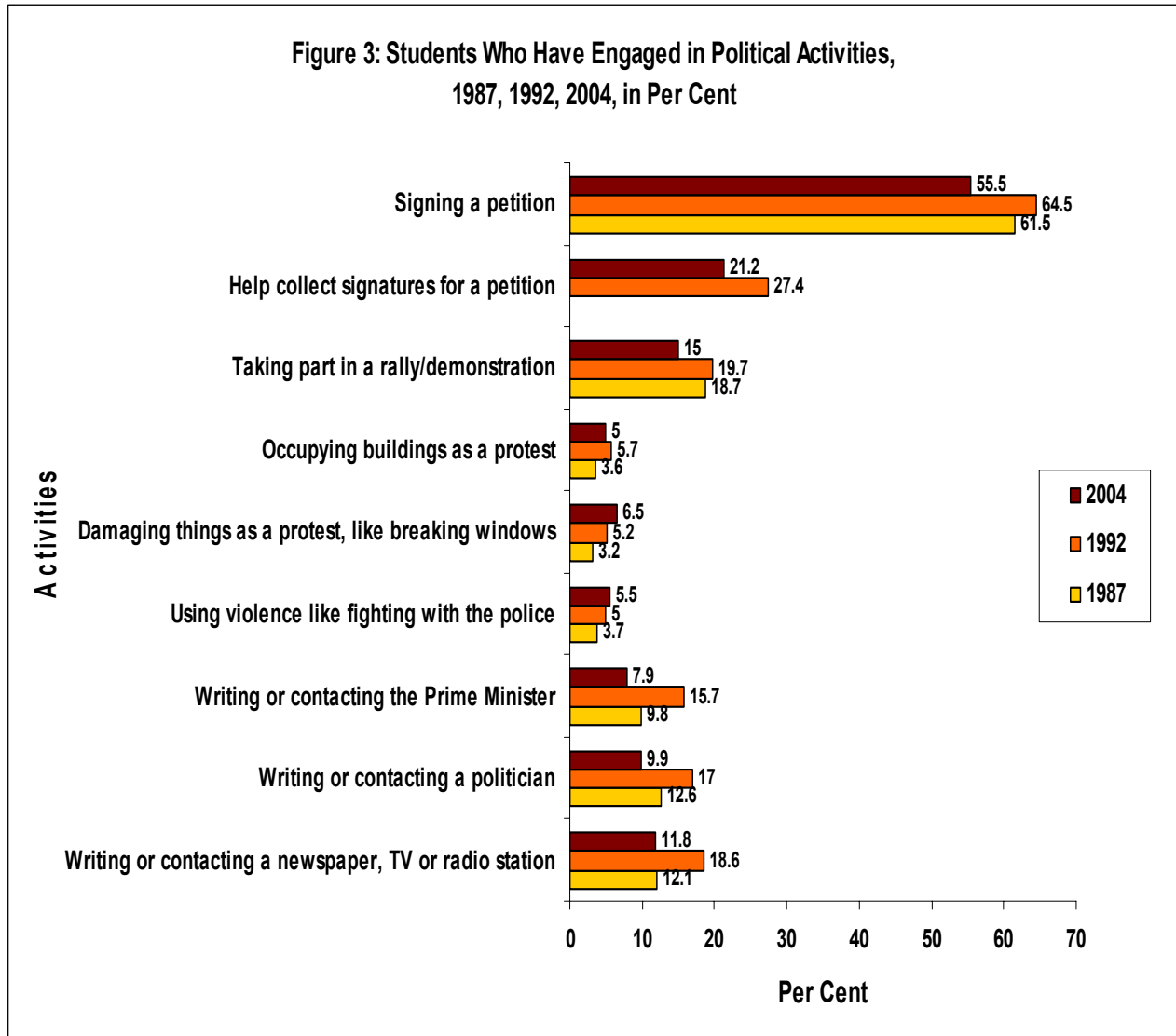
Figure 2 displays male-female differences with respect to activities already experienced by the students, the “have done” portion of the question.



From the table, it is clear that female students were more likely to have participated in the “normative” actions, namely signing petitions, collecting signatures, taking part in rally/demonstrations, and writing letters or contacting the Prime Minister, members of Parliament, or the media. On the other hand, the males by far are more likely to have experienced the “non-normative” or more violent activities. This again, is consistent with previous research findings.

How do the students in our survey compare with previous generations? Are they more or less active in the sense that we have described them? Fortunately there have been two previous surveys using the identical question (except for the item “collecting signatures”) in 1987 and 1992 (Saha, 2000b).

In Figure 3 we compare the results of the three surveys.



While there are small variations between the three surveys, the pattern over the 15 year period is remarkably similar. Signing a petition is by far the most common political activity that secondary school students seem to have done, with collecting signatures and taking part in a rally or demonstration the next most often experienced. What is equally

interesting is the small but consistent percentage of youth who say they have participated in forms of protest which have involved damage or violence.

Key Points:

1. Already in secondary school young people begin to experience political engagement through various kinds of politically linked activities.
2. There is wide variation in the kinds of political engagement that young people experience.
3. The most common form of political activity experienced by our 2004 surveyed students is signing petitions (55%), followed by collecting signatures for a petition (21.2%), and taking part in rallies or demonstrations (15%).
4. Female students are more likely than male students to engage in non-violent, “normative” forms of political activism, while male students dominate the more violent “non-normative” types of behaviour.
5. The patterns of participating in types of political activism have remained fairly stable over the past 15 years.

3) Student Support of Social Movements

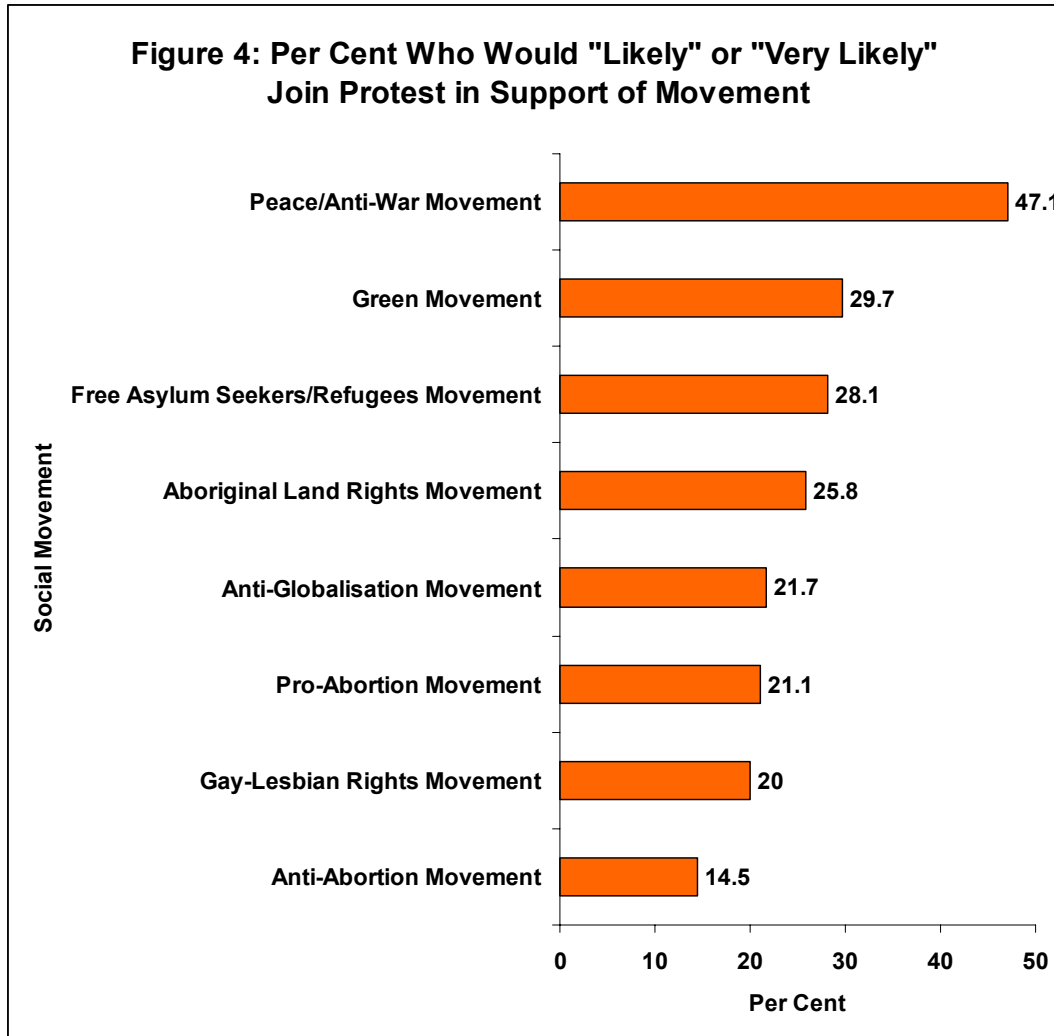
It is well-known that already in secondary school various social movements attempt to recruit young followers to support their causes. Branches of the environment movement, such as Greenpeace, and the human rights movement, such as Amnesty International, already promote activities for youth. Since 1997 the *Discovering Democracy* curriculum package has encouraged students to participate in various political activities, including social movement activities. Evidence of the political awareness and involvement of some youth occurred in early 2003 when thousands of primary and secondary school students throughout Australia participated in peace marches to protest against the threatened war in Iraq. (See, for example, “Gutsy students repeat protest history”, *The Australian*, March 6, 2003.)

In the YES survey questionnaire the students were presented with a list of social movements, and were asked the following question.

“If one of the following groups organized a public demonstration to promote their cause, would you attend it? (Tick one box for each group.)”

The students were given four response choices: “Definitely Not”, “Not Very Likely”, “Quite Likely”, and “Very Likely”. These four response categories were scored 1 to 4 respectively, with “Definitely Not” = 1, and “Very Likely” = 4.

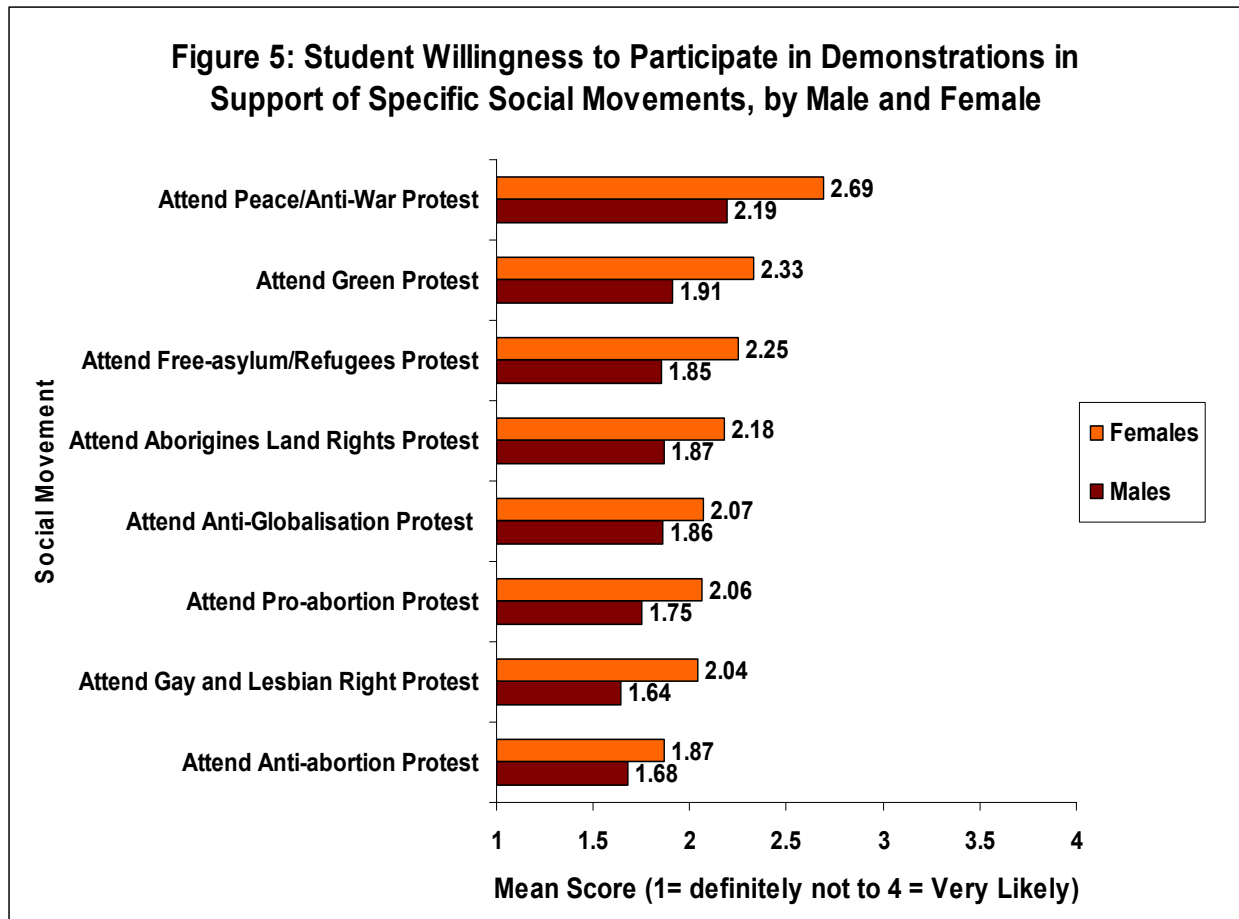
Figure 4 displays the per cent of the students who said they would “likely” or “very likely” join a protest in support of each of the eight social movements listed, starting with the movement receiving the highest support to that receiving the lowest.



There is clear differentiation between the social movements. The movement generating the most support is the peace/anti-war movement, while that generating the least is the anti-abortion movement. Furthermore, the movements at the top half of the list tend to be less contentious than the movements at the bottom.

But are there differences between male and female students in the propensity to support a particular movement? The previous discussion in Section 2.2 (Figure 2) about gender differences in political activity is relevant here as well.

Figure 5 displays social movement support by sex of student. The figures represent the mean score, or average, for males and females, with an average of 4 being the highest level of support, to 1 being the lowest level of support.



The data show a pattern similar to that which we observed in the discussion about political activism, namely that the female students are more likely to attend social movement demonstrations than male students for all eight movements. Furthermore, with the exception of the anti-abortion protest, the female mean scores are above two (into the “Quite Likely” response category), while only one male average score is greater than two, namely the peace/anti-war movement.

Key Points:

1. Already in secondary school, students differentiate between the social movements that they would likely support.
2. The “popular” social movements for students are the peace/anti-war, the environment, the free asylum-seekers/refugee movement, and the Aboriginal Land Rights movement (all with a mean score above 2).
3. Female students are more likely than male students to say they would attend movement demonstrations for all eight social movements.

3. The Students Speak Out about Political Activism in Group Interviews

Although we did not specifically ask students in the group interviews about various forms of political actions, the topic did come up in the course of group discussions. Here we present a sample of typical comments regarding protest activity by Australian secondary school students.

Some students saw participation in rallies and protests as forms of empowerment – as feeling “powerful”, that they could make a difference. They also saw it as a way of learning more about the specific issue. This latter point is consistent with the argument of Eyerman and Jamison (1991) that social movements are a way of disseminating knowledge about social issues. In other words, by participation in political activities related to social movements, the students learn about issues and become better informed citizens.

Exhibit 1: Protest Activity and Empowerment* (From the YES Group Interviews)

Students at Trenton College attended (Iraq) anti-war protests. Here Jenny said: "Heaps of people went to peace rallies and got really involved". At the time these students felt "powerful" by protesting, but in the longer term were disappointed that their efforts "had not changed anything".

Abigail said: "protests can change things... but you have to vote too".

Dara said: "I liked going to protests about the Iraqi war, I liked listening to the speeches by the politicians - they gave me insight".

* The names of the school and students are pseudonyms.

In Exhibit 1 we have statements which show positive dispositions toward protest activity. In these examples, the students specifically refer to anti-Iraq war protests which fall into the category of “Peace/Anti-War” protests, which received the most support in the survey question (See Figure 5 above).

Some students like Jenny in Exhibit 1, however, also realised that protest activity is not always successful. Abigail not only saw protest activity as empowering, but she also saw it as connected with voting. Dara, on the other hand, recognized that he learned about issues by participating in protests.

A specific indication of student perceptions of the ineffectiveness of political protest activity is given in Exhibit 2.

Exhibit 2: The Ineffectiveness of Protest Activity* (From the YES Group Interviews)

Many students in the group interview at Grania High School had attended anti-war protests. These students were annoyed that their protests had not been more effective in changing government policy. One student in particular was angry that she had been told by an observer of the protest that "you're just kids - you're too young to understand". The lack of actual effectiveness of their protests concerned these students.

At Wickham College students had also protested, although one said he "didn't like protests ... it is a waste of time". Others agreed that protesting was "worth doing, although we didn't really get anything done".

* The name of the school is a pseudonym.

The comments by students in the Grania High School and Wickham College groups reflect some of the idealism of youth regarding political involvement, and in protest activity. Their comments also illustrate the disappointment they express at their perceived lack of success. It is useful to note that in one group, their right and ability to be politically involved is asserted.

As we noted in our discussions for Figures 1 to 3, there are many different types of political activity engaged in by students. However in our group interviews, we found that not all schools allowed students to participate in some of them. In Exhibit 3, we present the case of St. Margaret's College which “barred” students from joining an anti Iraq war protest.

Exhibit 3: No Protest Activity at Saint Margaret’s College* (From the YES Group Interviews)

Students at Saint Margaret’s College were angry because they were barred by the school from attending protests about the [Iraq] war.

A female student commented: “Alison and I wanted to protest but the school said we weren’t allowed to. They said it was a bad example. But we and a few other people would have done so.”

They had been encouraged to write letters instead. They felt that this was unfair.

* The names of the school and student are pseudonyms.

The example of St. Margaret’s is useful and important for our consideration, because the students were encouraged to write letters instead of marching. As we now know from Figure 6, the experience of writing letters as a form of political protest also has a positive relationship with voting. These findings merit attention. It is possible that schools, students, or even parents might have objections to some forms of political action by their children. But as we clearly show, even the simplest action, like signing petitions or writing letters, is positively related to the intention to vote as an adult.

Key Points:

1. The unsolicited comments in the group interviews do support the general pattern in Figure 5 about participation in a social protest in support of a social movement.
2. Some students recognise that protest activity can be “empowering”, but that it is not always successful.
3. Some students recognise that political activism is not an alternative to voting.
4. The unsolicited comments in the group interviews indicate that not all forms of political activity are seen as acceptable by school authorities, but that one form of activity can be substitute for another. In other words, even at Saint Margaret’s College students were encouraged to write letters as a form of political action, which itself is a type of behaviour of an “active citizen”.

4. Are Students Who Are Politically Engaged More Likely to Vote?

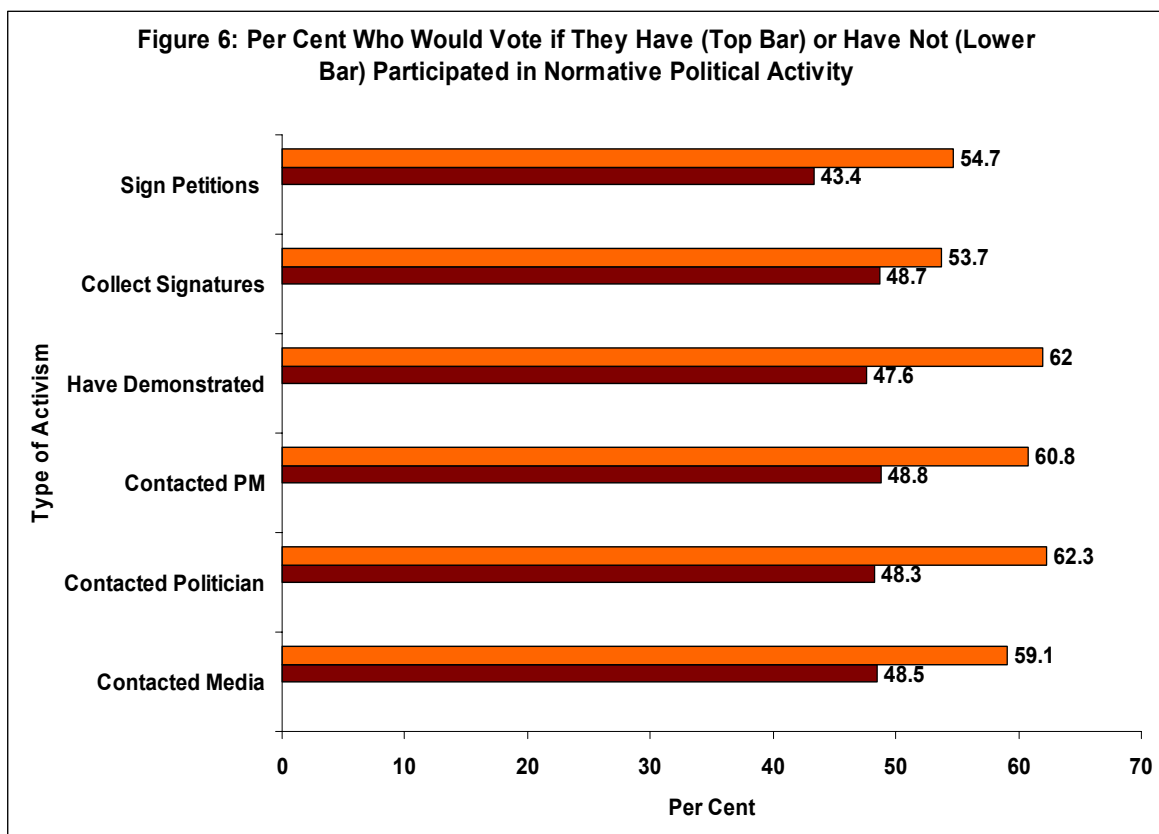
At the outset of this report, we said that ultimately we want to know whether forms of political engagement among youth are likely to be related their propensity to vote. The details about the extent of political engagement with respect to a number of behaviours were given in Figures 1 through 5, and Exhibits 1 through 3. We now consider the link between political activity and voting intentions.

1) *Political Activism and Intention to Vote*

In order to examine this relationship further we constructed cross-tabulations and compared those who engaged or did not engage in a particular activity with whether they would vote in a Federal election if they did not have to.

As we noted in Section 2.1, the nine political activities in our survey question fall into two groups, namely the “normative” activities (those which are within the acceptable norms of society), and the “non-normative” (those activities which are not always considered as within the norms of acceptable behaviour). This distinction is kept in reporting the relationship between political activities and the intention to vote, keeping in mind that the voting question is within the context of non-compulsory.

The results for the relationship between “normative” activities and the intention to vote are given in Figure 6.



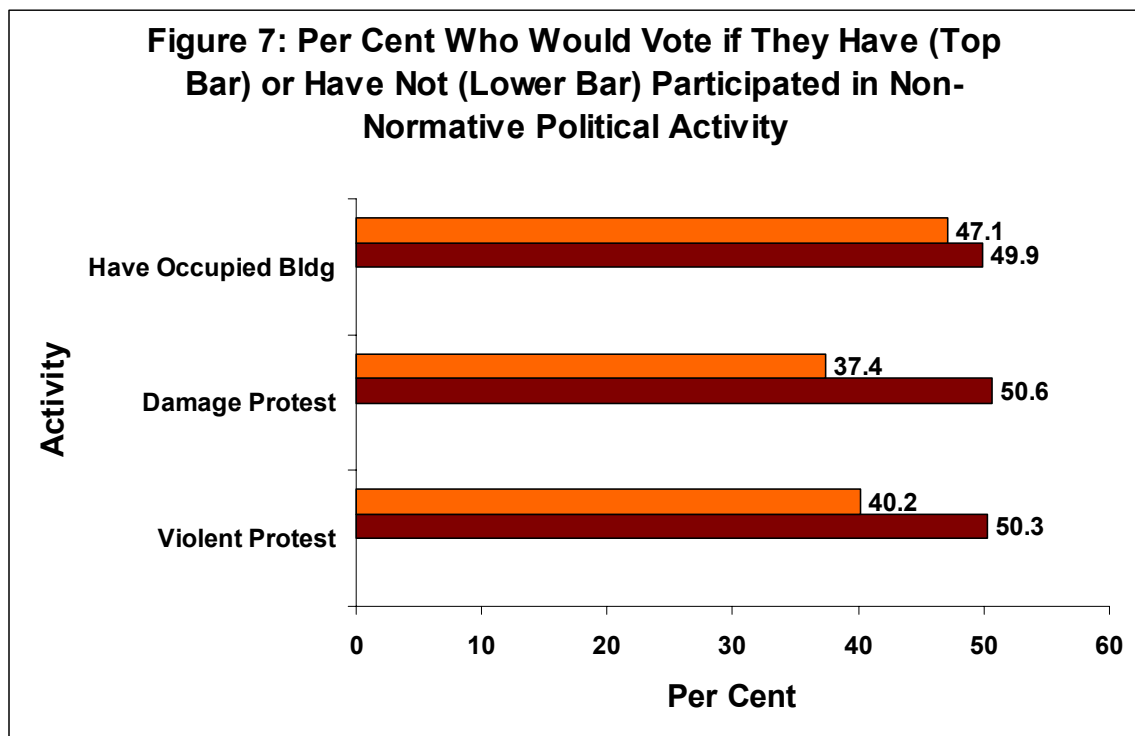
In Figure 6, the top bar indicates the per cent who would vote for those who have experienced the specified political activity, while the lower bar indicates the per cent who would vote for those who have not experienced the specified political activity.

For example, for those who have signed a petition, 54.7% say they would vote, while for those who have not signed a petition, only 43.4% say they would vote.

When we examine the six political activities in Figure 6, we see that for every activity, those who have engaged in that activity are more likely to say they would vote than those who have not engaged in the activity.

Clearly, there is a link between the experience of “normative” (acceptable) political activities and the intention to vote. Students who feel strongly enough to openly display their views through political action, are also students who feel strongly about voting.

But does the relationship also occur for those political behaviours which often are not seen as acceptable? The comparable data for the non-normative (more violent) activities are given in Figure 7.



Unlike the previous figure, here we find a much different pattern. Those students who say they have experienced one of the three activities are less likely to say they would vote in a Federal election if they did not have to. For example, of the students who say they have participated in violent forms of protest to the extent of damaging things, 37.4% say they

would vote, but for those who have not engaged in this behaviour 50.6% say they would vote.

In other words, these forms of activism seem to have a negative relationship with the intention to vote.

How can we interpret this pattern? First, we must keep in mind that far fewer students engage in the non-normative form of behaviour than the normative. (See Figures 1 and 3.) Second, previous research found that the students who engaged in non-normative forms of political activity were more disaffected and alienated from school and society (Saha, 2000). Therefore rather than complement voting intentions, participation in the more extreme non-acceptable forms of political behaviour actually seems somewhat incompatible with voting intentions.

At this point, a number of cautions should be kept in mind. First, these figures only consider the two variables in question; they are based on cross-tabulations. More detailed analyses are needed to determine whether or not these relationships are due to other factors. Second, at this point we are not suggesting a causal link between the two variables, that is, that participation in protests causes a person to have a positive intention toward voting. We only want to make the point that the two variables are correlated.

Key Points:

1. The experience of normative forms of activism has a positive relationship with the intention to vote.
2. The experience of non-normative forms of activism has a negative relationship with the intention to vote.

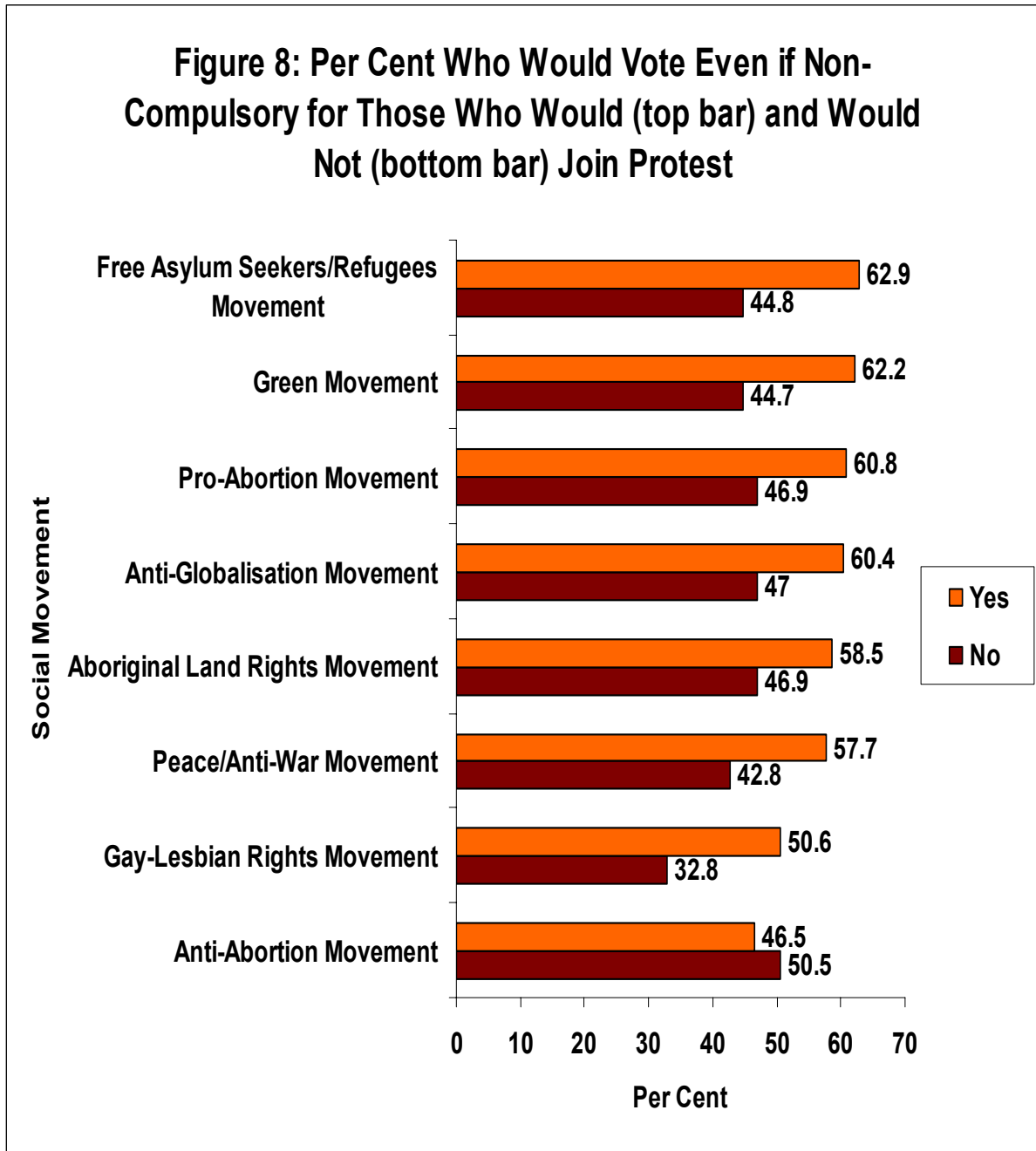
2) Support for Social Movements and the Intention to Vote

Now let us turn our attention to participation in rallies in support of specific social movements and its link with voting.

Social movements provide another avenue for people to become politically engaged with politics. This is true whether the nature of the movement is consistent with or adverse to the policies of the government in office. As we have seen, the students in our survey do discriminate between different social movements, but some movements such as the peace and environment movements do enjoy very strong student support. However, does social movement support relate to other political actions, in particular that of voting?

In Figure 8 we display the relationship between social movement support and the

intention to vote. In this figure we give the per cent of students who would join the social movement (top bar) or would not join (the bottom bar) the social movement, and who say they would vote, even if voting were non-compulsory.



There are three main observations that can be made from Figure 8. First, for all but one of the eight social movements listed, the disposition to join a rally or protest in support of the specified movement is related to a higher intention to vote. For example, of those students who say they would join a protest to support more freedoms for asylum seekers or migrants, 62.9% say they would vote, while only 44.8% of those who would not join a protest would vote. This pattern is the same for seven of the eight movements, the exception being for those who would join a rally or protest for the anti-abortion movement. Here the figures are reversed (46.5% compared to 50.5%), but the difference is very small.

A second observation is that the proportion that would join a movement and also would vote varies considerably between movements. For example, for those who would join a rally in support of asylum seekers and migrants, 62.9% say they would vote. This compares to 46.9% of those who would join a rally in support of an anti-abortion campaign.

The third observation concerns the unique pattern for those who join a rally to support an anti-abortion campaign. Here one can only speculate, but one reason might relate to the underlying motives for supporting a social movement. It could be that the first seven movements are motivated by civic motives while the eighth is motivated by moral or religious motives. A more detailed analysis will be need to be done to fully explain this unique pattern.

Key Points:

1. Support for seven of the eight social movements is positively related to intention to vote.
2. The relationship between supporting a social movement and intending to vote does vary by social movement.
3. The unique pattern for the anti-abortion movement may be that it is less motivated by civic concern and more by moral or religious concerns.

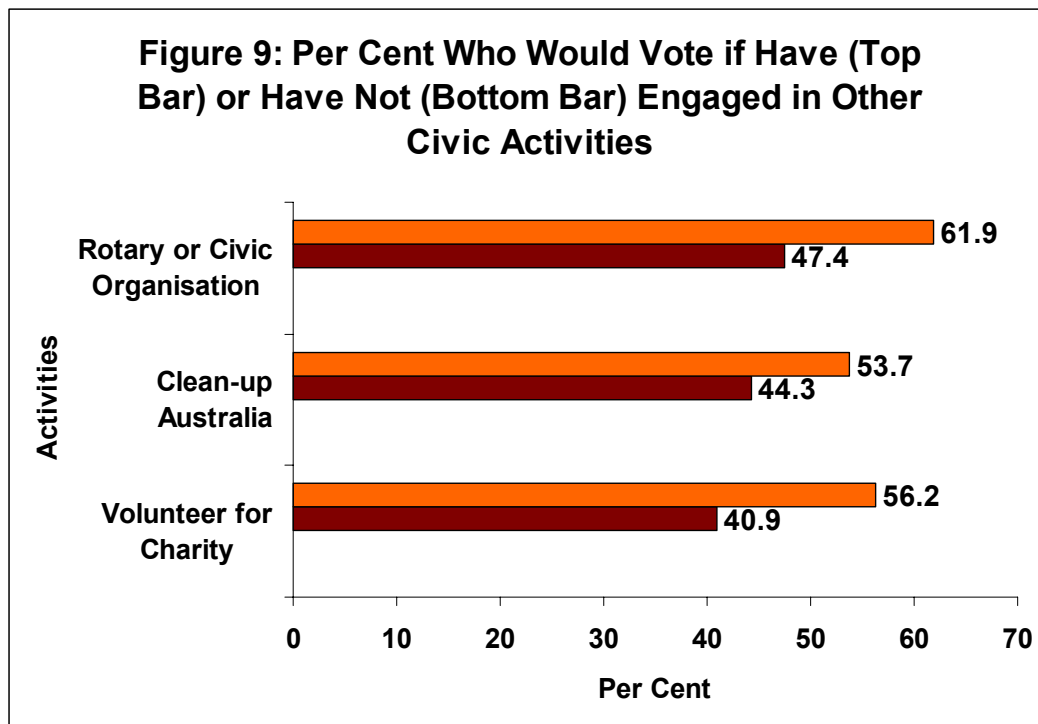
3) Other Civic/Political Behaviours and the Intention to Vote

The questionnaire contained three additional activities that may be related to political engagement, namely whether the student had been involved with Rotary or other similar civic organizations, whether the student had participated in the Clean-Up Australia campaign, and finally whether or not the student had ever done volunteer work for charity.

There is considerable evidence to suggest that participation in specific civic activities such as these three is strongly related to active citizenship behaviour because of two

reasons. The first is that by participating, the students become exposed to the underlying ideologies, values and norms of the sponsoring groups, and second, that by participating the students have a chance to see themselves as actors “for a cause” which is community/collective oriented rather than individual oriented. Both of these are considered to create a stronger civic identity (Youniss et al., 2002).

So what about Australian students? Are those who have participated in the three civic activities more inclined to vote than those who have not? The results for answering this question are found in Figure 9.



The pattern for these three activities is consistent with others we have reported: for each activity, the student who has done them also is more likely to say he or she will vote in Federal elections. For example, 61.9% of the students who have participated in Rotary also say they will vote, compared to 47.4% for those who have not.

The relationship is much the same for those who have or have not participated in the Clean Up Australia campaign or who have worked for charity.

Key Point:

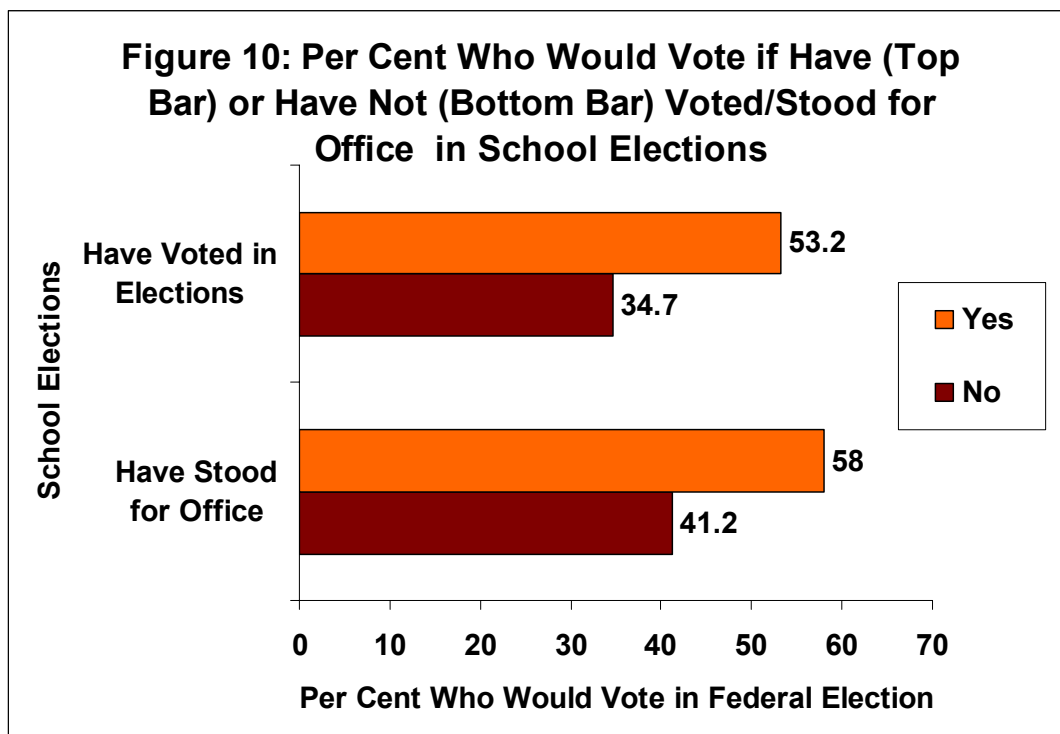
1. Participation in specific civic activities has a positive relationship with the intention to vote in Federal elections.

4) Student Government in Schools and the Intention to Vote

Previous research has found that participation in student government is positively related to later adult political behaviour. Verba and his colleagues (1995) argue, with de Tocqueville, that institutions in which individuals have an opportunity to practice democratic governance are “schools of democracy”. In their study of over 2000 American adults, having participated in student government while in high school was the most important school variable in predicting adult political activity. (Cited in Verba, et al. 1995, p. 425.)

The YES study has collected similar data both in the group interviews in 16 electoral divisions, as well as the national survey. In the survey questionnaire, students were asked whether they had ever run for a school position, for example in the student association, school council, school parliament, or as a school prefect. They were also asked whether they had voted in elections for any of these positions. In the qualitative study we have collected similar information through group interviews, strategic interviews, observation and documentary analysis.

Figure 10 shows the difference between students in the questionnaire study who have and who have not voted in school elections, or who have or have not stood for office in school elections, and whether they would vote when 18 even if voting were not compulsory.



Clearly the difference between students who have and who have not participated in school elections is significant for both those who have stood for elections, and for those who have voted. Of those who have voted in school elections, 53.2% say they would vote in a Federal Election when 18. Of the students who have not voted in school elections, only 34.7% say they would vote in a Federal election when 18.

The figures for those who have actually stood for election are a little higher, but similar. Of those who have run for school elections, 58% say they would vote, compared to 41.2% of those who have not run for elections.

These figures make it very clear that participating in school elections, either as a candidate, or as a voter, is positively related to the intention to vote when age 18. Verba and his colleagues seem to have been correct when they argued that school elections provide “hands on” experience for general political participation in adult life. The data in Figure 10 suggest that the same applies for voting.

Key Point:

1. Participation in school elections, either by voting or by standing for office, is positively related with the intention to vote in Federal elections at 18, even if not compulsory.

5. The Students Speak Out About School Elections in Group Interviews

Discussions about school elections were directly addressed in the group interviews. Most (but not all) schools that participated in our group interviews seemed to have had some form of student officers for a student association. There were a number of titles or names for the student associations, but ultimately the function was the same.

Student elections seem to be conducted in many different ways in schools. The Australian Electoral Commission, through its electoral divisions, will come into a school upon request and will conduct the school election in a formal (and educational) manner. But we do not know how frequently the AEC is called in. For the most part, it seems that teachers oversee elections in most schools.

We mentioned in the previous section (Section 3.4, Figure 10) that democratic practices in schools, especially school elections and student governments, have been considered “hands on” opportunities for learning about democracy and voting (Verba et al., 1995). It is practices such as these which, according to de Tocqueville, can make academic schools into “schools of democracy” (cited in Verba et al., p. 425).

We found that schools varied widely in the practice of student elections. For some schools, student elections involved all students, and the students held them in high regard. However,

in other schools the students regarded them with indifference, but at the same time saw them as fair. But not all schools held student elections, even though the students seemed to be favourably disposed toward them. This variety of student experiences with student elections is presented in Exhibit 4.

Exhibit 4 : The Positive Side of School Elections* (From the YES Group Interviews)

At Mallory College, students participated in elections for the Student Representative Council. All students were required to participate in these elections.

One female student felt that "...the fact that everyone had equal input is good. I think people appreciate that and think that it is fair."

This 'fairness' caused by equality of input was generally seen as important with many chiming in with agreement to this comment.

Despite this, there was a general feeling that teachers manipulated the elections and prevented certain students from getting elected.

At Holy Cross College, students were neutral towards the idea of elections, expressing neither excitement nor negativity. Although they said that these elections were a bit of a popularity contest they were also seen as reasonable and fair.

At The Lakes High School there were no school elections, and all but one student expressed the view that they would like elections. Involvement on the student representative body was voluntary.

* The names of the schools are pseudonyms.

Unfortunately our group interview students had many disparaging things to say about elections in their schools. Their disenchantment was multi-faceted, but generally focused on lack of effectiveness. Some school experiences related through the group interviews are found in Exhibit 5.

Exhibit 5: The Negative Side of School Elections* (From the YES Group Interviews)

In many cases (Grania High School, Pinehill High School and Wickham High School, for example) school elections were described as a "popularity contest".

At Grania High School a participant complained that "our representatives do nothing". At this school, representatives had tried to change the school uniform to no avail. Students commented that "the teachers run the school".

At Wickham College one student who had been on the SRC complained that the student representatives "never really got to do anything".

*The names of the schools are pseudonyms.

Students are quick to recognise when practices such as school elections are genuine or not. The sentiment which came through comments about school elections in the group interviews was often one of cynicism. However, as we have found in Figure 10, participation in these elections does have a positive relationship with the intention to vote as an adult.

The link between school elections and government elections was only sometimes expressed by students, as is apparent in Exhibit 6.

Exhibit 6: School Elections and the Link with Government Elections* (From the YES Group Interviews)

At Grania High School, a female student made a direct connection between school elections and elections more broadly. She was the only student to draw this direct link. Most students saw student elections as a "school thing".

However the student expressed the view that (with regard to elections more broadly) "in the end it is the people who you vote for who make the decisions" just like the way that teachers and school captains "got the final say" at school.

*The name of the school is a pseudonym.

If school elections are to help make “schools of democracy”, then they must be run in a democratic manner. Research has shown that political knowledge alone is insufficient in learning about democracy and active citizenship. The experience of democracy is considered by some to be far more important. (See Youniss and colleagues (2002).) Unfortunately, many students in our group interviews did not believe that their school elections were “democratic”.

Some of this sentiment is found in Exhibit 7.

Exhibit 7: School Elections and Democracy* (From the YES Group Interviews)

At St Jude's College, students thought it was mainly due to teachers' influence who would be elected, since the teachers' votes outnumbered the students', and unpopular candidates, from the teachers' point of view, were often vetoed anyway.

Describing the elections, Louis said: "I see it as just a waste of time". Aaron said: "why give us the vote if it is not going to count anyway".

Students at Trenton College expressed concern that the voting process was not very democratic. Unease was expressed regarding the lack of a secret ballot. Miranda, Debbie and Dara complained that "the teachers watched us voting".

*The names of the schools and students are pseudonyms.

Insofar as schools do have student governments of one form or another, and they have elections to determine which students hold office in those governments, then the failure to hold proper democratic elections, and the failure to treat the student governments seriously, represents a serious missed opportunity. Given that the experience of democracy can be a more important agent of political learning than the academic knowledge about democracy, suggests that some practices in some schools at least, may be undermining efforts to effectively produce active and participatory adult citizens.

In this respect, student elections in school, and participation in student governments, can be seen as part of the informal and possibly the hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum, according to Gordon (1997), "...refers to learning outcomes that are either unintended ... or if intended, are not openly acknowledged to the learners (p. 484). The hidden curriculum is not part of the manifest curriculum, but as Gordon states, under certain circumstances the hidden curriculum can be more effective and more powerful than the manifest curriculum. Print (1993) has pointed out that the hidden curriculum can be seen as positive or negative, but which is which “depends on one’s point of view” (p. 11).

The manner that teachers allow students to conduct an election for the SRC, or the function of the SRC itself, can generate positive or negative views by students of democracy, and by extrapolation, of the way government elections are conducted and how the government functions in adult civil life. Thus the predispositions that school students acquire about their adult lives as citizens, might in part be related to their experiences of citizenship and democracy in schools. Where the opportunities for democratic experience in schools are undermined, the ensuing student cynicism and disenchantment may remain into adulthood and be related to adult participation in politics and elections, including the processes of enrolment and voting

Key points:

1. At least in some schools, there is considerable cynicism by students about the effectiveness of student elections and student governments.
2. Students do not seem to see the link between student elections and student government, and what goes on in adult political life. On the basis of what we know from research, this experiential side of student life might be more important than the academic side in producing adult active citizens.
3. In some schools at least, school elections are not perceived to be democratic, and student governments are not taken seriously.

6. Implications of Our Findings for Policies to Increase Commitment to Voting, and Political Engagement Generally

We believe that our findings in this 2nd Report have important implications for enhancing the level of political awareness and political engagement among students in schools. Our findings can be grouped into two main categories, namely 1) student political activity and voting intentions as adults, and 2) student elections, student government and voting intentions as adults.

Student political activity and voting intentions

We have examined a wide variety of forms of civic and politically-related behaviours, ranging from signing petitions to participation in demonstrations. Our analysis of the data on student political activity has found that, with few understandable exceptions such as violent and destructive protest, politically-related activities are positively related to the intention to vote as adults, even if voting were not compulsory.

What is more compelling is that all of the appropriate behaviours we have considered, in one way or another, can be encouraged and even built into school curricula or youth programs.

Student elections and student government

Our data show that student elections for student governments in schools are a valuable training ground for adult political participation in a democracy. However participation in school elections was for some students an event of little meaning. To these students, school elections and the existence of a student government were not taken seriously because of the ways they were conducted. Certainly schools should utilize these opportunities to make the election and student government experiences of students a genuine, meaningful, valuable, and a realistic pre-cursor to the responsibilities of citizenship in a democracy as adults.

To create “schools of democracy” does not mean the schools themselves have to be totally democratic. Tse, for example, contends that by nature schools are not democratic, and to attempt to make them so is a “mission impossible” (Tse, 2000). However to provide students with the opportunity to experience democratic processes, in particular through genuine democratic student elections and an effective student government, appears to be a valuable component in making the entire school experience a part of civics and citizenship education. The mechanisms to assist proper school elections already exists through the efforts of the Australian Electoral Commission, and other bodies such as Elections ACT, through whom school elections can be facilitated by request. Examples of school election guidelines can be found at www.aec.gov.au and at www.elections.act.gov.au . Our data suggest that more advantage should be made of these election opportunities in schools.

Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, the *Discovery Democracy* curriculum contains classroom exercises, some of which are very similar to the behaviours we have examined. It stands to reason, then, that if properly implemented, many of these types of programs will enhance political awareness and political engagement among young adults. These exercises can be valuable “hands on” experiences of democracy in action.

A true democracy requires active citizens who are committed to making that democracy work. This means that citizens often engage in political behaviour not because it is compulsory, but because they want to, often for the common good. We have demonstrated that there is a way to raise the level of political awareness and political engagement among youth.

In conclusion, this report has established, in a preliminary manner, that a wide range of political activities experienced in schools or during adolescent years in community organizations, can have beneficial effects on attitudes towards, and intentions to engage in adult political behaviour, such as voting. Therefore the experiences of young adults in secondary school are crucial determinants, as we see it, to the kind of politically aware and active citizens they become as mature adults.

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