



Millennials are in many ways more political than older Canadians, study finds

ASHLEY CSANADY | September 9, 2015 | Last Updated: Sep 9 11:33 AM ET

Millennials are a lot of things: narcissistically obsessed with social media, contradictorily self-hating and overly nostalgic for a decade they can barely remember.

Just stop calling them apathetic.

Turns out, millennials are in many ways more political than older Canadians, even if that doesn't translate into votes.

If you ask voters whether they've engaged in political acts, from joining a party to signing a petition to running a community organization to sharing political stories online, millennials are equally or more engaged than older Canadians, according to a new Samara Canada study. Across 18 metrics, respondents under 30 were overwhelmingly more engaged in online political activities (no surprise) but they were equally likely as seniors to have volunteered for a candidate or party and more likely to have signed a petition.



They're also twice as likely to have given a political speech in public. Overall, the report, "Message Not Delivered: The Myth of Apathetic Youth and the Importance of Contact in Political Participation," found millennial respondents "participated at a rate 11 percentage points higher than those 30 and over." It's survey-based anecdotal data, but it shows something many millennials have been saying for years: it's not that they don't care about politics, it's just that electoral politics isn't necessarily catching their imaginations.

"We often use the ballot box as proxy for interest in politics and I think that's misplaced," said Samara Canada Executive Director Jane Hilderman. "To continue to call this generation apathetic I think is a disservice."

“They don’t see politics always as the most relevant arena for pushing for change,” she added, saying many would see parliament championing an issue as a last step, not a first for fostering change.

So why then, aren’t they voting?

The reasons are many but the report highlights one key difference: under 30 voters are far less likely to have had direct contact with a political party or politician, whether it’s by mail, phone, online or in person.



There are practical reasons for this, Hilderman said, such as the fact students move a lot as do young people at the start of their careers, fewer and fewer young people have landlines and when messages do arrive, they don’t always resonate.

Less-educated and poorer millennials are even less likely to have political contact: university campuses get many young politicians into one party or another, but if you go to college, pursue a trade or skip post-secondary all together, the report found you’re more likely to be less engaged in party politics.

“College students by and large get ignored even more than university students,” said executive vice-president of Mainstreet Research.

“Are the parties putting enough resources into reaching young voters? I would say no,” Valentin said. “When we think about canvassing, the way the system is set up now is skewed against young people who don’t own homes or don’t have landlines.”

“The political parties have to decide that it’s worth their while,” he said.

When youth turnout has declined since the 1960s, that’s a hard case to make: in that decade, two thirds of first-time voters cast a ballot, by the 1990s, it was a third, Hilderman said.

“Politicians have been trained to expect young people not to vote.. and so young people don’t vote, and it’s a self perpetuating cycle,” Valentin said.

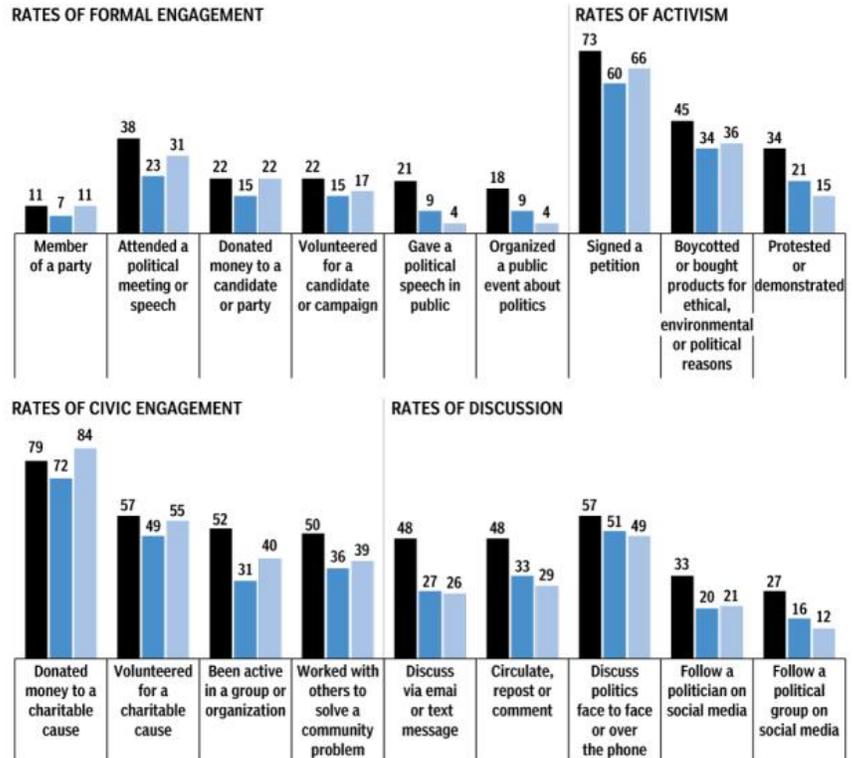
But Hilderman said if voters don’t start building the habit when they’re young, they are less likely to start voting later, which could further erode voter turnout over time.

DEBUNKING THE MYTH

Being engaged in politics is more than just casting a ballot. Samara Canada surveyed over 2,400 Canadians and found that when you look beyond votes cast, millennials are even more engaged than older generations.

POLITICAL AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT RATES IN CANADA, BY AGE

■ 18-29 ■ 30-55 ■ 56+



SOURCE: SAMARA CANADA

JONATHAN RIVAULT / NATIONAL POST

The issues millennials care about aren't all legal weed and beer free to travel across provincial boundaries. Turns out, their number one issue is the economy, just like everyone else, according to Shachi Kurl, senior vice-president of the Angus Reid Institute.

Of course, young voters — which her data defines as under 25 not under 30 — are more preoccupied with education and training issues, but Kurl said they're also more likely to believe the government can affect the economy. And, they're less likely to have made up their minds when it comes to who they will vote for (if they do).

At this stage in the election, a third of 18 to 24-year-olds say they're "very certain" about their voting intentions, she said, compared to half of 45 to 50-year-olds and nearly 60 per cent of those over 60. Kurl said it's still early in the election, and many Canadians are still unsure how to vote, but the younger they are, the less likely they are to have made up their minds.

So if voting is a habit and all it takes to get someone to consider casting that ballot is a phone call, and younger voters are more likely to have their minds changed, why aren't they being micro-targeted with tax credits and promises of shiny ponies?

In an election of inches, it's a numbers game, Kurl said. And though there are simply more Canadians over 30 and they are still more likely to vote, if you're trying to fight to move the political football even a little down the field to maintain possession, it might be time to turn their eyes to those fickle millennials.

Engage them directly; they just might surprise you and care.

Note: the data cited in this article was collected from over 2,400 Canadians online and has a margin of error of 1.99 per cent, 19 times out of 20. To learn more about it you can check out Samara's Democracy 360 work [here](#).