

# Hilderman: Political parties, you can no longer ignore young voters



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Liberal leader Justin Trudeau was educating a future voter – his son Xavier – when he cast his own ballot last Oct. 19.  
*PAUL CHIASSON / THE CANADIAN PRESS*

The official numbers are in today from Elections Canada, and they deliver a significant blow to the

myth of youth apathy. In the 2015 federal election, 57 per cent of young Canadians voted, an incredible 18 percentage point jump from the previous election. October 2015 may be the last election in which politicians dismiss young people as not worth their effort.

While voter turnout was up among all age groups, the jump was most extraordinary among young people. The 18 percentage point increase among 18 to 24 year olds [between \(http://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=res&dir=rec/eval/pes2015/vtsa&document=table1&lang=e\)](http://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=res&dir=rec/eval/pes2015/vtsa&document=table1&lang=e) elections is unprecedented since Elections Canada started publishing these results in 2004. Even in the United States, which has tracked turnout by age since the 1970s, the largest jump in magnitude was an 11 percentage point bump among 18 to 24 year olds in the 2004 presidential election.

This heightened engagement confirms what we at Samara Canada, a nonpartisan charity reconnecting Canadians to politics, noted during the election: Young people aren't apathetic, or more apathetic than older generations.

As described in our report "Message Not Delivered: The Myth of Apathetic Youth and the Importance of Contact in Political Participation," [young people \(http://www.samaracanada.com/research/active-citizenship/message-not-delivered\)](http://www.samaracanada.com/research/active-citizenship/message-not-delivered) are more engaged than older Canadians. When we measured 18 forms of participation in political life beyond voting, we found younger Canadians' participation rate is 11 percentage points higher, on average, than that of older Canadians. Canadians aged 18 to 29 are more likely to attend a political meeting or volunteer for a political candidate or campaign.

Young Canadians care a lot about political issues. But they have been underestimated, because they have traditionally voted in lower numbers than other Canadians. As such, parties have devoted fewer resources to reaching young people and have designed platforms without considering their appeal to young people. According to young people, many politicians don't even bother to talk to them: In 2014, only 55 per cent of Canadians aged 18 to 29 reported contact by a candidate or a political party, compared to 75 per cent of Canadians aged 56 or older.

The 2015 turnout numbers show ignoring youth is no longer an option – a

fact that should be on the minds of political leaders as they consider overhauling Canada's election system before 2019. The time in between elections is a key opportunity to find ways beyond the ballot box to hear from youth on this issue and other policy choices.

To illuminate how political leaders can better engage young people, Samara asked the true experts: young people. That advice is published as an [open letter \(http://www.samaracanada.com/poster-for-elected-representatives\)](http://www.samaracanada.com/poster-for-elected-representatives) with four lessons all politicians should take to heart:

- Recognize the diversity of youth. Young people are rich and poor, well-educated and less educated, urban and rural. A single young person cannot speak to the experiences of all youth.
- Forget talking about “youth” issues. Young Canadians have the same hopes and fears of other generations and are interested in the same issues as they are.
- Use social media for meaningful conversations. Allow for authentic and two-way dialogue to build relationships with young people.
- Visit youth where they are. Remember to build relationships with young people via face-to-face contact, especially in spaces where they spend time.

Many observers will chalk up the 2015 youth turnout numbers to the charisma of a single leader. But rather than assume this to be a one-time phenomena, the country will be better served if political leaders of all stripes work to maintain and attract further engagement of young people.

Right now, there are almost 200 MPs serving their first term in our House of Commons. If these MPs are successful in engaging with their young constituents, they will find young people to be full of energy and ideas that will invigorate their parties. Just as importantly, it will be likely that youth continue to turn out for elections – making Canadian democracy stronger for everyone.

*Jane Hilderman is executive director at Samara Canada, a national nonpartisan charity dedicated to reconnecting citizens to politics. To learn more, visit <http://www.samaracanada.com> (<http://www.samaracanada.com>).*

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**John Robert MacKenzie**

Yes because they bought into the pot vote no brainer there!

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**Malcolm Swoboda** · Algonquin College

And even IF so? They still went out when something (whether its what you claim, or all sorts of other things) mattered enough. The apathy is expected at a politician's possible peril.

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**Alan Hogg**

Well, lets be honest. When you campaign in schools from the Municipal level all the way up to the Fed Level, you know being teachers and all, and you make promises which most of us older folks know is BS and expensive, then ya, I can see the spike. Did I mention Free Education and Legalization. Really, where is the surprise? it was strategy by the Liberals to suck in a new generation of the Coddled Generation.

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**Rousseau Gordie**

well least they know what works and doesnt they are leading now must got some brains to figure that out.

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**Alan Hogg**

Rousseau Gordie It's the Voters I worry about. Trudeau and his band of morons will imple...

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