REGISTRATION MATTERS: EXPLAINING YOUTH VOTER PARTICIPATION IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

by

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Abstract

This study explores why voter turnout is higher among some youth than others in British Columbia and evaluates the ability of demographic, institutional and engagement variables to predict which youth vote. The primary source of data is Elections BC for the 2001 and 2005 election. Supplemental data is acquired through BC Stats, the Canadian Federation of Students, and Check Your Head. Ordinary Least Square regressions are estimated using a dozen explanatory variables. Statistical analysis indicates that being registered to vote is the greatest predictor of voting among youth in British Columbia. In assessing policy alternatives, this study suggests that Elections BC should engage with post secondary institutions in a voter registration partnership and a communications partnership effort in order to foster greater electoral participation among youth.

Keywords: youth; voter; age; turnout; British Columbia; elections; registration;
Executive Summary

Democracies rely on the participation of citizens to ensure that their representatives reflect the preferences of the people they aim to serve. Indeed, the level of participation in elections is seen as an indicator of the health of a democracy. Unfortunately, waning participation in elections and declining voter turnout is a phenomenon faced by many democracies including Canada. Most worrying for some are increasingly low turnout rates among youth. Current research both nationally and in the provinces indicates those 18-24 years of age participate in elections at lower rates than other age cohorts. Low turnout among youth is problematic because it suggests that the governments who are supposed to act on their behalf may overlook the distinct views and ideals of young people.

British Columbia has not been spared from low voter turnout in provincial elections. Elections BC puts some devoted attention to the engagement of young voters. They have made strides in improving the quality of the voters list, which aids in voter registration as well as becoming the first electoral authority in Canada to offer online voter registration. In addition, Elections BC has election specific initiatives that include hiring a youth liaison officer and they make great efforts to ensure students who live in campus housing receive information about upcoming elections.

This study was undertaken to better understand the key factors that influence voter turnout among youth in British Columbia. Using data that looks at a combined voter turnout among youth for the 2001 and 2005 election year, this investigation employs Ordinary Least Squares regression analysis to assess the impact that demographic, institutional and engagement variables have on turnout among youth in BC.
Statistically significant variables are used to formulate policy alternatives that aim to increase voter registration and turnout among youth. Five alternatives are considered including; the Status Quo, registration partnership with post secondary institutions, communications agreements with post secondary institutions, a partnership with Medical Services Plan and a peer-to-peer mobilization project. The viability of each alternative is evaluated against five criteria; effectiveness, cost, administrative feasibility, impartiality and stakeholder acceptability. From this evaluation, both alternative #2, a registration partnership with post secondary institutions, and #3 a communications agreement with post secondary institutions emerge as the most appropriate policy alternatives for Elections BC.
Dedication

To Morgan, thank you for being my number one fan, for always encouraging me and never letting me doubt myself.

And

For Michael whose gift of life gave meaning to mine and who I miss every day.
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# Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Glossary</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electoral District</td>
<td>The province is divided into 79 geographic areas for the purposes of provincial elections. Each district elects one member to the legislature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-time youth voter</td>
<td>An individual between 18-24 years for whom the election they are participating in is their first.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GYVO</td>
<td>Get Your Vote On</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RTV</td>
<td>Rock the Vote</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>18-24 year olds</td>
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1: Policy Problem and Background

Representative democracies rely on citizen participation to accurately reflect the preferences of the people they aim to serve (Mill, 1946). Central to this model of governance is electoral participation, which is seen as an indicator of the health of a democracy, with electoral outcomes signifying the degree to which the values and opinions of its citizens are adequately addressed in the political process (O’Neill, 2007). Unfortunately, declining voter turnout is a phenomenon faced by many democracies including Canada (Milner, 2005). Most worrying for some are increasingly low turnout rates among youth (O’Neill, 2007). Current research both nationally and in the provinces indicates those 18-24 years of age (herein after described as youth) participate in elections at lower rates than other age cohorts (Elections BC, 2005). Low turnout among youth is problematic because it suggests that the governments who are supposed to act on their behalf overlook the distinct views and ideals of young people.

Of all the provinces, citizens in British Columbia are the most concerned about low voter turnout. (Environics, 2004) This is not surprising as BC was the beginning of a revival in interest in Canada around electoral reform starting in 2003. Despite interest among researchers, election officials and citizens, there has not been a great deal of investigation into low voter turnout that looks specifically at British Columbia. Yet, low voter turnout is a reality in BC (Elections BC, 2004).

In seeking to more deeply understand the problem and causes of low youth turnout in BC, this study examines youth voting behaviour in the 2001 and 2005 provincial elections. It is hoped that this research will produce recommendations to help boost youth turnout rates. The remainder of the introductory section outlines the value of voting, the experiences of low voter turnout
internationally, nationally, and in British Columbia as well as provides an overview of youth turnout.

1.1 Policy Problem: The Value of Voting

As voting is the central mechanism for participating in representative democracies it is distressing that western democracies such as the United Kingdom, the US, Canada and even Finland and Norway are all experiencing in decline voting among young people (Milner, 2005). Representative democracies rely on the practice whereby eligible voters in a jurisdiction express their political preferences by casting a ballot for a representative (Manin, 1997). Low turnout among some populations influences not only the selection of a representative but elected officials’ policy decisions (Archer, 2003). As Smith and Stewart (1998: 13) note, “in elections with extremely low levels of voter turnout there is the distinct possibility that entire segments of the population will not have their policy preferences represented”.

The problem of low voter turnout is especially acute among established democracies. The literature indicates that both educational attainment and income are factors that have a positive correlation with turnout and yet turnout continues to decline (Lijphart, 1997; Rubenson et. al., 2004). This trend in declining voter participation is also worrying because if smaller and smaller groups of people are voting then politicians and political parties will only have to cater to those small groups in order to win seats in government. A situation may develop where not voting means you do not matter. Given what we know about who votes, predominantly those who are wealthy and educated, the potential outcome is clear: politicians will woo the small groups of the wealthy and well educated for their votes and the policies and programs of government will only represent those interests. As Lijphart notes, “Unequal participation spells unequal influence” (Lijphart, 2000). The ramifications are serious and may lead to the undermining of legitimate representative governments (Pammett and Leduc, 2003). Low turnout among youth is troubling
because if they vote less than others there is a risk that the distinct needs and values of youth have little influence and receive little attention.

The specific policy problem of low voter turnout among young voters is troublesome not only because the preferences of this segment of the population will be under-represented in legislature, but also because voting is a habit forming activity and there is a risk of creating a habitual cycle of non-voting that will only get worse in the long term. According to Milner, entrenched habits of non-voting in youth is a critical contributor to the growing democratic deficit (Milner, 2005). The importance of the participation of young voters in elections should not be underestimated as, “they represent to a very considerable extent the future citizens of a democracy, and thus their active engagement is tied to the very success of the political system” (Archer, 2003). It is important to address this aspect of Canadian voter trends otherwise “we face the prospect of a state of affairs in which only a minority of citizens exercises the democratic franchise” (Milner, 2005: 3).

Turnout is lowest among young voters. By not participating in elections through there is the potential those non-voting behaviours that last for life will be established. Thus, the problem of low turnout among youth requires serious consideration in any representative democracy. If this phenomenon goes unaddressed, “then turnout decline will accelerate as newly-eligible-to-vote cohorts, set in their non-voting ways, replace older cohorts with developed voting habits” (Milner, 2005). There is a real potential for low voter turnout among youth to have long lasting impacts on the electoral system as a whole. A lack of participation among youth in elections raises concerns about the legitimacy of the policies of government but it also ensures that the unique views and experiences of young voters receive no attention in the political process. Clearly, there is a need to examine the factors that influence turnout among this age cohort.
1.2 Voter Turnout: International, Canadian and BC Trends

In the last ten years, declining voter turnout has been a topic of interest for policy makers, academics and the public, all three groups expressing concern over the growing democratic deficit (Nekhaie, 2006; Milner, 2005). This distress stems from recent research showing participation declines among Western nations, even in Scandinavian countries which have typically high voter turnout levels (Milner, 2005; IDEA, 2004). Declining voter participation among these established democracies is noteworthy because these countries benefit from high standards of living and strong electoral institutions free of corruption and fraudulence, all factors which are traditionally associated with high turnout levels.

Democratic scholars attribute declining voter turnout to the lack of participation among youth in elections. (Blais et. al., 2004; Gigendil et. al., 2004; O’Neill, 2007) While the full extent of the phenomenon is not understood, in comparing overall turnout in the 15 Western Democracies, the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) suggest youth turnout is 10 per cent lower than their parents’ generations. IDEA’s comparative analysis also suggests countries facing an overall decline in turnout have the greatest turnout gap between their youngest voters and average turnout of all voters (IDEA, 1999). Both O’Neill (2007) and Gigendil et. al.(2004) contend that this overall decline in turnout can be attributed to the increasing decline in participation starting with those born in the 1970s and onward.
As shown in Figure 1, turnout has also been in decline in Canadian federal elections (Pammett and Leduc, 2003). This graph reflects turnout in all federal elections from 1945 to 2005 with the best-fit line illustrating voter turnout decline. While average turnout for all Canadian federal elections since 1945 is 75 per cent, these rates have oscillated over the years. A persistent decline began with the 1993 election when only 70 per cent of those registered cast ballots, followed by 67 per cent in 1997, 64 per cent in 2000 and the low of 61 per cent in 2004 (Elections Canada, 2006). Like other established democracies with strong institutions, Canadian voter turnout has been in decline since the end of World War II (Elections Canada, 2007).

Low voter turnout at a federal level is concerning because it suggests that the political process might not be fully representative. That is, when segments of the population do not participate in the electoral process there is little incentive for political representatives to ensure
that the views and needs of these groups are reflected in policy and decision-making. Despite the increased efforts on the part of Elections Canada to use their authority to help stem turnout decline, participation in federal elections has not been increasing. The 1999-2002 Election Canada strategic plan acknowledges Canada’s declining voter participation as a part of a larger international phenomenon that at the time was referred to as a “value shift in many democracies, including our own, that is producing diminished participation in all forms of political activity” (Elections Canada, 1999). For Elections Canada, high turnout in elections speaks of a healthy democracy and the low turnout of the past 20 years points to a democratic deficit.

Figure 2  Voter Turnout in British Columbia Provincial Elections 1983-2005 (%)

Source: Elections BC, 2005
Voter turnout is also declining in British Columbia. Figure 2 displays turnout in British Columbia from 1983 to 2005 and clearly illustrates a decline in participation. Data on voter turnout during this period spans six provincial elections. Turnout, which is measured here as a the number of those who voted as a percentage of who was eligible, in the 1983 election was 70.5 per cent and fell to a low of 55.4 per cent in the 2001 election. Additionally, Figure 2 illustrates the increase in turnout experienced in the 2005 election, which brought turnout up to 58 per cent. These results mirror the similar movement in turnout experienced at the federal level, whereby, turnout has been declining consistently and then rose slightly in the 2006 election.

1.3 Youth Turnout

Evidence suggests the young tend to vote at lower rates than older citizens do. Known as a “lifecycle” effect: a voter’s tendency to vote increases as he or she ages. However, contemporary studies suggest this is no longer the case. The gap between the youngest and oldest voters has never been so great in Canada and research puts forward that more and more young voters will not participate in elections as they age (Howe, 2003). Noticeable changes in this pattern only began to emerge among the generation born in the 1970s and who came of voting age in the 1990s (Blais et al., 2004). In comparing this generation with the turnout of the baby boomer generation at the same period in their lives, Blais et al.,(2004) discover that turnout is 20 percentage points lower and largely attributed the decline in voter participation to the low voter turnout among this generation.

It is unknown if these findings are reflected in voter turnout in British Columbia as very little research has been conducted into turnout at the provincial level. However, Elections BC does acknowledge that turnout among youth is quite low and the catalyst for their recent initiatives aimed at “increasing turnout and promoting the electoral process” (BC Stats, 2005:1) Greater discussion of youth turnout, how it is measured and the current situation in British Columbia is thoroughly reviewed in Section 3.4.
Recent scholarship suggests that the overall decline in voter participation can be largely accredited to the lack of participation on the part of youth voters. This situation is worthy of attention because a government’s ability to be truly representative is hampered when young people do not vote. At the provincial level, concern about low voter turnout in BC is high and yet an absence of research exists.

1.4 Summary

While youth turnout rates are often lower than those of older age cohorts, current youth voting levels appear to be very low in Canada and internationally. The youth voting deficit would appear to be so great that it is the main cause of overall turnout decline (Blais et. al., 2004). To emphasize this point, Butler and Stokes (1974) note that lifelong patterns of voting behaviour are established in three elections and remain that way until the end of an elector’s life. Thus, the patterns of non-voting among youth requires attention if anything is to be done about low voter turnout in elections.

Considering this initial evidence, this study examines youth voter turnout in British Columbia and seeks to provide recommendations as to how to improve voter turnout levels in this province. Left unchecked the current phenomenon of low voter turnout among youth could have a lasting impact on the legitimacy of representative democracy in British Columbia and will leave large segments of society without a forum for their policy preferences. Based on this problem, this research examines the factors influencing youth turnout in elections. The study then evaluates policy alternatives for increasing turnout among young people at the provincial level.
2: Methodology

Where many studies seek to explain why some individuals may or may not participate in elections (Pammett and LeDuc, 2003) this study follows the advice of leading scholars and examines voter turnout in aggregate. In other words, the purpose of this investigation is to discover factors that can perhaps help explain variations in aggregated measures of youth voter turnout. While the difference in turnout between age cohorts is widely acknowledged, this study extends this line of investigation to focus on the factors that may explain the turnout difference among youth themselves. Employing data collected from each electoral district in British Columbia, this research seeks to uncover why voter turnout among youth is higher in some electoral districts than others. Here the percentage of eligible youth voting in each district is the dependent variable in which the study seeks to explain variation, with Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression employed to determine which of a series of independent variables most influence this variation. This section explains the methodological approach used to examine the impact of various factors on youth turnout. It presents and defines all explanatory variables used in the research and provides the rationale behind their selection and their hypothesised effects on youth voter turnout.

2.1 Understanding Voting Behaviour: Individual vs. Aggregate Approaches

Many studies explore voter turnout and the factors that influence voter behaviour in one of two ways: either through using individual level data or aggregate level data. In looking at individuals, investigators seek to understand the impact that discrete data has on turnout among individuals (e.g., the impact that one’s annual income has on one’s propensity to vote). Conversely, exploring the factors that influence turnout at an aggregate level, they seek to
understand the impact of group data on the turnout for a particular demographic (e.g., the impact that average annual income for the electoral district has on the turnout of the residents of the electoral district).

Voting studies focused on individual behaviour explore how demographic factors and personal characteristics affect voting behaviour (Matsusaka and Palda, 1999). Research that looks at explaining turnout at an individual level seeks to understand individual preferences. It also provides an opportunity to explore some of the subtleties of predictors of voting. In capturing individual data there is an ability on the part of the investigators to analyze outliers and isolate common factors experienced by a variety of individuals. Furthermore, depending on the nature of the sample, individual data on turnout allows researchers to generalize about the public at large without having to collect data on the whole population.

There are three difficulties with the individual survey approach to understanding voting behaviours. First, there is the issue of inaccurate reporting. More specifically, surveys of individuals always find that participants overrespond to the question, “Did you vote?” As such, these findings often show the number of people who voted to be much higher in the sample than the number of people who actually voted in the election. Research has found that this may be caused by a social stigma attached to non-voting (Blais et al., 2004). Even though a survey respondent may not have voted, they will lie when asked because it is considered socially desirable to vote (Granberg and Holmberg, 1991). The second reason is similar in that the act of participating in a survey prior to an election may have encouraged those respondents who were unlikely voters to actually vote, hence there is a distorted assessment of their voting behaviour (Blais et al., 2004). Third, people who respond to surveys are likely the types of people who would vote. That is to say, researchers are more likely to be able to complete surveys with those individuals who vote (Granberg and Holmberg, 1991). For these reasons, the robustness of this approach is problematic.
In light of these concerns, contemporary literature in this area suggests that aggregate
data is a more appropriate unit of measurement for study. Furthermore, employing an aggregated
unit of observation, such as an electoral district, rather than an individual creates the opportunity
for analysis “where individual idiosyncrasies will cancel each other and allow the estimation of
models with greater explanatory power” (Matsusaka and Palda, 1999 pg. 442). Such a method as
this, examines aggregate voting behaviour and aggregate explanatory variables (Matsusaka and
Palda, 1999; Geys, 2006).

In terms of research specifically focussing on youth, most is based upon the individual
approach, using survey data to focus on explaining why an individual does or does not vote
(Milner, 1997; Matsusaka and Palda, 1999; Pammett and Leduc, 2003; Blais et. all 2000;
Elections BC, 2005). These studies seek primarily to understand a young person’s motivation for
voting or not voting, by focusing on issues that are believed to characterize the problem of low
turnout such as; lack of political knowledge and interest, apathy and cynicism with the electoral
process and the lack of a sense of civic duty (Milner, 2005; IDEA,2004; Pammett and LeDuc,
2003; Mackinnon, Pitre and Walting 2007; O’Neill, 2007; Gigendil et. al., 2004). That is to say,
they focus on the psycho/sociological explanations that influence low voter turnout in terms of
attitudes, values, norms etc.(Matsusaka and Palda, 1999).

Exploring low turnout among youth in this fashion using data from individuals introduces
earlier described problems of over-response, diversity of the sample and surveying influencing
the participant’s behaviour. Milner (2004) suggests individual level analysis may not be the best
approach if the goal is to find policy solutions for increasing turnout and raises his concerns at
the suitability of using individual data to make conclusions about aggregate level hypotheses
(Milner, 2004). It may not be the best approach to explore a demographic phenomenon by
investigating the individual. In focusing on the individual’s reasons for not participating, the
social context is ignored and the predictive power of the analysis is low (Nekhaie, 2006).
2.2 Summary

In summary, surveys that seek to understand turnout at the individual level often have problems with positive over responses when asked if they voted. Over response occurs for three reasons. Individuals lie about their voting behaviour due to social stigma attached to not voting. The type of person who responds to surveys is the type of person who are more likely to vote and third, participating in a survey may remind a respondent to vote, thereby changing past behaviour. The greater part of research on youth has focused on the individual psycho/sociological reasons for low turnout. Further, it is difficult to assess the value in evaluating a demographic phenomenon at an individual level.

In light of past studies, this investigation follows the aggregate path and offers a cross-sectional examination of factors influencing youth voter turnout in British Columbia. A dataset is constructed for this study using Elections BC voter participation data from the 2001 and 2005 elections. This data is especially useful, as information for each electoral district has been divided into age cohorts. In other words, electoral district level information on the turnout rate of 18-24 year olds for the last two provincial elections is the basis for this research. Supplemental data regarding electoral district demographics relies on data from BC Stats and interviews with Elections BC, Get Your Vote On, and Rock the Vote. Descriptive statistics are discussed and then they are used in OLS regression to explain why youth turnout might be higher in some than other electoral districts during the 2001 and 2005 BC provincial elections.
3: Defining and Measuring Youth Voter Turnout in BC Elections

Measuring youth turnout is not a straightforward process, as numerous variations exist on how to both measure turnout and define youth. This section reviews how turnout out is measured in other jurisdictions and how it is measured in this investigation. It also includes an overview of how youth is defined for this study.

3.1 Defining and Measuring Voter Turnout

The dependent variable for this study is youth voter turnout in BC electoral districts. While a widely used variable, its measure is not straightforward as turnout rates are generated in a variety of ways across jurisdictions, institutions and countries (Geys, 2006). Even within Canada, there are differences within jurisdictions about how turnout is defined. The official measure employed by Elections Canada is a calculation of voter turnout as the number of people who voted as a percentage of those registered to vote on the National Register of Electors (Black, 2003). The province of British Columbia uses this measure of turnout but also calculates turnout as a measure of total number of those who voted as a percentage of those who were eligible to vote (Elections BC, 2006). Yet another method of calculating turnout, involving a measure of total population against number of people who voted, is practised in a number of countries (Geys, 2006).

All definitions have associated pros and cons. Using a turnout measure based on those eligible as the denominator ensures that the scope of the measure accounts for all people who fulfil the requirements to vote but may have not voted or registered to vote (Geys, 2006). A measure of turnout based on those who registered ensures that those on the voters list fulfil the
requirements of citizenship, are of legal age and have not lost the right to vote (Geys, 2006). However, this might be a problem because many potential voters and especially young voters are likely not registered. At the national level, this approach may be more appropriate because voter registration at the federal level is automatic (Matsusaka and Palda, 1993). This is not the case at the provincial level, with registration in British Columbia being voluntary and not automatic (Elections BC, 2003).

Currently, the United States practices the Voting Age Population (VAP) method of turnout calculations (Bickerton, 2004). This method uses a measure of turnout as a percentage of those who voted against the total populations. The Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance also uses the VAP method of turnout calculation on those who voted as a percentage of the Voting Age Populations. This is appropriate at an international level because there are inconsistencies among countries on the quality of data collection relating to their electorate. Using the VAP method of calculation ensures a conservative estimation of turnout and in the absence of hard data this is the best approach. The VAP method is a problematic approach in a country like Canada. Increasing immigration means that at any given time significant portions of the population would not be eligible to vote because they had not satisfied the citizenship test, which is required to vote in all level of elections in Canada. It is also not an appropriate procedure to employ British Columbia for two reasons: first, British Columbia is the second highest immigrant-receiving province in the country. Therefore, the VAP would be much higher then the actual number of eligible voters and turnout would be calculated as much lower. Second, the quality of the data on the BC electorate is quite high and the ability to measure fine variations of turnout.

While Elections BC also calculates an estimate of those who voted as a percentage of those registered to vote, this is not the basis of their official turnout count (Elections BC, 2003). In their 2003 discussion paper, “Voter Registration in BC”, Elections BC acknowledged problems
with its registration process (Elections BC, 2003). It was revealed that, “the voter’s list only contains approximately 70% of eligible voters” and that, “the currency of the list appears to be well below the traditionally accepted benchmark of 85%, and accuracy may also be below acceptable standards” (Elections BC, 2003:3). Also noted in the report is that the poor state of the voters list is related to the decline in participation in elections (Elections BC, 2003). Those who are not inclined to register themselves to vote are also less likely to actually vote (Highton, 2004). Using the definition of turnout based on a percentage of registered voters who voted may create the situation where a sub-group of the population (those eligible to vote but not registered) could be overlooked.

3.2 Defining Youth

Across the jurisdictions of national and international boundaries, it seems as if every institution has a different definition of what it means to be a youth. The United Nations defines youth as anyone between 15-24 years old as established in 1985, International Youth Year (UN Youth, 2008). The federal government definition of youth is those between the ages of 13-29 (Shen, 2006) and in British Columbia it extends to 30 (BC WorkInfoNet, 2008). Elections BC defines youth as those individuals 18 to 24 years olds at the time of an election (Elections BC, 2001) There is no universal definition of youth as defining it in different ways serves the objectives of each study and institution. For the purposes of this study, youth is defined as people between the ages of 18-24. This range is most appropriate, as it is the age range in which a citizen’s first opportunity to vote falls. When an individual turns 18, they are eligible to vote. However, their birthday may have fallen just after an election, which means they have to wait at least four more years for another opportunity to vote. Defining youth as those 18-24 years old captures those old enough to vote and is certain to capture them during their first election experience.
3.3 Summary

This research uses the measure of turnout that calculates it as a percentage of those who voted divided by those who were eligible. More specifically, the dependent variable is youth voter turnout as assessed by dividing the number of 18-24 years olds voting in each constituency by those of the same age who were eligible to vote. This rate is generated for 79 electoral districts in the 2001 election and 79 electoral districts in the 2005 election, for a total of 158 observations. Merging data from the two years creates a larger sample, which is desirable when employing multiple explanatory variables in a regression analysis. Descriptive statistical data on the dependent variable reveals some important details about the extent of the predicament in low voter turnout among youth in BC. Complete information on how turnout for this study was calculated please see Appendix A.

3.4 Youth Turnout in British Columbia Electoral Districts

Figure 3 illustrates the differing rates of turnout across age cohorts in the 2001 and 2005 BC elections. It also provides median scores combining data from both years. A median measure is used as opposed to a mean measure because the median ensures that turnout is not being inflated or deflated due to outliers in turnout and provides a more accurate depiction of turnout in the province.
Overall turnout in the 2001 provincial in BC was 55%. Turnout was highest among 65-74 year olds at 71 per cent. Conversely, turnout was lowest among 18-24 year olds at 27 per cent. The gap in turnout is greatest among these cohorts and the difference is 45 percentage points. As the electorate age’s, turnout in 2001 almost universally increases. One exception is the 75+ cohort whose turnout is slightly lower than 65-74 year olds. Among the cohorts, turnout is not more than 50 per cent until the electorate reaches 35 to 44 years of age where turnout is 53 per cent. This finding is significant because

The 2005 election results show a slight improvement in turnout. Overall turnout was 58 per cent indicating an increase of three per cent from the 2001 election. Turnout was once again lowest among 18 to 24 year olds at 35 per cent and highest among 65-74 year olds at 73 per cent. In this election, the difference in turnout shrunk to 38 percentage points. Between the 2001 and
2005 election turnout increased among all cohorts save one, the oldest cohort. In 2005, turnout among 75+ electorate decreased by three percentage points. This may be related to the demographic reality of an aging population and the

In both elections turnout is lowest among youth voters. However, the gap in turnout between the lowest participating and highest participating cohort shrank in the 2005 election. Median youth participation in the 2001 election was 27 per cent. In the 2005 election, turnout among youth rose, just as it did in most of the cohorts, to 35 per cent; however, turnout among young voters remains the lowest of all the cohorts. Overall, median turnout for the two years was 31 per cent. This finding is consistent with the literature that notes youth vote less than older voters (O’Neill, 2007). Noteworthy is that the youngest cohort had the greatest gain in voter participation between elections. Comparatively, turnout among youth at the federal level has been lower than turnout at the provincial level. In the 2000 federal election turnout was 22.4 per cent among youth (Elections Canada, 2005). However, it seems as if BC has mirrored the federal experience as turnout among youth rose in the next federal election to 37.05 per cent (Elections Canada, 2005).

It is very important to acknowledge the difference in turnout between the youngest cohort and the median turnout because it provides a sense of how far below the average turnout among youth falls. Median turnout in 2001 was 55 per cent and the gap in turnout between the overall median and turnout among the youngest cohort was 28 percentage points. In the 2005 election, median turnout reached 58 per cent compared to youth turnout, which was 35 per cent. This change slightly closed the gap between the median turnout and youth turnout to 23 per cent indicating an increase in turnout among youth.

Figure 3 very clearly illustrates the vastly different turnout rates between generations and supports literature suggesting turnout increases with age until the age of 74. These findings also reinforce the idea that non-participating young voters significantly affect overall turnout levels.
For example, if turnout among 18-24 year olds was increased to 75 per cent or by 40 percentage points, overall turnout would increase to 64.4 per cent or by 6.4 per cent on 2005 turnout. On the other hand, if turnout among 55-64 year olds increased to 75 per cent or four percentage points overall turnout would only increase to 59.28 per cent or by less than two per cent.

These low voting rates among youth are problematic. As noted by Smith and Stewart’s (1998) report *Making Local Government Work*, “the generally agreed threshold of 50 per cent electoral participation is the test for all democracies. Anything less essentially represents a real democratic dilemma for political systems.” The data shows that turnout in British Columbia is at real risk of falling below the threshold. This data is a rich indicator and concisely demonstrates the extent of the problem of low voter turnout among youth in British Columbia, setting the stage for further analysis.
4: The Factors Affecting BC Youth Voter Turnout

To remind the reader, the purpose of this study is to determine what commonly cited factors affect or do not affect variations in aggregate youth voter turnout in British Columbia. While the descriptive statistics in the previous section tell some of the story, more advanced statistical analysis will help fortify initial conclusions. Thus, this section outlines the independent variables in this study. Organized as voter demographics, institutional variables and engagement variables, Table 1 explains how each variable is measured, the hypothesis of the expected impact on the dependent variable and the reasoning behind the choice of each variable. In depth, discussion of each independent variable follows.
Table 1  
Independent Variables and their Hypothesized Effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Hypothesized Effect</th>
<th>Related Literature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demographic</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>Average annual household income</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Blais et al, 2004; Lipjhart, 1997;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Matsusaka and Palda, 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>% with University Education</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Blais et al, 2004; Rubenson et al p. 411,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Density</td>
<td>Total electoral district population/</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>Blais, Massicotte and Dobrzynska, 2003;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>electoral district area</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lipset, 1981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Immigrant</td>
<td>% immigrant residents</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>Matsusaka and Palda, 1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus</td>
<td># post secondary institutions</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence</td>
<td># campus residences</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFS Local</td>
<td># of CFS locals</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered</td>
<td>% youth registered to vote (18-24)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Elections BC, 2005; Highton, 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitiveness</td>
<td>(1st place votes-2nd place votes/1st</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Rubenson et al, 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>place votes+2nd place votes)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Engagement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GYVO events</td>
<td># Get Your Vote On events</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RTV events</td>
<td># Rock the Vote events</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EBC events</td>
<td># Elections BC events</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EBC radio ads</td>
<td># radio ads aired</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Milner, 2005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.1 Demographic Variables

*Income and education* are two variables in this study known to be positively related to voter turnout and help to describe the characteristics of the electoral district (Lipjhart, 1997; Matsusaka and Palda, 1999; Blais et al, 2004). Education is a well-known determinant of voting (Blais et al, 2004). People with more education are more likely to vote (Blais et al, 2004). They are also more likely to feel prepared to vote and to have the sense of voting as a social obligation (Blais et al 2004; Matsusaka and Palda, 1999). The data for the education variable is based on data provided by BC Stats as a measure of average years of education completed for each
electoral district. According to Rubenson et. al, the impact of education has a larger effect on the
turnout of young voters versus older voters (Rubenson et. Al., 2004). Data for all 158
observations of the demographic variables is derived from 2001 Census. The timing of this
research feel in between the 2001 and 2006 Census data and current information on British
Columbia was not available.

Income is as a factor that affects voter turnout (Matsusaka and Palda, 1999; Rubenson et
al, 2004). Those with higher incomes tend to vote more. Rubenson et. al’s findings link voting to
income because those of higher income have more time and energy to devote to participating in
elections (Rubenson et. al., 2004). Voting behaviour considered through a rational choice lens
assumes that there is a cost to voting. Those with higher incomes are easily able to pay the cost of
voting (Matsusaka and Palda, 1999). Further, individuals with higher incomes are more invested
in the election outcomes because as Filer et. al., (1993) states, they “have more to gain or lose
from the election.” BC Stats is the source for the data on Average Annual Income for each
electoral district in the province. For this study, it is hypothesized that income has a positive
impact on the dependent variable. As with the data on Education, Average Annual Household
Income is based on BC Stats profiles for each electoral district.

Consistent with the literature, population density is employed as a third demographic
variable in this study (Blais, Massicotte and Dobrzynska, 2003). This variable is used to
differentiate between rural and urban areas. Population density in this study is a ratio of the total
population of the electoral district over the area of the electoral district. Using Community
Profile data from BC Stats and the 2001 Census Data, population densities are calculated as a
ratio of people to land area. Population density is essentially a measure of whether or not an area
is urban or rural. Some schools of thought suggest that in rural areas the pressure to vote is strong
because elections in small communities are more personal, have tighter social networks and the
shame of not participating exist (Hoffman-Martinot, 1994). Conversely, the literature also
suggests that voter turnout is higher in urban areas because it is easier to mobilize voters in concentrated areas. Yet, in his 2005 review of aggregate level data, Geys finds that there is no relationship between population concentration and turnout (Geys, 2005). Recent literature is inconclusive about the impact that population density has on voter turnout out (Geys, 2006). Some studies hold that the less dense an area the greater the turnout will be because there is a greater sense of community among residents and less opportunity for anonymity so community members will feel an obligation to participate (Geys, 2006). Equally, studies hypothesize that greater density in an area can have positive impacts on turnout (Blais, Massicotte and Dobrzynska, 2003). This greater turnout in more dense areas is attributed to the fact that, “electors are more concentrated and easier to mobilize” (Lipset, 1981).

The percentage of an electoral district that identifies as immigrant is included among the demographic variables. British Columbia as a province is the second largest receiver of immigrants every year (Government of Canada, 2003). Often, these new residents settle in neighbourhoods that have established ethnic communities, and the literature suggests that this trend could have an impact on voter turnout. However, the directional impact is not thoroughly understood. Buoyed by social networks, immigrants may be encouraged to vote (Matsusaka and Palda, 1993). The converse may also be true: the process of settlement, of becoming informed and of understanding the political system could be too overwhelming to participate (Matsusaka and Palda, 1993). Therefore, the hypothesized direction of the effect of immigration on turnout is not stated.

*College and university campuses* and campus residences are included in this study as demographic variables. These institutions are dominated by young people and provide natural venues for election information dissemination and events. The presence of young people on campuses suggests that the population will be better educated and therefore more likely to vote.
Using information provided through the BC Ministry of Advanced Education, the number of college and university campuses was determined for each electoral district.

As well as being places where young people concentrate, campuses are also home to campus residences. Traditionally, information on elections is sent to every address in the province. Unfortunately, the information is often not received by those who live in residences because it was perceived as bulk mail or did not make it to residents directly. In 2005, the youth liaison officer for Elections BC conducted outreach to the administration branch of each on campus housing authority. Elections BC coordinated with residence administration to have election information (including registration and voting location information) delivered directly to all campus residents. The presence of a residence was measured for each electoral district based on information accessed from the public post-secondary institutions in British Columbia. The presence of post-secondary campuses and the presence of campus residences in an electoral district are both hypothesized to have a positive impact on voter turnout.

The Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) is a national students union with a branch in British Columbia. The CFS has 19 local chapters of the union in British Columbia organized at different campuses throughout the province (CFS, 2006). These union locals are the basis of organizing for students unions at universities and colleges. CFS locals participate in the yearly issue campaigns designed at the provincial level and are often active in encouraging their union members to participate in elections. This variable is a measure of the number of CFS locals in an electoral district with a hypothesized positive correlation with the dependent variable.

4.1.2 Institutional Variables

Registration refers the number of eligible voters in the 18-24 year old cohort that were registered to vote on the provincial electoral list in each electoral district. This study hypothesizes that there is a positive correlation between being registered to vote and voter
turnout. American scholars have found that turnout rates are higher among those who register to vote (Highton, 2004). Indeed the bulk of literature from the United States focuses on the issue of registration and problems associated with registration as the source of low turnout in elections (Piven and Cloward, 1988). These American experiences share similar conditions to voting in British Columbia where registration is also not automatic. The voluntary nature of registering suggest that those who do register are more interested in elections and have the time to participate. Being registered to vote also ensures that electors receive important information relating to the election, for example, when and where to vote (Elections BC, 2005; Highton, 2004). Complete data on registration among 18-24 year olds in each electoral district was gathered from Elections BC.

*Competitiveness* of the elections in each of the electoral districts is also a variable used in this study. Studies on voter turnout show that the closeness of an electoral race can encourage people to participate and is a factor that affects turnout (Rubenson et al., 2004; Milner, 1997; Matsusaka and Palda, 1999). The measure of competitiveness employs the method used by Matsusaka and Palda (1999), as introduced by Barzel and Silberberg (1973) that is taking the “difference between the votes of the top two finishers as a percentage of their combined votes” (Matsusaka and Palda, 1999). The competitiveness of the race was calculated in each electoral district for both election years using the General Election Statement of Votes: Summary of Results by Candidate data provided by Elections BC (Elections BC, 2001 & 2005). The competitiveness of an electoral race can make a strong impression on young voters (Milner, 2005). A young first-time voter has yet to establish voting habits but these habits can be encouraged by a close electoral race (Rubenson et al., 2004). If the voters perceive the outcome of the election to be predetermined then they will stay away from the polls (Rubenson et al., 2004 pg 412). In accordance with past studies this study hypothesizes, that competitiveness is positively correlated with voter turnout.
4.1.3 Engagement Variables

The attention on low voter turnout among young populations has encouraged researchers, governments and advocates to take action in order to reverse this trend. Theories on how to mobilize young voters abound and, in the absence of clear policy or institutional changes, those who are concerned are left to experiment. Beyond the work that Elections BC is involved in to capture young voters, third-party mobilization projects have emerged with the intent of engage with young voters on issues of importance to them. The theory is that through this focused engagement young people can be lured back to the polls.

Third-party organizations became involved in the 2005 provincial election and two organizations in particular launched large-scale, province-wide voter mobilization campaigns aimed at youth. These two initiatives received a lot of attention: Get Your Vote On (GYVO) and Rock the Vote (RTV). Both organizations invested enormous resources into campaigns aimed at increasing youth voter turnout.

Get Your Vote On is a non-partisan youth engagement project that emerged from the 2004 federal election and that was supported by the organization, Check Your Head (GYVO, 2005). This project was aimed at making voting fun and relevant for 18-34 year olds. They used innovative online and mobile networking tools to connect with young people along with concerts, all-candidates meetings and workshops (GYVO, 2005). Focused on using peer-to-peer networks, GYVO worked with interested communities of young people to start their own GYVO “hubs” throughout the province in order to disseminate information and encourage voter registration.

For this study, data was gathered from GYVO that reflected the events that they organized and attended and this was attributed to the appropriate electoral districts. GYVO had an extensive online presence as well as an innovative SMS or mobile text messaging campaign that was supported by Western Economic Diversification and hosted by UBC’s Mobile MUSE Project. They also registered an estimated 20,000 young people and were the subject of upwards
to 25 media stories all over the province (GYVO, 2005). However, due to incomplete data, I was unable to tie these efforts and their results to particular electoral districts. This variable measures the impact of GYVO events on voter turnout, employing the frequency of these events in each electoral district and I hypothesize that there is a positive impact on voter turnout.

*Rock the Vote* (RTV) was a provincial project developed and paid for by the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) British Columbia chapter (CFS, 2005). This non-partisan initiative focused on issues of importance to students, mainly the increase in post-secondary tuition fees. RTV toured the province visiting CFS locals and tabling, supporting local events and encouraging students to become informed and register to vote. The tour was supported by concerts and events, a website and promotional material that included both paid advertising and in kind support from media partners (CFS, 2005). For this study, a measure of the events that Rock the Vote supported and/or initiated is used. Based on data provided by the CFS and former RTV staff this variable is measured by attributing the frequency of events to the corresponding electoral district where they took place. This study hypothesizes that there is a positive correlation between RTV events and the dependent variable.

*Elections BC* did not organize events for youth themselves, rather they sought to support the work of others. The youth liaison officer did attend a number of events, providing information about voting and registering young people to vote. In addition to these efforts, Elections BC dedicated resources towards paid radio advertising. Advertising was spread across the province and across electoral districts. The target audience was 18-24 year olds and these commercials focused on the upcoming elections and the need to register and directed listeners to the website. Milner (2002), is clear regarding the importance of being informed as a precursor to voting. These advertisements sought to engage young people on the subject of the election and brought the message directly to them. Using information provided by Elections BC, the number
of advertisements aired in each electoral district is used a measure to assess the impact this variable has on the dependent variable. The hypothesized relationship is a positive one.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics for Independent Variables

This section outlines the descriptive statistics for the group of independent variables and the dependent variable. Table 2 presents the median results of all the variables for 2001, 2005 and both years combined. These results are displayed below and subsequently discussed in detail. Analysis of the descriptive statistics reveals an interesting portrait of the provinces 79 electoral districts and lays the foundation for the regression analysis in the next section.
Table 2  Results of Median values for the Dependent and Independent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demographic</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Household Income</td>
<td>$54,600</td>
<td>$54,600</td>
<td>$54,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of electoral district with University Ed.</td>
<td>.151</td>
<td>.151</td>
<td>.151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral district population density per square km</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of electoral district that is immigrant</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of University or College Campuses per electoral district</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of University or College Residences per electoral district*</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence of a CFS Local*</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registration</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitiveness of the race in the electoral district</td>
<td>.474</td>
<td>.142</td>
<td>.276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Engagement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of Get Your Vote On Events per electoral district</td>
<td>0^</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of Rock the Vote events per electoral district</td>
<td>0^</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of Elections BC attendance at events per electoral district</td>
<td>0^</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of Elections BC radio advertising per electoral district</td>
<td>0^</td>
<td>5.86</td>
<td>2.930</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This value reflects the mean rather than the median as there are so few observations.
** These values reflect the mean rather than the median as there are so few observations.
^ No data is available on events, advertising or attendance at events for this year.

4.2.1 Demographic

Average Household Income Data is only available for 2001 on average annual income of each electoral district. The median income is $54,600 and in comparison to the national median income from 2001, which was $47,071 shows a higher median income at the provincial level (Statistics Canada, 2003). The lowest average annual income in the electoral districts is $31,976 and the highest is $108,907.

University Education The median for university education in the electoral districts is 15.1 per cent of residents compared to university degree attainment at the federal level which is 20 per
cent it shows that BC falls a little below (Statistics Canada, 2003). Once again, the range in university education attainment is great among the electoral districts. The highest percentage of university education attainment experience by an electoral district is 51.4 per cent while the lowest is 8.3 per cent.

The electoral districts in British Columbia are arranged in a manner that ensures the size of the population being represented is similar. That is to say, while the geographic size of electoral districts varies, the number of people that Members of the Legislative Assembly represent is very similar. A measure of the population density provides a sense of how concentrated these populations are in each district. Median population density is 321 people per square kilometre. The densest electoral district boasts a population density of 7204 people per square kilometre. The least dense has less than one (0.179) person per square kilometre. In comparison, population density in British Columbia is far greater than that of Canada as a whole which only has a population density of 3.33 people per square kilometre (Statistics Canada, 2001).

Immigrant populations are not equally settled across all electoral districts in the province. Immigrants, on average, comprise 25 per cent of an electoral districts population. However, the range is great with immigrant populations accounting for as much as 61 per cent and as little as 7 per cent of an electoral districts population. In comparison, 18.4 per cent of the population federally identifies as an immigrant (Statistics Canada, 2003).

The median number of college and university campuses in the province is one. The maximum number of campuses in any electoral district is seven. The presence of a campus residence has an average value of 0.61. Some electoral districts have no residences for students. However, the most an electoral district has is 14. Additionally, average frequency of CFS locals in the electoral districts is 0.47. In some electoral districts, there are no CFS locals as all while the maximum amount in any electoral district is three.
4.2.2 Institutional

Median registration grew incredibly between the 2001 and the 2005 election. In the 2001 election, median registration reached 38 per cent whilst registration in 2005 was 62 per cent. As noted earlier, changes to the Elections Act in 2004 and the advent of online registration is accredited with the increase. The extent of the difference in registration in this sample varies from a low of 27 per cent registration to a high of 83 per cent registration among youth.

The data also revealed that competitiveness of the electoral race in each electoral district was low in the 2001 election with the median difference between the first place and second place finisher being 47.4 per cent. Competitiveness in the 2005 election was considerably higher with the median difference of only 14.2 per cent. In one election race there was only an 11 vote difference between the first and second place finisher.

4.2.3 Engagement

Table 3 also illustrates the low frequencies of the engagement variables. These four variables have a median frequency of zero for 2001 because not data exists on initiatives carried out by Elections BC, GYVO or RTV. For 2005, the data shows very low values because the frequency of these events was concentrated to only a few electoral districts.

Median frequency of GYVO events is 0.35 in 2005 and 0.18 in the combined sample. The GYVO on campaign clearly concentrated its efforts and held events in less than half of the electoral districts. The maximum number of events by GYVO in any electoral district was nine and the minimum was zero.

Similarly, RTV focused its efforts as well, predominantly in electoral districts that contain CFS locals. The median number of RTV events in 2005 was 0.45 and the overall median for both years 0.23. The most events carried out by RTV in an electoral district were three while the minimum was zero.
During the period of study the median frequency of Elections BC events in 2005 was 0.11 and 0.06 overall. As mentioned, no data is available for 2001. The attendance of Elections BC has a median value less than both RTV and GYVO. The maximum frequency of attendance at events in any electoral district was two while the minimum was zero.

Elections BC also paid for radio advertising direct specifically at youth. The mean frequency of radio advertisements in the 2005 election was 5.86 and the overall mean was 2.93. Elections BC targeted their radio advertisement and as a result, there were electoral districts in 2005 who did not benefit from this initiative. The highest number of radio ads aired in any electoral district was 68 while the lowest was zero.

4.3 Summary

This information provides an overall picture of British Columbia during the period of study. Median registration is greater than voter turnout among youth. The demographic variables reveal that great range exists among the electoral districts in British Columbia with regards to average household income, university education, population density and immigration. The data also reveals that median household income in BC is greater than the federal median income. Comparatively, British Columbia is also more densely populated than Canada overall. The median number of electoral districts with university and college campuses is low as is the mean number of campus residences and CFS locals. Competitiveness in the electoral races was greater in the 2005 election versus the 2001 election and registration among youth was higher in the 2005 election compared to 2001. In calculating the median, it is made apparent that the number of observation for the four engagement variables is quite low. The frequency of observations were so low that median values were zero and it was necessary to calculate the mean in order to obtain an understanding of the reach of these events and initiatives on the electoral districts.
Taken as a whole, this information paints a picture of the state of affairs in British Columbia's electoral districts as it relates to the problem of low voter youth turnout. Extreme differences exist across the electoral areas in the province. This robust data seeks to assess the degree to which the various explanatory variables can explain the problem of low voter turnout among youth turnout. In using aggregate level data, this section asks; to what extent do the attributes of an electoral district affect turnout amongst its youngest voters?

Yet, to assess the impact of these variables on voter turnout a regression model is necessary. A test for parametric data was positive as displayed in Appendix A. Therefore, Ordinary Least Square regression analysis is possible. The following section describes the OLS regression models and their relationship with the independent variables.
5: Statistical Modelling: Turnout & Registration

This section attempts to more completely explain variation in youth turnout in British Columbia's electoral districts using Ordinary Least Squares regression analysis. Two regression models are carried out which examine the predictors of voter turnout and voter registration. Results from this analysis are discussed including significant variables, non-significant variables and these results are used to inform policy alternatives in Chapter 4.

5.1 Using OLS to Explaining Youth Turnout Variation in BC

An Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression is employed to assess the extent to which independent variables explain variation in youth voter turnout. More specifically, each independent variable coefficient "indicates the change in the dependent variable as associated with a one-unit increase in the independent variable in question holding constant the other independent variables in questions" (Studenmund, 2006). Model 1 assesses the impact that the 13 independent variables have on voter turnout. Additionally, Model 2 consists of an analysis employing registration as the dependent variable and assessing the predictive power of the remaining independent variables. A review of the results of each model and their non-significant variables follows.

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1 A test for parametric data was positive as displayed in Appendix A. Therefore, OLS regression analysis is possible. The following section describes the OLS regression models and their relationship with the independent variables.
Table 3  

OLS Regression: Model 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable Name</th>
<th>Coefficients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Registration</td>
<td>.623(2.267)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Household Income</td>
<td>.064(.116)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Educated</td>
<td>-.021(-.065)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race Competitiveness</td>
<td>-.015(-.020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population density</td>
<td>.034(.087)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant</td>
<td>-.004(-.009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University or College Campuses</td>
<td>-.002(-.031)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University or College Residences</td>
<td>3.382E-5(.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFS Locals</td>
<td>.005(.047)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get Your Vote On Events</td>
<td>.008(.112)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elections BC events</td>
<td>-.020(-.082)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock the Vote events</td>
<td>.005(.038)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elections BC radio advertising</td>
<td>.0001(-.103)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>-.076(-.540)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total N</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R-squared</td>
<td>.843</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significant at <.05, **<.01

The first model, in Table 3, examines the extent to which included independent variables explain variation in voter turnout in the 158 included BC electoral districts. Un-standardized and standardized beta coefficients scores are included with standardized coefficients appearing in brackets. All 13 variables are included as well as a dummy variable that controls for the year.2 The Adjusted R-squared score of .843 indicates the model explains 84 per cent of the variation in voter turnout among 18-24 year olds in BC constituencies. Three variables, registration, radio advertising and the year, were significant to the 99 per cent confidence level, while average household income and the frequency of Get Your Vote On events were significant at 95 per cent confidence level. All variables are explained below in more detail.3

---

2 This variable is employed because two years are combined in the data set. Some data is election year specific and including a dummy variable for year ensures that this is accounted for in the estimation. E.g. the voter mobilization efforts on behalf of Elections BC, GYVO and RTV did not exist in 2001.

3 Pearson Correlation test and two-tailed t-test assessed the strength and the direction of the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent. (Field, 2000) Correlation coefficients were examined in each individual year and then tested as a combined set of observations. Variance inflation factor or VIF test is a means of testing for multicollinearity among the independent variables by assessing if one
5.1.1 Statistically Significant Variables

The model clearly shows that registration is not only a significantly predictor of variation in voter turnout, but this variable also explains a good deal of turnout variation. As expected, registration has a statistically significant relationship at the 99 per cent confidence level and a positive relationship between registration and voter turnout. The standardized coefficient of 2.267 indicates it is the most important of the variables proving significant. This result confirms the hypothesized effect and indicates that of all the significant variables, registration has the most impact on voting. The unstandardized beta coefficient of .623 indicates that as registration increases by one per cent, voter turnout will increase by .6 per cent. In other words, a ten per cent increase in registration translates into an increase of turnout by six per cent. This is an extremely important finding as it suggests increased registration efforts will have a direct, positive and considerable effect on young voter turnout.

Median average household income is statistically significant. Consistent with the literature, those electoral districts with higher median annual incomes are more likely to vote than those with lower medians, a result which confirms the hypothesized effect. The beta coefficient for average household income is 0.064. If average annual income is increase by one per cent, voter turnout among youth increases by 0.064 per cent. As an example, the median annual income in the province is $54,600. For every additional $546 in average annual income (a one per cent increase), turnout will increase by 0.064 per cent.

The only statistically significant engagement variable, frequency of Get Your Vote On events, positively correlates with youth voter turnout. As hypothesized, these events have a positive effect on turnout. With a Beta value of .008, the Get Your Vote On event effect is low,
with every one per cent increase in events organized delivering an increase in turnout of .008 per cent. In other words, if there were a 100 per cent increase in GYVO events, bringing the total up to 62 events, turnout would increase by 0.8 per cent. While the presence of GYVO events only explains a small portion of turnout variation, it does have important implications because it suggests that there is value in this method of engagement. In what is considered a young area of research, these finding support the merit of certain types third party engagement strategies.

The relation between youth turnout and the frequency of Election BC radio advertisements is significant, but unexpectedly proves to be the opposite of what was hypothesized. Beta value for this variable is -0.0001. That is, for every 1 per cent increase in radio advertising, voter turnout decreases by 0.0001. Elections BC aired 240 ads in total, so increasing to 24,000 ads (an increase of 1000 per cent) would decrease voter turnout by one per cent. This finding has important policy ramifications for Elections BC. Even though a negative relationship was unanticipated it does make sense if Elections BC’s advertising is targeted to ridings with lower turnout. Rather than suggesting that this finding demonstrates that radio ads lower turnout, it is more reasonable to suggest that Elections BC have targeted their ads incorrectly.

5.1.2 Non-Significant Variables

This section reviews the nine variables found not to be statistically significant. Of these nine variables, there were five some very surprising results. Mainly that variables previously supported by the literature as significant were shown to not be statistically significant in predicting youth voter turnout. These variables are displayed in Table 44 and discussed below.
Table 4  Non-Significant Variables: Model 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of electoral district with University Ed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitiveness of the race in the electoral district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population density per square km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of electoral district that is immigrant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University or College Campuses per electoral district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University or College Residences per electoral district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFS Locals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of Elections BC attendance at events per electoral district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of Rock the Vote events per electoral district</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Model 1 found that the percentage of the electoral district with University Education is not significantly related to voter turnout. While this runs counter to the literature, past studies focused on the impact of an individual's education on turnout. This study examines the impact of aggregate educational attainment on aggregate turnout among 18-24 year olds; the impacts of an education variable could be diffused at an aggregate level explaining its lack of significance in this estimation.

The competitiveness of the electoral race is not a statistically significant predictor of voter turnout. This finding runs counter to the literature which indicates people are less likely to vote if the election is not perceived to be competitive (Franklin, 2004). As this study looked solely at the impact of competitiveness on 18-24 year olds it may show that the competitive nature of an election is not a factor that will encourage voting amongst the youngest cohort, it may still be a factor that influences voter turnout at other ages. Yet it seems that for first time a voter, competitive races do not influence whether or not youth vote.

Population density is found to not be statistically significant. While literature concerning the impact of population density is not conclusive, it is a variable oft included in studies on voter turnout. As stated in the section on demographic variables, the theory on the effects of population density...
density is dualistic. Thus, this finding contributes to emerging research which refutes the premise that voter turnout will differ between urban and rural residents.

The lack of significance for the immigration variable refutes previous studies, which indicate that the percentage of immigrants helps determine voter turnout levels (Matsusaka and Palda, 1993). This finding suggests electoral districts with high immigration are not any more or less likely to experience higher or lower youth voter turnout. This may be the result of greater integration in British Columbia of different ethnic communities.

The attendance of Elections BC at events does not appear to significantly affect turnout among youth. This finding runs counter to the available literature suggests that engagement initiatives should encourage turnout among youth. While it is unlikely that Elections BC will stop attending events in an effort to engage young voters this finding shows that, the impact of its efforts is not considerable.

Very few of the explanatory variables relating to the engagement of young voters are significant in this model. While the literature suggests that engagement activities directed at youth in general should encourage greater turnout, there is not a vast amount of literature related to these particular variables (Mackinnon, Pitre and Walton, 2007). Both the presence of a CFS local and Rock the Vote events did not statistically significantly impact turnout. Considering the resources devoted to this form of engagement strategies this finding is surprising, and should prompt a rethinking of these strategies.

5.1.3 Model Summary

The analysis of Model 1 reveals important findings that suggest possible policy approaches to increasing voter turnout among youth. Above all other variables, registration was the greatest predictor of voter turnout among youth. Thus in order to put forward the most appropriate policy options, it would seem prudent to gain a better understanding of what factors
influence youth registration as it is such a strong predictor of voter turnout. Thus, the next section describes the statistical analysis and the significant and non-significant predictors of registration among 18-24 year olds. In terms of other variables, it was unexpected that the RTV initiative and the radio advertising carried out by Elections BC would have no significant impact on turnout. These initiatives concentrated their efforts in an attempt to employ resources as effectively as possible, yet it did not yield the results they had hoped. Further, the lack of significance with the other demographic variables indicates that perhaps the traditional determinants of voter turnout do not apply to young voters.

5.2 Using OLS to Explaining Youth Registration Variation in BC

As illustrated in Model 1, registration explains most of the variation in voter turnout. In order to have a more thorough comprehension of the appropriate policy alternatives a greater understanding of voter registration in British Columbia is necessary. Figure 4 illustrates the differing rates in voter registration across age cohorts in the 2001 and 2005 provincial elections. A median score combining data across both years is also provided. Once again, a median measure is used as opposed to a mean measure because the median ensures that voter registration is not being inflated or deflated due to outliers in registration and provides a more accurate depiction of the registration of voters in the province.
Figure 4  
British Columbia Voter Registration 2001, 2005 and median (%)  

![Bar chart showing voter registration by age group for 2001 and 2005.](chart.png)

Source: Adopted from Statistics Provided by Elections BC, 2005

Voter registration during the 2001 provincial in BC was 77.64%. Registration was the highest among the 75+ age cohort at 101.56 per cent.\(^{4}\) Not surprisingly, registration was lowest among 18-24 year olds at 38.29 per cent. The gap in registration is greatest among these cohorts and the difference is 63.27 percentage points. As the electorate age's, registration in 2001 universally increases. The youngest age cohort, 18-24 year olds is the only cohort to have registration under 50 per cent.

Figure 4 results on 2005 registration results show a great improvement. Generally, registration was 93.31 per cent indicating an increase of 15.67 per cent from the 2001 election.

\(^{4}\) Registration is over 100 per cent because of list contains unprocessed and unreported deaths.
Registration was once again lowest among 18 to 24 year olds at 63.24 per cent and highest among 75 year olds plus cohort at 107.38 per cent.\textsuperscript{5} In this election, the difference in registration between the two cohorts decreased to 44.14 percentage points. From the 2001 election to the 2005 election, voter registration increased in all cohorts.

In both elections, registration is lowest among the youngest voters. Nevertheless, the gap in registration between the lowest registering and highest registering cohort shrank in the 2005 election. Median voter registration among youth in the 2001 election was 38.29 per cent. In the 2005 election, registration among youth rose, just as it did in all of the cohorts, to 63.24 per cent indicating an increase of 24.95 percentage points. Yet, registration remains the lowest among the 18-24 year old cohort. Median registration for the two years was 50.76 per cent.

Of note is the difference in registration between the youngest cohort and the median registration rate as it presents a sense of how far below the average registration among youth falls. Median registration in 2001 was 77.64 per cent and the gap in registration between the median and turnout among the youngest cohort was 39.35 percentage points. During the 2005 election, median turnout climbed to 93.31 per cent compared to registration among youth, which was 63.24 per cent. This increase among youth shrank the gap between the median turnout and youth turnout to 30.07 per cent, a decrease of 10 per cent.

Those who register to vote are more likely to actually vote and therefore the impact that registration has on voting cannot be ignored (Highton, 2004). Results from model one reinforce the importance of voter registration on turnout among youth. In order to comprehend the impact of 12 explanatory variables on youth voter registration, a second regression model is employed.\textsuperscript{6} Once again a dummy variable for was used to control for the year. Table 5 reveals the model

\textsuperscript{5} Registration is over 100 per cent because of list contains unprocessed and unreported deaths.
\textsuperscript{6} Correlation tests did not reveal high correlations between any of the explanatory variables. VIF scores were not above 2.42 and suggests there was no risk of multicollinearity.
strength and coefficient estimations for registration as the dependent variable. Standardized beta coefficients appear in brackets.

Below is the table for the OLS Regression: Model 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable Name</th>
<th>Coefficients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average Household Income</td>
<td>.092/(.081)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage with University Education</td>
<td>.155/(.101)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral Race competitiveness</td>
<td>-.053/(-.082)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population density per square km</td>
<td>-.098/(-.122)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage immigrant</td>
<td>-.106/(-.111)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of University or College Campuses</td>
<td>-.031/(-.278)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of University or College Residences</td>
<td>.005/(.076)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of CFS Locals</td>
<td>.032/(.159)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of Get Your Vote On Events</td>
<td>.006/(.040)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of Elections BC event attendance</td>
<td>.034/(.066)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of Rock the Vote events</td>
<td>-.016/(-.065)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of Elections BC radio advertising</td>
<td>.0001/(-.046)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>.234/(.821)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total N</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R-squared</td>
<td>.818</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significant at <.05, **<.01

Model 2 consists of a sample size of 158 observations, which once again combines observations from both the 2001 and 2005 election years. Twelve variables are included as well as a dummy variable that controls for the year. The ability of this model to explain a predictor among 18-24 year is quite high as indicated by the adjusted R squared value of .818. This means that the predictive power of the combined variables can explain 82 per cent of the variation in registration. In total four variables were statistically significant. Three variables, presence of a university or college campus, CFS local and the year, were significant to the 99 per cent confidence level or higher. The presence of a university or college residence was significant at 95 per cent confidence level.
5.2.1 Statistically Significant Variables

There is a positive correlation between the presence of a CFS local and registering to vote. The presence of a CFS local was significant at the 99 per cent confidence level and the unstandardized beta coefficient is .032. Signalling that for every 1 percent increase in the number of CFS locals in the electoral districts there is a corresponding 0.032 per cent increase in registration. In other words, if the number of CFS locals were increased 100 per cent from 19 to 38, registration among youth would increase by only 3.2 percent. While there is no literature to reinforce this finding, it can perhaps be inferred that CFS locals act as a centres of organizing for students as they have experience at engaging and mobilizing students around issues at election time. Therefore, the ability of CFS locals to engage students to register is high.\(^7\)

As noted, the presence of a university or college campus was significant, yet surprisingly the relationship is in a negative direction. With an unstandardized beta coefficient of -0.031 this finding implies that a one per cent increase in the number of post secondary institution campuses would result in a 0.031 per cent decrease in registration among youth. A 100 per cent increase in the number of campuses in the province would bring the total to 180. This increase would correspond with a decrease in registration of 3.1 per cent. Further analysis suggests that the concentration of young people at a post-secondary campus may have a negative relationship because it is essentially concentrating a population that has poor registration habits. Non-registering behaviour can be reinforced at campuses due to the commuter nature of schools.

Finally, the presence of a campus residence was significant with a positively correlated relationship at the 95 per cent confidence level and the beta coefficient is 0.005. Thus, a one per cent increase in the presence of campus residences would only increase registration by 0.005 per cent. To put this finding in perspective, increasing the number of campus residences in the

\(^7\) The year is the most important variable as a predictor of registration. This is in line with the changes that took place between 2001 and 2005 elections concerning registration initiatives and the resulting higher registration count for the 2005 elections.
province by 1000 per cent to 4800 would increase registration by five per cent. The efforts coordinated by Elections BC to ensure that campus residents receive information related to elections and registration and efforts by other organizations have influenced youth registration. The concentrated nature of campus residences also suggests that residents are perhaps more easily mobilized and registered than their colleagues who attend university but do not live on campus.

5.2.2 Non-Significant Variables

The non-significant variables from Model 2 are illustrated in Table 7. Unlike Model 1 results, in this regression, GYVO events are not significant, nor is average household income or any of the engagement variables. That GYVO events were not found to be significant is surprising given that the focus of their work was to register young people to vote and then to follow through on voting. However, this lack of significance may be due to the fact that GYVO events were more successful at mobilizing and reminding people to vote rather than register. This is quite possible given that eligible individuals can vote on the day of an election in BC without being previously registered.

Table 6 Non-Significant Variables: Model 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average Household Income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of electoral district with University Ed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitiveness of the race in the electoral district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population density per square km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of electoral district that is immigrant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of Get Your Vote On Events per electoral district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of Elections BC attendance at events per electoral district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of Rock the Vote events per electoral district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of Elections BC radio advertising per electoral district</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2.3 Model Summary

In sum, the statistically significant variables in Model 2 were the presence of a campus, presence of a campus residence and the presences of a CFS local. In terms of impact, the more campuses in a single electoral district, the lower the youth turnout. While the Rock the Vote events were not found to be a significant predictor of youth voter registration, the presence of CFS locals had a positive impact. This finding may speak to the power of having an organization like the CFS on campus year round versus the one of efforts of RTV.

None of the four engagement variables were statistically significant predictors of registration. This finding is noteworthy given the widespread acknowledgement among RTV, GYVO and Elections BC that a major motivation of their work was to register young people to vote. Even though registration was a focus of their efforts, neither RTV nor GYVO could provide accurate data on the number of youth that they registered to vote.

As literature indicates, those who register to vote are more likely to vote. By understanding the predictors of registration policy makers can get closer to the reasons behind low turnout and find appropriate policy solution. Nonetheless, the theory and literature on registration is different from that of voter turnout. It is therefore necessary to be cautious about making conclusions from the data in the second model and even more cautious in deriving policy alternatives from these findings alone.

5.3 Why British Columbian Youth Vote and are Registered

In sum, the regression analyses performed in this section offers findings concurrent with previous studies and reveals new findings regarding how engagement variables affect voter turnout and registration. Most importantly, this study shows voter turnout is higher in those electoral districts where registration is higher. Further, statistical findings suggest a 100 per cent registration rate among youth would yield voter turnout of approximately 60 per cent or 29 points
higher than the 2005 median turnout score. Moreover, youth voter registration in individual electoral districts is negatively affected by the presence of college and university campuses, but boosted by the presence of CFS locals and campus residences.

Other evidence in this study suggests that competitiveness does not impact on voter turnout, nor do Get Your Vote On events, Elections BC radio advertising Rock the Vote events or Elections BC events. All other demographic variables – university education, population density, immigrant population, presence of a university or college campus, presence of a campus residence and presence of a CFS local in the electoral district – failed to have statistically significant impacts on the dependent variable. Therefore, the suggested policy alternatives should focus on addressing low turnout among youth through policies that stress increasing youth voter registration and Get Your Vote On events.
6: Increasing BC Youth Voter Turnout

The following sections uses the preceding statistical analysis to generate alternatives to increase youth voter turnout in British Columbia provincial elections. This section first establishes criteria by which alternatives are evaluated. Policy alternatives are generated specifically to fit Elections BC’s mandate and scope of powers and these alternatives evaluated against a set of criteria including effectiveness, cost, administrative feasibility, impartiality and stakeholder support. It then suggests a number of possible alternatives policies by which youth voter turnout might be increased. Finally, this section recommends which alternatives should or should not be pursued. It is important to note that policy alternatives are generated specifically to fit Elections BC’s mandate and scope of powers. This focus would seem appropriate as elections BC is required to maintain a “constant state of readiness for recalls, referendum and by-elections” as well as uphold excellence in electoral registration, electoral finance, and geographic data related to elections and constant interaction with the public regarding education and information regarding elections and electoral activities (Elections BC, 2008).

6.1 Policy Criteria for Judging Alternatives

To determine an appropriate policy response to the problem of low voter turnout in British Columbia a range of policy alternatives are evaluated against four criteria for assessing the four policy alternatives. The evaluation is outlined below and the outcome of each criterion is ranked relative to one another. A ranking system of high, moderate and low is used to assign value the outcome of each criterion. For example, an alternative with a low financial cost receives a high ranking. Table 7 presents an overview of the criteria used in the evaluation, a definition of each, how each is measured and the ranking system used in evaluation.
### Table 7: Criteria and Measures for Analysis of the Policy Alternatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Measurement</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effectiveness</strong></td>
<td>Expected voter turnout increase</td>
<td>Regression coefficients</td>
<td>Low (1) = No increase, Moderate (2) = turnout 44%-56%, High (3) = Turnout 57% +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Long-term Costs</strong></td>
<td>Long term operating costs relative to the status quo</td>
<td>Annual dollars spent on project over the period of implementation</td>
<td>High (1) = 100k+, Moderate (2) = 50-100k, Low (3) = &lt; 50k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Costs per election</strong></td>
<td>Election time costs</td>
<td>One-time financial costs spent during election period</td>
<td>High (1) = &lt; 100k+, Moderate (2) = 50-100k, Low (3) = &lt;50K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Impartiality</strong></td>
<td>Acceptability to administrators</td>
<td>Possibility Elections BC impartiality compromise</td>
<td>Risk = 1, No Risk = 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Administrative Simplicity</strong></td>
<td>Implementation and administration simplicity relative to status quo</td>
<td>Input from policy interviews</td>
<td>High = 3, Med = 2, Low = 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Acceptability</strong></td>
<td>Stakeholder acceptability</td>
<td>Input from stakeholders</td>
<td>High = 3, Med = 2, Low = 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 6.1.1 Effectiveness

The key factor taken into consideration when evaluating policy options against this criterion is will the policy alternative increase voter turnout. The effectiveness criterion assesses the ability of the policy alternative to achieve the stated goal of increasing voter turnout among 18-24 year olds in British Columbia. As such, it is measured as the expected percentage increase in voter turnout resulting from the policy alternative. Elite interviews as well as research into the literature inform this evaluation. While Elections BC have a primary concern with ensuring that free and fair elections are held in the province and that it is an inclusive and accessible process to all electors in recent years special attention has been paid to the 18-24 year old cohort. It is important to assess to what extent the alternative will be successful at increasing voter turnout among 18-24 year olds. For a policy alternative to be considered effective, it must increase participation in elections among young people. A scale of effectiveness is employed in order to measure the estimated impact of the alternative. If the alternative increases turnout to meet the
current overall median turnout (57 per cent) then it is considered highly effective and given a score of three (3). An alternative that is expected to increase turnout by 13 per cent or half of the current gap between turnout among youth and the overall median this option would be considered somewhat effective and given a score of two (2). Finally, if the alternative suggests no increase in turnout but also does not indicate a likelihood of decline, it is assigned a score of one (1).

6.1.2 Cost

Elections BC, like most public institutions, face financial constraints. This office experienced a 35 per cent budget cut over three years starting in 2002. The provincial government established in 2001 its intention to ensure that the budget was balanced and implemented dramatic cuts to public spending. Elections BC was included in these cuts in spending and initially received a 45 per cent budget decrease; however, given the demands of carrying out both a provincial election and the referendum on electoral reform the decrease was minimized to 35 per cent (Johnson, 2008) It must also be noted that Elections BC has no revenue raising abilities. Clearly, the cost of policy alternatives must be carefully considered.

Costs associated with the different policy alternatives are measured in two different manners: 1) those annual operating dollars spent per year on the alternative, and 2) those costs incurred only during the time of election events. This is done because the budgets for annual operating and election events are separate. High rankings are assigned to alternatives with costs less than $50,000. A ranking of moderate is assigned to alternatives with costs between $50,000 and $100,000 and an alternative would receive a low ranking with costs that exceed $100,000.

6.1.3 Impartiality

In seeking to advise Elections BC, the scope of the analysis should take into consideration one of their key limitations. As the election authority for the province, Elections BC is a non-partisan office of the legislature which holds the responsibility for "the
administration of the *Election Act, Recall and Initiative Act*, and conduct of referenda under the *Referendum Act* (Elections BC, 2008). The Chief Electoral Officer is an independent officer of the legislature who reports directly to the Legislative Assembly through the speaker of the house. Alternatives that would call into question this impartiality could have far-reaching ramifications for the whole of the elected government. The effort to maintain completely non-partisan and non-biased in its operations is at the centre of Election BC’s mandate. Consequently, if the alternative involves risks to Elections BC’s reputation and role as impartial administrator of elections it would be considered risky and would receive a low score (1). Alternatively, if the policy option poses no risk to the impartiality of Elections BC it would receive a high score (2). No scale is employed because an initiative is either risk the impartiality of Elections BC or it does not.

### 6.1.4 Administrative Feasibility

The analysis must take into account the ability of Elections BC to implement the policy alternative. As they will be the main group responsible for implementation, it is necessary to consider their response to the suggested alternatives. Partnerships with other institutions require considerable staff effort as well as possible need for technical expertise. Different institutions have different organizational structures and mandates and this may influence the administrative feasibility of the option. Administrative feasibility gauges the ability of the stakeholders to undertake the project and the anticipated challenges, if any. The measure for this criterion is developed through elite interviews with staff from the different stakeholder institutions. Interviews were conducted with representatives from Elections BC, Check Your Head, Office of the Registrar at Simon Fraser University, Ministry of Labour and Citizen Services.
6.1.5 Acceptability to stakeholders

The acceptability to stakeholders refers to the level of acceptance for the policy alternative among the stakeholders. An alternative that faced widespread or severe opposition from the stakeholders can be eliminated because politicians or Elections BC would probably not consider it; however, this does not automatically rule out mildly unpopular alternatives. The acceptability of any given alternative is assessed through elite interviews with stakeholders. Interviews measure the response of representatives to the various policy alternatives. It is important to take into account the characteristics of those opposed or in favour and the force of their support or opposition.

Interviews were conducted with representatives from Elections BC, Check Your Head, Office of the Registrar at Simon Fraser University, Ministry of Labour and Citizen Services.

6.2 Policy Alternatives

This following section focuses on evaluating each policy alternative using the established set of criteria in order to predict the success of these policies. The Comparative Ranking Matrix in Table 8 below graphically represents rankings of each option. The analysis presented here informs the final policy recommendation.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alternatives</th>
<th>Effectiveness</th>
<th>Long-term Costs</th>
<th>Election Costs</th>
<th>Administrative Feasibility</th>
<th>Impartiality</th>
<th>Acceptability</th>
<th>Total Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1 Status Quo</td>
<td>Low (1)</td>
<td>High (3)</td>
<td>High (3)</td>
<td>High (3)</td>
<td>High (2)</td>
<td>Low (1)</td>
<td>13/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2 Registration Agreement with Post-Secondary Institutions</td>
<td>High (2.5)</td>
<td>High (3)</td>
<td>High (3)</td>
<td>Moderate/ Low (1.5)</td>
<td>High (2)</td>
<td>Moderate (2)</td>
<td>14/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3 Communication Agreement with Post-Secondary Institutions</td>
<td>Moderate (2)</td>
<td>High (3)</td>
<td>Moderate (2)</td>
<td>High (3)</td>
<td>Low (1)</td>
<td>High (3)</td>
<td>14/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4 Information Sharing with MSP</td>
<td>High (3)</td>
<td>Moderate (2)</td>
<td>High (3)</td>
<td>Moderate/ Low (1.5)</td>
<td>High (2)</td>
<td>Moderate/ Low (1.5)</td>
<td>13.5/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5 Peer-to-Peer Mobilization</td>
<td>Moderate/ Low (1.5)</td>
<td>High (3)</td>
<td>Low (1)</td>
<td>Moderate (2)</td>
<td>Low (1)</td>
<td>Moderate/ Low (1.5)</td>
<td>10.5/18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.2.1 Alternative 1: Status Quo (13/18)

As the provincial authority responsible for the administration of elections and the Elections Act, Elections BC takes the matter of declining voter participation among youth and the population in general very seriously. In the year preceding the election, they undertook a number of initiatives in an attempt to reverse this trend (Elections BC, 2005). It is important to note that the backdrop to these initiatives include a 35 per cent budget reduction for Elections BC over three years beginning in 2002.

For the 2005 election, initiatives were undertaken that included a radical revision of the registration process moving from province wide enumeration to targeted enumeration, as well as fully automating registration on the Elections BC website making it available 24 hours a day. During this period, changes to the Election Act allowed for the merging the federal and provincial voters list for the first time (Elections BC, 2005). For the period of this election, Elections BC also added Aboriginal, Indo-Canadian, Chinese and a youth liaison officer whose role was to “identify barriers and the needs of their respective communities” with the overall goal of informing and increasing voter turnout (Elections BC, 2005).

The work of the youth liaison officer included connecting and supporting youth organizations, schools and initiatives throughout the province, which were working to engage young people in the election. The liaison office also set up voter registration tables at different events, mailed out information packages and acted as a media spokesperson. In addition to this work, Elections BC invested financial resources into radio and television advertisements targeting the 18-24 year old demographic. Advertisements aired in the lead up to the election and the content alerted young people to the upcoming election, the importance of registering and referred them to the website for online registration. However, these activities were only carried out during
the 2005 election and have not been incorporated into the status quo. Elections BC are currently considering reinstating this position for the 2009 elections.

The results of the descriptive statistics reveal that turnout among 18-24 year olds increased in the last provincial election. In the lead up to the 2005 election, the registration process was revamped to include access to online voter registration and the changes to the Election Act that which allowed federal and provincial voters lists to be merged. These practices have for the moment increased registration and curtailed the decline of voter turnout among 18-24 year olds. Current procedures also included a youth liaison officer, who served a variety of functions from media contact, soliciting registration forms, and outreach and support person.

Maintaining the status quo means Elections BC continues to operate online registration services as well as providing a youth liaison officer during the provincial elections. They would also continue providing information via their website and advertising on television and radio as well as updating the voters list through annual merges with the National Register of Electors. The role and mandate of the organization includes the registration of voters and maintenance of the voters list. Continuous activities during non-election years encompass voter education, voter registration activities, event readiness and electoral boundary maintenance (Elections BC, 2008). Data from the 2005 provincial election suggests approximately 60 per cent of youth will register and result in a 37.5 per cent turnout in the 2009 election. In the following section the policy alternative is evaluated against the criteria and the results are explained below.

Effectiveness: Under the Status Quo it is unlikely that turnout among youth will increase. Current levels of registration and turnout suggest that turnout decline may be stalled but more evidence is required to assess if the increase in turnout in 2005 is the beginning of a trend. Registration efforts clearly have an impact on turnout but the innovations acquired in 2004 will not be a factor in the next election. The effectiveness of this option is ranked low.
Cost: As pursuing the status quo would mean maintaining current expenditure levels, this policy alternative ranks high on the cost criterion. Under the current financial constraints, Elections BC is coming to the end of its 35 per cent budget cut (Elections BC, 2005) over three years and has no ability to raise revenues to fund new initiatives. Thus, Elections BC must be cautious when considering new spending.

Administrative feasibility: The status quo receives a high ranking on the administrative feasibility criterion as no change will occur. Proceeding with the Status Quo ensures that no administrative changes are required.

Impartiality: Under the current registration and related activities, the ability of Elections BC to maintain its reputation and workings as impartial is ensured. Working on their own and responsible for all their own communication they are able to retain complete autonomy. This policy is ranked high for impartiality.

Acceptability to Stakeholders: The Status Quo receives a low ranking for acceptability to stakeholders. The presence of third party organizing during elections acknowledges that a problem exists and that the current state of low voter turnout among youth is undesirable. None of the stakeholders interviewed are supportive of continuing with the Status Quo as it relates to voter turnout among youth.

6.2.2 Alternative 2: Registration Partnership with Post Secondary Institutions (14.5/18)

With the status quo as the basis, this policy option suggests that registration efforts be pursued through an information partnership with all public post-secondary institutions in British Columbia. Elections BC would collaborate with all of the public colleges and universities in the province using their administrative systems to capture personal information about students and register them to vote.
The rationale behind this approach flows from the results of regression Model 2 that demonstrates a statistically significant negative relationship between registration and the presence of college and university campuses. Elections BC could develop a system whereby those who register at a post secondary institution would be automatically registered to vote, given fulfilment of the eligibility criteria. All post secondary institutions regularly update the personal information of the student body on a semester-to-semester basis.

Effectiveness: Under this alternative registration and turnout would see an increase among 18-24 year olds. As of 2007, headcounts from the Ministry of Advanced Education suggest that there are approximately 119,216 students aged 18-24 years enrolled in public post secondary institutions. This would account for 33 per cent of eligible voters. It is safe to assume that a number of these youth are already registered to vote but as the data in Model 2 shows, registration on campus is statistically significant in a negative direction. Thus, the numbers of registered to vote on campus are surely not overwhelming. Conservatively, if only 50 per cent of this population or 59,608 people who were not previously registered were added to the list, this would increase the number of registered 18-24 year olds to 80 per cent and increase turnout to roughly 48 per cent. 8 This alternative is ranked moderate on the effectiveness criterion.

Cost: The implementation of this alternative is expected to cost Elections BC an estimated $40,000 per year in operating costs in the form of a part-time employee (PTE). 9 As this position will be updating information on a continual basis and not just during the time of an

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8 This estimation is based on current eligibility of 357,006 18-24 year olds and the current number of registered 225,756 according to Elections BC.
9 The cost of an PTE is based on an have of an average fulltime employee using annual salaries and benefits for Elections BC staff.
electoral event, there are no extra costs assumed under that criterion. This alternative is ranked as high on the cost criterion.\textsuperscript{10}

\textit{Administrative Feasibility}: This option receives a moderate/low ranking for administrative feasibility. Problems exist with administering this policy option. Current Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA) regulations restrict the sharing of information that is not consistent with the purpose under which the information was originally collected (FIPPA, 2007). As such, the ability to share information between post-secondary institutions and Elections BC may not be possible. To circumvent this problem changes to the school registration forms can easily be made. All that is necessary is for the colleges and universities to amend their registration forms to include an option to agree to share their information with Elections BC of which the costs and administration will fall to the post-secondary institutions.

\textit{Impartiality}: The potential risks to Election BC’s impartiality are considered low for this option. Public post-secondary institutions have to maintain impartiality themselves as forums for the free exchange of ideas. In the collection of data for school registration, it is unlikely that the process would be politically biased. This also applies to the transfer of information from the post-secondary institutions to Elections BC.

\textit{Acceptability to Stakeholders}: This alternative engages a partner who is like minded in its interest of creating individuals who are strong learners and contributing members of society. However, privacy issues do exist and students may be reluctant to share information with their college or university if they know it will be passed on to Elections BC. Precedent does currently

\textsuperscript{10} This alternative also has costs for the post-secondary institutions that are not captured in this analysis. Based on information confirmed in Interview #1 (March 7, 2008) the cost for implementation of this option at the 25 post-secondary institutions in BC could range from a total of $25,000 to $125,000 depending on the administrative changes required as described under the administrative feasibility section.
exist as information regarding your status as a student is shared with Student Aid BC if you seek financial assistance.

6.2.3 Alternative 3: Communications Agreement with Post Secondary Institutions: (14/18)

With the Status Quo as the base, this alternative proposes using post-secondary institutions email service to disseminate information related to elections to the student body. These colleges and universities have email addresses for the entire student body, and an immediate communication connection that allows post secondary institutions to convey information to the student body through email. In partnership, Elections BC could advance information regarding upcoming elections, notifications to update registration information and provide details on where to vote the post secondary institutions and these institutions themselves could forward this on to the student body.

Effectiveness: This alternative is seen as an effective tool for mobilizing voters beyond registration efforts. Through communiqué’s with students Elections BC would be able to provide information to student voters alerting them of an upcoming elections and notifying them of where and when to vote. It is difficult to estimate by how much this alternative would increase turnout. This effort would build nicely on the registration efforts and because it would be sent to the entire student body and not just 18-24 year olds, it may have some spill over effects into other age cohorts. As with the previous option it is important to recognize that the collection of personal information and communications with students would not be limited to only those students who are 18-24 years old. All students, regardless of age would be captured in this alternative and spill over effects of the policy. This alternative is ranked as moderate (2).

Cost: This option also ranks high on the cost criterion. Very limited costs if any are associated with sending along electoral information to post-secondary institutions. Using existing institutional infrastructures for further dissemination to the student body will also not push cost to
the universities or colleges. It is practice to send monthly communiqués to the students using this system and this alternative could piggyback on this endeavour.

*Administrative feasibility:* Administrative feasibility for this option receives a high ranking. This alternative can be easily implemented by the colleges and universities and only requires that Elections BC convey the information specific to the electoral district that each institution is located in. This option could be further simplified is Elections BC chooses to send identical information to each institution.

*Acceptability to Stakeholders:* For Elections BC, this option “would be a very attractive option to broadcast information” to students. Third party Get Out the Vote projects will support this initiative because they themselves target their initiatives at youth who attend post-secondary institutions. This alternative receives a moderate ranking for acceptability to stakeholders.

*Impartiality:* Alternative 3 is evaluated as being at risk of tarnishing Elections BC impartiality. Elections BC would be relying on colleges and universities for the dissemination of elections related information. This is because it may be difficult to control how the information Elections BC forwards to the colleges and university will be conveyed. Once Elections BC is no longer in command of or responsible for their messages there is always a possibility that their nonalignment will be threatened.

6.2.4 Alternative 4: Partnership with Medical Services Plan (13.5/18)

A reasonable alternative would be to reconsider the manner in which personal data that forms the basis of the voters list is collected. Currently, Elections BC is able to maintain its voters list through updates provide by the files of the Insurance Corporation of BC (ICBC) “motor voter” program and the Vital Statistics Agency of the Ministry of Health (Elections BC, 2003). BC experiences high rates of annual mobility, which ranges from 15 to 27 per cent making it difficult to track residents in the lead up to an election (Elections BC, 2003). A
partnership between Medical Services Branch who administers Medical Services Plan (MSP) and Elections BC would allow for constant updating of personal information related to residential and mailing address, name etc. through client interaction with this service. This alternative proposes that through everyday interactions with health care providers the quality of the voters list would be more accurately up to date. Residents in all Canadian provinces are required to have health care coverage and BC is no different.

While Elections BC does get updates through the year from the Motor Voter program and the Vital Statistics Agency, registration efforts in the lead up to elections does require significant resources (Elections BC, 2003). A partnership with MSP would allow for Elections BC to redirect precious resources to other areas and further reduce the relevance of door-to-door enumeration. The intention of pursuing this alternative would be to create a higher quality of voters list to ensure maximum coverage of registration and effective dissemination of election information.

Effectiveness: Upon analysis, this option had a potential to have a high level of effectiveness. Enrolment in MSP covers approximately 4.3 million people in British Columbia and the number of 18-24 year olds enrolled is approximately 344,065 (Ministry of Health, 2007). By consolidating data from MSP, the number of youth registered to vote would increase by 118,309 or 33 per cent. If all 344,065 young people on MSP were registered to vote this would mean that approximately 96 per cent of youth would be registered to vote. Once again, using the results from Model 1, this suggests that turnout among youth would increase to 57.6 per cent bringing it on par with the overall median turnout for the province. Further, voter turnout across all age groups would increase, as this data will provide updated information for all British Columbians who are registered for MSP not just the 18-24 year old cohort. Gains in the older age cohorts would be proportionally smaller because there are fewer additional votes to be captured given their higher current turnout rates.
Cost: It is assumed that in the merging of MSP data with Elections BC data that all age cohorts would be captured and that this will create a sizable database in need of processing. This alternative will have only operational costs and is estimated at $80,000 for a FTE.\textsuperscript{11} The ongoing nature of this data collection and processing categorizes this as an operational cost. No costs related to electoral events are assumed. Thus, this alternative is given a moderate cost ranking.

Impartiality: This alternative is assigned a high score on impartiality. In collaborating with another government service, Elections BC can be assured that impartiality is maintained. Using the system that already exists assures that there is no risk of voters being influenced by the medical administrators who process these interactions with clients.

Administrative feasibility: This option receives a low/moderate ranking for administrative feasibility. As with the previous option, issues arise concerning FIPPA regulations. Section 32 stipulates that personal information collected can only be used for the purposes under which it was obtained (FIPPA, 2007). Yet, section 33.1 also states that information can be shared if an individual consents (FIPPA, 2007). MSP could change their application forms and other administrative documents (billing forms) to include an option to consent to being registered.

Acceptability to Stakeholders: This policy is supported by all of the stakeholders, but receives less support among the general population (EKOS, 2007). Concerns exist relating to privacy and fears on the part of the public about information misuse or leakage. Similar attempts in the UK to move towards one single government database for all personal information consolidation of government services met with widespread criticism and were eventually abandoned (Travis, 2008; Bradbury 2007). Consequently, this alternative receives a moderate/low ranking.

\textsuperscript{11} The cost of an FTE is based on an average of annual salaries and benefits for Elections BC staff.
6.2.5 Alternative 5: Peer-to-Peer Mobilization (10.5/18)

As with the previous policy options, this one seeks to increase both the number of young people registered to vote and who actually vote in provincial elections. This option is to be considered in addition to the status quo. The power of registration will only go so far in terms of increasing voter turnout among 18-24 year olds. The results from Model 1 illustrate that the efforts of the Get Your Vote On campaign was statistically significant at the 95 per cent confidence level.

This policy would adopt a partnership model and would have Elections BC put resources in the hands of a third party non-partisan organization that would conduct voter mobilization campaigns directed at those who were already captured in registration efforts. Using face-to-face and phone canvassing strategies this policy seeks to mobilize registered voters in the final week of the election and get them to the polls. Combining registration efforts with a peer-to-peer outreach campaign builds on the results of the regression analysis, which illustrates that the third party work of Get Your Vote On is statistically significant.

Current research exists that is supportive of this model. In the 2000, federal US election a research team from Yale University conducted a randomized experiment on young voters who had been previously registered to vote through mobilization campaigns (Green and Gerber, 2001). Their results found that the follow up efforts organized through third parties effectively target youth and translated into those youth actually voting. In employing this method, Elections BC would contract directly with a third party outlining the details of the agreement and ensure that they uphold the non-partisan protocol. According to Green and Gerber (2001), the merits of this approach is uniquely suited to peer based organizations.

For young voters, non-partisan contact represents a bridge to electoral participation. They sense that the election is important, but many are detached from the electoral process. They need the authentic encouragement of a peer to become a participant. Non-partisan GTOV (Get Out The Vote) campaigns provide a link between young voters and the electoral system.
Elections BC would be contracting out work to target the mobilization of young voters. Based on conversation with the RTV and GYVO initiatives, these groups can register between 10 to 20,000 young to vote.

**Effectiveness:** Initiative of this kind can generate an additional one vote for every 12 face-to-face contacts and one additional vote for every 20 phone call contacts. Estimating an average of 12 face-to-face contacts an hour, a single staffer could pull eight additional votes per day. Assuming that voter mobilization activities occur over seven days, one person can pull 56 additional votes and a staff of 237 could pull 13,272 additional votes. Based on the supposition that these are all new voters this would result in an increase in turnout of approximately three per cent. Therefore, this alternative ranks moderate/low on the effectiveness criterion.

**Cost:** The costs involved in this option included costs to Elections BC to project manage an initiative of this kind and cost associated with funding third party organizations to pull the vote. The cost of this initiative is would be higher than $100,000 because of the additional costs associated with required staffing on behalf of Elections BC. This alternative ranks as low on cost because it will require internal and external expenditures.

**Impartiality:** The ability for Elections BC to control the content of its message when collaborating with a third party to undertake peer-to-peer mobilization would be considerably difficult. The nature of many of these Get Out The Vote campaigns relies on mobilizing youth to vote around issues. Some of the top issues for this age group relate to tuition, the environment and health. A serious risk of the messaging being perceived as biased towards a party exists. Even one incidence were the impartiality of Elections BC is publicly criticised poses a grave problem to this partnership. Hence, this option receives a low ranking on impartiality.

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12 This assumes 3 staff in each of the 79 electoral districts, working eight hours per day for seven days
13 Based on 237 staff at $10 per hour, eight hours a day for seven days, costs are estimated at $132,720.
Administrative feasibility: An initiative such as this would require project management on the part of Elections BC as well as coordination with a Get Out the Vote initiative. Much of the coordination could be passed on to the youth organization itself but the synchronization of messaging and information would need to take place. Some challenges are anticipated with the expenditure of revenues on a non-governmental organization. The administrative feasibility ranking for this alternative is moderate.

Acceptability: This option was acceptable to third party groups but not to Elections BC. As a result, it receives a moderate/low ranking. It would signal a great shift in policy approach if Elections BC were to enter into a partnership with a third party organization for the purposes of mobilizing voter turnout. Third party organizations such as Check Your Head welcome this move but it is unpalatable to Elections BC as the ability to confirm the non-partisan nature of an organization is quite difficult.

6.3 Evaluation Summary

After thorough comparison of all the alternatives against the evaluation criteria, a Registration Partnership with Post-Secondary Institutions, coupled with a Communications Agreement with Post-Secondary Institutions emerges as the most suitable policy alternatives. A Partnership with Post-Secondary Institutions performed the best of all alternatives and ranks high on effectiveness, high on both cost measures and moderate/low on administrative feasibility. It also receives high ranking on impartiality and a moderate score for stakeholder acceptability. Alternative three, scores marginally lower but still performs better than the other alternatives and is the companion piece to alternative two.

Going with an alternative that created an information sharing partnership between Elections BC and the Medical Services Plan would likely be effective at increasing the number of youth registered to vote and thereby increase turnout. In fact, this alternatives ability to increase
voter turnout is greater than that of Alternative 2. However, it faces severe opposition from a public concerned about privacy. The resistance to greater consolidation of personal information by the government should not be underestimated. The burden of administering and dealing with the FIPPA regulations also renders this alternative less suitable than Alternative 2.

In pursuing policy Alternative #2 and #3, Elections BC would be limiting the scope of their efforts to only those youth who are enrolled in a public post-secondary institution. This means that as much as two thirds of 18-24 year olds in the province would not be covered by this policy alternative. Clearly, Alternative #4 would capture all youth in the province but as described, considerable obstacles exist in implementing that option. As such, pursuing Alternatives #2 and #3 is an appropriate first step in dealing with the problem of low voter turnout among youth and further study of this issue is required in order to find ways to access those youth not in college or university.

Implementing this policy would require that the post secondary institutions make changes to their registration forms which would allow for students to agree to sharing their information with Elections BC for the purposes of being registered to vote. Elections BC is in contact with all of the 25 public post secondary institutions in the lead up to elections as they look to confirm polling stations and ensure information is received by students who live in residence. Yet, relationships between these institutions and Elections BC will need to be formalized. This policy alternative could be introduced at all post-secondary institutions for fall registration. This would provide enough time for Elections BC to update the voters list. They would be able to distribute information to students, through these networks in the lead up to the next provincial election, which takes place in 2009.
7: Conclusion

Voting is central to participating in representative democracies yet voter turnout among youth in British Columbia extremely low compared to other age cohorts. While studies show that young people vote less than older voters do, the present day situation reveals that fewer and fewer young people are voting and this decrease in participation can explain the overall decline in turnout during elections. If nothing is done to overturn this phenomenon, the future promises lower and lower turnout in provincial elections bringing with it the decreased legitimacy in our representative democracy through less representative policies.

This study and explored the variation in turnout among youth in an attempt to isolate those factors that contribute to voting. Using regression analysis it was discovered that registration, average annual income and the frequency of Get Your Vote On events were all significant predictors of voter turnout. Among these three variables, registration explains most of the variation in turnout.

Through the careful consideration of the limitations of Elections BC and the statistical analysis results, this study outlined four possible policy alternatives that could be pursued by Elections BC. These include maintaining the status quo, a partnership with post-secondary institutions, a partnership with MSP and peer-to-peer mobilization efforts with a third party. Using an established set of five criterions and information from policy interviews, these alternatives were analyzed and a partnership with post-secondary institutions emerges as the most suitable.

The current low levels of voter turnout among youth in British Columbia are unacceptable if a healthy democracy is to be maintained. Elections BC has attempted to address
this issue and this study reveals that their focus on registration is an appropriate response given their mandate. Furthermore, this study has shown that the extent to which Elections BC can address this issue on their own is extremely limited. Future research needs to address the way in which other branches of government and non-governmental organizations can encourage voting among youth. In order to successfully address this phenomenon, the burden addressing low turnout must be the responsibility of many.
Appendices
Appendix A: Measuring Turnout

Elections BC provided complete data on voter turnout for 18-24 year olds in each of the 79 electoral districts for the 2001 provincial election. Included in this data is information on the number of eligible voters by electoral district, the number who registered to vote, participation rates based on individuals who were eligible to vote and participation rates measured as a percentage of those who were registered. Data on voter turnout for 2005 was not as complete. Elections BC provided data regarding eligibility at an aggregate level, for the province as a whole and then for the different age cohorts as a whole. However, they did not create data of eligibility for each cohort at the electoral district level. There are a number of reasons for this change in practice. Elections BC had been basing its measure of eligibility on data from BC Stats (which derives its information from Statistics Canada). At the time of the 2005 provincial election, the data available on eligibility was four years away from the most recent census and Elections BC was concerned about its accuracy. During the time between the 2001 and 2005 provincial elections, changes to the Elections Act took place at the federal level that also influenced Elections BC’s decision not to estimate eligibility at the electoral district level (Elections BC, 2005). Elections Canada and their provincial electoral counterparts were able to merge their lists of registered voters for the first time, meaning the National Register of Electors that are compiled during federal elections were made available to Elections BC in 2004 prior to the 2005 provincial elections. Information is available from 2001 on the percentage of youth who were eligible, who registered and who voted in each electoral district. For the 2005 election, data on the percentage of youth eligible to vote in each electoral district was not available. In order to have voter turnout observations for each year it was necessary to create an estimate of how many eligible voters there were in the 18-24 year old cohort for each electoral district. Elections BC was able to provide data at a province-wide level on the number of youth who were eligible to vote in the 2005 elections. Based on this data, it was possible to estimate eligibility and turnout for each
electoral district for 2005. Attempts were made to find more accurate data concerning eligibility. Unfortunately, BC Stats has not yet released up to date information beyond the aggregate data they provided to Elections BC in 2005. Statistics Canada, recently conducted a Census in 2006 however, data regarding complete Census Profiles are still forthcoming and BC Stats has yet to analyze the data at the electoral district level.

The aggregate data revealed that overall eligibility of 18-24 year olds rose by 6.77 percent between the 2001 and 2005 provincial elections. This increase is uniformly applied to all electoral districts to generate the missing data in order to calculate the turnout in 2005. Table 9 shows an example for one electoral district showing this calculation: \( \text{Turnout} = \frac{\text{Voted}}{\text{Eligible}} \times 100\% \). Once turnout was calculated for all electoral districts in the 2005 elections the two data sets were combined. There were 79 electoral districts in each election and combined they create one sample with 158 observations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 9 Calculating Turnout</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abbotsford-Clayburn</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eligible</td>
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<td>-----------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>2001</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
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Appendix B: Test of Parametric Data

![Histogram showing the percentage of eligible voters 18-24 who voted. The x-axis represents the percentage, and the y-axis represents the frequency. A normal distribution curve is superimposed on the histogram.]

Percentage of eligible voters 18-24 who voted

Frequency

0.10 0.20 0.30 0.40 0.50 0.60

0 10 20 30
Appendix C: 2008 British Columbia Provincial Electoral District Map

Figure 5   Electoral Districts of BC

Click for Victoria/Lower Mainland detail map

Source: Elections BC, Provincial General Election Maps 2001 and 2005c
Figure 6 Electoral Districts of BC inset Lower Mainland and the Islands

Source: Elections BC, Provincial General Election Maps 2001 and 2005c
Appendix D: Electoral Districts of British Columbia
| 10. Cariboo South           | 37. North Vancouver-Seymour | 64. Vancouver-Burrard |
| 11. Chilliwack-Kent         | 38. Oak Bay-Gordon Head | 65. Vancouver-Fairview |
| 15. Coquitlam-Mailardville  | 42. Peace River South   | 69. Vancouver-Kingsway |
| 17. Delta North             | 44. Port Coquitlam-Burke Mountain | 71. Vancouver-Mount Pleasant |
| 18. Delta South             | 45. Port Moody-Westwood | 72. Vancouver-Point Grey |
| 19. East Kootenay           | 46. Powell River-Sunshine Coast | 73. Vancouver-Quilchena |
| 20. Esquimalt-Metchosin     | 47. Prince George-Mount Robson | 74. Victoria-Beacon Hill |
| 22. Kamloops                | 49. Prince George-Omineca | 76. West Kootenay-Boundary |
| 23. Kamloops-North Thompson | 50. Richmond Centre     | 77. West Vancouver-Capilano |
| 24. Kelowna-Lake Country    | 51. Richmond East       | 78. West Vancouver-Garibaldi |
| 26. Langley                 | 53. Saanich North and the Islands |
| 27. Malahat-Juan de Fuca    | 54. Saanich South       |

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