Youth Electoral Study

REPORT 2: YOUTH, POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AND VOTING

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Research Report 2:

Youth, Political Engagement and Voting

The YES Project

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

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

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

Project Objectives

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

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

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

1. Political engagement and "Active Citizenship"

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

But can one be an active citizen without voting?

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

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

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

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

The many behaviours included in the above research, whether at the individual or community level, are usually regarded as forms of political engagement and also include activities such as signing petitions, writing letters and even participating in forms of public display of consent or dissent with government policies or actions. These latter activities occur in the form of rallies or demonstrations connected with various social movements, and have sometimes been referred to as the "politics of the future" (Jennett & Stewart, 1989) or "new politics" (Pakulski, 1991).
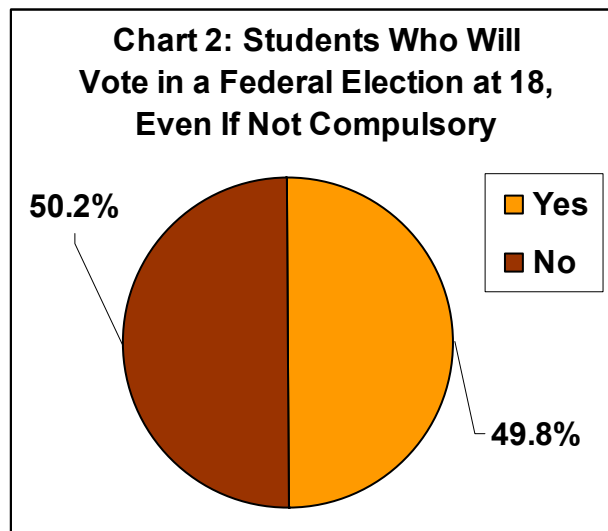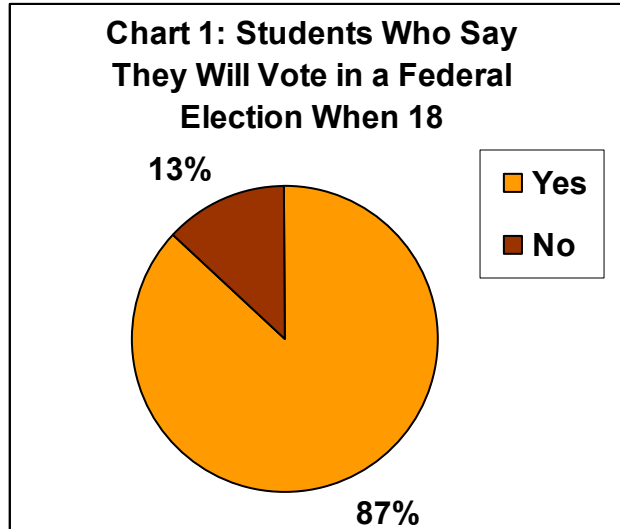
In this report we focus on the link between various forms of political activity reported by Australian youth, and their intention to vote. In addressing this issue, we highlight some of our findings from the 2004 national survey of 4855 senior secondary school students, from 153 schools, drawn randomly from an inclusive national list. The response rate of targeted schools was 74%. We also utilise the group interview data collected from sixteen electoral divisions. (See Print, Saha and Edwards, 2004 for a more detailed description of the YES project.) We focus specifically on the behaviours which we define as indicating political engagement among Australian youth, and we examine how these behaviours are related to their voting intentions.

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

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

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

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

**Chart 1: Students Who Say
They Will Vote in a Federal
Election When 18**

13%

Yes
No

87%

**Chart 2: Students Who Will
Vote in a Federal Election at 18,
Even If Not Compulsory**

50.2%

Yes
No

49.8%

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

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

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

It is the responses to this second question that we use to relate political engagement activities to voting intentions throughout the remainder of this report.
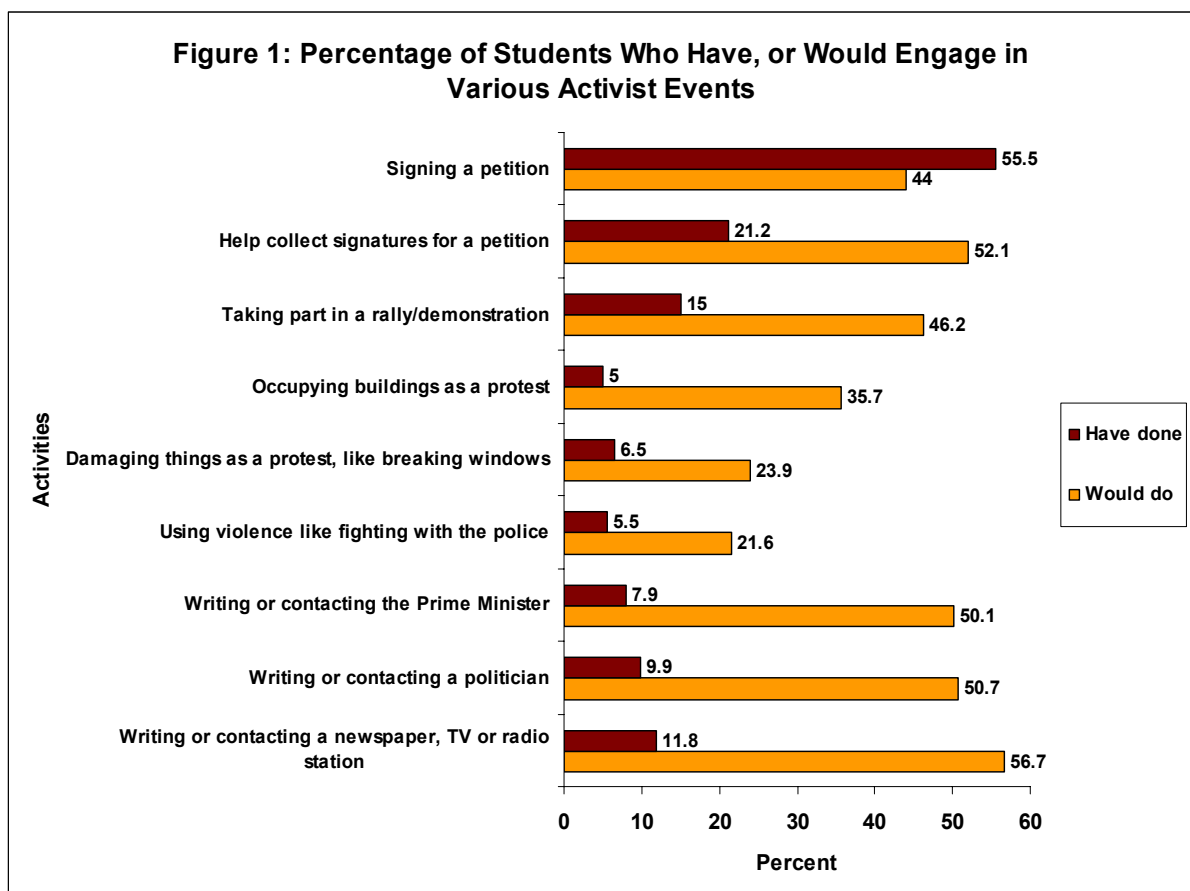
2. School Students and Political Engagement

1) Student Political Actions

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

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

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

Figure 1: Percentage of Students Who Have, or Would Engage in Various Activist Events

Activity	Have done	Would do
Signing a petition	55.5	44
Help collect signatures for a petition	21.2	52.1
Taking part in a rally/demonstration	15	46.2
Occupying buildings as a protest	5	35.7
Damaging things as a protest, like breaking windows	6.5	23.9
Using violence like fighting with the police	5.5	21.6
Writing or contacting the Prime Minister	7.9	50.1
Writing or contacting a politician	9.9	50.7
Writing or contacting a newspaper, TV or radio station	11.8	56.7

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

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

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

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

2) Gender Differences In Political Actions

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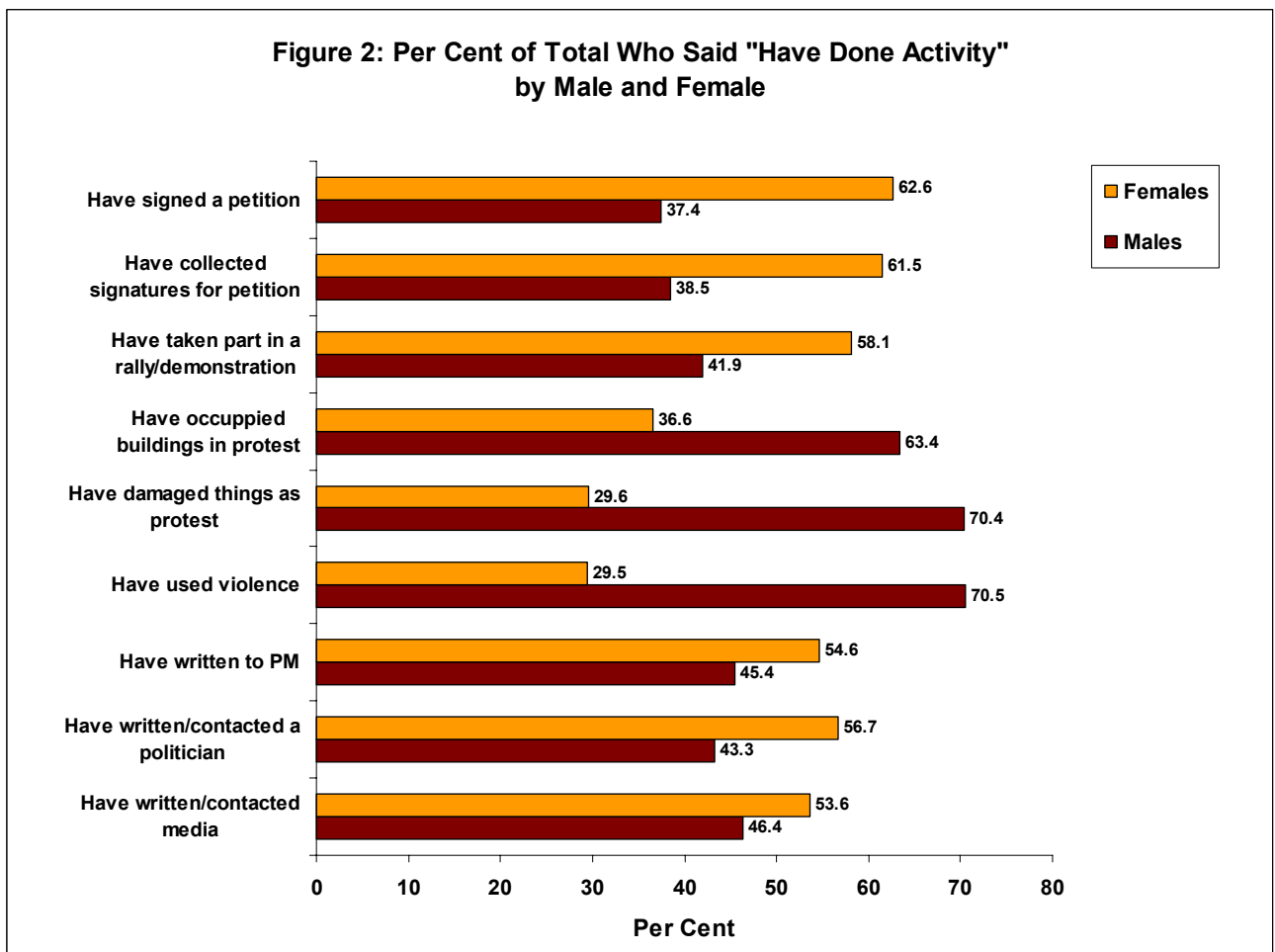
Current research suggests that young females have become more prominent in various forms of political activity, and this is a trend which has been increasing since the late 1970s (Loeb, 1994). In Australia, Vromen found that women tended to be more participative than men for two of her four scales, the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

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

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

Gender is clearly a relevant factor in understanding differences in youth political engagement. In their analysis of the Australian IEA data, Mellor, Kennedy and Greenwood emphasise its importance and say it is an "untapped" area for civic education research (2001). There is thus good reason to focus on gender differences in the political behaviours and voting in the YES survey and interview data.
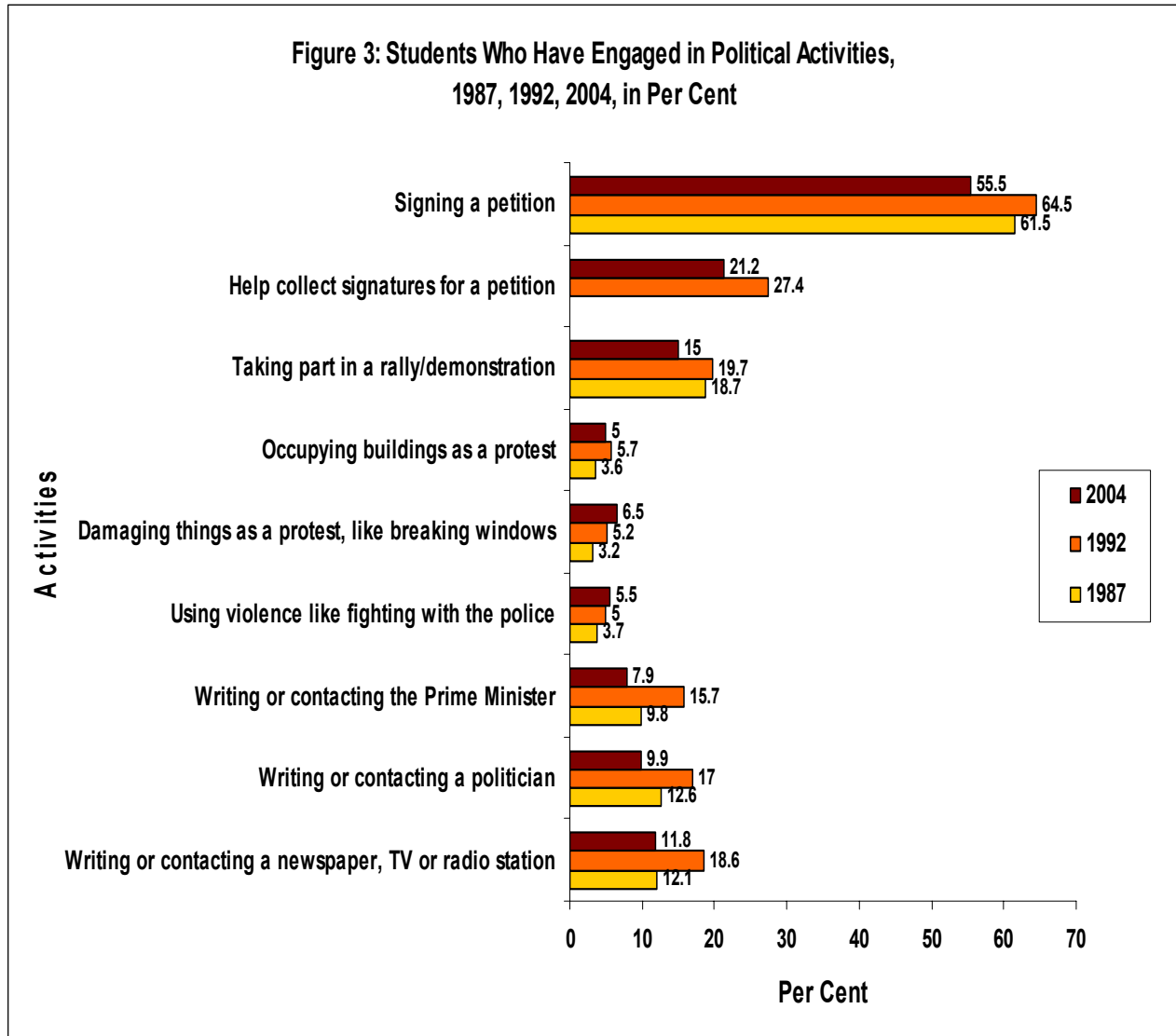
Figure 2 displays male-female differences with respect to activities already experienced by the students, the "have done" portion of the question.

Figure 2: Per Cent of Total Who Said "Have Done Activity" by Male and Female

Activity	Females	Males
Have signed a petition	62.6	37.4
Have collected signatures for petition	61.5	38.5
Have taken part in a rally/demonstration	58.1	41.9
Have occupied buildings in protest	36.6	63.4
Have damaged things as protest	29.6	70.4
Have used violence	29.5	70.5
Have written to PM	54.6	45.4
Have written/contacted a politician	56.7	43.3
Have written/contacted media	53.6	46.4

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

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

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

Figure 3: Students Who Have Engaged in Political Activities, 1987, 1992, 2004, in Per Cent

Activities	2004	1992	1987
Signing a petition	55.5	64.5	61.5
Help collect signatures for a petition	21.2	27.4	
Taking part in a rally/demonstration	15	19.7	18.7
Occupying buildings as a protest	5	5.7	3.6
Damaging things as a protest, like breaking windows	6.5	5.2	3.2
Using violence like fighting with the police	5.5	5	3.7
Writing or contacting the Prime Minister	7.9	15.7	9.8
Writing or contacting a politician	9.9	17	12.6
Writing or contacting a newspaper, TV or radio station	11.8	18.6	12.1

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

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

Key Points:

1. Already in secondary school young people begin to experience political engagement through various kinds of politically linked activities.

2. There is wide variation in the kinds of political engagement that young people experience.

3. The most common form of political activity experienced by our 2004 surveyed students is signing petitions (55%), followed by collecting signatures for a petition (21.2%), and taking part in rallies or demonstrations (15%).

4. Female students are more likely than male students to engage in non-violent, "normative" forms of political activism, while male students dominate the more violent "non-normative" types of behaviour.

5. The patterns of participating in types of political activism have remained fairly stable over the past 15 years.

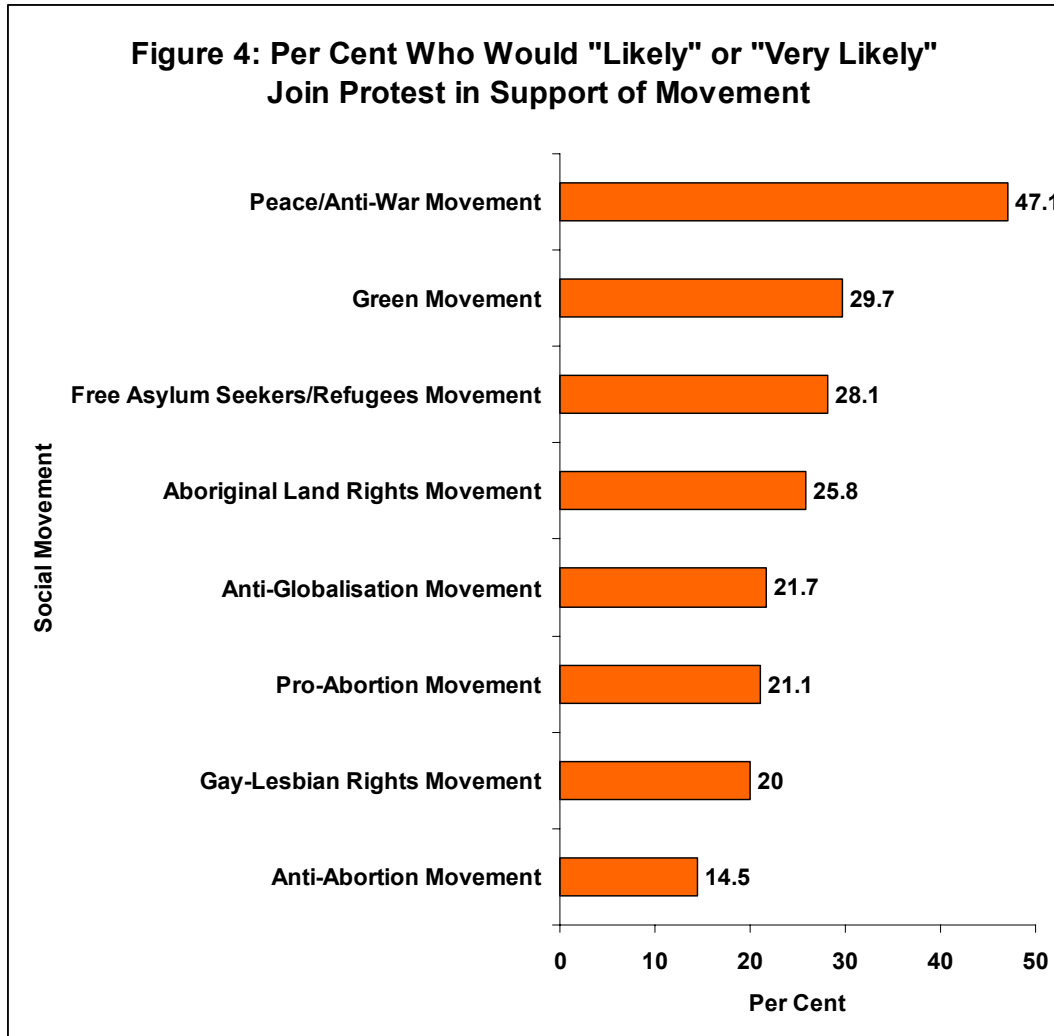## 3) *Student Support of Social Movements*

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

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

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

The students were given four response choices: "Definitely Not", "Not Very Likely", "Quite Likely", and "Very Likely". These four response categories were scored 1 to 4 respectively, with "Definitely Not" = 1, and "Very Likely" = 4.
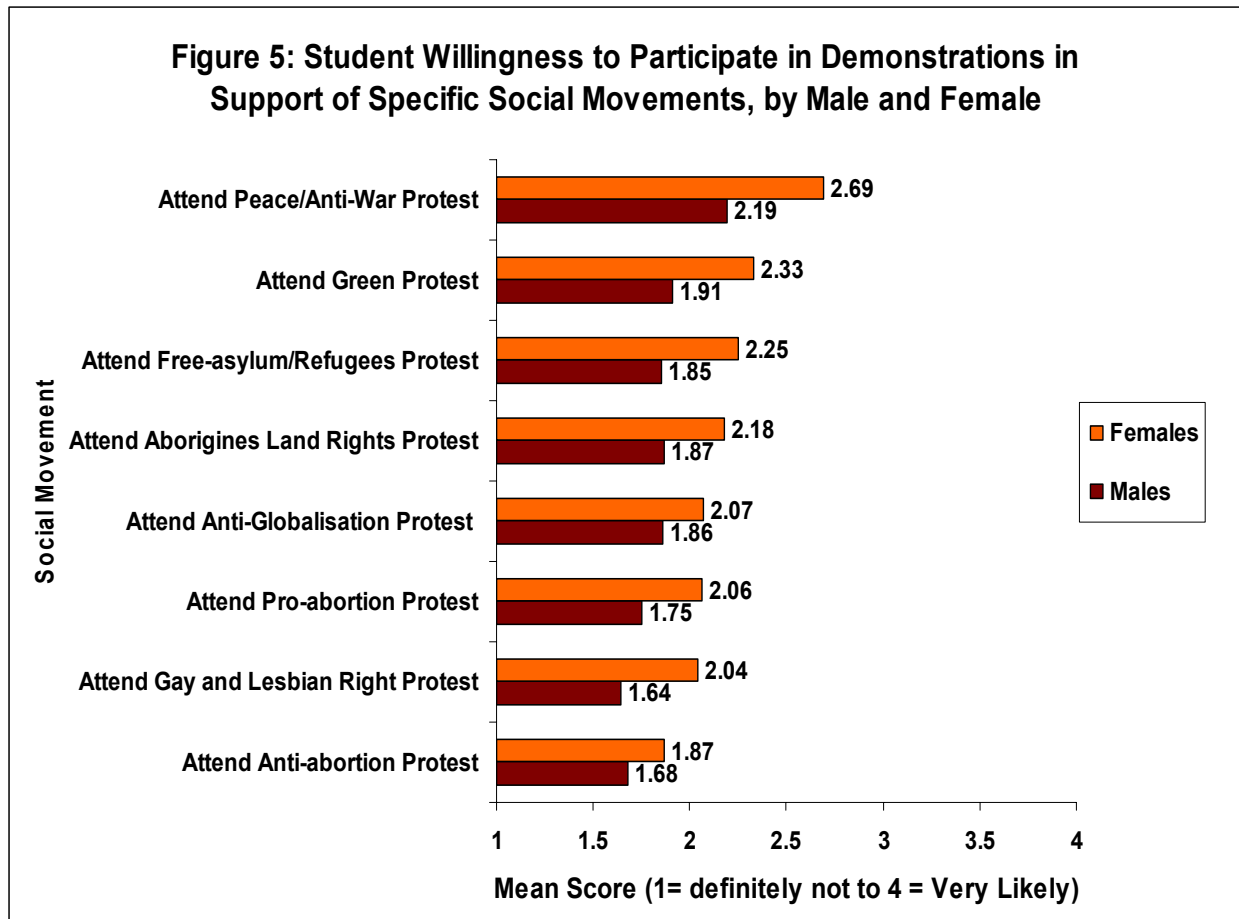
Figure 4 displays the per cent of the students who said they would "likely" or "very likely" join a protest in support of each of the eight social movements listed, starting with the movement receiving the highest support to that receiving the lowest.

Figure 4: Per Cent Who Would "Likely" or "Very Likely" Join Protest in Support of Movement

Social Movement	Per Cent
Peace/Anti-War Movement	47.1
Green Movement	29.7
Free Asylum Seekers/Refugees Movement	28.1
Aboriginal Land Rights Movement	25.8
Anti-Globalisation Movement	21.7
Pro-Abortion Movement	21.1
Gay-Lesbian Rights Movement	20
Anti-Abortion Movement	14.5

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

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

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

Figure 5: Student Willingness to Participate in Demonstrations in Support of Specific Social Movements, by Male and Female

Social Movement	Females	Males
Attend Peace/Anti-War Protest	2.69	2.19
Attend Green Protest	2.33	1.91
Attend Free-asylum/Refugees Protest	2.25	1.85
Attend Aborigines Land Rights Protest	2.18	1.87
Attend Anti-Globalisation Protest	2.07	1.86
Attend Pro-abortion Protest	2.06	1.75
Attend Gay and Lesbian Right Protest	2.04	1.64
Attend Anti-abortion Protest	1.87	1.68

Mean Score (1= definitely not to 4 = Very Likely)

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

<u>Key Points:</u>

1. Already in secondary school, students differentiate between the social movements that they would likely support.

2. The "popular" social movements for students are the peace/anti-war, the environment, the free asylum-seekers/refugee movement, and the Aboriginal Land Rights movement (all with a mean score above 2).

3. Female students are more likely than male students to say they would attend movement demonstrations for all eight social movements.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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*   The names of the school and students are pseudonyms.

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

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

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

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

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

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

*   The name of the school is a pseudonym.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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    *   The names of the school and student are pseudonyms.

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

Key Points:

1. The unsolicited comments in the group interviews do support the general pattern in Figure 5 about participation in a social protest in support of a social movement.

2. Some students recognise that protest activity can be "empowering", but that it is not always successful.

3. Some students recognise that political activism is not an alternative to voting.

4. The unsolicited comments in the group interviews indicate that not all forms of political activity are seen as acceptable by school authorities, but that one form of activity can be substitute for another. In other words, even at Saint Margaret's College students were encouraged to write letters as a form of political action, which itself is a type of behaviour of an "active citizen".

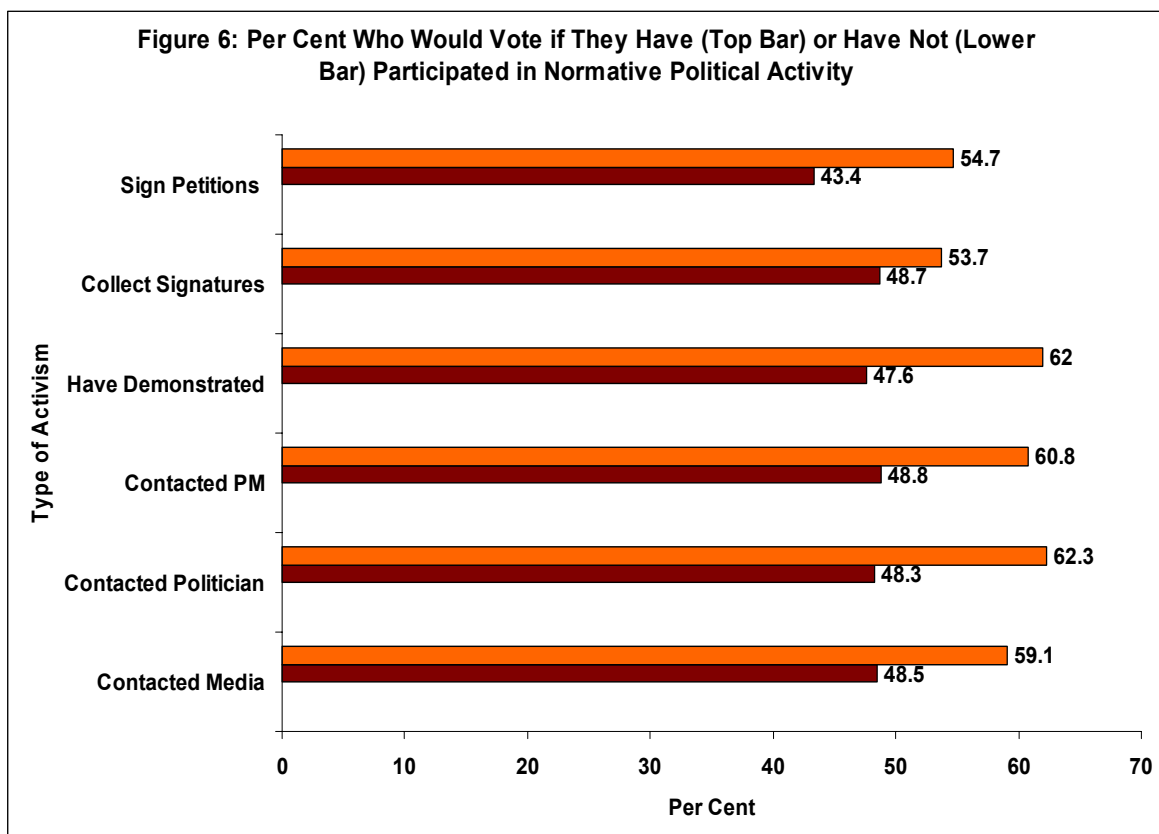# 4. Are Students Who Are Politically Engaged More Likely to Vote?

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

1) Political Activism and Intention to Vote

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

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

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

Figure 6: Per Cent Who Would Vote if They Have (Top Bar) or Have Not (Lower Bar) Participated in Normative Political Activity
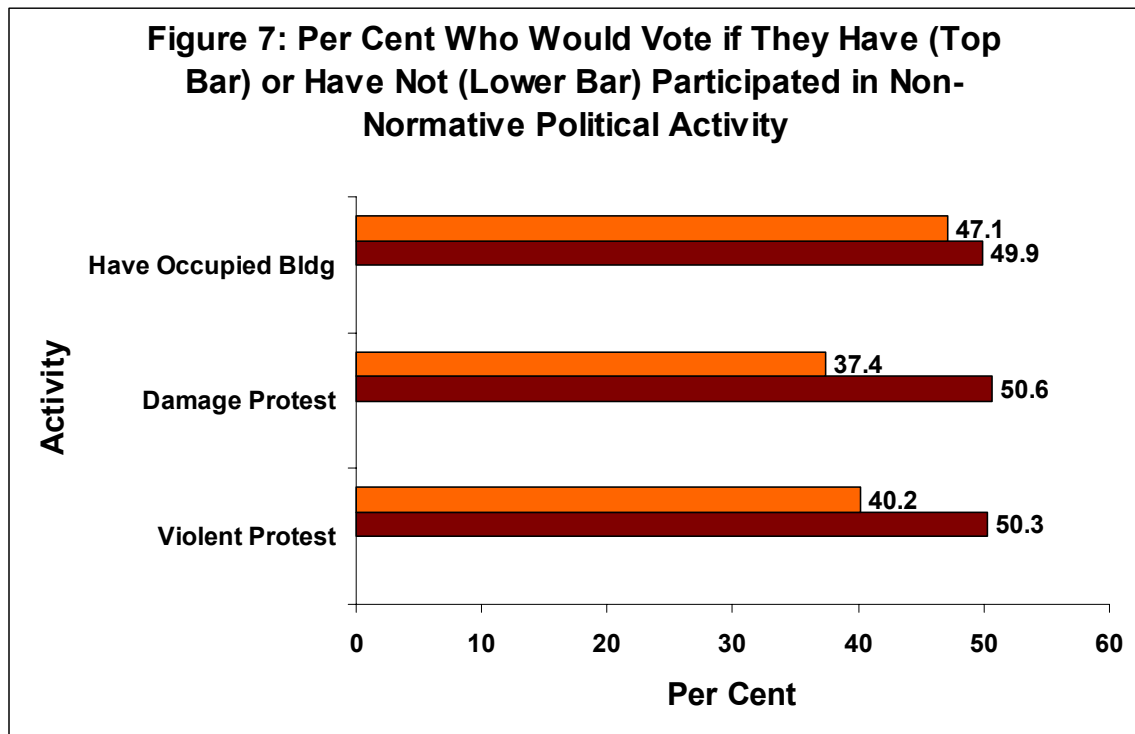
In Figure 6, the top bar indicates the per cent who would vote for those who have experienced the specified political activity, while the lower bar indicates the per cent who would vote for those who have not experienced the specified political activity.

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

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

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

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

Figure 7: Per Cent Who Would Vote if They Have (Top Bar) or Have Not (Lower Bar) Participated in Non-Normative Political Activity

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

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

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

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

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

Key Points:

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

2. The experience of non-normative forms of activism has a negative relationship with the intention to vote.
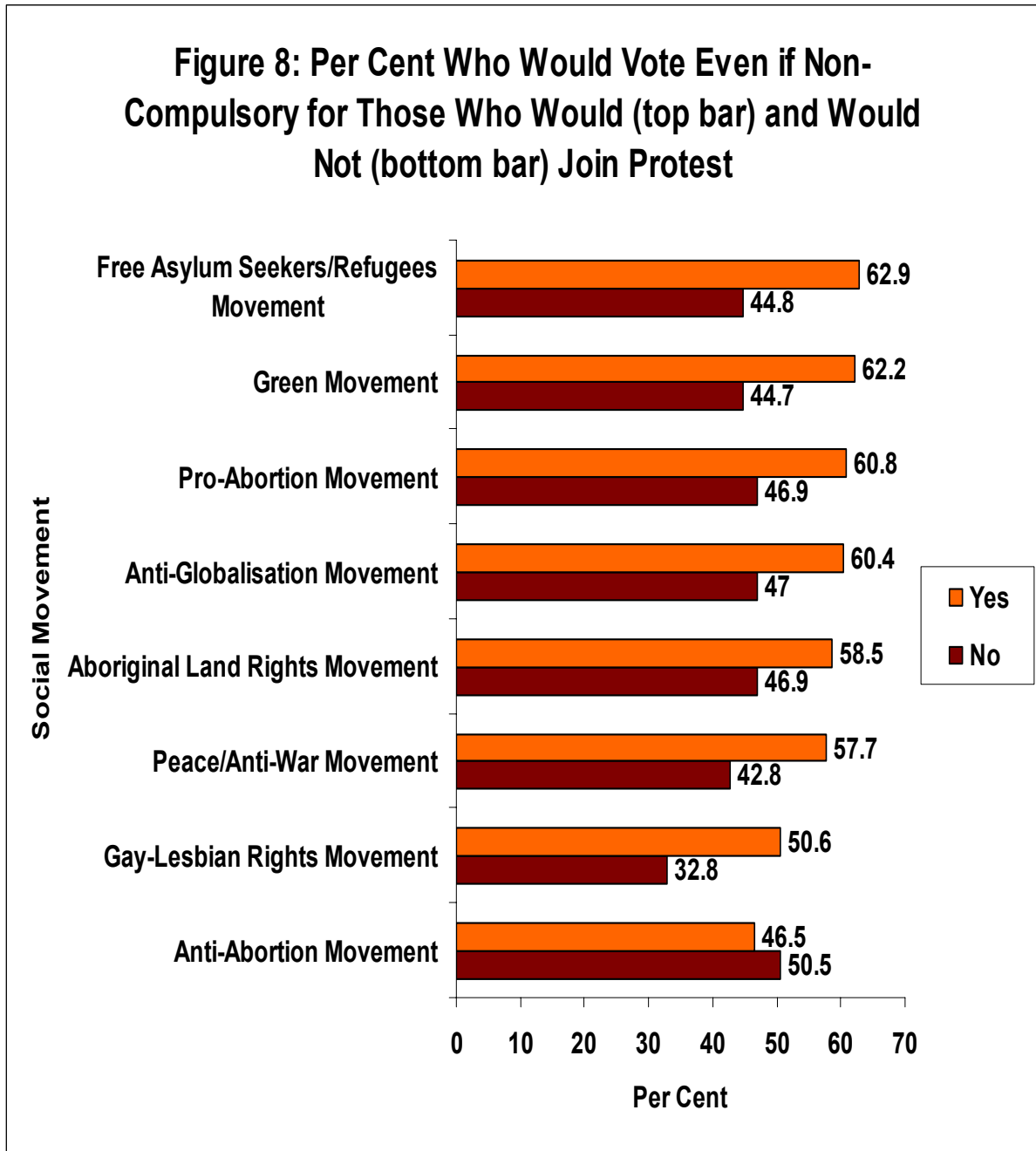
2) Support for Social Movements and the Intention to Vote

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

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

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

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

Figure 8: Per Cent Who Would Vote Even if Non-Compulsory for Those Who Would (top bar) and Would Not (bottom bar) Join Protest

Social Movement	Yes	No
Free Asylum Seekers/Refugees Movement	62.9	44.8
Green Movement	62.2	44.7
Pro-Abortion Movement	60.8	46.9
Anti-Globalisation Movement	60.4	47
Aboriginal Land Rights Movement	58.5	46.9
Peace/Anti-War Movement	57.7	42.8
Gay-Lesbian Rights Movement	50.6	32.8
Anti-Abortion Movement	46.5	50.5

Per Cent

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

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

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

Key Points:

1. Support for seven of the eight social movements is positively related to intention to vote.

2. The relationship between supporting a social movement and intending to vote does vary by social movement.

3. The unique pattern for the anti-abortion movement may be that it is less motivated by civic concern and more by moral or religious concerns.
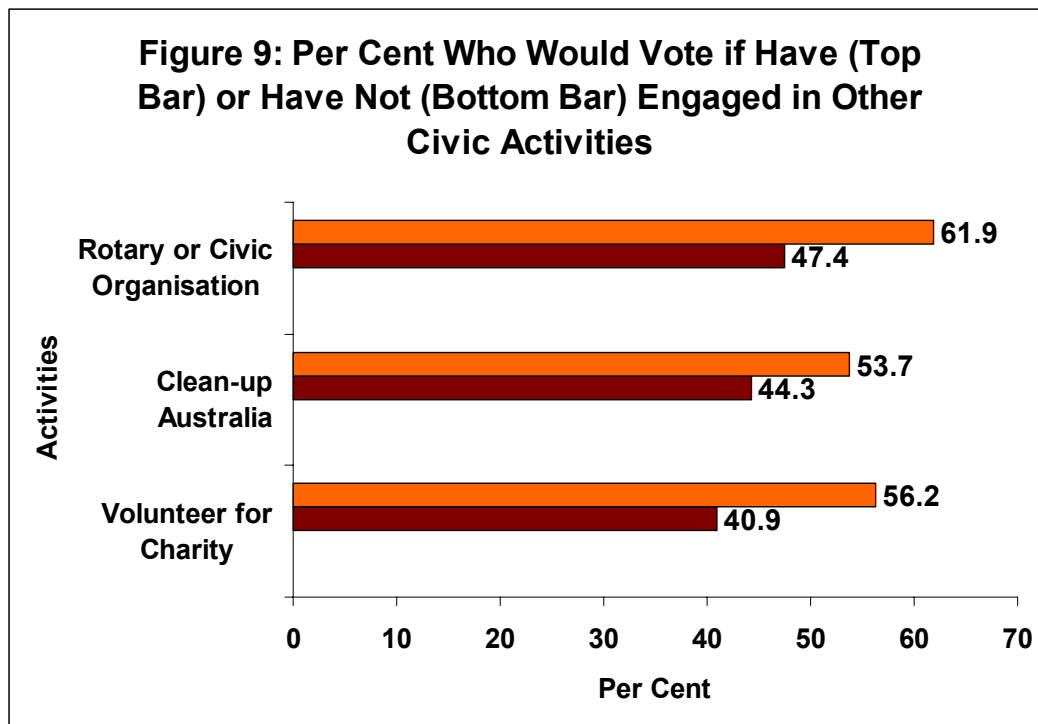

3) Other Civic/Political Behaviours and the Intention to Vote

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

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

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

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

Figure 9: Per Cent Who Would Vote if Have (Top Bar) or Have Not (Bottom Bar) Engaged in Other Civic Activities

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

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

Key Point:

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

4) Student Government in Schools and the Intention to Vote

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

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

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

Figure 10: Per Cent Who Would Vote if Have (Top Bar) or Have Not (Bottom Bar) Voted/Stood for Office in School Elections
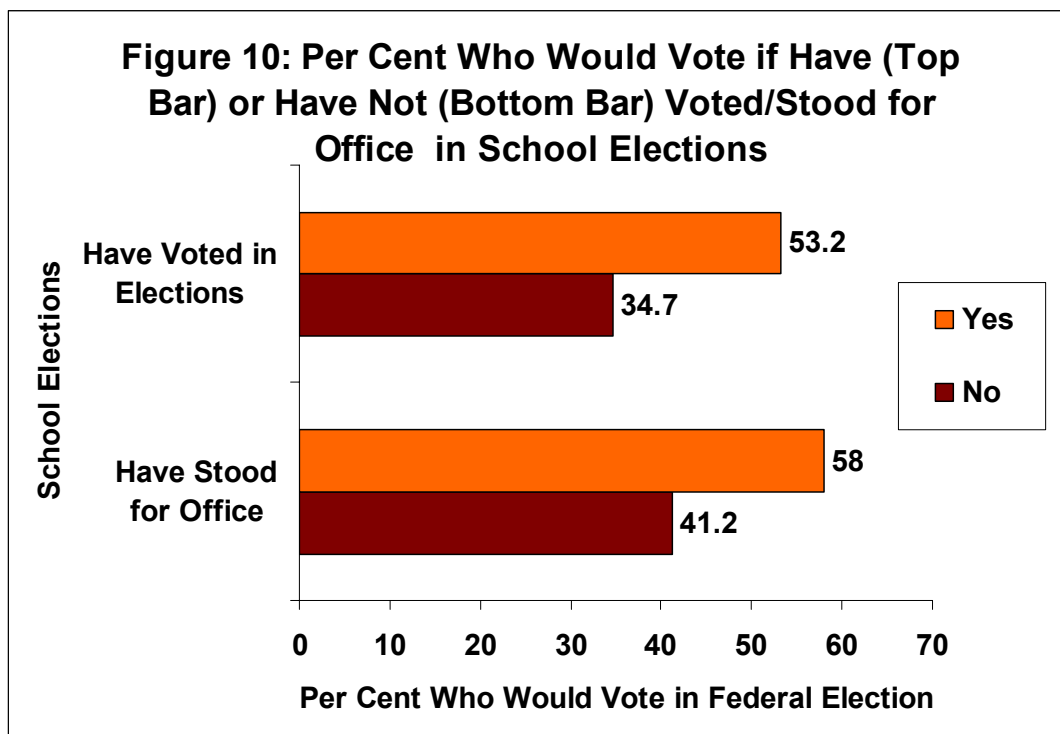
Clearly the difference between students who have and who have not participated in school elections is significant for both those who have stood for elections, and for those who have voted. Of those who have voted in school elections, 53.2% say they would vote in a Federal Election when 18. Of the students who have not voted in school elections, only 34.7% say they would vote in a Federal election when 18.

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

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

Key Point:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* The names of the schools are pseudonyms.

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

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

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

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

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

    *The names of the schools are pseudonyms.

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

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

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

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

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

    *The name of the school is a pseudonym.

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

Some of this sentiment is found in Exhibit 7.

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

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

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

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

      *The names of the schools and students are pseudonyms.

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

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

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

Key points:

1. At least in some schools, there is considerable cynicism by students about the effectiveness of student elections and student governments.

2. Students do not seem to see the link between student elections and student government, and what goes on in adult political life. On the basis of what we know from research, this experiential side of student life might be more important than the academic side in producing adult active citizens.

3. In some schools at least, school elections are not perceived to be democratic, and student governments are not taken seriously.

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

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

Student political activity and voting intentions

We have examined a wide variety of forms of civic and politically-related behaviours, ranging from signing petitions to participation in demonstrations. Our analysis of the data on student political activity has found that, with few understandable exceptions such as violent and destructive protest, politically-related activities are positively related to the intention to vote as adults, even if voting were not compulsory.
What is more compelling is that all of the appropriate behaviours we have considered, in one way or another, can be encouraged and even built into school curricula or youth programs.

Student elections and student government

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

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

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