



Canadian Parties Fail to Engage with New Media and Risk Leaving Young Voters on the Sidelines

Toronto, September 24, 2008 – A poll for the Dominion Institute, conducted by Innovative Research Group, shows that political parties have not yet adjusted to the new online environment that young Canadians increasingly inhabit.

Young Canadians live in a new world where even more (83%) have a Facebook page than have a cell phone (81%). Furthermore, young Canadians prefer to use the internet (35%) when looking for more information about the Canadian election, followed by three-in-ten who chose television (30%). Less than one-in-ten (8%) chose friends and family as their key information source.

“Only 42.2% of eligible first-time voters actually cast a ballot in the last federal election. Political parties have to do more in this campaign to engage young voters,” said Marc Chalifoux, Executive Director of the Dominion Institute. “Yet we found that Canadian political parties have not managed to keep up the pace with wired young Canadians.”

When asked if any Canadian political parties had reached out to them through a new media method (email, text message, Facebook, MySpace and/or Twitter), only one-in-ten (9%) reported that they had been engaged. The parties could learn a very valuable lesson here, as this research shows that young Canadians that are actively engaged online, are much more likely to vote than those that are only passively engaged. Bloggers are twenty per cent more likely to respond that they are definitely casting a ballot on October 14th than non-bloggers.

“Online strategy cannot merely be an add-on to an old-fashioned, business-as-usual campaign, it must be a core component of modern political parties,” said Marc Chalifoux. “Political parties are not alone in carrying the responsibility. Low turnout among young voters affects all those concerned by the health of our democracy. We must be prepared to think outside the box.”

Three quarters of young Canadians report being concerned about the low young voter turnout. Not surprisingly, as young Canadians are so plugged in online, a majority (61%) report that they would be more likely to vote if they could cast their vote online.

During the 2008 election, the Dominion Institute is running *Youth Text 2008* (www.thedemocracyproject.ca/youth-text-2008), which allows the 81% of young Canadians with a cell phone to communicate directly with political parties using text messaging.

However, one solution that is rejected by young voters is lowering the voting age to 16. Two-thirds (65%) oppose such a measure, with two-fifths (39%) strongly opposing. Young Canadians draw the line at allowing their younger sisters and brothers to vote.

See attached deck for more information.