



## Youth Electoral Study

### REPORT 4:

### YOUTH, POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE INTENTION TO VOTE

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#### **1. 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 Professor Larry Saha (Sociology, ANU), together with Dr Kathy Edwards as Senior Research Associate. The Partner Investigator is Gail Urbanski (Assistant Commissioner, Communications and Information Strategy) . The Steering Committee is composed of the following: Gail Urbanski, Andrew Moyes (Assistant Commissioner, AEC), Tim Evans (Assistant Commissioner), A/Professor Murray Print and Professor Larry Saha.

#### ***1.1 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, 18-24 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.

## **2. Political Parties in Australian Democracy**

What are political parties? The oldest, 19<sup>th</sup> century definition of political parties may be the best: "...political parties are organizations that try to win public office in electoral competition with one or more similar organizations" (Lijphart 1985, p. 574). This is virtually the same as the definitions given in government textbooks, that they are like-minded groups of people who organize themselves to win elections (Singleton, Aitkin, Jinks, and Warhurst 1996)

Most democracies in the world have governments based on political parties. Political parties play a role in identifying political philosophies and policies. In this respect, political parties have been said to embrace an ideology, to exercise discipline over their members, and are institutionalized in some organizational form (Singleton, Aitkin, Jinks, and Warhurst 1996). In most countries, they are a central feature to elections. Indeed, Jaensch comments that elections and political parties are virtually "inseparable" (Jaensch 1995). Thus one could argue that without at least some knowledge of political parties, it is difficult for a person to vote intelligently in an election where the candidates are listed according to party membership.

Effectively, a two-party system has been a part of the Australian electoral scene since 1910 when the Labor and Commonwealth Liberal parties faced each other in the election that year. Although there were other candidates, these two parties received 95% of the vote. Although many political parties have come and gone since then, it is said little has changed in this basic two-party structure, at least with respect to numerical dominance (Singleton, Aitkin, Jinks, and Warhurst 1996). However, from time to time one or more minor parties have played larger roles, and have held the balance of power in the Senate (See, for example (Warhurst 1997))

Because of this aspect of the Australian political system, it comes as little surprise that a knowledge of political parties is something of a pre-requisite for casting a meaningful vote in an Australian election. This seems to be reflected in the answer that the youth in our survey gave where less than 50% thought they had enough knowledge about political parties to vote in an election (Print, Saha, and Edwards 2004, Figure 4, p. 12).

## *2.1: Australian Political Parties in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

Following the Federal election of 2004, there were six political parties represented in Federal Parliament, two of which, The Liberal Party and the National Party, were working together as a coalition party. The two major parties, the Liberal-National Coalition and the Labor Party, hold most of the seats in the Senate and the House of Representatives. The minor parties hold the remaining seats, with the Family First Party holding only one seat in the Senate.



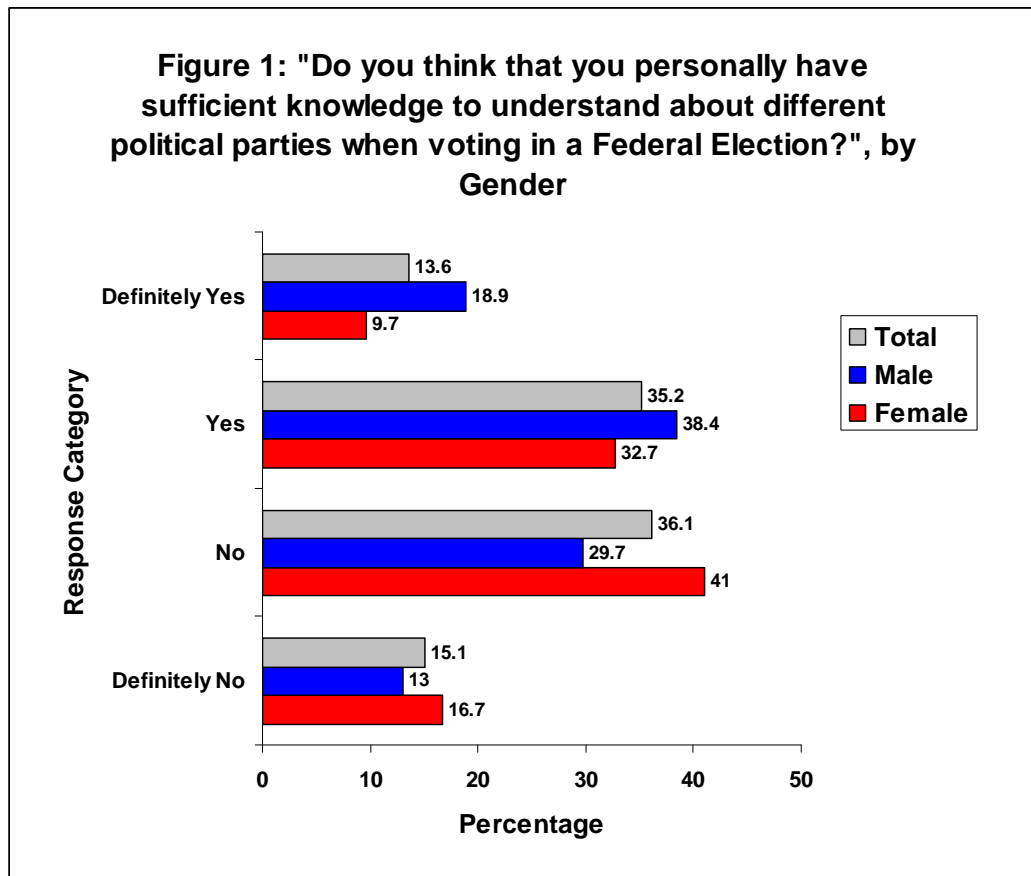
Since the YES questionnaire, which was administered in 2004, was designed prior to the election, only the five parties were listed, with the Liberal-National coalition listed as one party. As a result, all information acquired by the questionnaire focused on four party choices. The Family First Party did not hold a seat at the time of the survey.

### 3. Youth and Party Politics

Given that political parties play such a large role in Australian politics, it is surprising that more attention is not given to the manner that young people are expected to learn about them, or to become members. Both major parties have youth programs and membership is available at ages 15 for the ALP and 16 for the Liberal Party. There is little research on the importance of these youth party organizations for recruitment into political parties generally, although overseas evidence suggests that they do perform an entry into political life for a substantial proportion of party members (Hooghe, Stolle, and Stouthuysen 2004). However little information is given on either party website about these youth organisations, or how young people generally are expected to learn about political parties. One of the purposes of this report is to examine the knowledge of Australian adolescents about political parties, their attitudes towards them, and whether these attitudes have a relationship with their intention to vote.

#### 3.1 What Do Youth Know About Political Parties?

One of the questions that we asked our student respondents concerned their knowledge about political parties. The student responses are given in Figure 1.



The data in Figure 1 indicate significant differences between males and females. Overall, 48.8% of the total sample of 4758 who responded to this question said that they did know enough about the political parties to vote in a Federal Election (“Definitely Yes” plus “Yes”). However, when broken down by sex, 57.3% of the boys and only 42.4% of the girls felt this confident.

At the bottom end of the figure, the pattern is reversed. Slightly more than half, or 51.2%, of the students did not feel that they know enough about political parties to vote. But 42.7% of the boys fell into this category, compared to 57.7% of the girls.

While one can speculate about the specific meaning of this sex difference, it is consistent with patterns we reported in previous reports, namely that boys think that they know more about politics than girls (Saha, Print, and Edwards 2005).

In Exhibit 1, we present several comments by students in our group interviews who commented about their lack of knowledge of the political parties. What the students seem to be saying is that the parties are not really relevant with respect to the issues that concern them. These comments are useful in that they reflect and reinforce the responses in Figure 1.

### **Exhibit 1. Student Perceptions of their Party Knowledge**

At Trenton College, Lauren said "no one goes around talking about being affiliated with a political party; no one goes around saying ‘the Liberal Party is my favourite party’ or anything".

Also at Trenton Dara said, "I don't know what all the policies are for all the groups".

At Gelbson Grammar School, Webster said "There is only a little bit of politics I am really interested in, and that is the Labor and Liberal parties in the elections. It is interesting to see who wins and why".

However, this was a minority view - most group participants at Gelbson were more interested in issues than either parties or elections .

\* The names of the school and students are pseudonyms

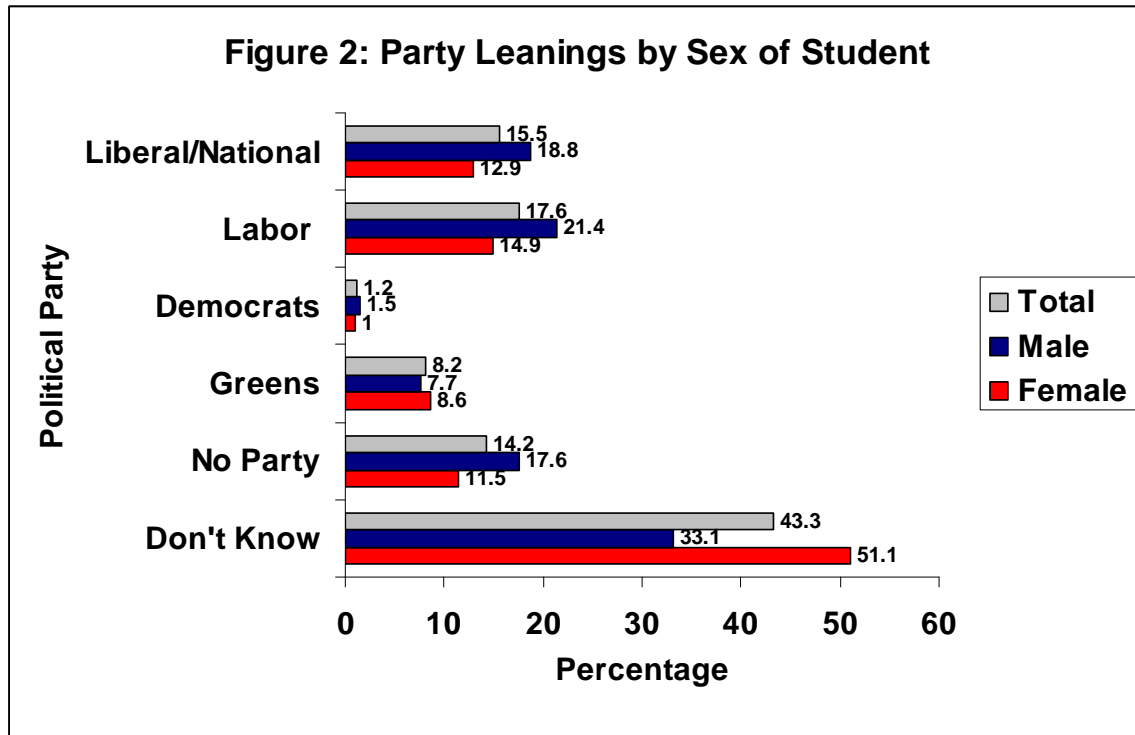
### 3.2 Student Perceptions of Their Party Leanings, by Sex of Student

Research on the political learning and political development of youth has a long history. Over forty-five years of accumulated research has established and that young people already become aware of political parties before secondary school, and by the time they are in secondary school, they acquire a sense of political party differences and begin to develop personal identification and loyalty with a particular party ideology (Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960; Greenstein 1969; Jennings and Niemi 1974).

Because many senior secondary students are already at, or are fast approaching age 18, some will be in a position to vote in the near future. Therefore it is of practical and political relevance to know what party loyalties are developing at that time, as these party loyalties most likely will indicate young people's voting patterns when they first vote.

In our first national YES survey we asked students the question: "We would like to know what you think of the Federal political parties. Do you and your parents feel closer to any one of the parties? (*Tick one box for each person.*)" The students were given a box to tick for the following response choices: Liberal/National Party, Labor Party (ALP), Democrats, Greens, No Party, Don't Know, and a blank line for Other Party.

Table 2 indicates the student responses, for all students, and separately for males and females.



The overall party leanings for all the students were as follows: Labor (17.6%), Liberal/National (15.5%), Greens (8.2%), and Democrats (1.2%). Male students were more likely than female students to favour the Labor, Liberal/National and the Democrat parties, while the female students were more likely to favour the Greens. However the rank order of the party preference remained the same for both sexes.

What is of additional significance is that only 42.5% of all the students named one of the four parties (49.4% for males, 37.4% for females). An additional 14.2% indicated that they did not feel close to any party, which can be interpreted as a conscious rejection of all parties. However a large percentage, 43.3%, did not know what party they felt close to. Surprisingly, more than half of the females (51.1%) and about a third of the males (33.1%) put themselves in this category.

In Exhibit 2 we give some of the comments from our group interviews about the party leanings of some of the students. One point which clearly emerges from the student comments is that for many, there does not seem to be much difference between the parties. On the one hand these statements may reflect the lack of in-depth knowledge about the political parties, or they might indicate that the parties are irrelevant for the issues that the students consider to be important.

### **Exhibit 2: Perception of No Party Differences**

At Watkin College, Paco said "maybe if we had more radical parties - like the conservatives and the communists. At the moment the Greens and the Democrats are considered the same".

Piers suggested that young people were politically aware but that "they don't think there is any difference between the candidates".

Michaela said "I think if the parties made their stances on the more controversial topics more prominent and defined, more young people would be interested in politics and voting."

At Crowfield Agricultural College, Students referred to the "sameness" of politicians.

At Grania High School a student said: "The opposition party doesn't oppose enough" and some considered that the parties were so similar that voting could not really change things.

At St Luke's College three students considered that voting made no difference because the parties simply contradicted each other.



At Cheltenham College three participants considered "the parties are too similar". These students considered that since the major political parties apparently had the same opinions voting could not have much of an effect on issues.

\* The names of the school and students are pseudonyms

### ***3.3 Student Perceptions of Own and Parents' Party Leanings***

Research has shown that young people tend to adopt similar political orientations as their parents. This is not surprising given that students tend to talk to their parents more about politics, and acquire much of their political knowledge from their parents (Edwards, Saha, and Print 2006). Jennings and Niemi (1974) found in their USA study that the agreement between student and parent party affiliation, as perceived by students, produced a correlation coefficient of .58, and that 59% of the students gave the same party (that is, either Democrat or Republican) as they did for their parents (page 39).<sup>1</sup>

In Figure 3, we compare the distribution of party leanings between the student respondents and their perception of their mothers' and fathers' party leanings. Because these are aggregate figures, this bar chart does not link individuals, but rather indicates the total number of times the response categories were ticked.

What is particularly apparent in the figure is that a number of students were less likely to lean toward both the Liberal/National or the Labor parties than their perception of their parents. On the other hand, they were more likely to lean toward the Greens, or to say they had no party leanings, than their parents.

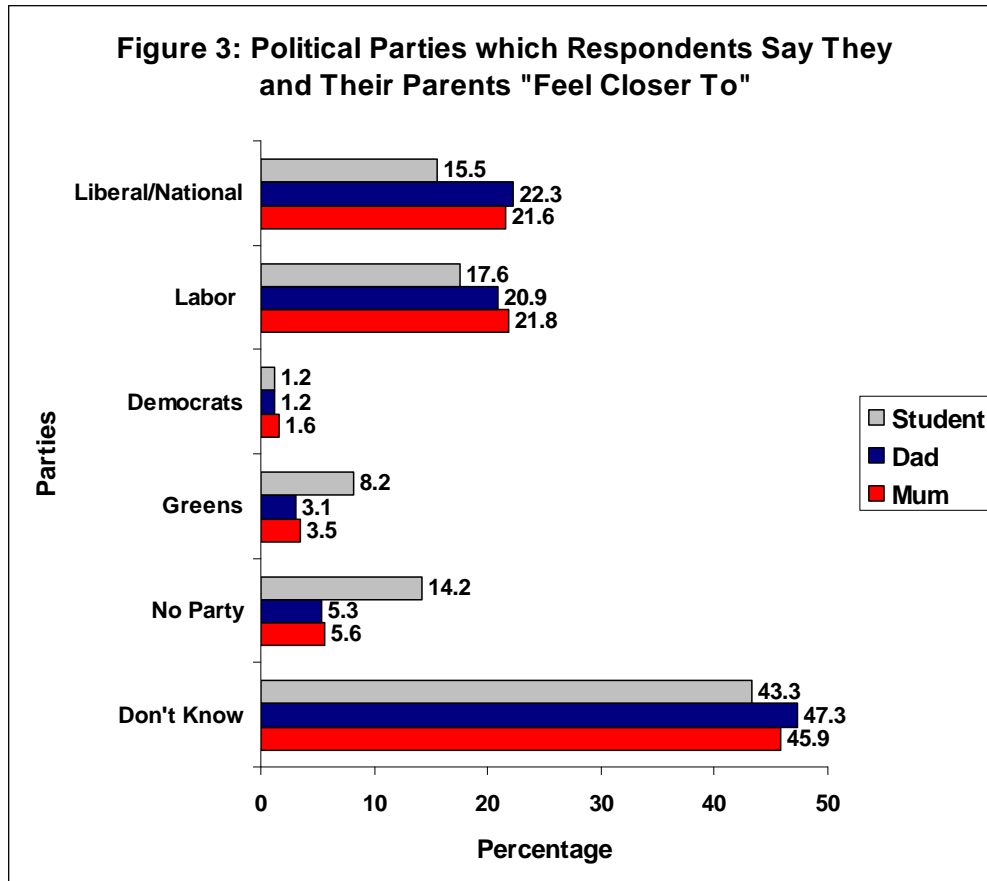
By far, the largest percentage of the students, almost half, did not know what party they leaned toward, nor did they know what party their parents leaned toward.

On the one hand, the data in Figure 3 indicate considerable political transmission within the family, in that most students who could name a party, named the party of their parents. However, the figure also indicates where the differences between students and their parents do occur, namely with the Greens and in the rejection of any party.

On the other hand, the figure makes clear that there are many students who have not yet decided on a party, and this occurs more often for the girls than the boys.

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<sup>1</sup> Jennings and Niemi (1974) point out that students tend to overestimate the party agreement between themselves and their parents. Based on their own study in which they also had independent party leanings from the parents, they found that students' perceived agreement produced a correlation coefficient of .58, whereas the actual agreement produced a correlation coefficient of .47 (pages 38-40, footnote 10).



### 3.4 Party Inheritance and Party Reproduction

The similarity between student party leanings and the perceived party leanings of their parents may indicate two processes: 1) how party leanings get passed from one generation to the next; and 2) the extent to which party sympathy and possibility party membership is *reproduced* in society. An indication of these two processes are given in Table 1.

Each row in the table reports the perceived parental party leanings for the students who named the party in that row. Thus for the students who said they leaned more to the Liberal/National Party, 78.1% and 74.5% thought their father and mother did also. Furthermore, 67.7% of these students thought both their father and mother leaned to the Liberal/National Party.

Jennings and Niemi (1974) regard the similarities in perceived leanings between students and parents as indicators of the "...transmission of party preferences from one generation to the next..." (p. 40). Furthermore, compared to the figures they obtained in their own study of American youth, the figures for the Liberal/National Party suggest a relatively high level of transmission.

However, from the other figures in Table 1, it is apparent that this intergenerational transmission process does not occur to the same degree for all Australian political parties. For example, the student-father-mother percentage for the Labor Party is somewhat lower, with 63.4% and 67.5% of the Labor-leaning students perceiving their parents to hold the same view.

The biggest difference between student and parents occurs with respect to the minor parties, with few students perceiving their parents to hold the same views as their own. This suggests that the minor parties, namely the Democrats and the Greens, draw their following from a more individual preference rather than through family transmission. Furthermore, the students who lean toward these minor parties rarely perceive their parents to agree with themselves in minor party leaning.

**Table 1: Correspondence between Student and Perceived Parent Party Leaning, and Perceived Correspondence between the Parents. (The percentage in each cell indicates the correspondence for that particular party. The number indicates the base for the percentage.)**

Student Political Party Leaning	Student is Same Party as Father (Percent/ Total N)	Student is Same Party as Mother (Percent/ Total N)	Father and Mother are Perceived Same (Percent/ Total N)
Liberal/National Party	78.1% (688)	74.5% (698)	67.7% (685)
Labor Party	63.4 % (797)	67.5% (808)	56.2% (787)
Democratic Party	13.3 % (60)	16.4% (61)	8.3% (60)
Green Party	23.6 % (377)	24.1% (381)	17.4% (374)
No Party	28.2 % (635)	29.4% (643)	26.9% (631)
Don't Know	75.9 % (1944)	76.0 (1950)	74.7% (1927)

The observations regarding the minor parties also seem to hold regarding those students who indicated that they did not lean toward any party. Given that there was a response option between “No Party” and “Don’t Know”, it is possible to assume that the students who indicated no party leaning can be interpreted as those who consciously refuse to nominate any party. In other words, that they know enough about parties to be able to reject them.

The high figures for the “Don’t Know” students can be interpreted as students who simply do not know enough about the political parties to choose between them.

These patterns have implications for party reproduction because a high correspondence between student and parent party leaning means that a particular party is virtually guaranteed a constant level of support over time. Strong party inheritance also means a high level of party reproduction, thus minimizing the necessity for party recruitment. Thus from the figures in Table 1, it appears that the Liberal/National parties and the Labor Party are well entrenched over time, since there is a high level of party inheritance. On the other hand, it seems that the Australian Democrats and the Green parties, at least at the present time, must recruit harder to maintain their numbers, since the level of inheritance is low.

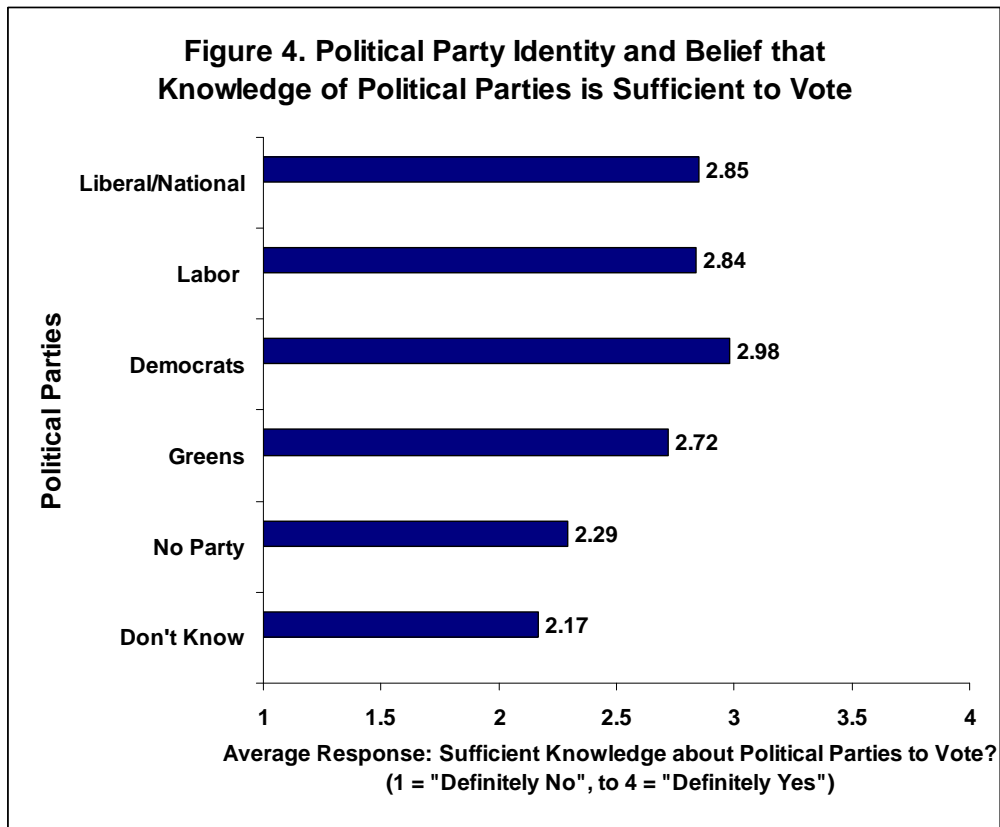
### ***3.5: Party Leanings and Sufficient Knowledge to Vote***

Is being able to name a party related to perceived sufficient knowledge about parties to vote? In order to examine the meaning of specific party identity and the two “no party” response categories, we present the mean response scores on the question about sufficient knowledge about political parties (see Figure 1) for each party identity. The higher the mean score, the more the students who ticked that response category feel that they understand parties well enough to vote.

The mean scores make it clear that students who identified with a party also thought that they understood enough about parties to be able to vote. On the other hand, the students who ticked the categories “No Party” or “Don’t Know” also were lowest in their perceived sufficiency of their knowledge about parties to vote.

Because the question about party leaning was not a question about political knowledge (the names of the parties were included in the question), it is clear that the ability to name a party is related to the perception about political knowledge. The correlation coefficient between the two variables is .35 which indicates a significant relationship between the responses to the two items.

A final observation concerns the difference between the political party preferences and the perception of knowledge to vote. The highest mean score is for those who nominated the Australian Democrats. As can be seen in Figure 2, the Democrats were the party which received the lowest percentage of nominations. It is also evident from Table 1 that the Australian Democrats had the lowest level of party inheritance and party reproduction. Thus one explanation for the higher relationship between party choice and perceived knowledge of parties is that the students choosing the Democrats must have known why they were selecting that party. It certainly was not because they perceived their parents to be Democrats. Students nominating the Australian Democrats must have done so because of their knowledge about the party’s political philosophy and policies, or because of the reputation of the party in youth political culture.



### Key Points for Section 3

1. Only about one half of our sampled students felt that they understood the political parties sufficiently to vote ( "definitely yes" and "yes"). (Figure 1)
2. Males felt that they understood the political parties more than females (57.3% compared to 42.4%). (Figure 1)
3. Only 42.5% of the students named one of the four political parties when asked which party they leaned toward. Another 14.2% said "no party", and 43.3% said they did not know. (Figure 2)
4. The females (51.1%) were much more likely to say "don't know" than the males (33.1%). (Figure 2)
5. The proportion of students who named the same major political party as their parents was relatively high, above 75% for the students who named the Liberal/National Party, between 63 and 67.5% for those who named the Labor Party. (Figure 3 and Table 1)

6. The proportion of those students who named one of the minor political parties were far less likely to perceive their parents to be the same, with between 13.3 and 16.4% for the Democrats, and between 23.6 and 24.1% for the Greens. (Table 1)
7. Students who had a party identity also were more likely to believe that they had sufficient knowledge about political parties to vote. (Figure 4)

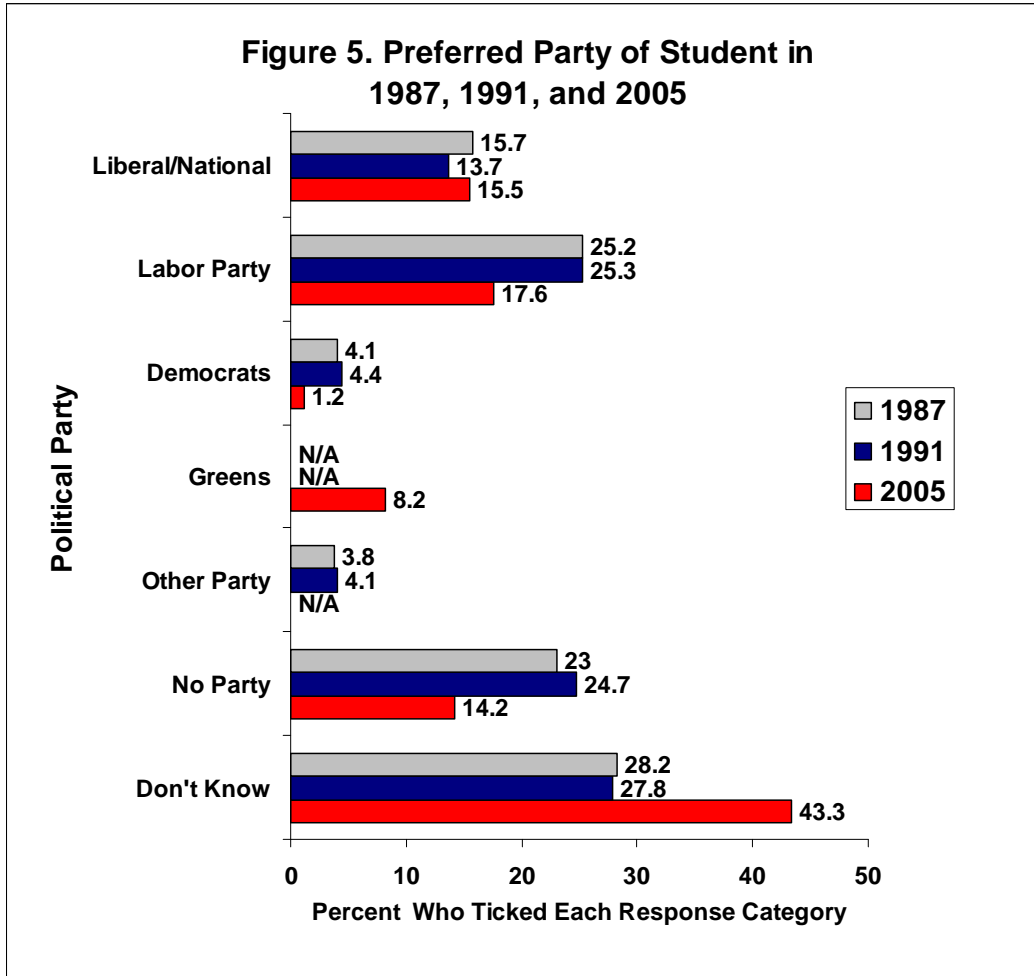
#### **4: Changes in Youth Party Leanings over Time**

The questionnaire item about political party leanings appeared with identical wording in two previous youth surveys conducted in 1987 and in 1991. The first of these surveys included secondary school students, Years 10 to 12, in the ACT only. The second survey in 1991 included the same grade levels of students, but from the ACT and South Australia. The sample sizes of these previous surveys were 1014 and 1311 respectively.

The comparison of the results from the three surveys is given in Figure 5.

While the two major parties dominated youth party leanings, there are some interesting variations between the three surveys. These can be briefly summarized as follows:

1. The nomination of the Liberal/National parties in 2005 is similar to that of 1987, but the nomination of the Labor Party decreased between 1991 and 2005 by almost 8 %.
2. The support for the Australian Democrats declined considerably from a high of 4.4% in 1991 to a low of 1.2% in 2005.
3. The Greens did not officially exist in 1987 and 1991, but received 8 % of the nominations in 2005.
4. There was a sharp decline in 2005 in the per cent who said “No Party” (from a high of 24.7% in 1991 to 14.2% in 2005, and a sharp increase in those who said “Don’t Know” (from a high of 28.2% in 1987 to a high of 43.3% in 2005).



There are a number of additional comments that can be made about the patterns in Figure 5. First, as one might expect, the variation in support for the major parties is probably due to the changing nature of the political climate and political personalities at the time of each survey. It would be necessary to do a closer analysis of these patterns with the general voting patterns during the same period to be able to explain the changes further.

A second pattern which merits closer examination is the sharp drop in specific “No Party” responses, and the sharp increase in “Don’t Know” responses. A “No Party” response indicates a deliberate rejection of the parties listed in the question. On the other hand, a “Don’t Know” response means simply that the respondent has not made up their mind yet, or that the respondent doesn’t feel that he or she knows enough to make a choice.

Some researchers have suggested that at least in countries like the UK, young people have disengaged from political activity because the political parties are seen as no longer relevant, or that there is little difference between them (Campbell 2002; Russell 2005). If

a similar phenomenon is the case among Australian youth, then perhaps an increase in “Don’t Know” responses reflect a similar disengagement from party identification because of the inability to tell the difference. Once again, a closer examination of these data is necessary to seek an explanation for this pattern.

In conclusion, these data suggest that youth party preferences are worth giving attention to. There is enough variation in the pattern over the three surveys to indicate that, even during late adolescence, most young people are aware of party differences, but an increasingly large proportion remain undecided or are unable to indicate a party choice. Either way, given that these students will be voters in a short period of time, there is sufficient cause for some attention to these figures. One implication might be that young people should receive more party focused civic, political or citizenship education at this stage of their school studies.

#### **Key Point for Section 4**

1. The nomination of parties was only partly stable between three surveys between 1987 and 2005, with the Labor Party, the Democrats, and those saying “No Party” showing declines, while the number saying “Don’t Know” showing increases. (Figure 5)

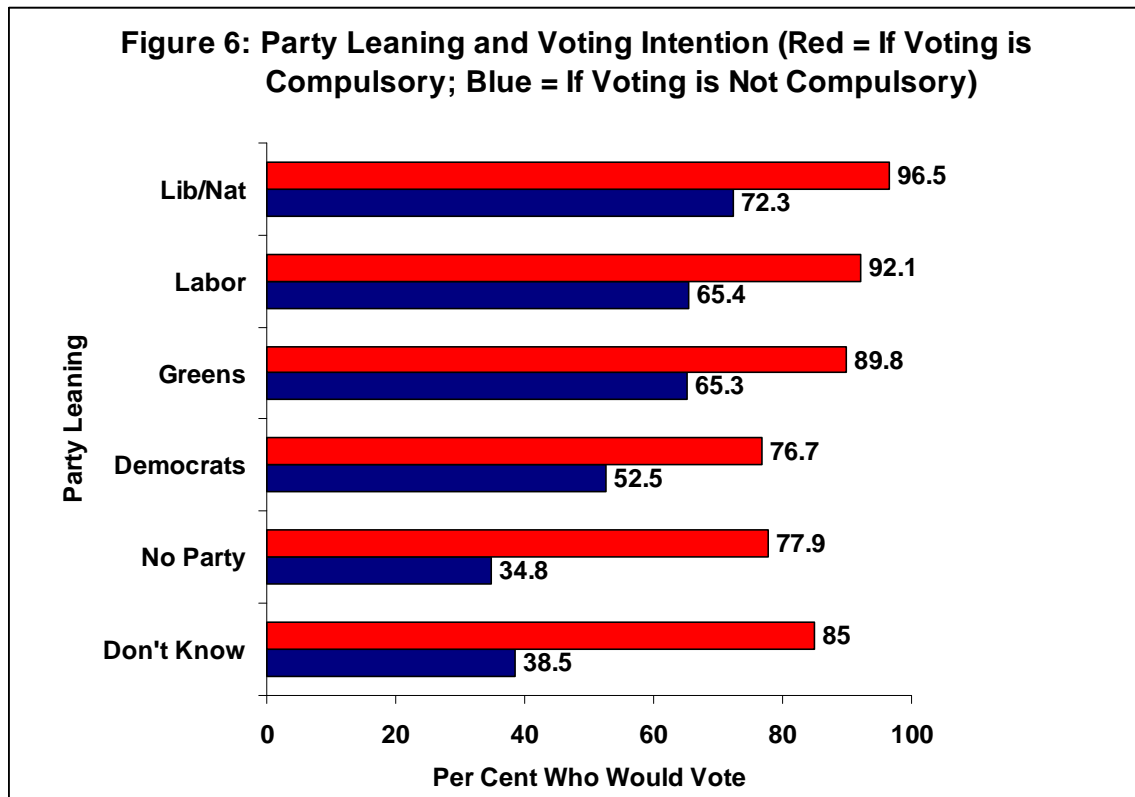
### **5. Party Preference and Intention to Vote**

We now turn our attention to what some consider the most important aspect of the question relating to student party leaning, namely, are students who favour a particular party more likely to vote than those who either have no party leanings, or simply do not know which party they favour? Research in other countries, for example, has demonstrated that party identity is related to the tendency to vote in elections, and that this is true for young voters as well as older voters. (See Howe (2006) for evidence from Canada and the Netherlands.)

The data in Figure 6 show the student responses to the two key voting questions that we asked in our questionnaire: “Do you intend to vote in Federal elections after you reach 18?”, and “Would you vote in Federal elections if you did not have to?”

There were different response categories for each of these questions. For the first, students had a choice of four responses, ranging from “Yes, definitely”, to “Definitely not”. For the second question, students were simply asked to respond “Yes” or “No”. In order to present these data in a simple form, and to compare the responses, the categories for the first question were collapsed into two: “Yes definitely” and “Yes probably” were recoded as “Yes” while “Probably not” and “Definitely not” were recoded as “No”.





The percentage of the students responding “Yes” or “No” to the two voting questions are given in Figure 6 for each Party or non-Party category. What are the important patterns?

First, it is clear that under compulsory voting, most Australian adolescents say they will vote, although this varies from 96.5% for those who identify with the Liberal/National Party, to a low of 76.7% for those who identify with the Democrats. This gap between the highest and lowest percentage of those who say they would vote (the top bar for each party leaning) is 19.8%. Given that the top bar represents the student response to the question on compulsory voting, the differences are noteworthy. The figures show that the most compliant group of students, who say they will vote, is the group who say they lean toward the Liberal/National Party (96.5%). At the bottom, those who are least compliant, even when voting is compulsory, are those who say “No Party” (77.9%) and those who identify with the Democrats (76.7%). The difference of almost 20% between the upper and lower figures suggests that there might be either a disengagement from the electoral process, or perhaps a higher level of rejection of the process by these students.

However, when we turn to the hypothetical situation of non-compulsory voting ( a measure of voting commitment), we find the differences much more pronounced. Overall, the difference in voting intention between the highest figure ( 72.3% for the

Liberal/National parties) and the lowest figure (34.8% for those who said “No Party”) is almost double at 37.5%.

In terms of party differences, it is clear that the Liberal/National parties enjoy the highest level of voting commitment by the youth who identify with them, followed by the Labor Party and the Green Party. It is not clear why the students who identify with the Democrats are the least likely of the party identifiers to say they will vote, irrespective of whether it is compulsory or non-compulsory. What is most striking, however, is how voting commitment declines for young people who have either rejected a party identity, or do not, for whatever reason, identify with any party. Only one-third of these students would vote if they did not have to.

Clearly, being able to identify with a party does enhance a young person’s propensity to vote.

We did not discuss political parties, or how political party identity was related to voting, in our group interviews. However on one occasion a group of students did talk about parties and voting. This brief discussion is described in Exhibit 3.

### **Exhibit 3: Party Identity and the Necessity to Vote**

At Scholl High School we encountered another participant, Jake, who was a member of a political party, this time the Young Liberals.

Interestingly, the bias at this school was decidedly towards the left and participants considered themselves "working class". They [some students] considered that some parties were "for the working class" and that it was important to vote for these parties.

Jake did not offer any opposition to this general view.

\* The names of the school and students are pseudonyms

### **Key Points for Section 5**

1. Having a party identity was strongly related to the intention to vote, even if voting were not compulsory, especially when compared to those who said “No Party” or “Don’t Know” (Figure 6).
2. The percentage, who would vote, even if not compulsory, ranged between 72.3 % for the Liberal/National Party and 52.5% for the Democrat Party. (Figure 6).

## 6. Party Identity and the Propensity to Vote

In previous reports from the YES project, we have identified a number of different factors related to Australian youth's propensity to vote. Among these has been gender, confidence regarding voting, and so on. It is possible that any one of the factors that we have discussed is only partly linked with voting; that the correlation between factors tends to obscure the full picture of what explains the attitudes and behaviours of youth towards voting.

In this context, we ask the following question: is a person who has a party leaning (or party identity) more likely to say they will vote? But from the other YES reports we know that other factors are also related to the tendency to vote. Therefore, what we really want to know is whether having a party leaning, or party identity, related to the intention to vote, even when the other factors are taken into account.

In order to examine this question, the various factors which already have been found to explain the propensity to vote from the YES survey in a multivariate model, will be used to examine the relative importance of political party identity (Saha 2005).

Using the multivariate regression model from the previous analysis of the determinants of voting, the additional variable, party identity was added. This variable consisted of a simple dichotomy created from the political party variable, and was recoded as naming a party (coded as 2) and not naming a party (coded as 1). The first category of students was considered as having a party identity, while the second was considered as not having a party identity.

The voting variable that is used in the analysis, is commitment to voting, which is a combination of the two variables, 1) whether a person will vote at 18, and 2) whether a person would vote at 18, even if not compulsory. There are five categories in this variable: 1) definitely will vote, 2) probably will vote, 3) Maybe will vote, 4) probably will not vote, and 5) definitely will not vote. Each category is given a value ranging from 6 to 2, with 6 being allocated to "definitely will vote".<sup>2</sup>

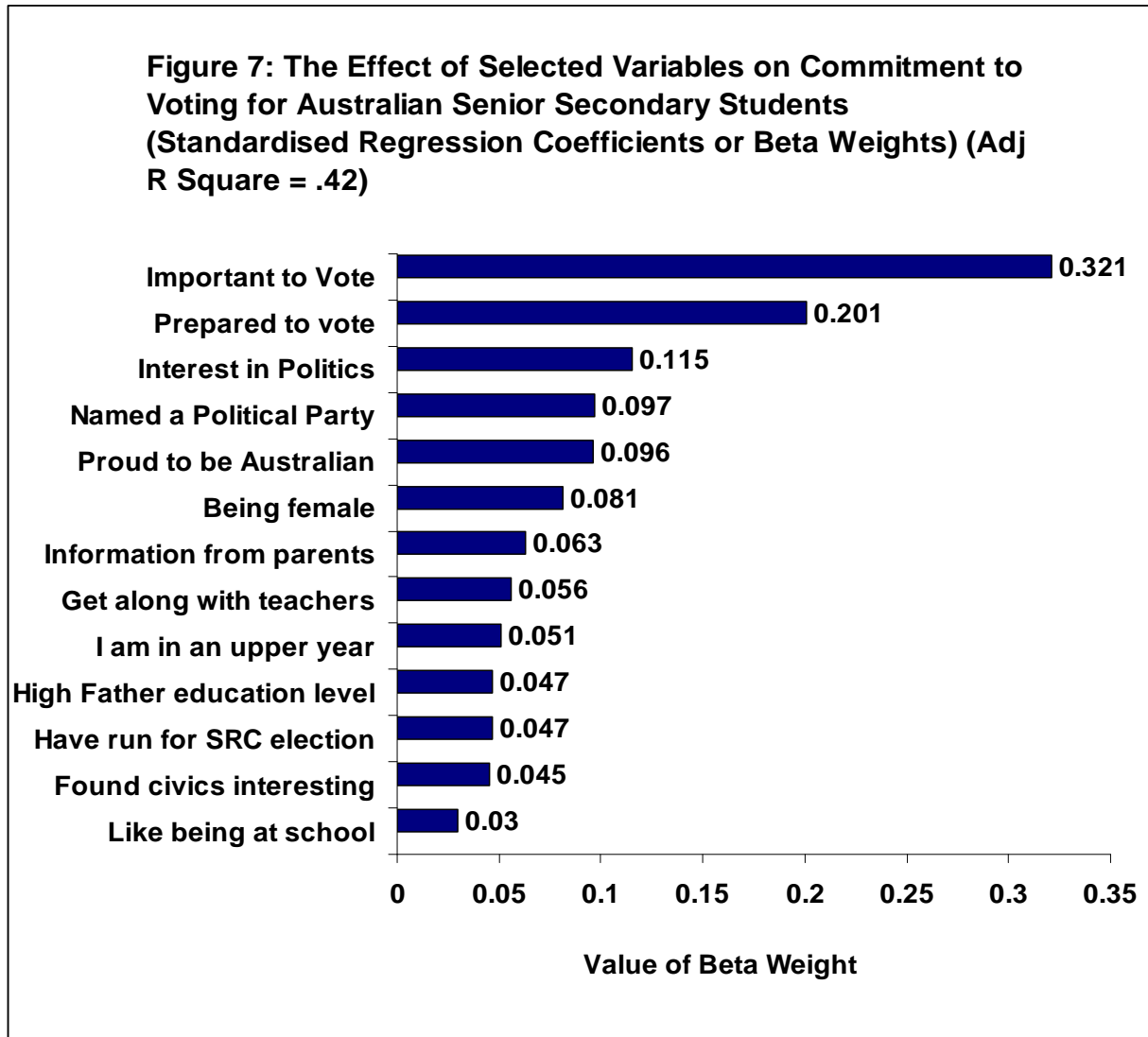
The same selection of variables which have been found to be related to "commitment to voting", as reported in Saha (Saha 2005), were used in this analysis. The only difference is that the new variable, "party identity" was added to the analysis. The results of the multivariate regression analysis are presented in Figure 7.

In this figure, the values for each bar represent the value of the standard regression coefficients (or beta weights), which indicate how much of a change in "voting

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<sup>2</sup> This variable is a combination of two questions in the questionnaire, namely whether the student intended to vote when 18 years of age, and whether the student intended to vote even if voting were non-compulsory Saha, Lawrence J. 2005. "Are They Prepared to Vote? What Australian Youth Are Saying." in *Youth Electoral Study Workshop*. Canberra.. Thus, by combining these two variables, we have a variable which takes into account the compulsory nature of voting in Australia, and gives us a measure of the student's "commitment" to voting, even if it were not compulsory.

commitment” is related to each of the variables which are listed, controlling for all the other variables. Since the values (beta weights) are measured in standard deviation units, it is possible to compare the relative size of each variable. Those with higher values are more strongly related to “commitment to voting”, even when the other variables are taken into account. The arrow points to the variable “party identity”.



It is clear that having a party identity (naming a party) is an important variable in understanding youth propensity to vote; it is the fourth most important variable, in this group of variables, in explaining commitment to voting (see the arrow). Only the three variables, namely, 1) regarding voting as important (a civic duty or legal obligation) 2) feeling prepared to vote, and 3) having an interest in politics, have a greater impact on “commitment to voting” than 4) party identity. All the other variables are less important.

The pattern in Figure 7 is consistent with the findings of Howe (2006), in that both a sense of civic duty (“It is important to vote”) and party identity are important determinants of intention to vote. Students who could name a party that they identified with, were also more likely to say that they will vote when 18, even when controlling for 12 other variables. This relationship is a strong one, which suggests that among young Australians, party identity alone does differentiate between those more likely to vote from those less likely to vote. In other words, being able to name a party does make a difference in intention to vote.

What remains to be determined is what factors contribute to a party identity among these young Australians. In other words, why did some students name a party that they leaned towards, and other students did not?

### **Key Points for Section 6**

1. Having a party identity is strongly related to the commitment to vote, even when other variables are controlled. (See Figure 7.)
2. Among a group of 13 variables, having a party identity ranks fourth in importance in relation to commitment to vote. In other words, it is important. (See Figure 7.)

### **7. Why Do Some Young Australians Identify With a Political Party?**

We saw in the previous section (Section 6) that political party identity is an important factor in explaining why some young people are committed to voting, and others are not. We also saw in Section 3.3 that there is considerable family inheritance in party identity when we examine each party individually. Of course family inheritance in party identity can be explained in many ways, for example by means of political party “cues” which young people pick up from their parents, or through the perceived link between the social status of the party and that of the family [Edwards, 2006 #220; Ventura, 2001 #231] .

Although the body of research linking party identity and perceived parental identity has been documented, researchers agree that these identities can change, and are subject to other non-family influences [Beck, 1991 #244].

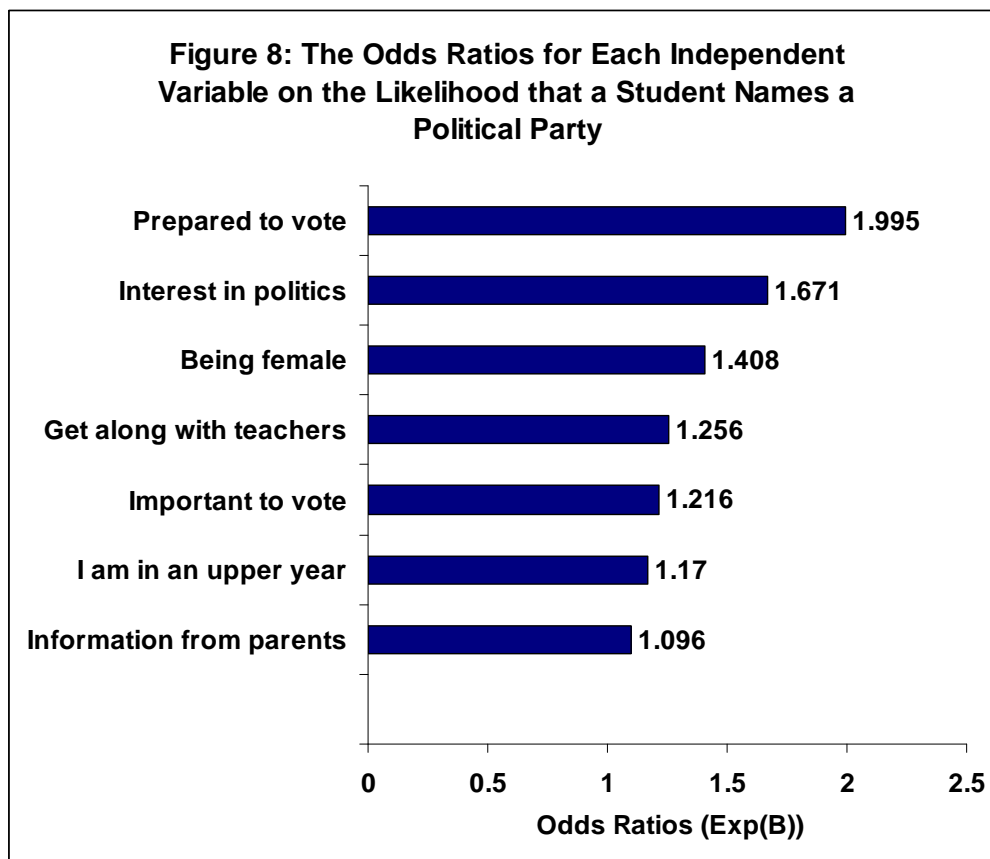
But the important question to be addressed is whether or not there are other factors which also explain the existence of party identity among young adults. In other words, what are some of the characteristics which differentiate between those students who identify with a political party (who named a party) and those who do not?

In order to answer this question, we will repeat the regression analysis in Figure 7, but instead of explaining propensity to vote, we will explain the propensity to name a political party. All other variables in the model are the same. But there is one major

difference which has to be taken into account, namely the nature of the variable that we are trying to explain. In Figure 7, we were explaining commitment to vote, a variable which consisted of five categories. The type of regression analysis we used was appropriate for this variable. However with party identity, we are using a variable with only two categories, namely does the student identify with a party or not?

When the variable we want to explain (the dependent variable) only has two categories, the usual multiple regression approach is not appropriate because some key statistical assumptions are violated, one of which is that the dependent variable cannot be normally distributed (Hair Jr, Anderson, Tatham, and Black 1995). In order to get around this condition, another form of regression procedure is used, namely logistic regression.

The selected results from the logistic regression are presented in Figure 8. This figure presents the “odds ratios” for only those variables that significantly predict whether a student named a political party that he or she “feels closer to”.



The odds ratios can be interpreted as follows. Let us first consider the first variable, “prepared to vote”. When the student’s score on the “preparedness to vote” scale increases by a unit value, the chance that the student will name a political party increases by a value of 1.995, or roughly 100%, controlling for the other variables in the model. At

the lower end of the figure, when “information from parents” increases by one unit value, the odds ratio of that person naming a political party increases by a value of 1.096, or roughly 9.6%. In other words, the increase is significant, but not by very much. An odds ratio of 1 would indicate that the variable in question is not related to an increase in the likelihood of naming a political party. All of the variables reported in Figure 8 have an odds ratio significantly greater than one.

Thus from Figure 8, we see the characteristics which are related to an increase the likelihood that a student named a political party, controlling for the other variables in the model. Thus, from the model we that “feeling prepared to vote” is clearly the most related to an increase, followed by “interest in politics”. Similarly, even as a student progresses from Year 10 to Year 12, the likelihood of naming a party increases, though not by much.

Perhaps of equal interest is the collection of variables that were not significantly related to naming a political party, when controlling for all variables in the model. These variables are as follows: 1) “father’s occupation”, “finding the study of civics interesting”, “liking school”, “national pride”, and “having stood for election as a student representative”.

In conclusion, given the fact that the ability or willingness to name a political party is significantly related to commitment to voting (see Figure 7), it is useful to know some of the characteristics which differentiate between those who name a party and those who do not. Furthermore, if some of the characteristics can be incorporated into a program aimed at the improvement of youth enrolment and voting, either through the media or the school, in the awareness of, and identification with a political party among young people, especially those who are nearing the voting age, then the level of youth participation in enrolment and voting can be increased.

Do the findings in Figure 8 give us something to work with in this regard? The answer is “yes”. With the exception of gender and the family, all the remaining five determinants can be incorporated into an educational program. The feeling of “being prepared to vote”, the “interest in politics”, the “conviction of the importance to vote”, and more “positive engagement with the school” (interaction with teachers), are all factors which can be targeted and incorporated into the school curriculum.

### **Key Points for Section 7**

1. There are a number of factors which are related to whether or not a student named a political party, many of which can be a part of an educational policy. (Figure 8)
2. The most important variables which are related to a party identity are “feeling prepared to vote”, and “having an interest in politics”. (Figure 8)

## **8. Conclusion: The Policy Implications of Youth Party Identity for Enrolment and Voting**

As long as the Australian political system is based on party politics and a Westminster Parliamentary government, and voting is more focused on party policies rather than on individual charisma, then the formation of party identity among young people, as a part of civics and citizenship education, is essential. Although our report has demonstrated the high degree of party inheritance through the family, there is also evidence that other factors contribute to party identity. First, in our survey the more than half of the young people who did not name a party show how much remains to be done to get young people more involved with the party-based electoral system. Second, some young people do name a party, but do so by realigning themselves with a party other than that of their parents (Campbell 2002). So clearly there is much that can be done to make civics and citizenship education more party sensitive.

One of the fears which often characterises civics and citizenship education is that it can become a partisan exercise. But there is no reason why political parties, their ideologies, their policy platforms, and their membership cannot become a more central part of the curriculum. Some writers have suggested that part of problem, at least in the UK and Europe, lies with the political parties themselves, and also the emergence of the new “career politicians”. The implications of these developments are that the political parties, and the politicians within them, are becoming increasingly difficult to differentiate or are seen as irrelevant (Russell 2005; Henn, Weinstein, and Forrest 2005).

Nevertheless, our data clearly show that party identification among Australian youth is somewhat low, and that more than half of our sample still has to make up its mind about which party, or “independent” candidates to support, before casting a vote in a Federal election for the first time. The only other option for those who have no party identification is to refrain from voting, spoiling the ballot, or guessing.

The purpose of our research is to identify ways in which young Australians can become more politically engaged, especially with respect to enrollment and voting. In this report we have shown that one way to improve the level of political engagement might be to raise the level of party awareness and party identification among young Australians. As long as political parties are an important part of Australian democracy, knowledge about them will be an important part of the political growth and political development of young people.



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