

Springtide
COLLECTIVE

NOVA SCOTIA YOUTH CIVIC LITERACY REPORT





Who We Are

This project was conducted by the **Springtide Collective**, a public interest group committed to improving the state of democracy for Nova Scotia. One of the core values of the Springtide Collective is intergenerational equity, specifically as it exists in the democratic process. Understanding the way youth think and act politically is important to Springtide because it informs our work, which includes sharing that understanding with educators, community groups, political groups, journalists, and others. This report is published in the hopes that it will empower others to make decisions in the best interests of all generations of Nova Scotians.

The **Democracy 250 Youth Engagement Legacy Trust** provided the funding to administer this study. The Trust exists, in part, to build on and support continuation of the youth engagement activities related to citizenship and the democratic process begun by D250 initiative in 2008.

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Executive Summary

About

- Civic literacy is important for ensuring effective and informed participation in civic life.
- Civic literacy is one of the strongest predictors of whether or not a citizen engages in politics at all.
- A ten-question civic literacy test was administered to 95 Nova Scotians aged 18-30 who were eligible to vote in the 2013 provincial election. The survey was administered in August 2013.
- Questions for the test were developed to assess the knowledge necessary to participate in the most basic elements of the political process, namely Elections, Political Parties, and Political Institutions.

Results

Question by question results are shown on the following page. The overall results were as follows:

- 48% of respondents failed the test outright (earning a score of lower than 50%); a full 64% of respondents earned a mark of 50% or lower.
- The average score on the test was 47%.
- Just 17% of participants scored an 80% or higher on the quiz
- A quarter (24%) of participants answered two or fewer of the ten questions correctly.
- 4% of respondents did not answer a single question correctly.
- 3% of those surveyed answered all questions correctly.

Discussion

- The lack of civic literacy measured among respondents suggests that most are unprepared for a life of basic political citizenship.
- In order to effectively participate in a political process, one must understand how that process works. According to our results, many do not understand much.
- Low civic literacy is likely associated with a

general culture of low formal political engagement among youth in Nova Scotia, and elsewhere in Canada and the world.

- There has been an increase in attitudes that promote individualistic behavior and market based solutions. These ideas are at odds with the notion of the collective good, and politics as a means of addressing shared challenges and pursuing the shared aspirations of communities.
- Public schools have set high standards for citizenship learning outcomes, but have not created the space in the curriculum to enable teachers to prepare students to meet these outcomes.
- An important element of civic literacy that we haven't explored is the motivational component. This type of learning (often experiential) creates a desire for collective action, and the pursuit of public goods and nurtures the societal values of associative living, the presence of public goods in our lives and the advancement of the public interest as a worthy goal.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, we recommend the following steps be taken by those concerned about civic literacy in Nova Scotia:

- Further investigation to understand the breadth of the civic illiteracy problem among both Nova Scotian youth and the general population.
- A review of evidence based best practices for civics education to determine the best place for civics education throughout the elementary and secondary civics curriculum in Nova Scotia. Such a review should be included in the government's expected review of the Nova Scotia public school curriculum.
- Greater public and private support for results-oriented community programming that educates and engages young people in the democratic process.

Overall Results



Figure 1: Overall Results



Why

The Nova Scotia Youth Civic Literacy Survey was conducted to learn more about civic literacy among young, voting aged adults. This demographic generally participates in politics far less than older demographics or previous generations of young adults. Civic literacy is not only necessary for ensuring effective and informed participation, but, as the research of Henry Milner has shown,¹ a person's civic literacy is one of the strongest predictors of whether or not they engage in politics at all.

How

An online survey was conducted with a combination of past respondents from a previous survey conducted by Springtide and a random sample of online participants. Demographic information was collected from respondents, and two sets of questions were asked, one set on civic literacy and the other on civic engagement. The results of the literacy survey are reported on here. The results of the engagement survey will be the subject of a future paper.

Who

All 95 respondents were between the ages of 18-30 and eligible voters in the 2013 Nova Scotia election. 61% of respondents were between the ages of 18-22 and 39% of respondents were between the ages of 23-30. Just over half of the survey respondents were male (56%) and just under half were female (44%). 54% had completed only a high school education; 33% had completed a Bachelor's degree or higher; 9% had completed a certificate or diploma program and 1% had not completed high school at all. Roughly two-thirds of respondents (65%) resided in the HRM at the time of the survey. The remaining respondents resided outside of HRM.

What

We gave a ten-question quiz on Canadian politics to respondents of our survey. The topics included elections, political parties and political institutions. The questions, particularly those regarding elections and political parties, assess respondents knowledge of basic information related to the Canadian democratic process. Much of this information (voting in an election, participating in the nomination of a local candidate, voting in a leadership race) is considered integral to effective and engaged political participation at its most basic level. In our analysis, we assess the potential impact of the results on effective political engagement in Nova Scotia. Finally, we contextualize and explain the results, and offer recommendations to improve civic literacy.

A limitation of this study is our inability to compare the civic literacy of our sample to the general population, particularly older adults. From reviewing national data on civic literacy, we are unable to draw any direct conclusions about whether the young Nova Scotians interviewed in this survey are any less, or any more literate on civic issues than older adults.²

Questions & Answers

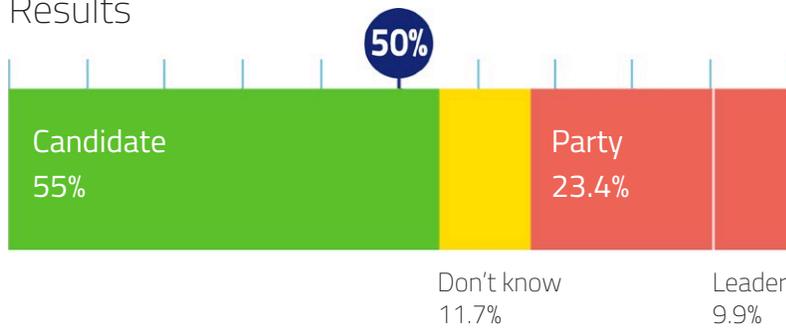
Respondents were asked the following ten questions. To reduce the amount of guessing, and allow respondents to admit they did not know an answer, respondents were given the option to answer, "I don't know" for each question, in addition to a list that included the correct answer and several plausible, but incorrect answers. The text for questions and answers appears here exactly as written. All options for each answer were randomized with the exception of the "I don't know" option, which was always last. In the pages that follow, correct answers are represented by green, wrong answers by red, and "I don't know" by yellow.



When you vote in a provincial or federal election, what are you being asked to vote for?



Results



Correct Answer Explanation

In Canadian provincial and federal elections, voters are asked to choose the candidate of their choice for MLA or MP. However, previous surveys have noted that 51% of Canadians believe that Canadian voters directly elect the Prime Minister in federal elections.³ While conventional political campaigns typically elevate the attention given to parties and leaders above the individual candidates, only a candidate can win or lose a riding-level election. Dominant media narratives, generally fed by the parties themselves, suggest we elect parties as governments, and their leaders as Premiers or Prime Ministers. However, it is ultimately up to the Queen's representative and the legislature to determine who forms the government.

Impact

Even though a majority of respondents selected the correct answer, the number who did not is still high enough to be troubling. This question represents the most-basic starting point for engaging in politics. 45% of respondents do not understand the purpose of their own ballots, and should they choose to vote, may be surprised by the options in front of them. It's worth noting that the question is not asking how respondents make up their minds when voting, in which case it is entirely legitimate for a voter to choose to vote for the candidate who belongs to a particular party, or to base their vote on the leader's appeal or the party's platform. The question asks if they understand the basics about the process they are engaging in. Among the 45% of participants who did not choose the correct answer, only one in ten (11.7%) are aware of their own confusion, whereas a full third (33.3%) of the responses collected believe their ballot does something other than what it actually does.

2

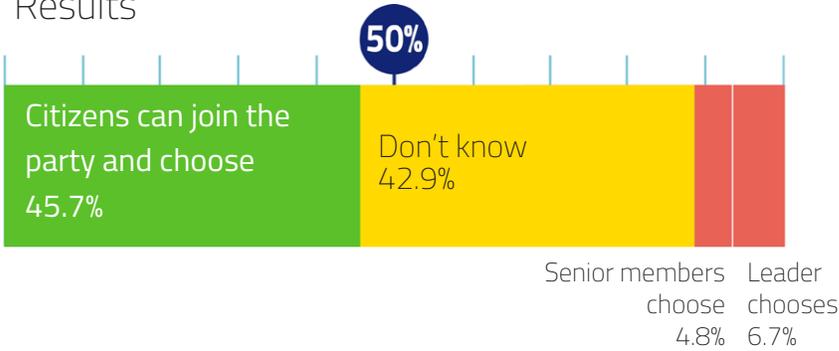
When you go to vote in a provincial or federal election, there will be several names on the ballot who are local candidates for different political parties. How do these names typically end up on the ballot?

Any citizen can join the party and vote as a member in a nomination meeting prior to the general election to select the candidate for each district.	Senior members of the political party in each district are responsible for selecting the candidate.	The leader of each political party is solely responsible for selecting the candidate in each district.	I don't know.
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Correct Answer Explanation

The best answer for this question is that "any citizen can join the party and vote as a member in a nomination meeting prior to the general election to select the candidate for each district." It is true that in federal elections, and many provincial elections, leaders have the power to reject a local candidate's nomination. Additionally, and often subsequent to a rejection, leaders have the power to supersede local nomination processes and appoint candidates of their choosing. This is the exception and not the rule, however. Typically, the process starts with local party members, who nominate the candidate of their choice.

Results



Impact

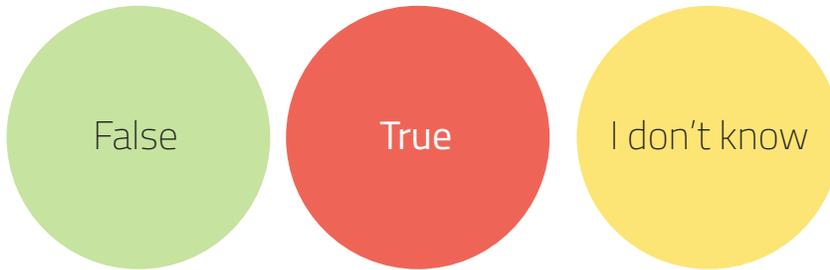
This question asks respondents if they know how the names on their ballot got there. An incorrect answer suggests they not only do not know how names end up on the ballot, but also that they do not perceive themselves as having the potential to participate in the candidate nomination process. Lack of knowledge of any democratic process, precludes informed participation in that process.

Low participation in candidate nomination processes has the potential to increase feelings of dissatisfaction with the options available to voters on general election day. Without participation in candidate nomination processes, the general election is less like the culmination of a series of democratic processes, and more like a vending machine whereby voters "technically" have a choice, but feel no control over the process that determines what their options are.

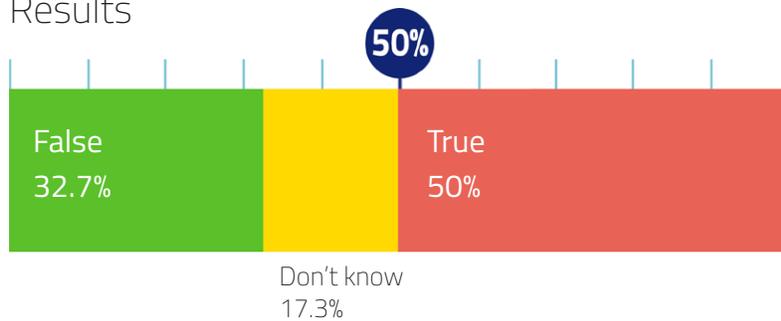


When it comes to winning provincial and federal elections, which of the following is true?

To win a seat, a candidate must receive the majority of votes



Results



Impact

More people chose a single wrong answer than those who chose the right answer. It is hard for any voters (young or old) to be champions of democracy if they do not understand how the electoral system works. This result highlights that young voters do not have a full understanding of the impact of their ballot, not only around what they are being asked to vote for (as demonstrated in question 1), but also around the rules that determine how their votes translate into actually electing a candidate.

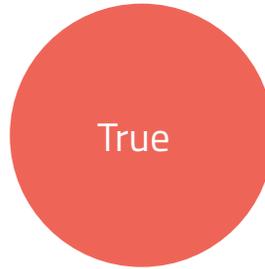
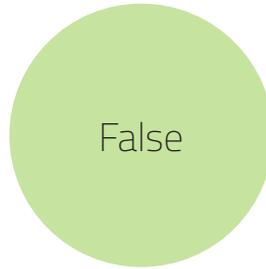
Correct Answer Explanation

The correct answer is "false". All provincial and federal elections in Canada use a "single member plurality" voting system. This means that the winner only needs to receive more votes than any other candidate in the riding, even if that number is less than a majority (which it often is). In the October 8th general provincial election in Nova Scotia, for instance, 32 candidates won seats with less than a majority of support, enabled by this system.⁴



When it comes to winning provincial and federal elections, which of the following is true?

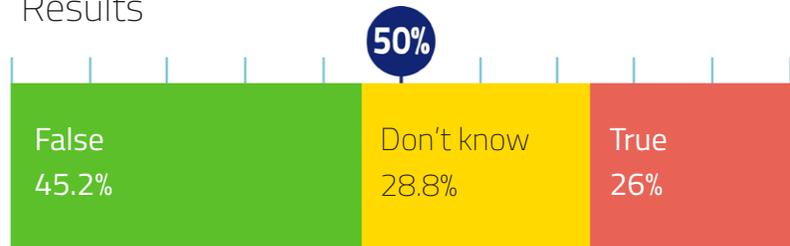
The number of seats a party wins is proportional to the percentage of the popular vote they win across the province/country.



Correct Answer Explanation

The correct answer is "false." A characteristic of our single-member-plurality voting system is that the proportion of seats won by a party does not necessarily bear any correlation to the total votes won province-wide or country-wide. It is the reason we have governments in Nova Scotia and Canada that hold a majority of seats in their respective legislatures, but earned less than a majority of the popular vote.

Results



Impact

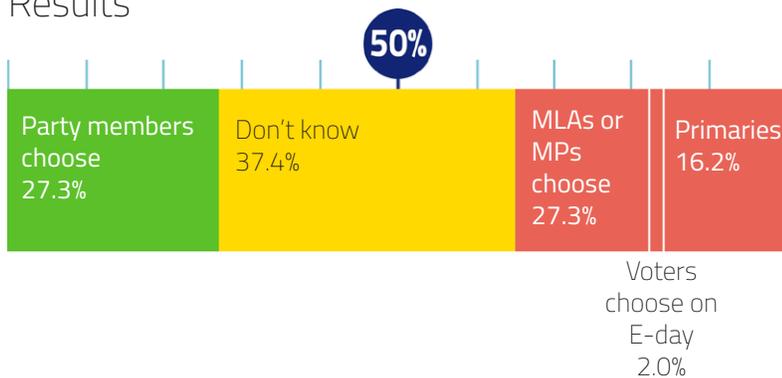
The majority of respondents again, failed to understand an important element of our electoral system – how ballots, and seats translate into legislative power. Both question four and question five highlight important elements of civic literacy – an understanding of how small actions (voting) play into larger processes (the formation of legislatures and governments). Any misunderstanding among the public (young or old) about how the voting system works is an impediment to both effective participation in that system, and the efforts of those working to improve that system.⁵



How are leaders of political parties typically chosen in Canada?

<p>Each party has its own way of electing its leader, any citizen can join the party and participate in the process.</p>	<p>Elected MLAs or MPs in each party are responsible for selecting the best leader among them, typically before a general election.</p>	<p>Through a process called primaries: citizens in each province vote for their preferred leader, province-by-province according to a predetermined schedule, in advance of the general election.</p>	<p>Every citizen who votes for the party also gets to cast a vote for party leader on election day.</p>	<p>I don't know.</p>
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Results



Correct Answer Explanation

The correct answer for this question is, "each party has its own way of electing its leader, any citizen can join the party and participate in the process." Traditionally, there have been a variety of ways for parties to choose their leaders and all of the leadership elections in the past decade involved citizens who joined the parties. One member one vote, means all party members have equal influence over the party, as was used in the 2012 federal NDP leadership election. Weighted voting systems, such as the one used for the 2013 Liberal Party Leadership Election or the Conservative Party's 2004 Leadership Election, ensure that all party members (and supporters, in the case of the Liberals) within a riding have equally powerful votes, but ensure that the collective power of members in one riding is no stronger than in any other riding. Delegated systems, such as the one used in the 2009 Liberal Leadership Race, have ridings elect convention delegates, who go on to vote in the leadership race.

Impact

Understanding of a political process is a prerequisite to informed and effective participation. With three quarters of respondents unsure or misunderstanding how leadership races work in Canada, they are unlikely to find themselves participating in such races without an invitation.

6

Which of the following statements do you feel best describes the role of political parties in determining how elected representatives vote on legislation in Canada?

MLAs and MPs are almost always expected to vote “with” their political parties, except for rare “free votes” where they are free to choose how to vote.

Votes in legislatures are almost always “free votes” where MPs and MLAs can vote as they like, except for very few votes where they are expected to vote “with” their political party.

I don't know.

Correct Answer Explanation

The best answer for this question is: “MLAs and MPs are almost always expected to vote “with” their political parties, except for rare “free votes” where they are free to choose how to vote.” With the exception of Nunavut, where there are no political parties, Canadian parliaments and legislatures are highly disciplined and representatives are generally expected to vote with their party or face serious consequences. Experts say our country has the strictest party discipline in the world.⁶ In Nova Scotia, there are few recorded votes, but the culture of discipline is largely the same. One recently retired MLA recalls only a handful of instances when an MLA broke ranks with their party in over a dozen years serving in the house of assembly.⁷ Failure to vote “with” the party can result in a variety of disciplinary measures taken by the party towards the MP or MLA in formal and informal ways.

Results



Impact

As with previous questions that test respondent’s knowledge of the electoral system, the ability to answer those questions correctly is a prerequisite for understanding one’s own ability to participate in the system, and in this case, interact with one’s representatives. Even though a majority of respondents understand that they elect candidates (55%) in our elections, and not parties or leaders, most respondents were unaware of the level of discipline successful candidates face once in parliaments or legislatures. If this discipline is excessive (and all signs suggest it is), then a low awareness of it will stand as an impediment to public discussion of this problem. Regardless of one’s opinions of the level of party discipline in Canadian politics, failure to understand and empathize with the types of constraints and conventions to which our elected officials are subject will mean expectations of those individuals which are inconsistent with reality and their ability to deliver.



As you may know, the system of government we have in Canada and in Nova Scotia is a type of “responsible government”. Responsible government means that the executive level of government...

- ... is accountable and responsible to the elected legislative assembly or House of Commons.
- ... is accountable and responsible to the voters.
- ... acts in a responsible and professional manner.
- ... is accountable and responsible to the Queen.
- ... is accountable to the Supreme Court
- I don't know.

Results



Impact

While on the surface, it may appear to be a trivial question, knowing the meaning of “responsible government” signifies an awareness of the political process, and informs one’s participation in it. Our form of responsible government largely prevents the type of legislative gridlock seen in the United States where the executive is not directly accountable to the legislature. Because our executive is generally drawn from, chosen by and accountable to the legislature, responsible government aspires to ensure some semblance of accountability of the executive between elections. It is particularly concerning as party discipline escalates, power becomes more centralized in the offices of the heads of government alongside a concomitant decline in the exercised powers of legislatures, and an increased use in the discretionary powers of the Governors General for prorogation to allow the government to avoid facing parliament.⁹

It is also possible that respondents simply do not know the difference between the executive level of government and the other levels of government.

Without informed public awareness around these issues, we can likely expect discussion of these issues to continue to be a “back-page” issue and these troubling trends to continue.

Correct Answer Explanation

The correct answer for this question is that “Responsible government means that the executive level of government is accountable and responsible to the elected Legislative Assembly or House of Commons.” The Legislative Assembly or House of Commons is the only body that is accountable to the voters in our Westminster style government. It is the assembly that is responsible for holding the government to account. Theoretically and practically speaking, voters could elect consecutive legislatures who continue to uphold a government that the voters themselves do not support, thereby demonstrating that the government itself is not responsible to voters.

8

Who is the head of state in Canada?

The Queen

The Governor General

The leader of the governing party in the Senate

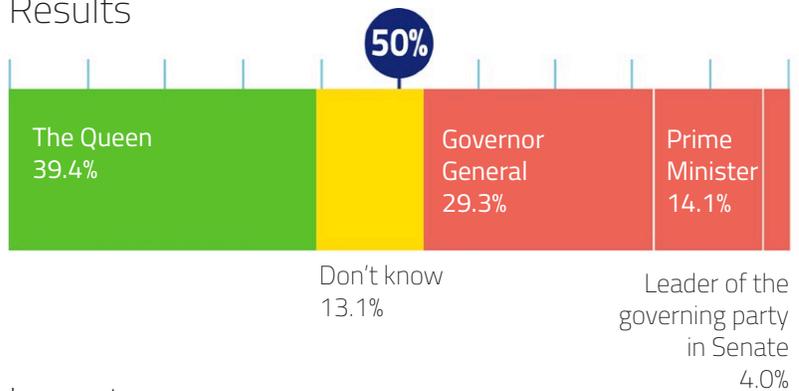
The Prime Minister

I don't know

Correct Answer
Explanation

The correct answer to this question is "The Queen". The Queen of Canada, also the Queen of the United Kingdom and several other constitutional monarchies, is the official head of state. The Governor General and the provinces' Lieutenant Governors are the Queen's representatives in Canada.

Results



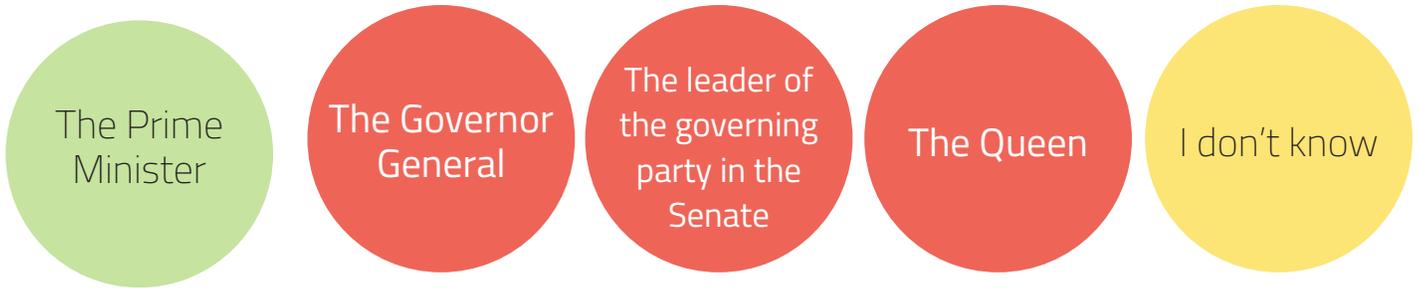
Impact

The answer to this question and the subsequent questions does not directly lend itself to a practical implication that impairs respondents' ability to participate in the democratic system. The terms "head of state" and "head of government" are labels. More important is an awareness of the roles and responsibilities associated with each of these positions. To adequately assess respondents' understanding of those complex roles and responsibilities would require a more extensive questionnaire.

In our country, as a constitutional monarchy, the Head of State (but more often, her representative) continues to play an important role (albeit often hidden and subtle) in the affairs of government. As such, awareness about this office is important.



Who is the head of government in Canada?



Results



Impact

As with the previous question, the ability to name the head of government, or state, is a trivia-type question with little discernable impact on ability to participate. What remains most important is an understanding of the responsibilities associated with the roles of head of state and head of government. This question, however, collected a higher number of correct responses than any other question.

Correct Answer Explanation

The correct answer, of course, is the Prime Minister. Provincially, the heads of government would be the Premiers.

10

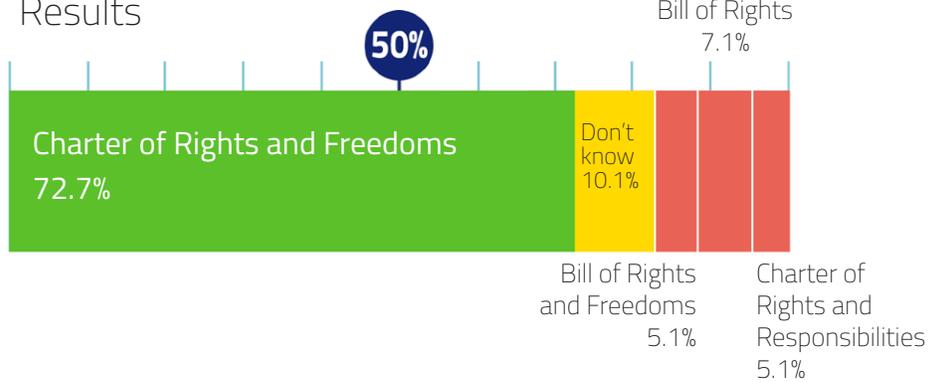
The section of the Canadian Constitution that outlines our civil rights and liberties is called the:



Correct Answer

The correct answer to this question is "The Charter of Rights and Freedoms." While there is a federal statute called the Bill of Rights, it is not a part of the Canadian Constitution and the Charter has effectively replaced its use in most circumstances.

Results



Impact

The Charter of Rights and Freedoms is an important document for citizens to be aware of, as it outlines the nature of our relationship with our governments and their institutions. The charter, its sub-sections and the judicial interpretations that allow us to express our freedoms are complex, therefore limiting our ability to do a more in-depth analysis of respondents understanding of their own charter rights. To assess respondent understanding of this document would require a more extensive survey. As with the previous two questions, this is also of a trivial nature, but may be indicative of some general knowledge among respondents of the rights and freedoms the charter guarantees us. If nothing else, this high response rate suggests that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms has a lasting resonance which respondents can identify with by name.

Summary of Results

Scores out of Ten by Number of Participants

Number of participants who received each score

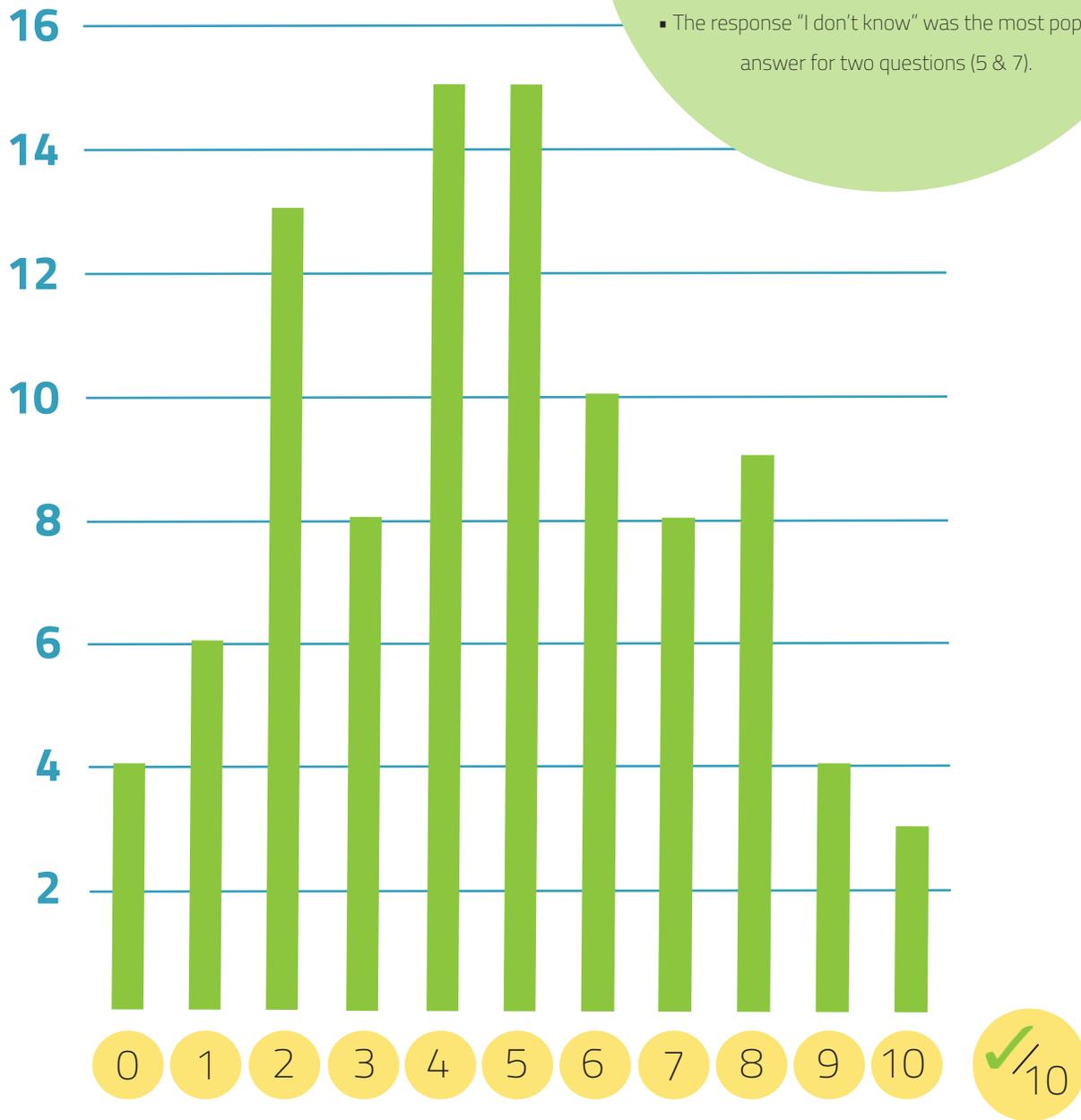


Figure 2: Scores out of Ten by Number of Participants



Results by Demographic Information

Certain demographic information was recorded. From this information, we observed that males scored an average of 0.7 points higher than females, primarily due to lower performance among females on the election-related questions of the quiz. No notable differences were noticed between respondents who resided within the Halifax Regional Municipality, versus outside of the municipality. Those with at least one diploma or degree above

high school scored an average of one and a half more correct answers than those with no more than a high school diploma. Those who reported a high level of civic engagement (drawn from a 20-question survey on engagement to be released in a future report) also provided, on average, one and a half more correct responses than those who reported low levels of civic engagement.⁹

Respondent type	Total	Female	Male	Outside of HRM	HRM	No more than high school diploma	At least one diploma or degree above high school	Low engagement	High engagement
Average score out of ten	4.7	4.4	5.1	4.7	4.6	4.1	5.4	4.1	5.6

Figure 3: Results by Demographic Information

Discussion

If our survey were a test administered in school, with each question valued equally at 10%, and a score of 50% considered a pass, 48% of participants would have failed the test outright. An additional 16% scored just 50% on the test - a questionable pass - meaning a full 64% of respondents received a mark of 50% or

lower. The average score on the test was 47%. Just 17% of participants scored an 80% or higher on the quiz, and a quarter (24%) of participants answered two or fewer of the ten questions correctly. Only 3% of those surveyed answered all questions correctly, and 4% of respondents did not answer a single question correctly.

Impact

The lack of political knowledge measured among respondents means that most are not prepared for a life of basic political citizenship. At the entry level to the political process, only a slim majority of respondents (55%) understand how to use their ballots properly in provincial and federal elections. Most respondents don't understand how a candidate for a political party ends up on their ballot (55%), or how a politician becomes a party leader (72.7%). These citizens, therefore, aren't likely to participate in can-

spendents (74.7%) do not understand the concept of responsible government, and most (52.5%) were not aware or were unsure about the culture of whipped votes in Canadian parliaments and legislatures.

The answers given for candidate and leader elections suggest that most respondents are not aware of the democratic processes to elect a party's leader and local candidates. Citizens cannot participate in a process if they do not know it exists, or how it works.

The lack of political knowledge measured among respondents means that most will not be prepared for a life of basic political citizenship

didate nomination or leadership races. A majority of respondents (67.3%) do not know (17.3%) or are incorrect (50%) in their understanding of how a candidate wins an election. Similarly, most respondents (54.8%) did not know (28.8%) or were incorrect (45.2%) in understanding how the winners of elections affect the number of seats the party holds in parliament and legislatures. Finally, three quarters of re-

The two questions which participants performed the best on (questions 9 and 10) were actually the most trivial questions on the test - questions where the answer given does not necessarily affect the respondent's ability to engage in the process. This may be an indication that political knowledge and awareness among respondents is superficial. That is to say, there is a general awareness around names and labels for things, but awareness is lacking around how things actually work (albeit in different areas of the survey).

Why is civic literacy so low?

We stop short of generalizing our responses to the 18-30 year old Nova Scotian population as a whole. We also make no claims to suggest that youth civic literacy is any lower or higher than that of the general population of voting aged Nova Scotians. There is insufficient data available to make any claims on either front. Nevertheless, there are few reasons to suspect that results from the general population of young Nova Scotians would be any better than those from the small group surveyed here - especially given traditionally low voter turnout among this demographic for the past decade. For instance, only 20% of eligible voters between the ages of 18-24 voted, in the 2013 provincial election.¹⁰ There are a variety of reasons that might explain why civic literacy is so low among the sample surveyed here. A general culture of low political en-

agement among youth persists in Nova Scotia, across Canada, and over the western world in general. A positive feedback loop, whereby low literacy and engagement in formal politics feeds further declines in literacy and engagement, may be fueling a culture that is unsupportive of political engagement. This culture does not encourage people to self-teach or seek out materials, programs or peer groups that can help people learn more about politics.

It is tempting to label declining youth political engagement and low civic literacy as the problem. We find it helpful to consider these both symptoms of larger problems and provide below some perspective on what those larger problems might include.



The avenue of politics as a way of solving problems must also compete with the market in the minds of young people, like never before. As the political scientist, Miriam Smith writes, “It is, perhaps, not surprising that young people do not vote when they have been raised on a steady diet of political discourse that identifies governments as the problem and markets as the solution.”¹¹ This notion, extended further, means that it is up to the individual who purchases market products to solve their own problems. The casualty of increasingly individualistic attitudes pervading school systems, workplaces, and our social culture is the notion of the collective

good. By our observation, it seems the problems we face are increasingly framed by a narrative that tells us these problems belong to the individual, and the notion of a public problem and shared aspirations for the future are in decline.

Attitudes and cultures of individualism are incredibly hard to change, but a stronger awareness of how our democratic institutions, processes and conventions function can only improve our ability as citizens to aspire to common goals, address shared challenges, and work within our public institutions for the public interest.

Public education system

With such a large number of respondents failing our civic literacy quiz, we should consider the systemic factors which contribute to this level of civic illiteracy among respondents. While there are a number of places one can be expected to learn about politics, the most obvious place to look is to our public schools. Most, but not all, of the respondents from this study would be graduates from a Nova Scotia high school.

The Atlantic Social Studies curriculum (which Nova Scotia subscribes to) includes the following as some of the expectations for citizenship outcomes:

- By the end of grade six students are expected to “be able to describe the main features of the Canadian constitution.”
- By the end of grade nine students are expected to “be able to explain, analyze and compare the effectiveness of various methods of influencing public policy, and to explain the origins and main features of the Canadian constitution”
- By the end of grade twelve, students are expected to “be able to analyze the origins, purpose, function and decision-making processes of Canadian governments and how their powers are acquired, used and justified”

When you consider some of these expectations, the quiz questions asked of respondents in this study barely scratch the surface when it comes to assessing the learning outcomes expected of high school graduates. It is not unreasonable to presume the questions asked in our

Students who had mastered the citizenship outcomes expected by the end of grade 12 should be able to answer the questions on this exam

survey, or similar ones, would find themselves on a test in a Nova Scotia public school classroom.

What is unreasonable is to expect teachers to find the time to teach and assess student comprehension on this material without sufficient dedicated time in the required curriculum. Some elective social studies courses in high school will cover this material, so some students will receive a civics education, but not all.

Other considerations

The type of civic literacy tested and analyzed here is only one element of civic literacy – that which indicates an individual's ability to understand, analyze and effectively participate in the democratic process. Another important element of civic literacy is based in character and values education. Briefly, this type of education is motivational, it creates a desire for collective action, and the pursuit of public goods. It nurtures the societal values of associative living, the presence of public goods in our lives and the advancement of the public interest as a worthy goal. These values are not addressed in this study, nor do we comment on how to address this challenge, but are recognized as important for promoting civic engagement.

Conclusion Recommendations

The results explored in this report give a strong indication that there is a void in civic literacy that ought to be addressed. Based on these findings, we recommend the following steps be taken by those concerned about civic illiteracy in Nova Scotia:

- Further investigation should be conducted into understanding the breadth of the civic illiteracy problem among both Nova Scotian youth and the general population.
- A review of evidence based best practices for civics education should be conducted to determine the best place for lifelong civics education throughout the elementary and secondary civics curriculum in Nova Scotia. Such a review should be included in the government's expected review of the Nova Scotia public school curriculum.
- Greater public and private support for results-oriented community programming that educates and engages young people in the democratic process.

Notes

¹ Milner, H. (2002). *Civic literacy: How informed citizens make democracy work*. Hanover: University Press of New England.

² However, a two question survey of Canadians from the Dominion Institute in 2008 showed some troubling indicators about the civic literacy of the general population. On that survey, just over half (51%) of Canadians indicated they believe the Prime Minister is directly elected (which he isn't), and three quarters (75%) could not name Canada's head of state. In these questions alone, the Canadians surveyed scored worse than the respondents in our study scored on similar questions (1 & 7) (see note 3 below). However, since the questions in our survey were worded differently than the Dominion Institute's question, even this comparison is imperfect, but hints of what we suspect is a broad-reaching civic literacy problem affecting all ages and demographics.

³ Dominion Institute (2008, December). *In Wake of Constitutional Crisis, Dominion Institute Survey Demonstrates that Canadians Lack Basic Understanding of our Country's Parliamentary System*. Toronto: Dominion Institute.

⁴ Elections Nova Scotia (2013). 39th Provincial General Election 2013 Official Results. Accessed online on October 16th 2013.

⁵ Many political observers - academics, journalists and engaged citizens - understand that the voting system we have is imperfect. For instance, the government appointed commission charged with reviewing Nova Scotia's provincial electoral boundaries in 2011 stepped outside of their mandate in their final report and noted that the current voting system is one where "all votes for losing candidates are, in effect, 'thrown out,' and only those cast for the winning candidate in each riding count in terms of electing a representative." The commission went on to recommend some type of proportional electoral system be explored "as a means to "make every vote count." Most established democracies (with the exception of the UK, US and Canada) have moved to proportional voting systems, and few of the emerging democracies established in the last half-century have adopted single member plurality systems for voting. Further improvements to our own system will be hampered by low civic literacy about this system, and it's alternatives.

⁶ Galloway, G. (2013, February 7). *Is Canada's party discipline the strictest in the world? Experts say yes*. The Globe and Mail. Retrieved from . <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/is-canadas-party-discipline-the-strictest-in-the-world-experts-say-yes/articleB313261/>.

⁷ SpringtideCo (2013, September 17th). *The Afterparty - Graham Steele (Part 3 of 5)* [Video file]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Un2Lj4Y8tmc> on Friday November 29th.

⁸ Aucoin, P., Turnbull, L. B., & Jarvis, M. D. (2011). *Democratizing the constitution: Reforming responsible government*. Toronto: Emond Montgomery Publications.

⁹ Based on all responses to the civic engagement questions in a separate survey. High Engagement = those who have engaged in all categories (Online engagement, in-person engagement, activism, non-political community involvement, partisan/candidate support engagement) at least once on average in the past 12 months, Low Engagement = less than once.

¹⁰ Elections Nova Scotia (2014). Statement of Votes and Statistics: Volume I. Retrieved from http://enstools.gov.ns.ca/39ProvGenElect/PDF/Web_SOVCourour_Final.pdf

¹¹ Smith, M. (2009). *A civil society? Collective actors in Canadian political life*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

spring·tide *noun*

A springtide is a set of extreme high and low tides. At high tide, rising waters reach points usually untouched by ocean waves – sometimes powerful enough to move boulders and flush out debris previously untouched. At low tide, a springtide exposes things that are usually covered up.

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