

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AMONG YOUTH IN NEWFOUNDLAND

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A Thesis submitted to the

School of Graduate Studies

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Sociology

Faculty of Arts

Memorial University of Newfoundland

March 2014

St. John's

Newfoundland

ABSTRACT

Since 1970, there has been a global decline in youth voting (Hay 2008). The thesis will explore the political engagement of youth in rural Newfoundland – specifically, the low levels of voter participation. The scholarly literature has offered different reasons for the decline such as the rise of new social movements, apathy and alienation. The thesis tests the literature in the context of Colin Hay’s distinction between “demand-side” and “supply-side” politics (2008) to determine if it is applicable to youth voter decline in rural Newfoundland or if there are other identifiable factors operating in Newfoundland specifically that contribute to a youth voter turnout even lower than the Canadian average.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I would like to thank my supervisors Dr. Karen Stanbridge and Dr. Peter Sinclair for their patience, guidance, understanding and encouragement during the writing of this thesis. It is Dr. Stanbridge who also inspired me to pursue my graduate studies and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to do so. I would like to thank Sean Hayes, a great friend, who was my sounding board and who challenged my ideas – thank you for all the coffee and conversations! I also want to recognize and thank the research participants who gave their time and experiences willingly to this project.

This thesis would not have been possible without the support, encouragement and love of my partner, Christopher. I also want to recognize my parents and grandparents for always being there. I also have to thank Marten, who sat by my side to keep me company during the late nights of writing this work – and yes, I am thanking my cat.

In conclusion, I recognize that this research would not have been possible without the financial assistance of the School of Graduate Studies, Memorial University and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and express my gratitude to those agencies.

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Chapter 1

Since 1970, there has been a global decline in youth voting (Hay 2008). This has caused much concern for the health of democracy in Western nations. Voting is the foremost way that members of the general population participate in a democracy because it allows the citizens to decide who guides and leads their country. Fewer youth are voting, and scholars like Adsett (2003) have argued that it is because public policy does not reflect their wants or needs, and as a result, youth feel excluded from the political process (Adsett 2003). Colin Hay (2008) makes the observation that each successive cohort of voters is less likely to vote than previous cohorts. If this trend continues, voting rates will continue to decline, further highlighting the importance of focused study of the reasons for youth non-participation.

In Canada, youth participation rates have declined steadily to what many believe are crisis levels. At the Federal level, in the 1970s it is estimated that voter turnout among youth (18 to 24 years of age) was 70 percent, whereas in the 2000 election it had fallen to 40 percent (Adsett 2003). Elections Canada (December 2005) estimates only 37 percent of youth between 18 and 24 years of age voted in the General Federal Election of 2004. By comparison, the voter turnout for Canadians between the ages of 58 and 67 was 75 percent. In the General Federal Election of 2006, the estimated voter turnout for youth between 18 and 24 had increased to 43.8 percent. However, when compared to voter turnout of 75.4 percent of Canadians between the ages of 55 and 64, the turnout rate for youth was still much lower (Elections Canada March 2008). In the October 2008 General

Federal Election, the estimated voter turnout for youth between 18 and 24 had returned to 2004 levels at 37.4 percent (Elections Canada n.d.).

Newfoundland and Labrador statistics are even more dramatic. Only 23.5 percent of individuals aged 18 to 24 voted in the 2004 Federal General Election. This compares to a voter turnout of about 70 percent among people aged 58 to 67 (Elections Canada December 2005). During the following Federal General Election of 2006, Newfoundland and Labrador's voter turnout remained essentially the same with 23.6 percent of youth voting while the rest of Canada experienced an increase in the number of votes cast by those aged 18 to 24 (Elections Canada March 2008). In 2008, the overall voter turnout for Newfoundland and Labrador's youth had neared the national average at 34.4 percent, but it was still considerably lower than the 55.9 percent of Newfoundlanders and Labradoreans between the ages of 55 and 64 who voted in that election (Elections Canada n.d.).

1.1 Sociological Relevance & Problem

My thesis will explore the reasons why there is low voter turnout among young Newfoundlanders. Are these youth not voting because they do not care about the political process? Do they feel politicians and government ignore them or only speak to older voters? A national study found that a large majority (79.6 percent) of Canadian youth surveyed said they did not feel they were being represented by the political system, and half (51.5 percent) reported they did not vote because they felt disengaged (Pammett &

LeDuc 2003). Are Newfoundland¹ youth experiencing enhanced feelings of disengagement, or are there some identifiable factors operating in Newfoundland specifically that contribute to a youth voter turnout even lower than the Canadian average?

My study will seek to answer these questions, which have not been explored in the Newfoundland context. In fact, there is very little research on the political behaviour of youth in Newfoundland. Graesser (1983; 1987) conducted a number of surveys of political attitudes in Newfoundland in the 1980s, but these are now outdated and do not focus on youth specifically. My research can provide valuable insight into why Newfoundland youth between 19 and 24 are not voting. I interviewed youth from the City of Corner Brook as well as the rural communities of Woody Point, Norris Point and Rocky Harbour - communities situated in Gros Morne National Park on the west coast of Newfoundland. Results will be of interest to students and scholars of youth and politics in Newfoundland and elsewhere, as well as politicians, government representatives and the public in general.

1.2 Newfoundland Politics and Youth: A Backgrounder

The following is a brief description of Newfoundland and Labrador's unique political history, which until Confederation did not allow all citizens to participate². It has operated

¹ This thesis focused on the island portion of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador and did not consider Labrador. Henceforth, I refer only to Newfoundland.

² As will be discussed further in the chapter, Newfoundland gave up self-rule in 1934.

under many forms of governance, from British colonial governance to Canadian Confederacy, which it entered 64 years ago. Following this review, I will examine the economic and social context in which Newfoundland youth lived until the winter of 2008/2009, when the data for my study were collected. This was the time when Premier Danny Williams and his provincial Progressive Conservative party were at the height of their power and popularity in the province.

1.2 (a) *Newfoundland's political history*

Before 1824, Newfoundland had no formal system of governance³. The British state did not consider the island and its settlements a colony but rather a fishing station where no permanent settlement was allowed. To fill this void, the fishermen created the Admiral System, which was adopted by the British government as the King William's Act and served as the island's system of governance in 1634 (Greene 1982). Under the Admiral System, the master of the first English ship to arrive in a harbour after March 25 was the Fishing Admiral for that port for the upcoming fishing season (Bannister 2003:30). The Fishing Admiral was the harbour's police officer and judge (Greene 1982:185).

The Admiral System was problematic because its Fishing Admirals often had no formal education, were illiterate, and often abused their positions of authority. Serious crimes, such as murder, could not be tried in Newfoundland (Greene 1982; Bannister

³ This discussion is limited to the European settler context.

2003) and no records were kept for cases that carried over between fishing seasons (Greene 1982).

To address these issues, the British government appointed the island's first naval governor and civil magistrates in 1729 (Bannister 2003). The naval governor was appointed the responsibility of overseeing the military, political, and judiciary systems during the fishing season (MacLeod and Brown 2005); in the winter months, when the naval governor was absent, the civil magistrates settled disputes amongst the residents.

By 1824, with more people settling on the island, the coexistence of the Admiral System and naval government was no longer suitable, so in 1824, Newfoundland was granted colonial status and became a crown colony (Gunn 1966). This involved the appointment of a civil governor, an official council, and a revised and extended supreme court (Gunn 1966:3):

[There was] an assembly of fifteen persons elected from nine defined districts, and a nominated council of seven named persons with both legislative and executive functions. The franchise was to be very wide, the vote being given to all registered male householders, either tenants or owners, who had been resident in the island for a year. ... The qualifications for candidates were to be the same, except that they must prove two years' residence. (Gunn 1966:11)

In 1832, Newfoundland was granted representative government, the system of governance practiced in the rest of British North America. The British government appointed the governor and legislative council, while the assembly was elected by select inhabitants:

Every man who was over the age of 21 and who had lived in Newfoundland for one year could vote. The assembly had little authority and could only suggest new laws for approval by the council and governor. There the governor and the council were in fact 'the government.' (MacLeod and Brown 2005:73)

While representative government allowed more citizens the right⁴ to vote compared to previous forms of governance, there were still disadvantages. The appointed council, *not the elected assembly*, held most of the power (MacLeod and Brown 2005). The appointed council represented wealthy merchants who belonged to the Church of England, while the elected assembly represented the poor and were Irish Roman Catholics and Methodists. This created much conflict, and little work was accomplished.

Reformers argued for a new system of governance, leading to the creation of Responsible Government in 1855. The governor was appointed from the elected assembly, and the cabinet, which replaced the council, was selected from the political party that held the most seats in the assembly (MacLeod and Brown 2005:75). This system remained in place until 1934.

The First World War exacerbated Newfoundland's public debt problems, and the government struggled throughout the 1920s and early 1930s to repay its debts. With the collapse of world financial markets, Newfoundland, an export-based economy, was adversely affected by depressed fish and fur prices⁵. The Great Depression created hunger lines together with social and political unrest, and the government could no longer service its debts (MacLeod and Brown 2005). By 1933, the situation was dire; the Newfoundland government was forced to accept a loan from Britain and Canada. The condition placed on the loan was the establishment of a Royal Commission to investigate the Dominion's financial and economic problems. The recommendation of Lord Amulree's investigation

⁴ Newfoundland had the broadest franchise in the British Empire, as all men could vote (Cadigan 2009). Women's suffrage was not achieved until 1925 (MacLeod and Brown 1925).

⁵ Aboriginals and trappers were most affected by the collapse in the fur prices (MacLeod and Brown 2005).

was the suspension of responsible government, which the Newfoundland government voted to accept (Blake 2004).

On February 16, 1934, the Commission of Government was appointed. It was comprised of six members – three Britons and three Newfoundlanders – and chaired by a governor (Blake 2004). During the period of Commission of Government, Newfoundlanders could not vote to elect their government leaders, and the Commission was responsible only to the Dominion Office in London (MacLeod and Brown 2005). It was not until 1948, when Newfoundlanders voted in a referendum to join Canada, that democracy returned. For the first time, all Newfoundlanders over the age of 18 would have the right to vote. Rather than entering Confederation on April 1, 1949, Newfoundland did so shortly before midnight on March 31 to avoid references of the province joining Canada on April Fool’s Day (Greene 1982). After joining Canada, Joseph Smallwood, the main proponent for Confederation, was sworn in as Premier of Newfoundland.

In the first provincial election, held May 27, 1949, Smallwood, leading the Liberal party, won 22 of 28 seats in the House of Assembly (Blake 2004; Summers 2001:28). Since joining Confederation, Newfoundland and Labrador has had only eight premiers. Smallwood was in power for Newfoundland’s first 22 years after Confederation. Throughout this period, Newfoundland underwent a monumental change due to resettlement⁶ and the “urbanization and the decline of the inshore fishery [that] resulted in

⁶ The purpose of the Household Resettlement Program was to relocate people from isolated, rural villages into centralized locations as a “local unskilled labour pool that might attract industry” (Cadigan 2009:246).

the transformation of an isolated rural economy into a more industrial and service-based economy” (Summers 2001:33).

This period of modernization was realized with new infrastructure development, which brought electricity to most of the island, as well as the construction of the Trans-Canada Highway, which linked the island by road from east to west (MacLeod and Brown 2005). These infrastructural changes helped to bring Newfoundland into the modern era where many of today’s conveniences such as electricity, running water and sewer, and shopping malls have become a part of everyday life (MacLeod and Brown 2005:266).

1.3 The Lived Realities of Youth in Western Newfoundland

Newfoundland youth living in rural areas are faced with challenging circumstances, particularly with the collapse of the cod fishery and the subsequent moratorium imposed in 1992 (Barbara Moriarty Snowadzky 2005), which devastated many rural communities both economically and socially. The collapse of the fishery and the lack of employment opportunities have led to a steady depopulation of rural Newfoundland since 1981 (Bollman and Clemenson 2008). Those who leave rural areas are often young (Audas and McDonald Summer 2004) and their exodus is mainly driven by two factors: lack of employment options and the pursuit of a post-secondary education (Alston 2004).

This reality affects those who remain in the province as birthrates decline and contribute to aging communities; the median age of the provincial population is 41.7 years (Statistics Canada 2007). In 2005, the proportion of youth aged 15 to 29 accounted for 19.7 percent of the province’s population (Newfoundland and Labrador Youth

Advisory Council n.d.), but the proportion fell to 18.7 percent in 2007 (Statistics Canada cited in Newfoundland & Labrador Statistics Agency 2007). As the youth population continues to decline, the youth employment situation remains bleak.

Canadian youth between 15 and 24 were the hardest hit demographic group in this past recession: in 2009, the summer unemployment rate among this group averaged 19.2 percent, which is the second highest rate recorded for this cohort since 1977 (Statistics Canada 4 September 2009). In June 2009, youth in general experienced the highest unemployment rate in 11 years – 15.9 percent (Statistics Canada 10 July 2009). However in Newfoundland and Labrador, youth experienced an unemployment rate of 22.5 percent for 2009, a figure significantly higher than the rest of Canada (Statistics Canada cited in Newfoundland & Labrador Statistics Agency, n.d.).

The youth unemployment rate is also much higher than the provincial unemployment rate. Newfoundland and Labrador had the highest unemployment rate in the country at 13.1 percent in June 2008, which was double the national rate of 6.2 percent (Statistics Canada cited in Newfoundland & Labrador Statistics Agency 2008c). Youth employment in the province (51.7 percent) was lower than the province's average (55.5 percent), and their rate of *unemployment* (18.1 percent) was considerably higher than the province's average (11.0 percent) (Statistics Canada cited in Newfoundland & Labrador Statistics Agency 2008a). These rates were significantly lower than the unadjusted youth unemployment rate of 24.3 percent in May 2008. This drop in the unemployment rate can probably be attributed to summer jobs that are seasonal.

In examining the labour force characteristics, an interesting picture emerges that highlights the differences between the rural and urban economic regions. In St. John's, the urban capital of the province, and on the Avalon Peninsula, the overall unemployment rates in 2008 were 8.4 percent and 10.5 percent respectively. In the remaining economic regions, most of which encompass a largely rural population, the unemployment rates were much higher than the provincial average (Burin Peninsula and South Coast: 22.0 percent; West Coast, Northern Peninsula and Labrador: 15.4 percent; Central Newfoundland and North East Coast: 16.1 percent), and in some cases double the average of St. John's (Statistics Canada cited in Newfoundland & Labrador Statistics Agency 2008b).

These numbers highlight the very different employment circumstances the general population is facing in rural and urban areas of the province – differences that can be obscured by aggregate figures. “The Labour Force Survey,” for example, showed that the unemployment rate in 2009 for Economic Region 03 – a region comprised of the populations on the west coast of the island, the Northern Peninsula, and Labrador – was 18.7 percent (Statistics Canada cited in Newfoundland & Labrador Statistics Agency, January 2009), but the unemployment rate of Corner Brook, the only large urban centre on the province's west coast, was much lower at only 13.9 percent⁷ (Statistics Canada cited in Newfoundland & Labrador Statistics Agency, n.d.).

⁷ However, this is still much higher than the St. John's area.

The rural-urban divide is also evident in differences of income. According to the 2006 Census, gross income per capita in each of the three rural, west coast research communities on which this study will focus – Rocky Harbour (\$20, 600), Woody Point-Shoal Brook (\$17, 500), and Norris Point (\$19, 200) – was below the provincial average of \$22,800 (Community Accounts N.d.). In St. John's, the comparable figure was \$30,100 (Community Accounts, n.d.).

These statistics suggest a difference in the economic circumstances facing youth living in urban versus rural areas. It is probable that those living in areas outside of St. John's and the Avalon Peninsula are, like their adult counterparts, more likely to be unemployed. Therefore, rural youth were more likely to be living in poverty. What is more, those youth fortunate enough to be working are likely working in low-paying, seasonal jobs in the service industry. Before July 1, 2010, when the minimum wage was raised to \$10 an hour, nearly one-third (32.3 percent) of jobs in Newfoundland and Labrador were paid less than \$10 an hour (Morissette 2008). This may explain why the province also had the highest proportion of youth in their twenties still living with their parents: 52.2 percent compared to Alberta (31.7 percent) and Saskatchewan (31.8 percent), which had the lowest proportions (Statistics Canada 2007) in the country.

Taking into account the lived realities of youth living on the West Coast of Newfoundland, this thesis will explore the reasons for their low voter turnout. Chapter Two will review low voter turnout among youth by utilizing Colin Hay's perspective of politics as demand-side and supply-side. Chapter Three will discuss the methodologies used to gather the data for this thesis as well as the challenges in gathering the data.

Chapter Four will be an in-depth analysis of what the participants had to say about their participation, or lack thereof, in voting. Chapter Five will provide a brief summary of the findings and some suggestions on directions for future research into youth political participation.

Chapter 2

The Political Disengagement of Youth: Theoretical Perspectives

Why do young people not vote? Popular discourse has often portrayed youth as too apathetic to bother voting. A search of CBC and Globe & Mail archives provide dozens of hits where voter apathy among youth is mentioned, especially in the commentary sections. “Apathy” appears to be the accepted explanation for the decline in youth voting, and any attempts to attract young people to the polls invariably focus on battling their apparent indifference to formal politics. During the 2004 federal elections in Canada, for example, the Dominion Institute had youth voters send text-message questions to the federal party leaders as a tool to combat voter apathy (CBC 4 June 2004). There is even a website, *Apathy is Boring* (<http://apathyisboring.com/en>). Created by a dance choreographer from the Yukon, a filmmaker from Montreal, and a photographer/graphic designer from Vancouver, *Apathy is Boring* aims to increase youth voter turnout and combat youth voter apathy.

The youth vote became a major public issue during the last federal general election in 2011, when a national effort arose among independent groups and the media that aimed to increase voter turnout among youth. One example is the website Leadnow.ca, which describes itself as “an independent advocacy organization that brings generations of Canadians together to achieve progress through democracy” (Leadnow.ca 2011). This group spearheaded the so-called *vote mobs* which took place at many universities across the country. These were gatherings where youth would arrive at an

event and announce they would vote in the upcoming election. The intent was to combat the belief that youth are politically apathetic and to have politicians pay attention to this demographic of voter (Hildebrandt 6 April 2011).

Another website dedicated to engaging the youth vote is *Get Your Vote On*. Its goal is to increase voter turnout among voters 18-34 years of age by providing information about the political parties, their candidates and their positions on the issues. They are “an open-source network supporting you to organize in your communities and light a democratic fire in the places you live, study, work and play,” (getyourvoteon.ca 2011). Rick Mercer, a popular CBC political satirist used the “rant” segment of his show, *The Rick Mercer Report*, to try to get youth out and “do the unexpected ... Vote.”

The portrayal and perception of youth as politically apathetic is not confined to Canada. During the 2005 national elections in Britain, Nick Cohen, a journalist for the *New Statesman*, visited a university to find out why students were not voting. He described their answers as shrugging and grunting, and concluded “I wouldn’t put money on them making the Herculean effort to take five minutes out of their busy lives to visit a polling station. As the rain fell, I resented wasting time with incurious and lazy people...” (25 April 2005:21).

2.1 Hatin' On Politics

Scholarly research has offered different reasons for the decline in youth voting⁸. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the varied reasons scholars have put forth to explain why youth are disengaged from the formal political process. These reasons will be framed in the context of Colin Hay's argument from his book *Why we hate politics* (2008). This will provide an alternative framework for why youth – particularly youth in rural Newfoundland - are not voting. This chapter will also discuss the realities of Newfoundland youth in relation to Hay's concept of politics. The final section will ponder how Hay's distinction between the “supply-side” and “demand-side” of politics might tie together perspectives on the decline of youth voting.

Hay argues that the explanation for voter decline can be divided into “demand-side” and “supply-side” arguments. Demand-side explanations focus on the characteristics of the electorate themselves, whereas supply-side perspectives are concerned with what politics provides or “delivers” to voters. Demand-side arguments suggest that it is solely or mostly the voters who are to blame for declining voter turnout, while supply-side approaches examine the role of the “purveyors of political goods” (Hay 2008:40) on voter behaviour. These are defined by Hay as

changes in the content of the appeals that the parties make to potential voters, changes in the character of the electoral competition, changes in the substantive content of the ‘goods’ that politics offers to political ‘consumers’, and changes in the capacity of national-level governments to deliver genuine political choice to voters. (2008:55)

⁸ The author of this thesis and Statistics Canada define youth voters as those between the ages of 18 and 24. The literature of youth voting examined in this chapter considers youth a homogeneous group and does not even define youth by age. O'Neill (2007:21) acknowledges that youth engagement research is lacking because it is about more than just age – it is the interplay of class, gender, ethnicity, etc. For the purpose of this thesis, the literature's theories were tested against the definition of youth set by the author.

While Hay's arguments do not focus specifically on youth, they can be applied to youth and the scholarly approaches to the decline in the youth vote.

Demand-side perspectives can be classified as: the possibility that youth are more interested in social movements, single issues, and protest politics rather than in formal politics (Kimberlee 2002); generational explanations of delayed maturity associated with the decline in youth employment in recent years (Wallace 2003); and the focus on individual factors such as education and/or income on the level or lack of political knowledge among youth. Alienation perspectives, generational conflict (Adsett 2003), neo-liberal policies, and administrative barriers to the political participation of youth (Pammett and LeDuc 2003) can be understood as supply-side arguments, as are the perspectives that consider the role of government and politicians in the lives of youth, and the nature of politics itself. What follows is a review of each of these perspectives, highlighting factors that pertain to Newfoundland youth specifically.

2.2 Blame It On The Kids! Demand-Side Explanations

2.2 (a) Talking 'bout my generation: generational accounts.

In the last 160 years, the proportion of younger Canadians (aged 15-29) to older people (aged 30-65) has steadily decreased. The life expectancy of men and women has risen from the ages of 40 (men) and 42 (women) in 1861 to the ages of 77 (men) and 82 (women) for those born in 2002 (Côté and Allahar 2006:36). The birth rate has also been

declining from a high of 3.93 children per woman in 1959 to a low of 1.49 children per woman in 2001 (Employment and Social Development Canada 2014). This has contributed to changes in the demographic distribution of the population. Presently, the Canadian population now has “more than twice as many older people (aged 30 to 65) than younger people (aged 15-29),” compared to the Canadian Census data of 1861 when it was the younger demographic that outnumbered those between 30 and 65. (Côté and Allahar 2006:37-38). The Western labour market has also undergone significant changes. Since the 1980s, it has shifted from an industrial economy centered on manufacturing requiring primarily low-skilled workers, to a post-industrial economy. In the post-industrial economy, there has been a decline in the manufacturing sector and an increase in the service sector, leading to a demand for “educated workers and flexible specialization in the workplace” (Furlong and Cartmel 1997:1). Older workers who lost their jobs through restructuring of the labour market have ended up filling entry-level jobs that younger workers would normally take (Côté and Allahar 2006).

The changes have resulted in what James Côté and Anton Allahar (2006:37) say is an “intergenerational competition for scarce resources, particularly those found in the workplace.” There has also been a rise in part-time employment (Rattansi and Phoenix 1997). These developments mean that workers must now be better educated, yet face an employment situation that is more volatile than in the past.

Richard Kimberlee (2002) argues that such shifts in demographics and labour market characteristics mean that youth culture has changed drastically since the 1950s and 1960s, when the transition into adulthood was more straightforward than today. In

that era, when a young person left high school or completed a post-secondary education, it was easy to find work. It has become more difficult to secure employment, particularly permanent employment, when finishing school. The result has been increasing unemployment and underemployment among youth, as well-educated young people have been compelled to take jobs for which they are over-qualified.

Some scholars contend that underemployment has led to youth experiencing *delayed maturity* (MacKinnon, Pitre and Watling 2007). Rising levels of unemployment among youth have resulted in an increase in the number of youth remaining in school for longer periods of time to acquire the education they need to get a decent job (Wallace (2003), citing Hammer and Carle (2002)). This prolonged period in education, coupled with the fact that employment opportunities and advancements within the workforce for youth have diminished over time, has led to youth living with their parents for longer periods of time. In Canada, 43.5 percent of youth are living at home with their parents or are moving back in with their parents (Census Canada cited in MacKinnon et al. 2007). The Centre for Research and Information on Canada [CRIC] found that the proportion of youth between the ages of 25 and 29 still living at home had doubled from 12 percent in 1981 to 24 percent in 2001 (CRIC cited in MacKinnon et al. 2007); youth now undergo a longer transition to adulthood, finding employment and/or starting a family than previous generations.

Generational explanations link the delay in youths achieving maturity to delays in their civic involvement such as voting (O'Neill 2007). Proponents of these approaches argue that "it is the experiences a person has when they become politically aware that are

important for determining their electoral allegiance” (Kimberlee 2002:93). Contemporary social and political events influence whether a person participates in elections or chooses not to vote. If youth are not moving as quickly to that adult stage in life when political matters acquire the most salience, then politics will remain outside their interests for a longer period of time.

It is the *adult phase* of life when one starts paying taxes, a mortgage, and/or a retirement plan, and it is also the phase when political matters start to become a concern to the individual. If youth are not moving into the adult phase of their life, then they are not settling down with a partner, buying a home, having a career, and/or having children (Gidengil et al. 2004). Therefore, they are less likely to be interested in the policies and the issues that government and politicians are touting; making it less likely they will vote.

2.2 (b) *Taking on the world one issue at a time: new social movements.*

Youth may not be voting; but some scholars say that this does not mean that they are politically apathetic. André Turcotte (2007), for example, reports that youth *are* interested in political issues; 59.2 percent of youth he surveyed agreed they have a good understanding of important policy issues. Unfortunately, the participants were not asked to elaborate on their understanding of said issues. Therefore, we cannot know if they actually have a “good” understanding of important policy issues or not.

We do know, however, that at least some young people participate in *social movements*, especially those focusing on issues not usually discussed by political parties or government (Kimberlee 2002). Social movements can be described as collective action

focusing on conflict where the actors of the social movement are trying to promote or resist social change (Della Porta and Diani 1999). The actors of social movements are opposed to actors who have conflicting interest in the same issue. When the claims of one group are realized, it is detrimental to the other groups. The use of protest is also important in defining social movements for two reasons. Firstly, protest is not part of the institutionalized power structure (Kuumba 2001), and secondly, it distinguishes social movements from organizations that use institutionalized means, such as voting or lobbying. Social movements are often forced to operate outside of the system because of denied access to the institutionalized power structures; however, they may choose to remain outside the power structure because they are concerned more with changing the public's views and instituting change through social means rather than through changes in the political structure.

Social movements are comprised of social networks of people who enjoy shared beliefs and solidarity and use collective action to focus on conflicts in the form of protest (Della Porta and Diani 1999:14-15). Informal interaction networks are linked between individuals, groups and organizations to provide the social movements' members with resources for action, thereby "creating the preconditions for mobilization and providing the proper setting for the elaboration of specific world views and lifestyles," (Della Porta and Diani 1999:14). Within such networks, members share a belief system and/or ideology and a sense of belonging, leading to the creation of new ideas and public issues to "explain the nature of the social condition they seek to change, justify particular strategies of action, and outline the anticipated outcomes or objectives"(Kuumba 2001:5).

Many social movement scholars have noted that the Social Movements that have emerged since the 1960s are different from the previous class-based, labour movements. The “New Social Movements” (NSMs) are seen as progressive (Jacques cited by Kimberlee 2002) and focus on post-material issues such as culture, identity, the environment, peace and globalisation (Nash 2000; Weinstein 2004). Some researchers say that youth engage in politics through their involvement in such movements. NSMs, according to Alan Scott (1990:16), are social, and not necessarily political: “Their aim is the mobilization of civil society, not the seizure of power.” He also adds that these movements are “located within civil society” (1990:17) and as such they do not have to interact with established political institutions because they try to affect change through changing peoples’ values and lifestyles while simultaneously challenging traditional values (Scott 1990:27).

Another important point about NSMs is that they are not heavily organized. They are informal networks of interaction among individual actors (Della Porta and Diani 1999:16); they may include formal organization, but the formal organization does not define the movement.

NSMs also depend heavily on their collective identities because after a campaign is finished, it will be easier to mobilize again when necessary if members share an ideology. Thus, social movements often fluctuate from periods of being high-profile and active in the public to periods of dormancy, where “inner reflection and intellectual development prevail” (Della Porta and Diani 1999:20); as a result, participants’ numbers also tend to fluctuate (Scott 1990). Finally, social movements can give rise to new

movements, as Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani (1999) note happened with the movements of the new left, which led to the rise of political ecology movements.

Scholars who study the involvement of youth in NSMs claim that such involvement combats the sense of political alienation that youth feel toward formal politics. Estranged from a political system that minimizes their voices and experiences because they hold different values than their predecessors, some youth are said to prefer to express their politics through NSM membership. In a study by Alfred, Price and Pitawanakwat (2007), for example, the indigenous youth interviewed stated they felt alienated from their politicians and these politicians' methods of negotiation and compromise. They felt that they needed *new politics* where they could take immediate action. As a result of this need, they adopted alternative measures as a means to participate meaningfully in the political process.

Supporters of this perspective say that youth seek to make a difference outside the mainstream political system through social movements. They use actions such as protest to influence public opinion, which may in turn influence change in government policies and institutions (Weinstein 2004). With improved access to education and the rise of media globalisation (e.g. the internet), youth are reported to be more interested in these *new politics* that reflect "generational concerns, lifestyles and value orientations," (Kimberlee 2002:91)⁹.

NSMs are also said to be appealing to youth because they do not follow the bureaucratic, hierarchical order of political parties. They are decentralized, non-

⁹However, one would need to vote to help influence change in government policies and institutions.

hierarchical and egalitarian organizations (Buechler 2000) where leadership is equal to its membership as opposed to directing the organisation (Young and Cross 2007). Youth would rather join a NSM than a political party, claim these researchers, because they do not feel that political parties are welcoming to youth or that they offer sufficient opportunity for youth to provide direction in the organisation (Young and Cross 2007). Youth may prefer to join NSMs rather than vote because they feel they can have more of an impact on political outcomes through protest than the ballot box. This can be combined with other non-traditional forms of political participation, such as boycotts and buycotts (O'Neill 2007). By participating in such direct-action activities, youth feel more engaged than they would by simply voting.

[Voting] can be a particularly unsatisfying form of participation in that the structure of the process provides little in the way of opportunity for engagement; instead, one marks one's ballot, and this may or may not have an effect on the political outcome depending on the nature of the system in place. (O'Neill 2007:21)¹⁰

NSM literature suggests that youth are staying outside of the traditional political system and are becoming involved with NSMs as a way to enact change through resources they can access. The traditional political system is bureaucratized, hierarchical, and youth voices are muted. Only the elite of the political party and its leaders are heard. However, NSMs allow youth to have their voices heard. They “provide an opportunity for personal development and collective responsibility,” (Kimberlee 2002:92). From a NSM

¹⁰ However, O'Neill does not provide statistics on the voting rate of youth who participate in NSMs and other non-traditional forms of political participation. This sort of analysis with a comparison to the voting rates of youth who do not participate in such activities should be carried out to support the above perspective.

perspective, by fighting for change through the civil and social sphere instead of the political sphere, youth are trying to make changes by influencing mass public opinion. Thus, they are enacting change without voting.

2.2 (c) *Individual factors.*

The social movements' literature suggests voter decline has occurred because youth have turned to informal politics; however, this claim is not quite accurate. While a minority of youth is turning to informal politics to advocate for political change, Elisabeth Gidengil et al. (2004) found these youth are disproportionately university-educated. They are more likely to participate in formal politics and view informal politics as *additional* means to advocate for change. Gidengil's results indicate that there exist variations among youth with respect to their propensity to vote.

While the generational and social movements' arguments have valid points, they tend to treat youth as a homogeneous group. However, the levels of political knowledge and political efficacy Canadian youth possess is significantly lower than older voters (O'Neill 2007):

Political efficacy refers to the belief that one has the capacity to understand and influence political decision making (internal efficacy) and that government is responsive to citizens (external efficacy) (O'Neill citing Abramson 2007:17).

Hence, differences in the level of education, income, and political knowledge among youth can play key roles in determining which youth vote and which do not.

Gidengil et al. (2004) found that the more education people have, the more likely they are to vote. While university graduates vote, the majority of youth voter decline is

found among those without a university education, and especially those without a high school education. These people are also more likely to be poor, compounding their marginalisation. While some of these marginalised people do become involved in NSMs (Connolly 2006), not all have the opportunities and support to do so.

According to researchers, another issue that further marginalises young, poor voters is their lack of political knowledge, which is important in determining voter turnout. Political knowledge can be defined as knowing the issues, where the parties stand, and the leaders of the respective parties (Gidengil et al. 2004). O'Neill (2007:17), citing the 2004 Canadian Election Study, observed that youth between 18 and 25 have a lower political efficacy than other cohorts of Canadians. When asked to agree with the following statement, “[s]ometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can’t really understand what is going on,” 62.4 percent of youth agreed whereas only 52 percent of those between 34 and 45 agreed¹¹. Pammett and LeDuc (March 2003), in their survey of non-voters following the General Federal Election of 2000, found administrative and personal factors, which include lack of knowledge about when or where to vote, not being on the list of electors, registration problems, too busy and general lack of interest – is cited more frequently by 18–24-year-olds than by any other age group.

Gidengil et al. observed that lack of political knowledge was more common among less privileged voters. The “daily struggle to put food on the table, to pay the bills,

¹¹ O'Neill did not discuss the results of those aged 26-33. As stated previously, the literature surrounding youth engagement considers youth in broad terms and this includes the use of different age categories in individual researchers' work.

and to find money for the rent may sap any desire to follow politics closely” (2004:7). If one does not have the money or time to buy the newspaper or access the internet to educate oneself on the political issues, one is less likely to vote. Finally, say scholars who highlight these matters, government issues tend to be covered by the traditional news media, newspapers and television, and youth pay less attention to these forms of media (Turcotte 2007; O’Neill 2007). Consequently, the most marginalized groups are the least likely to vote and the formal political institutions may not address their needs. This will be further explored in supply-side discussions.

Newfoundland and Labrador has the lowest proportion of adults between 25 and 64 in Canada with a university degree (14 percent), while it also has the highest proportion of high school dropouts at 26 percent of the population (Statistics Canada 2008b). Approximately 22 percent have a college diploma and 20 percent have a high school diploma (Statistics Canada 2008b). If the level of education is important in obtaining the political knowledge, which has been linked to higher voter turnout, then the education levels of youth need to be explored. Further discussion surrounding political knowledge will be addressed later on.

This section explored the demand-side perspectives focusing on generational explanations, new social movements, and individual factors. While proponents of these perspectives maintain that youth are not voting because of delayed maturity, or that some see the act of not voting as a political statement and that it is frequently the educated who participate in informal and formal politics, the question to explore is why are most youth disengaged from politics?

2.3 Supply-Side Perspectives

Citizen: “We Need Leadership and Guidance in This Economy!”

Government: “We Can’t Help You! It’s Out of Our Hands!”

Hay (2008) points out that the literature focusing on voter decline has focused overwhelmingly on demand-side arguments. He argues this neglect of *supply-side arguments* impedes us from seeing the whole picture and that it places the blame for the decline solely on the characteristics of the electorate, their apathy or ignorance around politics and the political system, their lack of education or income, and their unwillingness to engage in political issues through formal or informal mechanisms. This view ignores the role politics, the government, and the politicians *themselves* have played in fostering among the electorate the belief that participating in politics is a futile activity.

Hay maintains that there are three sources of voter disaffection and distrust of politicians. Firstly, politicians are seen as interested in self-advancement and not the collective good; secondly, they are seen as easily influenced by “large (often corporate) interests,” and finally, politicians are seen as inefficient in the distribution and use of public resources (Hay 2008:39). Hay (2008) argues that this negative perception of politicians arose because of the growing adherence of governments to public choice theory as the basis for political action and its association and influence with neoliberalism and the rise of globalization on states’ policies. Public choice theory emerged in the 1960s, when Western European and North American states’ policies were focused on building welfare states following Keynesian economic principles, but it was not fully embraced by government officials around the world until the welfare state *crisis* of the 1970s. As inflation and unemployment rose, Keynesian policies were blamed, and public

choice theory gained traction among state officials as the political philosophy that could best respond to these pressures. Public choice theory maintains, among other things, that political actors (politicians, voters, and public officials) are self-interested agents who make rational choices that will maximize their material self-interest without regard to the collective interest (Hay 2008:96).

Neoliberalism, the political economic system that emerged with officials' embrace of public choice theory, advocates a *freeing* of the individual from state institutions through a reduction of the state and its role in the economy through deregulation, privatization, and depoliticization of state institutions and policies once considered public goods (Marquardt 1998; Hay 2008). The shift from Keynesian to neoliberal economic policies was accompanied by globalization, a process that politicians increasingly represented as beyond their control. They argued (and continue to argue) that states must have capital-friendly policies or else capital will leave and go to another nation with better capital-friendly policies. For example, the state cannot impose the high taxation levels that could provide better social programming, because this would discourage investment leading to economic crises and job losses. Moreover, says Hay, the policies "are depoliticizing in the sense that they effectively deny political responsibility for policy choices," (Hay 2008:87). Neoliberalism gained popularity in the Western labour market in the 1980s and radically changed the economy.

Thus, politicians' adherence to public choice theory in their decision-making, and the resulting neoliberalism that came to grip world governments, were influential in "demoniz[ing] politics and the political in the process of narrating the crisis of the 1970s

– a crisis to which neoliberalism was presented as the logical solution,” (Hay 2008:99). It also gave rise to the political and bureaucratic overload theses, which were also critical of the Keynesian welfare state as public choice theory gave voice to what people were feeling at the time: that politics and politicians were “interfering, prone to capture by powerful interests, prone to exponential growth and encroachment, prone to inefficiencies, technically incompetent and so forth” (Hay 2008:95).

The notion that politicians and government officials are self-interested, and that the forces of globalization are inevitable and uncontrollable have, says Hay, undermined public confidence in the state and its capacity to do anything more than just act as a manager of the global economy. In Canada, such perceptions are continually reinforced in the media as we see reports ranging from the sponsorship scandal to the ethics investigation of Rahim Jaffer (Payton 12 December 2011) to accusations of mis- and over-spending around the G20 and G8 meetings in Ontario in 2010 (Fitzpatrick 9 June 2011). These and other stories only confirm public suspicions that politicians are corrupt and/or inept at their job.

The platforms of all the parties – left, right, and centre – have become virtually indistinguishable, their leaders competing only to convince the electorate that they would be the best *manager*, rather than leader, of an economy subject to global pressures. Hence, says Hay, the electorate’s concept of politics has become cynical; they see politicians and the government as untrustworthy, as these officials are more likely to fulfill their own needs or those of powerful interest groups before those of the collective. Even politicians have come to believe that of themselves and of the bureaucrats who run

the government services. Not all politicians are manipulative and self-motivated, of course, but it is the perception that people have come to hold.

So Hay's supply-side argument for voter disengagement maintains that public choice theory and globalization have been used by political actors to argue that politics is not the arena in which to address many of the woes that face people today. Coupled with the process of depoliticization, rendering politicians and government no longer responsible for certain institutions and policies that are important to the electorate has, in Hay's words, "significantly undermined not only their own capacity to deliver collective public goods, but also the collective societal capacity for public deliberation" (2008:157). People are not motivated to vote if they see politicians as untrustworthy and interested in only maximizing their own self-interests.

Although Hay applies this argument broadly (i.e. to the Western electorate as a whole), it can be applied to youth voters in particular. Perhaps the decline in the propensity of youth to vote does not derive from personal failures or choices, apathy, lack of education, or the conscious decision to join NSMs rather than vote. Maybe it is because formal politics has failed *them* with respect to what it is offering or *supplying* youth. For example, if government and its politicians are eschewing responsibility for problems facing youth, such as unemployment, by blaming them on globalization, then youth come to see politicians as incapable of helping them. While a minority may turn to New Social Movements, others may become entirely disengaged from the political process.

The following will examine specific aspects of supply-side arguments and how they may aid in exploring why young Newfoundlanders are not voting. In the Newfoundland context, these sources of voter disaffection can be found in recent and past events. The misappropriation of constituency allowances involving cabinet ministers and opposition Members of the House of Assembly (MHA) and the selling of Fisheries Products International¹² (FPI) to a private company, which subsequently downsized its operations and presence in the province and outsourced fish processing, are both examples of events that had negative impacts on rural communities in the province.

2.3 (a) *All by myself: alienation.*

The supply-side perspective is evident in alienation approaches which maintain that youth are not voting because they feel shut-out of and alienated by the formal political system. Alienation is “an estrangement from society, group, culture or the individual self” (Kilminster 2006:10), and political alienation can follow youth into adulthood. “One of the best indicators of civic and political participation later in life is participation at an early age” (MacKinnon et al 2007:41). If youth are not voting today, it follows that they may not vote as adults. Indeed, recent studies suggest that this is occurring (Delli Carpini 2000; MacKinnon et. al 2007; O’Neill 2007).

Margaret Adsett (2003) takes a historical approach to account for what she sees as political alienation among youth in Canada. She argues that Canadian youth are no longer

¹² FPI, while a privately run company could not be sold without the approval of the Newfoundland and Labrador government.

interested in participating in the political process because federal governments since the 1980s and 1990s have failed to court the youth vote. For much of the 1970s, when the percentage of youth voters was high, the government was led by a youthful Pierre Trudeau and the Liberal party, following a Third Party system situated on the left side of the political spectrum. A Third Party system is characterized by weak governments (minority governments) that help to create a government more responsive to its electorate (Adsett 2003) as it must work with opposition parties to pass legislation and confidence votes to stay in power. In Canada, there were three minority governments in the 1960s and early 1970s under Lester B. Pearson and Pierre Trudeau.

The youth of this era, known as the *baby boomers*, can be defined as those born from 1946 to 1967 (Statistics Canada 2006:12). Baby boomers are important because they account for nearly one out of three Canadians (Statistics Canada 2006:12). In 1966, this cohort accounted for more than 40% of the population (Statistics Canada 2006:12); hence, they were a very important demographic group politically.

The 1970s was also the era of the welfare state and Keynesian economics which benefited youth, thus helping to foster the participation of youth in politics. Many initiatives were introduced to benefit them, such as job creation programs and increased public funding for the post-secondary education system. Recall, however, that public choice theory gained popularity in the decade following, when the economy went into a downturn and the Keynesian policy of using deficit-spending to revive the economy failed (Hay 2008; Marquardt 1998:46). Thus, as baby boomers became adults no longer

needing such state supports, world governments began to cut back on these youth-oriented programs.

Adsett notes that, as baby boomers aged, the government shifted its policies accordingly. In 1984, the Progressive Conservatives came to power and there was a shift to the right in the political spectrum with government cutting social programs and adding privatization and deregulation to its policies (Adsett 2003). Neo-liberalism was embraced by politicians and government leaders who came to believe that private interests could better manage public resources. In order to protect those resources certain institutions and policies had to be depoliticized (Hay 2008). An example would be the selling of the federally owned airline Air Canada in the late 1980s. It was heavily in debt and was claimed to have been “flagrantly mismanaged” (Economic Council cited in Burns 1988), so it was privatized.

This political shift from the welfare state to a neoliberal one occurred not just in Canada but also in the United States, under the presidency of Ronald Reagan, and in the United Kingdom with then-prime minister Margaret Thatcher. One of the many outcomes of this shift toward neo-liberal policies of privatization and downsizing led to the marginalization of labour and to the creation of few high-paying jobs and many low-paying jobs, which some commentators have called *McJobs*. *McJobs* have come to be mostly filled by youth and are characterized as unstable, provide only part-time hours, few or no benefits such as health insurance, and have no place for advancement (Marquardt 1998). As a result, Wyn and Woodman argue, the state has come to define youth as “a human resource for economic development, as students, consumers and

‘flexible workers’” (2006:499). They say such policies were economically disadvantageous to youth, as well as ideologically unappealing, and have resulted in their gradual *dropping out* of the political arena.

What is more, this shift coincided with the age demographic of Canada moving towards an aging population. The government emphasized tax cuts and reduced government spending. Applying a supply-side perspective, the government would be comfortable in carrying out this program because baby boomers had already completed their education, found employment, and bought a home, so they no longer relied on the social programs that were created during their youth (Adsett 2003). New policies focused on health care and pensions as the age cohort of 45–54 year olds increased from 13.5 percent of the population in 1988 to 18.4 percent in 2000 and the age cohort of those 55 and older increased from 25.3 percent in 1980 to 28.2 per cent in 2000 (Adsett 2003:256).

As youth are no longer the largest demographic group, alienation and a supply-side perspective would argue that their interests are not taken into account to the extent of those of the baby boomers. Political parties and the ruling government are interested in touting programs and benefits for older populations. Youth may feel they are excluded from politics because the government is not representing them in public policies that focus on those who are in the *adult phase* of their life. Further, the state continues to base its policies on concepts of youth that were better suited to the baby boomer generation and an industrial economy. Wyn and Woodman (2006) argue that such a model is inadequate to use as a basis for policy today as that model of adulthood – one that is

reached earlier and is more secure than the future waiting the young people of today – no longer exists.

Alienation scholars maintain that these many related developments have led to a sense of alienation among youth, where youth feel separated from the electoral system and the government, leading them to think there is no reason to vote. This sense of alienation is reinforced by the fact youth do not have representatives their age in parliament and the policies initiated by the government do not necessarily benefit them.

There is some evidence that youth feel alienated from the formal political process. Turcotte's (2005) study of the 2004 Canadian Federal Election found that whereas the campaign focused on the sponsorship scandal, childcare programs and healthcare issues, the youth he interviewed wanted to hear more about economic issues and education. Another study by Turcotte (2007) surveyed youth between the ages of 18 and 30, and found that 63.3 percent of them felt they had no influence on what government thought of them. As well, 60.1 percent of respondents felt that government did not care about what they thought. Indeed, I would argue that from a supply-side perspective, policies reflect an *anti-youth* sentiment. Cutbacks of federal funding to post-secondary education to help pay down the national debt during the 1990s, for example, led to an increase in tuition fees at post-secondary institutions across Canada. This funding has not been fully restored despite the multi-billion dollar budget surpluses of the pre-2008 recession.

In Britain, Henn, Weinstein, and Wring (2004) found British youth did not feel that politics are aimed at young people. They said that politicians ignored them and their

issues, such as education. The world of formal politics was seen by these youth as something distant from their everyday lives and had little meaning for them.

The political alienation of youth has only been compounded, says Delli Carpini (2000), by the broader devaluation of politics and the role of government. Since the 1970s, political and financial scandals have led many people to see the government and its politicians as corrupt or as the source of society's problems. Examples of scandals include the American Bill Clinton sex scandal, the Canadian sponsorship scandal, the Maxime Bernier affair, and the ethics investigation of Rahim Jaffer. Youth, along with other voters, simply do not believe that their voting is going to make any difference.

The move to a post-industrial economy and its results highlight the role of group power and political structures. Drawing upon the supply-side perspective, I would argue the traditional electoral system reinforces the status and the power of the dominant groups (baby boomers and pre-baby boomer generations) at the expense of youth as this group will support political parties that represent their interests. However, the group owning most of the resources in Canadian society are the pre-baby boomer generation, who saw gains in wages (resources) during the economic downturn of the 1980s and 1990s while everyone else experienced decreases (Côté and Allahar 2006: 49-50). Even among this group, not everyone benefited; 53 percent of Canada's wealth is held by only 10 percent of the population and 70 percent of the wealth is held by only 20 percent of the population (Côté and Allahar 2006:48).

It is this small, old, and wealthy elite that are most represented in government, where the average age of the Members of Parliament is 50.26 years and there are only 17

Members of Parliament under the age of 30¹³ (Parliament of Canada 2011). This serves to reinforce the position of older voters at the top of the social hierarchy. As youth are neither the largest demographic group nor the group holding 70 percent of the country's resources, their interests are not taken into account to the extent of those of pre-baby boomers and baby boomers. This is reinforced by the fact youth do not have representatives their age in parliament. Unfortunately, these circumstances set up a kind of vicious circle, because if youth and the lower income classes are not voting, the policies initiated by the government do not necessarily benefit youth or these other groups since it is unlikely these groups will vote in the next election. The policies and promises made during elections are focused on the groups that do vote, such as baby-boomers and the wealthy elite. The wealthy elite are portrayed as the *job creators* in our volatile economy; so its interests are likely to be protected by politicians.

Other groups that influence government are businesses and lobbyists representing business interests. As mentioned above, in the era of globalization and neoliberal domination, government argues it must create a capital-friendly state in order to maintain a healthy economy and retain foreign investment. Once again, youth may feel they are excluded from politics because the government is not representing them in public policies. This is supported by Turcotte's study (2007), where the majority of youth felt during the 2004 elections that issues such as education were not addressed. While education may be a provincial responsibility in Canada, the federal government does

¹³ While there are Members of Parliament as young as 20 and who received much publicity because of their age, it remains to be seen whether such representation will impact youth perceptions of formal politics.

provide funding towards education, and other provincial priorities such as health care.

They also felt they had no influence on government and that government did not care for their opinions. This argument, from a demand-side perspective, places the blame on youth for not voting because they are not forcing themselves to take interest in the issues that government and politicians choose to pursue.

In Canada, a 2000 IRPP survey found that 81 percent of Canadians between the ages of 38 and 47 strongly or somewhat agreed with the statement “[t]hose elected to Parliament soon lose touch with the people,” (O’Neill 2007:17). Youth, when asked the same question, scored 10 points less (O’Neill 2007:17). Because the level of cynicism among youth is lower than among older Canadians, cynicism alone cannot account for the lower levels of voting; however, at 71 percent, it must play a role, which I will explore in interviews with Newfoundland rural youth. Hay also examines a public opinion poll, which gauged the public’s level of trust in public institutions in the United States and the European Union (Hay 2008:34-35). The results show that political parties, the national government and congress/parliament had the lowest levels of trust in both the US and the EU. While the survey did not include Canada, it is likely that the Canadian case is similar.

2.4 Supply and Demand Sides in the Newfoundland and Labrador Context

Can any of these perspectives help to shed light on the low turnout of the youth vote in Newfoundland and Labrador as the province experiences serious issues such as outmigration, lack of employment opportunities, and lack of basic services, such as family doctors? This study is designed to find out, assessing the impact of both demand-

side and supply-side factors on the propensity of a sample of young Newfoundlanders and Labradoreans to vote.

The economic and educational prospects of young Newfoundlanders and Labradoreans suggest that their reticence to vote may stem from demand-side factors. Globalization and neoliberalism, as well as environmental disasters such as the collapse of the cod fishery, have devastated rural communities. These pressures have resulted in high unemployment and out-migration, especially among youth. Many of the jobs youth acquire are low-paying, seasonal jobs in the service industry. In Newfoundland and Labrador, until the recent, mandated minimum wage hike, nearly one-third of jobs were paid less than \$10 an hour (Morissette 2008). Recall too that Gidengil et al. (2004) found those who have more education are more likely to vote and to be more politically knowledgeable. If one cannot afford to pursue a post-secondary education, then he or she is more likely to live in poverty and is less likely to vote. Also, underemployment or unemployment among youth with post-secondary education can lead to poverty, which again may affect youth voter turnout. Given that Newfoundland and Labrador has the lowest percentage of university graduates in Canada, and that the unemployment rate among youth and in rural areas is double the national unemployment rate, access to political knowledge needs to be furthered explored.

Generational pressures may also be a factor. Newfoundland and Labrador does not have a large manufacturing sector, but it has always been heavily dependent on the primary resource sector. Not surprisingly, therefore, pressures associated with the decline in the traditional industrial economy have affected the province. An example is in the

pulp and paper industry. With the decrease in the demand for newsprint, the high Canadian dollar, and the rising cost of transportation, the costs of producing paper has risen to the point where the province has lost two pulp and paper mills and the future viability of its remaining pulp and paper mill is questionable, despite subsidies from the provincial government. Another example would be the decision by Ocean Choice International to close two fish plants, which were vital economic generators in the communities of Marystown and Port Union. The company stated they were no longer profitable in today's market and the provincial government has refused to intervene. The upshot of such events, according to generational explanations, is that traditional means through which Newfoundland and Labrador youth came of age and achieved adulthood have experienced significant decline. Does the greater tendency of Newfoundland and Labrador youth not to vote derive from the delay in their achieving maturity, given the especially devastating decline in the traditional industrial and resource economies in the province?

Finally, could it be that Newfoundland and Labrador youth are finding other ways of expressing their politics rather than through the ballot box? Another demand-side approach contends that while youth may not be voting, they are joining NSMs. It is true that Gidengil found that this occurred mainly among educated Canadian youth who were also voting; however, it is worth investigating whether the New Social Movements argument is applicable to Newfoundland and Labrador youth.

While demand-side factors loom large in the Newfoundland and Labrador context as possible reasons why voter turnout among youth is so low, supply-side factors are also

present. Demographically, youth are one of the smallest groups in the province. Those between 15 and 24 represented only 12.9 percent of the population in the 2006 Census. Children under 15 represent only 15.5 percent of the province's population and this number has been declining. Newfoundland and Labrador has the lowest proportion of children in Canada, a sharp contrast to 1956, when more than 4 out of 10 people were under the age of 15 (Statistics Canada 2006:16). Supply-side explanations claim that issues that concern youth will not be addressed if it does not benefit larger demographic groups, such as the baby boomers or the wealthy elite. Perhaps Newfoundland and Labrador youth are becoming disengaged from politics because they feel alienated or ignored by the larger political system and process.

And what about the kind of politics Newfoundland and Labrador youth are receiving? Another supply-side argument claims that since the 1980s and the embrace of state officials of public choice theory and neo-liberal economic policies, voters have come to perceive politicians as self-serving, and governments as generally incompetent and unresponsive to their demands. In the Newfoundland context, perhaps the same events that have led to provincial out-migration and unemployment – the closure of the few manufacturing enterprises in the province, the decline of the fish and pulp and paper industries – have fostered cynicism and mistrust of government among Newfoundlanders and Labradoreans.

The federal and provincial governments' failure to intervene and address these circumstances effectively, as well as questionable decisions such as the federal government's decision to close the Maritime Rescue Sub-Centre in St. John's despite the

protests of mariners, employees, the provincial government and its citizens (CBC 8 June 2011), may be viewed as indications of political indifference. Add to this the scandal involving the overspending of constituency allowances by MHAs from all political parties, resulting in some facing criminal charges and serving time in prison (CBC 8 July 2006), and the provincial government's refusal to open the House of Assembly to debate this fall because it does not consider it productive (Antle 18 January 2012), may have diminished voters' trust in and respect for politicians. The question is whether these hold special salience for young voters, which will be explored in my study.

While there are different approaches to studying why youth are not voting, the academic literature suggests that it may not be entirely due to apathy. According to some research, youth are apparently interested in political issues. However, studies suggest that youth feel alienated from the traditional electoral system or prefer to participate in NSMs, rallies, or protests that focus on issues of interest to them. According to the research, this desire for *new politics* is echoed throughout the youth of today, regardless of their background.

In reviewing the literature, the arguments presented are all compelling and were explored in my study of youth voter turnout in Newfoundland and Labrador to verify if they were applicable. The province is composed of a small population spread across a vast geography and is simultaneously isolated as an island in the middle of the North Atlantic. This research will allow for an exploration of youth's accessibility to NSMs or other forms of *new politics* as most rural communities are several hours from the capital of St. John's. Other questions that arise from this chapter and were further explored centre

around demographic arguments and whether Adsett's argument (2003) holds true in the Newfoundland and Labrador context of a declining youth population (Statistics Canada cited in Newfoundland & Labrador Statistics Agency 2007).

The following chapter will describe the methodology used in my research and will include a discussion of where the interviews took place and the construction of the interview guide.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this research is to explore why Newfoundland and Labrador youth have low levels of voter participation and to see if the explanations put forth in the literature are applicable to this population. Public discourse portrays youth as lazy and apathetic, while the academic literature has suggested other explanations for their detachment from mainstream politics. These include disenchantment and disengagement from formal politics, participation in informal politics rather than formal politics, a lack of political knowledge, and/or feeling alienated from the system because it favours larger demographic groups such as the baby boomers. To assess these explanations and their utility in the context of Newfoundland and Labrador, the research utilized semi-structured interviews with a sample of young voters from Western Newfoundland.

“Political participation” for the purpose of this study includes participation in both formal *and* informal mechanisms of governance. The formal sphere of politics includes the acts of voting, joining a political party, campaigning, and standing as a candidate in an election (Gauthier 2003; Hay 2008). This has been declining among all age cohorts, especially among youth; however, Lisa Young and William Cross, based on their review of the literature, draw a “plausible assumption that those [Canadian] young people who might have joined a political party a generation ago are now more likely to channel their activism through an advocacy group” (2007:5). They say that the youth once considered to be politically active through *formal political participation* have turned to *informal political participation*. This can be defined as participating in social

movements or boycotts, signing petitions (O'Neill 2007), or other acts that are carried out for political reasons but do not fit the definition of formal political participation. My expansion of the concept of political participation beyond the formal sphere to include informal politics will enable me to explore whether or not the youth in my sample are politically active in this sense and, if so, why their political interest is not expressed through voting.

Originally, I focused on youth-voting behaviour in the communities of Woody Point, Rocky Harbour, and Norris Point. These communities fit Statistic Canada's rural and small town definition where "the population liv[es] in towns and municipalities outside the commuting zone of larger urban centres ... with population of 10,000 or more" (du Plessis, Beshiri, Bollman, & Clemenson 2002:1). These sites were chosen because they are next to Gros Morne National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site. Many youth in the region are employed annually by Gros Morne during its busy summer tourist season. However, in the off-season these communities are isolated, with fewer employment opportunities. Most of the jobs in which youth work in the summer are related to the service industry. These types of jobs are usually short-term, and the pay is often minimum wage. I reasoned that focusing on youth in these communities would enable me to explore how *employment uncertainty* might influence youths' attitudes toward the political process. *Employment uncertainty* was a factor identified by the generational scholars (O'Neill 2007; MacKinnon, Pitre and Watling 2007; Kimberlee 2002; Gidengil et al. 2004) in youth's *delayed maturity*, which they argue was linked to delays in youth's civic involvement, such as voting.

These sites are also fishing communities that were adversely affected by the collapse of the cod fishery in 1993, and all have seen their populations decline steadily, especially their youth population. Fewer youth in rural communities suggests that political parties may be less concerned with youth interests in these regions since they are the smallest demographic group. If supply-side arguments are correct, when a politician and his/her political party wishes to be elected, they will focus on the older age cohorts because they are the largest pool of potential voters. If an election is close, a politician and his/her political party will try to attract voters of all age groups. A closer examination of the politics in these areas allowed me to test whether these statements are indeed true, and if youth are aware of or are affected by *political disregard*.

Unfortunately, I could not find enough participants in the small communities and had to include participants from the City of Corner Brook. This will be discussed further in the chapter. While the City of Corner Brook is not considered rural, it does have a higher unemployment rate than St. John's.¹⁴ It is considered the service centre for the Western Newfoundland being home to the regional hospital, a pulp and paper operation, and several post-secondary institutions: Grenfell Campus – Memorial University, the College of the North Atlantic and the private college, Academy Canada. I reasoned that focusing on youth in this centre would enable me to explore if level of *education*, as discussed in Chapter Two, was linked to a lower rate of voter turnout.

¹⁴ See pages 9-10.

3.1 The Semi-Structured Interview

Quantitative methods usually follow the natural science model wherein it takes a deductive approach to test a theory by utilizing random samples of the population being studied to ensure generalization. Such data collection takes a macro-level perspective using large-scale empirical studies. The data collected are measured and quantified (Bryman 2001; Flick 2002), and they highlight the trends that emerge from the population studied (Clarke 2001). However, in order to examine political participation among Newfoundland and Labrador youth, quantitative methods did not seem sufficient, as one cannot probe deeper into the views and opinions of respondents. I chose a qualitative approach, specifically the semi-structured interview, as it allowed me to more thoroughly explore youths' political participation.

Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to understand the social world from the participant's perspective, and the participant is able to express this view in his or her own words (Kvale 2007; May 2001). I chose semi-structured interviews over structured and open-ended interviews as they employ a methodology best suited to this study. On the one hand, they allow the researcher the freedom to explore and/or clarify a participant's answers if needed – a flexibility not afforded by structured interviews consisting of specific questions that must be posed exactly the same way in all interviews. Thus, they avoid the limitations inherent to interviews in which most of the questions are closed-ended, i.e. the participant must select his or her answer from a given set of responses (Bryman 2001). On the other hand, they are not completely without structure. Semi-structured interviews require the use of an interview guide that includes specific

questions grouped around themes to be explored in the research (Kvale 2007). As my study focuses on exploring several themes around youth and their political participation, such a guide allows for a cross-comparison of participants' answers (May 2001). Completely open-ended interviews could result in my inadvertently omitting topics, which could be problematic when analyzing the data.

While the semi-structured interview was the best avenue to pursue the research, there are some limitations that must be addressed. Qualitative research is often criticized as too subjective because it is the researcher that decides which data are significant. As it is the researcher who is the *instrument of data collection*, the study can be difficult to replicate, if not impossible (Bryman 2004:284). The researcher's sex, gender, age, and demeanour are just some of the factors that may influence how a participant reacts in an interview. Also, the topics and questions that are pursued outside the interview guide are at the discretion of the researcher. A final critique of using semi-structured interviews would be the sample size. As it was a small sample, the findings cannot be applied to the general population.

I tested several perspectives that I identified in the existing literature among a small sample of youth to see if the arguments had any validity or if there were other factors influencing youth voter turnout.

3.2 The Interview Guide

Drawing upon the academic literature, I constructed an interview guide (see Appendix A). The interview was designed to explore why the participants were or were not voting and

their levels of formal and informal political participation. The interviews were based around several of the demand- and supply-side themes identified in the scholarly perspectives on youth voting that were reviewed in the previous chapter. These included social movements, informal politics, generational explanations, individual factors, alienation perspectives, generational conflicts, neo-liberal policies and the role of government and politicians in the lives of youth, and the nature of politics itself.

The interview schedule first asked participants whether they were working, going to school, or both, so that their employment and education history (individual factors) could be documented. Gidengil (2004), for example, argues that individuals with less education were least likely to vote. They were then asked if they had voted in past elections and their reasons for voting or not voting. This was to determine whether those who did not vote had made a conscious decision *not* to vote and whether they were making a political statement in doing so. This moved into a discussion about where the participants obtained their news and information. Turcotte (2007) claims government issues tend to be covered by traditional forms of media, but youth pay less attention to these in favour of the internet¹⁵. A key measure to determine participants' level of political knowledge was where they found information about political issues and the government.

Gauthier (2003) claims youth can be considered very involved politically if the concept of political participation is expanded to include civic and social participation.

¹⁵ This argument is problematic as the traditional media publishes government issues on their websites. The focus should be on the lack of youth traffic to the traditional media's websites.

Following Gauthier, the participants were asked to define *political activity* and *politics* to see how they defined political participation. Participants were asked if they did any volunteer work, and if so, they were asked to describe what they volunteered for and their role in this activity. They were also asked whether they considered this to be a form of political participation, as some forms of volunteering can be considered non-traditional political activity. However, it must also be noted that volunteering for political parties is considered traditional political activity. This allowed for discussion of the subject's participation or lack of participation in *New Social Movements* (NSM) and whether they participated in person or through the internet. The internet is where one can participate and educate oneself politically (Wyn and Harris 2004) through blogs, forums, etc.

Following this, the participants were asked what issues they cared about with the purpose of exploring the themes of *representation and alienation*. The questions centered on whether the participants felt the government could deal with the issues they believed were important and how they felt politicians viewed their age cohort. This tied into the concept of *cynicism* regarding government, politics and politicians, and whether such feelings existed for the participants.

The final part of the interview focused on the *disenchantment and disengagement* of youth from the political process. This follows from Hay's argument (2008) that government has eschewed its responsibility to rule in the public interest through deregulation and depoliticization and that it no longer has the capacity to help its constituents. The questions solicited the participants' opinions on politicians, why people chose to run for elected office, the government, and if it mattered who was in power.

During the interviews, some respondents, discussing well-known politicians, attributed characteristics to these politicians, but had trouble explaining why they felt that way about the politician. They would make statements like “well, you know what I mean...” I addressed this by telling them that I did not know and asking if they could clarify and elaborate on why they felt that way about the politician.

3.3 Data Collection Process and Sample

Among the literature, the age definitions of “youth” vary, but for the purpose of my research, individuals between the ages of 19 and 24 were selected. I selected the age of 19, rather than 18 because everyone who is 19 would have had at least one opportunity to vote since they were 18 (i.e. in the Provincial General Election in the fall of 2007). There were eight female and seven male subjects, and I included youth who traveled from home to pursue a post-secondary education and those who are working or who are unemployed. The sample varied along these lines because I wanted to see if there were differences affecting their voting behaviour as Gidengil (2004) suggests.

I collected data from October 2008 to March 2009. Interviews took place in participants’ homes, restaurants and coffee shops, one participant’s car, the aerobics studio of the local YMCA, and the Grenfell Campus’ Psychology Society’s room. Random selection was first used to recruit participants, but it was difficult to recruit because I had no personal connection. In each case I asked if there was someone between the ages of 19 and 24 with whom I might speak and if that person would agree to an interview. The residences were provided by the telephone company Aliant’s phone book.

However, I found only three participants by this method because most residences no longer had someone between the ages of 19 and 24 living there. Often, people would laugh and tell me that there were no young people left or they would tell me their child was away working or going to school. When I asked if I could get their contact information or when they may be back in town, the person would say they did not give out that information to strangers.

To complete the research, I employed snowball and convenience sampling. Snowball sampling is a method used to access difficult-to-access populations. The researcher asks members they know in the population to connect them to other members of said population. From there, each member that the researcher encounters can suggest others for the researcher to contact (Bryman 2001:166). As I had exhausted my telephone list, I asked the participants if they could refer me to their friends. One suggested speaking with their friend who resides in Corner Brook as this person could introduce me to potential participants. I spoke with this person and found two more participants. Subsequently, one of these participants recommended three more people and all three agreed to an interview. From these participants, I was able to find three more subjects.

Once these interviews were completed, there still remained a shortfall in the number of interviews needed for the research. As time and expenses were factors in completing this study, I included participants who were residents of Western Newfoundland, mostly in the City of Corner Brook. These considerations led to my implementing convenience sampling, where one recruits participants who are easy to access (Bryman 2001). A disadvantage of employing snowball and convenience sampling

is that it is unlikely to be representative of the general population. However, this research seeks to explore youths' views on political participation in detail rather than attempting to empirically prove causal relationships. As such, a demographically representative sample is not required.

When potential participants were contacted, they were asked if they would be interested in participating in an interview. They were informed of the purpose of my research, the approximate time it would take to complete the interview and that participation was strictly voluntary. If the participant agreed, then an interview time was arranged. At the meeting, the participant was asked to read and sign a consent form that explained the purpose of the research, the approximate length of the interview, and the measures in place to ensure the confidentiality of their identity and the information they would provide. These measures included the use of pseudonyms when referring to the participant, keeping all electronic data on password protected computer files, and keeping all paper copies locked in a filing cabinet. The participants were asked if they could be audio-taped, and all agreed. The average interview lasted approximately half an hour.

3.4 Conclusion

I was successful in finding enough participants despite some obstacles in the recruitment process. The interviews went well with the exception of one. This particular person was difficult and did not really want to answer the questions. When I questioned him about how he got his news, he became defensive and responded with "... I don't know what I can and can't say, you're recording me and stuff right. I'm not big on... pretty racist and

stuff you know what I mean” (Joe 2009:6). He went on to make offensive comments and became upset during the interview, and I did not feel comfortable in pursuing some of the topics that were discussed in the interview. Therefore, I ended it without having the participant elaborate on some of the things he had said. The rest of the interviews were very enjoyable.

Chapter 4

4.1 Political Participation

During the autumn of 2008 and the winter of 2009, I interviewed 15 youth between the ages of 19 and 24 about their political participation. When asked if they had voted in the October 2008 Federal General Election, 33 percent replied they had. Six participants, including two who had not voted in that election, had voted in other elections (i.e. the 2007 Newfoundland and Labrador provincial election). Taking into account previous elections, there were eight participants (53 percent) who had never voted in any election.

Table 4-1. Participants' Voting History

Voted only in the October 2008 election	0
Voted in multiple elections including October 2008	5
Voted in other elections but not October 2008	2
Never Voted	8

I begin this chapter with a brief description of each participant. Then I will test my dependent variable of voting behaviour. The questions asked of the participants were used to explore why the participants did or did not vote and thus to test the literature put forth in Chapter Two. The answers they provided will be examined against several independent variables, such as politics and political participation, to determine if there is a relationship between the variables. The data will be used to evaluate demand-side and supply-side arguments.

4.2 The Participants

I interviewed eight women and seven men. Two women were stay-at-home mothers who both had some post-secondary education but had not finished a diploma or degree. One was married with two children and one was in a relationship where she split her time between Alberta, where the father of her child lived, and her parents' house in Corner Brook, Newfoundland.

Seven participants were full-time students. Three were attending university and four were attending college. Four students were working part-time jobs anywhere from 12 hours to 30 hours a week. One of the students, who did not work, taught children to cross-country ski on the weekends as part of her course requirements, but she did receive \$20 for this work.

The remaining six participants were employed at the time of the interview, four full-time. Another was a substitute teacher, so I would classify her position as casual labour as she did not have guaranteed working hours. The final participant was working as a full-time heavy equipment operator but would be transitioning into casual work as a firefighter with the local fire department. All working participants had some level of post-secondary education, with the exception of one person. Two had college diplomas and two had university degrees. The following is a brief description of each participant.

Wendy was a 23-year old stay-at-home mother who commuted between Corner Brook and Grande Prairie, Alberta, where the father of her child lived. She had some post-secondary education, but was not in school at the time of the interview as she was

raising her child. She was economically dependent on her boyfriend but not on her parents, even when she stayed with them in Corner Brook.

Tom was 23 and from Corner Brook. He was a student pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree and worked part-time (20-30 hours/week) at a movie store. He lived at home with his parents, who helped him by letting him live with them and helping him pay for books. He worked full-time in the summers and worked his part-time job throughout the year to pay for school and car insurance on his parents' car.

Jill was a 22-year-old interior decorator from Corner Brook. She completed an 18-month course at Academy Canada in St. John's and had also completed one year of university. She lived with her boyfriend; they were economically independent and owned their own vehicles. She had student loans but did not have to start repaying them until July 2009.

Paul was a 20-year-old student from the Bonne Bay area. He lived in Corner Brook, where he was pursuing a one-year program in the millwright trade at the College of the North Atlantic. He was not planning on returning to his hometown when he finished. He was not economically dependent on his parents but, at the time of the interview, was receiving unemployment and had a sponsorship from the government to pursue his trade. Before attending school, he worked at a construction company in Corner Brook and then went fishing in Rocky Harbour. When he was laid off, he received sponsorship and started his trade in September 2008.

Mary was a 24-year-old married mother of two children, aged 3 and 17 months from the Bonne Bay area. She was a stay at home mother, but before that she worked

several jobs in the customer service industry. She went to Academy Canada and partially completed an office administration diploma. Her husband worked full time with an internet/cable business.

Molly was a 19-year-old from Corner Brook but was studying in St. John's at Memorial University. She was in her second year of university and was pursuing a Bachelor of Arts. She also worked a part-time job in retail at 12 to 15 hours a week. She worked to pay for school but received some economic help from her parents and had student loans. She lived with four roommates but returned to Corner Brook in the summer to live with her parents and work a full-time job.

John was a 23-year-old auto mechanic who worked full time as an apprentice in Corner Brook. He earned \$9 per hour and was working towards his journeyman's certificate. When it is complete, he could earn \$22/hour. He studied his trade at the College of the North Atlantic in Stephenville Crossing. He completed a one-year course and had to work so many hours in the trade and return for further courses to earn his journeyman standing. He had been working toward this certification for three years at the time of the interview. He lived with his girlfriend and was economically independent from his family. He had several loans, which he consolidated into one loan. He paid for his trade with student loans and assistance from his parents as he was not sponsored for school. He owned a truck, car, snowmobile, motorcycle and a camper.

Joe was a 23-year-old from Corner Brook who worked full-time as a maintenance man. He graduated from high school but did not complete a law enforcement administration program at Academy Canada. He completed one semester of a two-year

program and used student loans to pay for it. He lived at home with his parents but was not dependent on them for financial support. He also owned a car.

Jennifer was a 24-year-old from Corner Brook who worked as a certified pedorthist. She had completed 6 ½ years of post-high school with an undergraduate degree in physical education and then 18 months of post graduate studies in pedorthics. She worked full-time at an orthotics clinic with a starting income of \$35,000 and a bonus related to an increase in sales over the previous year. She lived with her parents; however, she had lived in St. John's, Ontario, and Halifax while she was pursuing her education. She was economically independent from her parents but paid no rent. She was not planning on moving from home within the next 5 years. She owned her own car but owed \$31,000 in student loans and \$32,000 on a student line of credit.

Jane was a 24-year-old substitute teacher from the Bonne Bay Area. She completed her Bachelor of Education in primary education in St. John's at Memorial University but studied at Grenfell Campus for the first two years. She lived at home with her parents because she worked as a nearly full-time substitute in Bonne Bay area with a salary in the low \$30,000 range. She commuted to Corner Brook on the weekends to see her boyfriend.

Brent was a 19-year-old from a small community outside Corner Brook. He was a full-time student pursuing a two-year diploma in forestry at the College of the North Atlantic in Corner Brook with plans to transfer to the University of New Brunswick to complete a forestry degree. He also worked at Dominion (a supermarket) part-time at 20 hours per week for spending money. He planned to work the summers in the forestry

department through a student job as an introduction to his future career. His parents helped him out financially by paying for school and allowing him to live at home rent-free. He did not own a car; he just used his parents' vehicle. He did own a skidoo, however.

Bob was 23 and from a small community outside Corner Brook. He was a heavy equipment operator and had been working this trade for the last four years. He did not attend school but earned his license through on-the-job hours. He was about to become a firefighter, having completed his training through the local volunteer fire department, which he said was equivalent to six months of school training. He would start with the paid fire department as a casual worker, but eventually transition to full-time work. He lived with his parents and paid bills and rent to them. He considered himself partially independent financially from his parents. He mentioned that he could be financially independent if required. He also owned his own vehicle.

Amy was 22 years old and also from a community outside Corner Brook. She was a full-time student and worked part time (15-20 hours per week). She lived at home with her parents and was economically dependent on them but owned her own car. She was completing a Bachelor of Science at Grenfell Campus at the time of the interview.

Amanda was 21 years old and from Corner Brook. She was enrolled in the two-year adventure tourism program at the College of the North Atlantic in Corner Brook. Before going to post-secondary, she worked and then qualified to attend school through Service Canada's sponsorship program. She lived at home with her parents, upon whom she was economically dependent.

Andrew was a 19-year-old full-time student at the College of the North Atlantic in Stephenville. He was completing a 2-year program in music industry performance. He did not work during the school year but worked full-time in the summer in the Bonne Bay area where he is from. He moved to Stephenville for school and he lived with a friend in an off-campus apartment. His parents were paying for him to go to school.

4.3 Demand-Side Arguments

The following will analyze the data and test to see if these results support the perspectives of the demand-side arguments discussed in the previous chapter. These are perspectives that look to characteristics of the electorate themselves to account for their political participation. The analysis examines whether the data support the generational or new social movements' perspectives, and whether individual factors influence participants' level of political knowledge in the ways predicted.

4.3 (a) Generational arguments

One demand-side perspective focuses on generational differences between the youth of today and youth from previous generations. In brief, the approach maintains that if youth are staying in school longer and/or living at home with their parents for longer periods of time, they are not moving as quickly to that adult stage in life when political matters acquire the most salience and become more of a concern to the individual. One implication of this, say supporters of this perspective, is that they are less likely to vote.

The following will describe the characteristics of the participants relevant to this perspective.

Nine out of the fifteen participants lived at home with their parents. Bob and Jennifer claimed they could live on their own as they were employed and financially independent, but they chose to live with their parents. Tom, Brent, Amy, and Amanda were students, and all but Amanda worked part-time. Wendy was a stay-at-home mother, while Joe and Jane were employed full-time. Six participants did not live with their parents. Mary was a stay-at-home mother, Jill and John were employed full-time, and Andrew, Paul, and Molly were students. Molly was also employed part-time.

If the generational approach holds and financial and social independence fosters political participation, one would expect that the six participants living apart from their parents and/or in “grown up” circumstances would vote. John and Jill were employed full-time and lived on their own, and John was looking to buy a house in the near future. Mary and Wendy were stay-at-home mothers. Bob and Jennifer, while they lived with their parents, did so by choice. These participants were experiencing *real life*; therefore they would vote as they were now part of the *adult world*.

In contrast, the seven students would not vote. They were in school; hence they were still transitioning to the *adult life*. Joe and Jane would not vote because while they were employed, they still lived at home like children, so they probably did not vote.

The actual results of the study broke down as follows: Only three of the six participants living independently (John, Bob, and Jennifer) had actually voted before. Bob and Jennifer had voted in multiple elections, including the October 2008 election, and

John had voted in other elections but not in October 2008. Jill, Mary, and Wendy, on the other hand, had never cast a ballot.

Among the nine who still lived at home, five (Joe, Jane, Brent, Paul, and Andrew) had never voted. Three of these were students, and Joe and Jane were employed but lived at home with their parents. Tom, Molly, and Amy were all students and they had all voted in multiple elections including October 2008. Interestingly, they also worked part-time jobs. The final participant I predicted would not vote, Amanda, had voted in the past but not in October 2008. The results are illustrated in the following table:

Table 4-2. Living Situation

Voting Behaviour	Participant Name	Living at home/ dependent on family	Living on one's own/ "grown up" circumstances
Ever Voted	Tom	X	
	Molly	X	
	John		X
	Jennifer		X
	Bob		X
	Amy	X	
	Amanda	X	
Total		4	3
Never Voted	Wendy		X
	Jill		X
	Paul	X	
	Mary		X
	Joe	X	
	Jane	X	
	Brent	X	
	Andrew	X	
Total		5	3

Overall, the generational perspective predicted 8 of the 15 participants' voting behaviours. However, in seven cases, the predictions were wrong, particularly those expected of the student participants. It was assumed students would not vote because they had not transitioned to adulthood. It is true that Brent's voting behaviour supported this;

indeed he explained his not voting using this reasoning. Brent chose not to vote in the October 2008 federal election and thought that he would want to vote in the future when he had “settled down” by getting a job, buying a house, or as he said a “mature sort of lifestyle.” Yet, in my small study, four of the seven students had voted.

In examining those cases where the participants were not students, the generational account, as highlighted by the table, did not hold in three instances. Jill lived on her own and was employed full-time; I predicted she would have voted, but she had never voted. Also, the two stay-at-home mothers, who could be considered to be in the *adult phase* of life, had never voted.

I would conclude that the predictions of the generational arguments were not borne out in my study. With no clear support for or against the generational perspective, let us examine if individual factors play a role in influencing the levels of political knowledge of the participants.

4.3 (b) *Individual factors:*

4.3 (b-1) *Education levels*

It is argued by those who examine the influence of individual factors on the participation of youth in politics that university graduates and university students are more likely to vote. Voter decline, these scholars say, is primarily found among those without a university education (Gidengil et al. 2004). The following will examine how education

levels and levels of political knowledge played a role in the participants' voting behaviour.

To attain employment with career advancement to improve one's economic prospects, post-secondary education is essential. However, since the rise of neo-liberalism, education funds have been cut back by the federal government, especially in the 1990s. In response to the cuts, universities raised tuition rates to offset the spending gap. Hence, many youth cannot afford to pursue a post-secondary education, so their prospects of finding employment are bleak.

Recalling our discussion in the previous chapter, Newfoundland and Labrador has the lowest proportion of adults between 25 and 64 in Canada with a university degree (14 percent), while it also has the highest proportion of high school dropouts at 26 percent of the population (Statistics Canada 2008b). Approximately 22 percent have a college diploma and 20 percent have a high school diploma (Statistics Canada 2008b).

While the province has enjoyed a reduction in tuition and then a tuition freeze, rural youth still face the financial burden of having to relocate to St. John's, Corner Brook, or cities outside of the province to pursue a university education. This burden can place rural youth at a disadvantage in obtaining an education as youth in St. John's or Corner Brook do not have to relocate. Also, families living outside of St. John's experience an unemployment rate that is almost double that of St. John's (Statistics Canada cited in Newfoundland & Labrador Statistics Agency 2008b). This may impact their ability to help finance their child's education.

In applying the research of those who examine the influence of individual factors on the participation of youth in politics, the following predicts which participants in my study, based on their education level, would vote and which ones would not. There were seven students, three in university (Tom, Molly, and Amy) and four in college (Paul, Brent, Andrew, and Amanda). I would predict the students would vote as the literature argues students are more likely to vote than those without post-secondary education.

There were two participants who completed college (John and Jill) and two who completed university (Jennifer and Jane). As they all had completed a post-secondary degree/diploma and were working, I would predict they would vote. Of the remaining four participants, two had some post-secondary and were stay-at-home mothers (Wendy and Mary), one had some post-secondary and was working full-time (Joe), and the final one was working full-time but had no post-secondary education (Bob).

The following tables illustrate how the voting behaviour actually broke down among the participants:

Table 4-3. Education Levels

Voting Behaviour	Participant Name	Post-secondary completed	Some post-secondary	No post-secondary
Ever Voted	Tom		X	
	Molly		X	
	John	X		
	Jennifer	X		
	Bob			X
	Amy		X	
	Amanda		X	
Total		2	4	1
Never Voted	Wendy		X	
	Jill	X		
	Paul		X	
	Mary		X	
	Joe		X	
	Jane	X		
	Brent		X	
	Andrew		X	
Total		2	6	0

Table 4-4. Type of Completed Post-Secondary Education

Voting Behaviour	Participant Name	University Completed	College Completed
Ever Voted	John		X
	Jennifer	X	
Never Voted	Jill		X
	Jane	X	

Table 4-5. Some post-secondary education completed

Voting Behaviour	Participant Name	Some university completed	Some college completed
Ever Voted	Tom	X	
	Molly	X	
	Amy	X	
	Amanda		X
Total		3	1
Never Voted	Wendy	X	
	Paul		X
	Mary		X
	Joe		X
	Brent		X
	Andrew		X
Total		1	5

When I examined the data more closely, I found the argument that the independent variable of education influences the dependent variable of voting behaviour is only partially supported among my participants. The tables illustrate that all those who voted, with the exception of one, had at least some post-secondary education. It is interesting to note that university-educated participants were more likely to vote than those who were college-educated. 66 percent of university-educated participants had voted, while only 25 percent of college-educated participants had done so. This supports Gidengil et al.'s (2004) argument that those without a university education are less likely to vote.

Among those who worked and had a post-secondary degree or diploma, one university graduate and one college graduate had voted in past elections, while one university graduate and one college graduate had never voted. One person who worked and had no post-secondary education voted, while the two stay-at-home mothers had never voted. The data demonstrates that Gidengil et al.'s (2004) argument is inconclusive.

So what other social factors play a role in voter turnout? Let us now turn to the levels of political knowledge and examine what role it may have played in the participants' voting behaviour.

4.3 (b-2) *Government? What's that? Exploring political knowledge.*

Political knowledge includes being familiar with current political issues, where the parties stand, and who are the leaders of the respective parties (Gidengil et al. 2004). Scholars have argued that voting has declined among youth because government issues tend to be covered by the traditional news media, newspaper and television, and youth pay less attention to these forms of media (Turcotte 2007; O'Neill 2007). Others highlight the fact that one needs money and/or time to buy the newspaper or access to the internet to educate oneself on political issues (Gidengil et al. 2004), and those financial barriers can limit the access of youth to these forms of media.

In the interviews, participants were asked about their knowledge about how governments function, such as how laws were passed and how policy decisions were made. They were also asked about what they knew about the different political parties and how participants obtained their news and information. The following will examine

political knowledge and whether it affects voting behaviour. I break down the independent variables into two sub-sections – the function of government and the political parties – to provide further clarification of the analysis.

i. The function of government

When I asked the general question, “how does the government work,” the answers were surprising. Seven of the fifteen participants could not clearly answer the question. I categorised the participants’ responses into three categories: no or low level of knowledge, medium level of knowledge, and high level of knowledge.

Of the eight remaining participants, four had very basic knowledge. Molly said she had some understanding of how politics operated from a university introductory course in political science, but she did not elaborate on what she knew. Jane, drawing upon what she remembered from a high school civics class, only understood the role of the Prime Minister. As a substitute teacher with a primary/elementary education degree, she was currently teaching a class learning this material so she was beginning to learn how the government worked.

Amy knew there was a Prime Minister, a Premier, and different political parties. When asked if she knew how laws were passed in Canada, she said she knew more about American politics than Canadian politics and explained some of the basics of the American system. She did not know how Canada’s system was structured, despite discussing the subject with political science majors. She knew there was a Prime Minister and a Cabinet, but could not understand the vote of confidence. She also did not

understand Canada's *first-past-the-post* electoral system. Her political science course appeared to have helped her better understand the American political system rather than the Canadian one. She found it disturbing that she was so "unknowledgeable about the subject."

Amy's responses are interesting because another participant, Amanda, was also following the United States presidential election. She was interested because it was the first time there was a female and a black candidate vying for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination.

The remaining four participants had better knowledge of how our government worked. Tom had learned about the three levels of government (municipal, provincial and federal), how Parliament was structured, and the role of the Governor General from the political science courses he had taken in university. Brent knew how bills were passed and policies were created because it was required for his forestry program.

Both Bob and John understood the electoral process of *first-past-the-post* and how bills were passed in Parliament. Bob added that he was interested because he wants "to know what they're doing. I'm paying taxes and I'd like to know that whoever is in charge of the tax dollars is going to look after it." The following table highlights the participants' responses.

Table 4-6. Level of Political Knowledge: Function of Government

Voting Behaviour	Participant Name	High Level of Knowledge	Medium Level of Knowledge	No or Low Level of Knowledge
Ever Voted	Tom	X		
	Molly			X
	John	X		
	Jennifer			X
	Bob	X		
	Amy		X	
	Amanda			X
Total		3	1	3
Never Voted	Wendy			X
	Jill			X
	Paul			X
	Mary ¹⁶			
	Joe			X
	Jane			X
	Brent		X	
	Andrew			X
Total		0	1	7

ii. Political Parties

I then asked the participants what they knew about the political parties that were part of the federal political landscape. The purpose of the questions was to determine if they knew the names of the parties, an idea of what their platforms were and if they knew the names of any of the leaders. The answers broke down into three categories: no or little

¹⁶ Was not asked about the function of government

knowledge (i.e. able to only name two political parties but no knowledge beyond that), some knowledge (could name three or more political parties), or fairly knowledgeable (name all the political parties and describe where the parties stand).

Nine of the 15 participants – more than half of my respondents – had little or no knowledge of the political parties. Wendy, Jill, Joe, and Amanda could not name any of the federal political parties, and one believed Danny Williams was Prime Minister. When I explained he was the Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador, she said she did not know who the Prime Minister was. Two participants knew Stephen Harper was Prime Minister but did not know what political party he represented. Jane, Brent, Paul, Mary, and Jennifer had some very basic knowledge of these matters; they were able to name two political parties, but could not explain party positions. Four participants, Andrew, Bob, John and Amy, had some knowledge in that they could name three or more political parties.

Only *two* participants, Molly and Tom, were able to name three or more political parties and discuss what each party represented in some detail. Tom was able to describe each party's political stance and knew, for example, that the Conservative Party promoted more traditional values while the Liberals were more to the left side of the political spectrum, as was the NDP. Molly's opinion was that there were no longer many differences between the parties and that "they were all straying away from what they really stand for because they want to please the voters." The following table highlights participants' responses.

Table 4-7. Level of Political Knowledge: Political Parties

Voting Behaviour	Participant Name	Fairly Knowledgeable	Some Knowledge	No or little Knowledge
Ever Voted	Tom	X		
	Molly	X		
	John		X	
	Jennifer			X
	Bob		X	
	Amy		X	
	Amanda			X
Total		2	3	2
Never Voted	Wendy			X
	Jill			X
	Paul			X
	Mary			X
	Joe			X
	Jane			X
	Brent			X
	Andrew		X	
Total		0	1	7

As referenced in previous chapters, it is suggested that the more political knowledge a person has, the more likely s/he is to vote. After detailing the participants' levels of knowledge of the function of government and of the political parties, the political knowledge perspective would make the following predictions concerning the participants' voting behaviour. Tom was the only participant who was fairly knowledgeable of both the function of government and the political parties, so it is predicted he would vote, as would Molly, Amy, Bob, and John because they had at least basic knowledge in both categories. While Jane and Brent had knowledge of the functioning government, they had little to no knowledge of the political parties, so it is predicted they would not vote. Andrew would not vote as he had no knowledge of the function of government and only basic knowledge of the political parties. The remaining

seven participants – Mary¹⁷, Wendy, Jill, Paul, Joe, Jennifer and Amanda – would not vote because they had no knowledge of the functions of government nor the political parties.

As the tables in the subsections of *function of government* and *political parties* highlight, there is evidence that supports the argument that youth voting behaviour is linked to levels of knowledge. It was predicted that 10 participants would not vote, and indeed 8 of the youth had never voted, confirming the expectation that possession of political knowledge will increase a person's proclivity to vote. Among these 10 participants, there were 7 who were classified as having either little or no knowledge of the political parties, as well as little knowledge about the federal government (Wendy, Jill, Jane, Joe, Amanda, Paul and Jennifer). Jane said she did not vote because she did not follow politics or understand politics. Her reason for not voting is best illustrated by Andrew's statement:

You have to know a certain amount about what's going on and [who] the parties are and who's running and stuff to vote because you can't form an opinion if you don't know what's, who's right and who's wrong.

Before examining those who had voted, there were two participants whose responses were very interesting about why they did not vote. While Brent had no knowledge of the political parties, he was quite knowledgeable about the functions of government and he *chose* not to vote. The 2008 federal election was the first election in which he was legally allowed to vote, but to him voting was a right he chose not to

¹⁷ Mary was only questioned about her level of knowledge of the political parties and not of the function of government.

exercise. He was satisfied with the government's performance and felt that there were no issues that affected him or were important enough to make him go to the ballot box. He summarised it in the following statement:

I'm not one of these people that all like going around and whine about this not being done, and that not being done, but I mean those are people that should go out and vote for and either it goes through, it goes through or not like, I'm not going around complaining about what this guy is doing.

Brent was not the only participant who chose not to vote. Joe did not vote because he does not believe the government acts in the best interests of its citizens. He believes that the government engages in "inside *jobby* stuff."¹⁸ However, he is one of the participants who admitted to having no knowledge of how government functions or who the political parties are.

The political knowledge perspective had predicted that five participants, John, Bob, Molly, Amy, and Tom would vote as they all had knowledge of the political parties and how the government worked. It was correct that all had voted before confirming a positive relationship between political knowledge and youth voting behaviour. Interestingly, all five had voted before the Federal General Election of 2008, and all but John voted in that election. John chose not to vote in the 2008 election, despite having voted in previous elections, because he did not feel any party connected with him or encouraged him to vote. This alienation will be further explored in later sections of the chapter.

¹⁸ Joe's reasons for not voting also suggest he is alienated from the government. This will be further explored in section 4.4 (a).

There were two cases where it was predicted the participants would not vote, but in actuality, they did. Amanda had voted in a previous election, and Jennifer had voted in several elections, including the election of October 2008.

Jennifer and Amanda, neither of whom was well-informed about the candidates or the political parties, had both voted, and their decisions on who to vote for were identical: they voted for the same candidate as their parents. Jennifer had voted in the October 2008 federal election and in previous elections because her parents asked her to vote. Amanda had only voted once, shortly after she turned 18 (she is now 21). She could not remember the election in which she had cast her vote, but she said she had looked forward to voting. She described it as:

Just a feeling that I could get out and vote and do it for the first time. It's like almost a big thing to me I guess, but after I done it the first time I was like okay, that done and over with, now I voted and kinda just never done it again.

Overall, the data supports the argument that youth voting behaviour is linked to knowledge levels. This can be further supported in the knowledge that Brent¹⁹ and John²⁰ had chosen not to vote despite having some political knowledge. This suggests an alienation from the democratic process which will be discussed in section 4.4. (a).

iii. News and Information

Of course, in order to have political knowledge, one must collect it from somewhere. Scholars who examine individual factors of voters argue that voting behaviour is

¹⁹ Brent was only eligible to vote in the 2008 election.

²⁰ John had voted in previous elections but had chosen not to vote in 2008.

influenced by political knowledge, which is in turn obtained through the traditional media or access to the internet (Gidengil 2004, Turcotte 2007). The following examines where the participants obtained their news.

Table 4-8. News and Information

Voting Behaviour	Participant Name	Television	Newspaper	Internet-based news sites	Radio	Internet
Ever Voted	Tom	X	X	X		
	Molly		X	X		
	John			X	X	
	Jennifer					
	Bob	X	X			
	Amy	X	X	X		
	Amanda	X				X
Total		4	4	4	1	1
Never Voted	Wendy	X	X	X		
	Jill	X			X	
	Paul	X			X	X
	Mary	X		X	X	
	Joe	X				
	Jane	X				
	Brent	X			X	
	Andrew	X				X
Total		8	1	2	4	2

As the table highlights, 12 of 15 participants watched the news on television. Some participants did not specify what programs they watched, while eight participants watched the supertime news broadcasts on NTV or CBC.

Two participants, Paul and Joe, watched the American news channel CNN to obtain their news. Their reasons for watching are interesting. Joe only watched what he considered interesting news “stuff,” such as items related to crime, conspiracy, and money. Paul watched CNN because “they’re talking smack about each other, I just like it, I like watching it, I find it exciting.”

There were six participants who read the paper, and they all watched the news on TV with the exception of one. There were also five participants who listened to the radio and watched the news on television; however, they did not read newspapers.

When it comes to the Internet, 13 participants used it for news and searching out information. Six respondents went to news websites, such as CBC, MSNBC, MSN, and newspaper websites, one person went specifically to government websites, and another read blogs. One participant used Facebook to find out information. Two participants used Wikipedia, but one of them, a university student, said she always verified the information she read on that particular site to ensure accuracy. One participant used the internet, but if he was looking for information about something local, he would seek out the answers from his professors or a friend.

Of the two who did not use the internet, one said she relied on her parents and her boyfriend for information. The other participant said he only read books on white supremacy or watched television shows about crime, conspiracies, or money. The use of Facebook will be discussed in the New Social Movements section.

Overall, I would argue that there seems to be little relationship between voting behaviour and the use of media. Those who voted watched the news and used the internet, as did those who did not vote. Of the seven who had ever voted, they were more likely to read the newspaper and visit internet-based news site than those who had never voted. It is interesting to note that all those who did not vote did watch the television news, but did not do so to acquire political knowledge, as was demonstrated in the previous sections.

I would conclude there is some evidence that the levels of political knowledge are important in voter turnout, as was demonstrated in my study. Overall, the majority of the participants had little knowledge about Canada's federal government and the political parties whose elected members govern the country. However, those who were fairly knowledgeable about the function of government and its political parties were more likely to vote, as highlighted in the data. Significantly, those who had the least knowledge were the least likely to have voted in previous elections.

In analyzing the data, I would argue the individual factors play a small role in influencing levels of political knowledge. For example, Tom, Amy, and Molly were all university students who were knowledgeable about the political parties and the functions of government. On the other hand, there were university graduates and students who had little to no political knowledge while Bob, a working youth with no post-secondary education, had one of the highest levels of political knowledge among the participants. All of the participants had access to the internet and 13 used it to seek out news and/or information. I would argue that access to the internet does not have an effect on voter turnout as all the participants used the internet. It highlights the weaknesses of Gidengil et al. (2004)'s argument because it does not seem to be access to the internet that is the problem, but the willingness of youth to actually search out information and news about the government and political parties.

Of the participants, 13 (87 percent) utilised traditional media, such as televised news broadcasts and newspapers, to obtain news and information. While Turcotte (2007) has claimed that youth no longer did this and that was why youth voter turnout had

declined, in my analysis, this is not the case. I would argue that it is only to particular content in the news that youth pay particular attention. I make this argument because if political parties and the government conveyed their messages and information, it is not reaching the youth using these media because as seen earlier, most had little to no knowledge of how government functions or who the political parties were.

4.3 (c) *Am I Political or Not? Exploring New Social Movements*

Gauthier (2004) argues that youth are very involved politically if the concept of political participation is expanded to include civic and social participation. I explored how the participants defined political activity and politics and if their conceptualizations of these phenomena only included actions in formal settings, such as the House of Parliament and casting one's vote in an election, or if they held expanded definitions that included involvement in New Social Movements or protest. I then explored whether they considered these acts as political activity and if this concurred with their definitions of politics and political activity. I also focused on their use of Facebook, as many different political groups and New Social Movements promote themselves through groups on Facebook. I will determine if these youths' concept of political activity, politics, and their participation in Facebook has influenced their voting behaviour. The following table is a synopsis of participants' definitions of both politics and political activity.

Table 4-9. Formal vs. Informal politics and political activity

Voting Behaviour	Participant Name	Definition of Politics			Definition of Political Activity		
		Formal	Informal	Both	Formal	Informal	Both
Ever Voted	Tom	X			X		
	Molly			X	X		
	John			X	X		
	Jennifer	X			X		
	Bob			X	X		
	Amy	X			X		
	Amanda	X			X		
Total	7	4	0	3	7	0	0
Never Voted	Wendy			X			X
	Jill	X			X		
	Paul	X			X		
	Mary	X			X		
	Joe	X			X		
	Jane	X			X		
	Brent	X					X
	Andrew	X			X		
Total	8	7	0	1	6	0	2

4.3 (c-1) *Formal vs. informal politics and political activity*

When I asked participants to define political activity, 11 understood it as only occurring in a formal setting. They considered “politics” to include political candidates who were campaigning during an election, those who are politically knowledgeable and voted, and politicians who were trying to better their communities. Here are a couple of participants’ statements:

[the politicians] who’ll be more politically active would be attending all of the votes and Parliament or House of Assembly and going into their riding knocking on the doors and talking to people and finding out what the issues are and trying to come up with resolutions and things like that.

This was followed by his definition of how ordinary citizens can be politically active:

First step would be to vote and if they’re voting and if they’re following it and know what’s going on and know who they voted for, have spoke to them or have issues and then brought them forward, basically the more involved you are I guess the more politically active you are.

Political activity is “involvement in the issues around them [the people] and trying to vote for what’s right and what’s wrong” (Jennifer). Andrew defined political activity as people who are interested and knowledgeable about politics and “not just current events but how politics work and the history of it and that someone who’d be more or less taking a course in something like that or have an extensive knowledge in politics.”

Only four participants saw political activity taking place in both formal and informal settings. All four mentioned that it involved individuals who cared about their communities and wanted to improve their communities. Here are some of their comments:

Political activity is defined as “any individual or group, who takes a stand for the good of the country or region or province.” This participant felt this ‘stand’ could include petitions, rallies or work strikes; “anyway to get people’s attention to better the community.”

[A person who is politically active has] done their research, they’re well-educated in what’s going on, they’re aware, they care about what’s going on which is the most important part.

When asked to define politics, only Brent considered it to take place in both formal and informal settings, such as in the workplace. He provided the examples of employees competing with each other for a new job, befriending the employer, or taking advantage of any opportunity to get oneself “ahead of the game.” Jane, Jennifer, and Wendy never clearly defined politics, but their explanations did illuminate opposing views. Jennifer simply described politics as “a mess,” and Jane viewed it as “bickering and arguing.” Wendy described it as a positive phenomenon that people should be knowledgeable about and aware of, as it affects their lives. She did lean towards a formal

description of politics when she mentioned that money, finances and doing things to better the economy were political.

The remaining 11 participants all understood politics as occurring only in a formal setting. They defined politics as referring to the activities of the government, including governing bodies at the school level, and elected officials, and explained that politics involved political parties making the decisions that affected a community, region or country. Here are some participants' definitions of politics:

[It was] elections, laws being passed, different things like that.

[Politics are the] people who are elected to represent the large number of people.

[Politics is] the art of governing our country.

[Politics is] basically the way the government like interacts with the people and how they listen to the people. It's like whether or not they do listen to the people and what they want to do about issues, whether they be current, past or future.

Most of the participants considered politics and political activity as taking place in a formal setting. This suggests there is no support for the argument that NSMs are what youth turn to rather than vote as they do not classify it as a formal means of politics. An analysis of the responses about involvement in informal politics and whether they considered it to be political will help further explore this relationship.

4.3 (c-2) *Involvement in voluntary associations*

Many of the participants had volunteered as children in events such as UNICEF's Halloween penny drive. There was only one participant who reported no volunteer experience. For my analysis, I have omitted these volunteer opportunities because it is questionable whether the participants had volunteered or were told to participate by their

parents. I also omitted volunteer work that was compulsory for school programs because the participant was required to do the unpaid work for school credit. The volunteer work considered in this analysis thus includes any volunteer involvement from high school to the time of the interviews.

I categorized the volunteering opportunities into one-time events and ongoing commitments. One-time events can include sporting events, fundraisers, or seasonal events. Ongoing commitments would include coaching sports teams, volunteering for a non-profit organization or other ongoing volunteer services. From this, I determined what volunteering opportunities could be considered “political.” I considered any organisation to be “political” if it was a political party or if the participant did something with the purpose of enacting change at the political/institutional level. Only Molly fit into this category, as she had had volunteered with the New Democratic Party. When it came to donations, 13 of the participants had donated money to an organization, but no one had donated to anything that would be considered a political cause.

4.3 (c-3) *Petitions*

There were two participants, Joe and Jill, who were not asked this question. Of the remaining 13, 7 had signed petitions in the past and 6 had not. Brent, who had never signed a petition, said the following: “[he was] not one of those people that are like going around like you know rallying trying to get people to sign stuff” (Brent). However, he would sign a petition if he thought it was a good cause and there was an effort being made to acquire signatures. Although he expressed the following view regarding his signature:

“what’s one more signature, right” (Brent). Wendy had also never signed a petition, but like Brent said she would sign a petition if she was interested in the issue and believed in it.

Molly had signed several petitions, the most recent being an online American petition for the ONE campaign. This petition campaigned for President Obama to provide more funding for AIDS research. Significantly, Molly was one of the three participants who saw political activity as taking place in both informal and formal settings. Paul had also signed a petition that asked government to establish health board regulations for tattoo shops, as there are none in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. He did not follow up on the petition to see if it was successful or not. Tom had signed petitions supporting tuition freezes, but he had also signed petitions without even knowing what they supported. Amy had also signed petitions to lower post-secondary tuition fees, as she felt they were too high. Mary had signed petitions in the past, the last one two years before the date of the interview. She only vaguely remembered what it was about. Andrew had signed a petition, but it was not political in nature – it was to bring back a TV show that was now off the air. Both John and Bob had signed petitions in the past but could not remember what they were about.

According to some scholars, signing a petition can be understood as a political act, but none of the participants saw this as political activity. The only exception is John, as he had defined political activity as “any individual or group, who takes a stand for the good of the country or region or province.” This ‘stand’ can include petitions, rallies, or unions going on strike, or “any way to get people’s attention to better the community” (John).

Yet John could not remember what issues were represented in the petitions that he had signed in the past.

The data, similar to the data presented in the section on formal and informal politics and political activity, demonstrates little support for the NSM perspective that youth are politically engaged outside of the formal setting. This is evident in the following section on protests.

4.3 (c-4) *Protests*

Only 10 participants were asked if they had participated in a protest; 5 had participated and 5 had not.

Molly had participated in a protest in November 2008 against the media-blackout in Burma. She had also participated in the Corner Brook Women's Centre's "Take Back the Night" walk. The remaining four participants had all joined protests in Junior High when the Western School District School Board was restructuring the schools in Corner Brook. They had all walked out of the school in response to the restructuring. Joe had supported the protest and walked out with the other students. Bob also participated, despite the fact that he felt that it was too late to change the School Board's decision. Amy and Amanda had also walked out of school; however, their motivation was not to support the protest but to have a day off from school.

Overall, the protest – with the exception of Molly – did not translate into continued political activity for the participants, nor did it increase their political

knowledge. The data does not support the literature's argument that youth are not turning away from the formal realm of politics, including voting, to engage in informal politics.

The following table highlights the participation of each youth in the activities of volunteering, signing a petition, participating in a protest, or using Facebook. The use of Facebook will be further broken down in the next section.

Table 4-10. Participation in a Political Activity

Voting Behaviour	Participant Name	Volunteer		Signed a petition	Participated in a Protest	Used Facebook
		Political	Non-political			
Ever Voted	Tom		X	X		X
	Molly	X		X	X	X
	John		X	X		X
	Jennifer		X	N/A		X
	Bob		X	X	X	X
	Amy		X	X	X	X
	Amanda		X	N/A	X	X
Total		1	6	5	4	7
Never Voted	Wendy		X			X
	Jill		X	N/A	N/A	X
	Paul		X	X	N/A	X
	Mary		X	X		X
	Joe		X	N/A	X	X
	Jane		X		N/A	X
	Brent		X		N/A	X
	Andrew		X	X	N/A	X
Total		0	8	3	1	8

4.3 (c-5) *Surfing the net & Facebook*

All of the participants used Facebook, and 13 had joined different Facebook groups in the past. Brent had not joined any groups, as he considered Facebook to serve the same purposes as e-mail. Jane did not mention if she had joined any groups and was not asked. Finally, Bob could not remember the groups s/he had joined. The following table highlights the types of groups participants had joined.

Table 4-11. Types of Facebook Groups

Voting Behaviour	Participant Name	Political	Classifieds	Memorials	Entertainment	Awareness	Events
Ever Voted	Tom	X			X		
	Molly	X					
	John					X	
	Jennifer				X		
	Bob	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Amy	X					
	Amanda	X					
Total		4	0	0	2	1	0
Never Voted	Wendy		X	X	X		
	Jill	X	X				X
	Paul	X			X		
	Mary			X			
	Joe				X		
	Jane	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Brent	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Andrew	X					
Total		3	2	2	3	0	1

Seven participants belonged to groups such as the classifieds, memorial sites, entertainment, or local events groups. The remaining five participants belonged to groups that could be considered political because they advocated for change or supported or opposed decisions made by the government. I will now explore these in more detail.

Jill and Andrew had joined a group that supported a man who was upset with the City of Corner Brook's dog pound. The City's animal control division had found the dog wandering the streets and brought it back to the pound. The man did not have enough money to pay the fine that had been incurred for letting his dog roam free, and consequently the dog was euthanized. A Facebook group was started to support the man because the man felt that the dog was only euthanized because it was a pit bull. The group was meant to raise awareness of animal cruelty. There was no petition on the website, but joining the group could be considered a political act as it questioned the decision of a government agency, a municipal division of animal control.

Paul had joined a group that supported the seal hunt; however, when asked, he did not see his support as political. Although he was part of the group, he said he was not familiar with the group. He supports the seal hunt because his dad is a seal hunter and it is part of his family's income. Paul was not familiar with the proposed ban that was put forward to the European Union and is now in place, but he thought the Newfoundland government did a good job supporting the seal hunt when asked. He mentioned that Danny Williams wears a seal fur coat.

Amy had joined the Newfoundland and Labrador Progressive Conservative Party's Facebook group. She joined the website during the provincial elections and found it helpful because it linked to the party's website, provided information on their candidates, and reminded people to vote. She voted in that election as well as in the 2008 Federal Election.

Amanda joined a group that could be considered political because it opposed the concept of running power lines through Gros Morne National Park, a government-designated and recognized area and a UNESCO heritage site. She joined because the issue was discussed in her classes in the adventure tourism program. When asked if she was actually against the development, she answered she was undecided. She could understand the need for the development to go ahead because she saw it as a need for communication, but at the same time she could see that the park was a beautiful place and she did not agree with "putting big like city I guess type things in it I guess." When asked if she understood the Facebook group as a way to voice that discontent, she said that her schooling had taught her to be aware of the issue and that is why she joined. If she had

not taken this program, then she would have ignored the group request to join. She feels this group will raise awareness only to those who are interested in the issue.

It is interesting to note that of the six voting participants, four of them did belong to political groups on Facebook, whereas only three of the six that had never voted belonged to such political groups. This may suggest a weak relationship between the use of social media and voting behaviour; however, further study would be required to make such a determination.

Overall, most participants had taken part in some form of informal political activity, but they may not view it in this light. While they had participated in protests in junior high, signed petitions, or joined groups on Facebook, they did not follow up to see if these activities had any impact on the issue in question. Turcotte (2007) argues that many political groups use these forms of media to encourage political activity, but the responses of these participants do not support the argument that they are politically active through the internet. This may be because for many of them, their concepts of politics and political activity are restricted to the formal setting. Anything outside of formal politics they would not consider “political.”

Most participants have very little political knowledge, if any, which could also affect their perception of whether their activities could be understood as political. If they do not understand how government and political parties function or the role they play in the everyday, it would be hard for them to see how voicing your opinion, starting an information campaign through Facebook, or signing a petition can affect change.

In summary, the participants' responses aligned with the demand-side arguments in some respects but not others. The generational perspective that delayed maturity has influenced voting behaviour was not supported in my findings. However, there were weak relationships found among the individual factors, such as the type of education participants were pursuing. Of the six participants who were pursuing or had completed a university education, four had voted. Among those pursuing or had completed a college education, only two of the eight participants had voted. However, the education levels did not correlate with the levels of political knowledge the participants possessed. As discussed, political knowledge appears to have a stronger influence on voter behaviour. There was no conclusive evidence established to support the influence of demand-side arguments, so let us turn to supply-side arguments to see if the participants' responses are more suited to this perspective.

4.4 Supply-Side Arguments

The following data will be used to evaluate the supply-side arguments discussed in the theory chapter. In brief, this perspective focuses on the role that politics, the government, and politicians have played in shaping people's propensity to vote. Hay (2008) argues that government and its politicians are eschewing responsibility for problems that citizens face (such as the sluggish economy and its effects on the labour force, or their lack of action on climate change and protecting the environment) and blaming them on globalization. As a result, voters, including youth, now see politicians and governments as incapable of helping them. Some may become entirely disengaged from the political process. To test this hypothesis among my respondents, I will explore whether they feel represented by or alienated from the government and politicians, whether they feel that if they were to vote, their vote would count, and whether they feel they are adequately represented by their Member of Parliament (MP) or ignored, perhaps in favour of other age groups. I also explore their opinions of politicians and governments, including their impressions of politicians' motives for running for office and whether it matters who is in power.

4.4 (a) Representation/Alienation

In this section, I explore some of the issues that affect youth, such as education and employment. I then examine whether they believe the government focuses and effectively deals with these issues or whether the government and its politicians present itself to these

participants as incapable of working on these issues. The following table highlights the issues that the research participants discussed in the interviews:

Table 4-12. Issues pertaining to youth

Voting Behaviour	Participant Name	Employment	Education	Health Care	Environment	Price of Gas
Ever Voted	Tom	X	X			
	Molly		X			
	John		X			X
	Jennifer		X			
	Bob					
	Amy		X	X		
	Amanda				X	
Total		1	5	1	1	1
Never Voted	Wendy				X	
	Jill		X			
	Paul	X				
	Mary	X	X			
	Joe	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Jane	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Brent	X				
	Andrew	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total		3	2	0	1	0

Four participants (Brent, Paul, Mary, and Tom) identified employment as an important issue. Both Tom and Brent felt that the federal government could do more since they, along with Paul, wanted to remain in the province and work when they finished their education. Tom was frustrated that one can obtain an education in Newfoundland, but not employment. Brent discussed the outmigration from the province to Alberta and felt the federal government should allocate more money to the province to create jobs. He complained that federal government officials did not focus on the issue. Tom described the attitude of the Canadian government towards the Newfoundland economy as “she’s gone b’ye, she’s gone.”

Paul felt that most of the employment opportunities in this province were for middle-aged people with their journeymen papers with the result that apprentices were at a disadvantage in the provincial labour market. He felt this was only a problem in Newfoundland and believed that, in other provinces, there were plenty of opportunities for apprentices. This reinforces Henn, Weinstein, and Wring's (2004) as well as Adsett's (2003) perspectives. When asked if the federal government could do anything about it, Paul did not respond with an answer about the federal government; instead he focused on solutions the provincial government could provide in helping apprentices find employment such as forcing employers to hire apprentices.

Mary was concerned about seasonal employment and wanted the government to help small businesses more during the tourism season. The available wage subsidy programs were not adequate. Aside from employment derived from the tourism industry, Mary wanted the federal government to focus on the fishery. She felt they were trying to take away the locals' livelihood by regulating the personal cod fishery, only allowing residents to fish cod 10 days per year for personal use. She thought that the government should focus on the bigger boats in the commercial fishery and that the changes the government was currently making to the fishing industry were for the worse. She said "the boats would be catching more but you know the fishermen know that there's fish out there but the guys in Ottawa are saying that there's no fish."

Another concern for Mary was the Employment Insurance system and the need for the payments to be increased. She also had problems with how Service Canada defined her local area. When Mary filed her E.I. claim, the department included Corner Brook as

her local area to search for employment, even though she lived in a rural area 90 minutes from Corner Brook. She was frustrated when they questioned why she was not taking jobs in Corner Brook and commuting daily from Woody Point. Mary's experiences and perspectives reinforce the supply-side perspective that rural youth feel alienated by the government because the latter do not understand the reality of her living in an isolated, rural community where access to Corner Brook is challenging.

Seven of the fifteen participants were concerned about education - in particular, interest rates and tuition costs. While education is a provincial responsibility, it is the federal government that transfers billions of dollars to the provinces to administer education programs. Molly and Jill were concerned about the interest rates on student loans and supported the elimination of such interest rates as it would amount to "five years taken off your payment, which is a lot of money - like thousands of dollars." They both felt the government was capable of eliminating interest rates and that it had started to focus on the issue.

The participants advocated for tuition freezes and/or reductions as they found current tuition fees a burden. Jennifer had attended Memorial University, which she said had reasonable rates, but when she went to Ontario for school, she had to pay a lot of money for her education. Amy made an interesting point of wanting lower tuition, but phrased it as getting a "high quality of education without having to pay an arm and a leg for it." As a student at Memorial University, which has one of the lowest tuition fees in the country, she felt there was a need for "Memorial to be recognized as a valid university

... a lot of people believe that it is a lower level of education which really it isn't, it's just you know more cheaper."

Mary and John had discussed the issues they had with student loans. Mary discussed how difficulties with student loans had resulted in her not completing her academic program. One semester, her loan was three months late, making her life difficult financially. When she completed the course component of her program, she needed one more loan to help her through the work term, and student loans refused to lend her the money. John hinted that he had trouble repaying his loan in the past: "I pretty well got my student loan under control now, but it was at one point, like within the past couple of years, it has been a big issue."

When the participants were asked if the federal government focused on the issue of high tuition rates, only Tom felt they had. In reality, it is the provincial government that implemented the tuition freeze, not the federal government. Yet, Tom also pointed out that they ignored students' cost of living. Jennifer felt the provincial government did focus on this issue but the federal government did not; as the only help it provided was the millennium scholarships.

When asked if he felt that the government had the capacity to deal with these issues, John felt that they could not because the economy was not doing well, so there were no funds to help. Amy felt the government ignored the costs of getting a university education. Whether or not the government was willing to pay attention, she felt that the petitions that students signed were "so small and minute I don't really think would even affect the politicians unless it's big corporations or bigger universities or I mean millions

of people and the news media got involved in unless they started to look bad for some reason...” Tom was cynical about whether the federal government would help because, he said, it profits from the interest charged on student loans. He saw the federal government as *big business* focused on turning a profit and needing to make money. The opinions of these three participants highlight Hay’s (2008) supply-side perspective that the government cannot or will not tackle the issues that concern voters.

While Canada’s public health care system is administered through provincial governments, the very essence of the public system falls under federal jurisdiction; this was important to both Amy and Wendy. They both felt that compared to the United States, we were lucky to have quality health care without the expenses Americans had to pay. When asked if the government focused on the quality of health care, Amy focused on the provincial government’s response and believed that, while they are focused on the issue, they can get sidetracked by events such as a nurse’s strike, and this may cause the quality of health care to decline. Wendy also focused on the provincial government’s delivery of health care and said that while it had better health care than Nova Scotia and Alberta, where she had also lived, she felt that there was room for improvement from all governments involved.

Only one participant, Amanda, mentioned the environment; she was concerned with climate change and conservation. She thought that the federal government was focused on the issue of climate change, and while they had the power to make the changes needed such as outright banning plastic bags, she thought they would only do so in the future. In her opinion, it will take actual changes to our climate in order for the

government and the public to change. When asked about the government's commitment to the environment outside of climate change, she thought they only focused on it and made changes if people "make enough noise" and demonstrated they care about the issue.

John was concerned about the price of gas and felt the cost of gas was too high. He suggested the federal government could help lower taxes by regulating prices or by doing something about the taxes. He could not understand why gas prices were so high in Newfoundland compared to other provinces that did not produce oil and gas as "we're sitting on an oil field right now, right off the coast out there. You'd never say it for what we're paying for gas you'd never say it."

The main issues discussed by the participants included employment, education, health care, the environment, and the price of gas. In analysing the issues that concerned and affected the participants, most felt the federal government could not deal with them effectively because it was outside of their ability or the government ignored the issue because of other interests.

This sense of alienation was also echoed in previous sections. Brent had chosen not to vote because he felt there were no issues that affected him (p.76). He also expressed the view that petitions could not enact change, by stating "what's one more signature, right?" This suggests that he does not expect petitions to change things (p. 86). John, who voted in previous elections, chose not to vote in the 2008 election because he felt disconnected from the political parties (p.77). Finally, Joe felt quite strongly that the government did not act in its citizen's best interests; so he did not vote (p.76).

These responses lend some support to Hay's (2008) argument that voter turnout declines if voters see the government as incapable of solving the issues with which they are concerned. I would also argue that the negative views expressed by some participants support Hay's view that cynicism depresses voter turnout. This will be explored further in the remaining sections.

4.4 (b) *Does this ballot count? Yes or no?*

The section also explores whether participants believed that their vote *counts* in an election and how they thought Members of Parliament and governments more generally viewed people in their age group. The purpose was to analyse whether there was a relationship between alienation and voting behaviour, specifically if youth felt alienated from the electoral process and from the government that was elected to serve them (Adsett 2003; Henn, Weinstein and Wring 2004). Henn, Weinstein and Wring (2004) also found that youth perceived formal politics as something that was distant from their everyday lives.

Participants were asked whether they felt their vote would count if they were to vote in an election. One participant did not answer, and one participant could not provide a clear answer. Ten participants responded that their vote would count, and from an alienation perspective, it would be predicted that they would vote in an election. Surprisingly, six of those ten had never voted before. Mary and Brent, who have never voted, nevertheless believed that it was important to vote because if everyone felt that

their vote meant nothing, there would be many votes not cast. Here are some highlights of the responses provided:

[I]f everyone did vote ... you get everyone's opinion.

Some ways I look at it and just one vote, what's that gonna do but then I think about if 50 people out there are going oh the same thing, I might as well not go then I say it does make a difference but you just kind of switch your thinking and thinking is not just one, it's everybody thought like you....

Five participants felt their votes did not count, and interestingly, four of them have voted. John, Paul, and Jill felt that it was only one vote among thousands. John said that one vote did not really count since even if “that one member got elected, I don't think it would've changed everything all over the country.” While Amy did not feel her vote counted in a first-past-the-post system, she had a different perspective on how her vote did count. A political party receives a \$1.95 for every vote they receive in a federal election from the federal coffers. Amy would vote as a way to make a financial contribution to the political party she chose²¹.

Tom had a very different perspective on why his vote did not count. He votes NDP while most of the province is either Conservative or Liberal. His parents have always voted and that has influenced him to vote. His mother is a member of the NDP and always explained why she voted for the party, and that has influenced him to vote the same. He also thought his vote would count more in the future, once his cohort becomes the group in power as a “lot of older people run the government now.”

²¹ The subsidy was eliminated in the Fall of 2011 as the Conservative Party, who hold a majority, had pledged to end it during the spring election.

These findings are surprising because an alienation perspective would predict a positive relationship between believing one's vote counts and voting behaviour as the youth would not feel alienated. However, the inverse appears to be supported in the participants' responses.

Table 4-13. Does your ballot count?

Voting Behaviour	Participant Name	Does your ballot count?	
		Yes	No
Ever Voted	Tom		X
	Molly	X	
	John		X
	Jennifer	X	
	Bob	X	
	Amy		X
	Amanda		X
Total		3	4
	Wendy	X	
Never Voted	Jill		X
	Paul	X	
	Mary	X	
	Joe	N/A	N/A
	Jane	X	
	Brent	X	
	Andrew	X	
Total		6	1

4.4 (c) *The role of the Member of Parliament and their relationship with the community*

This section analyzes the relationship participants felt Members of Parliament should have with them as constituents and what role MPs should have in their community.

A common theme repeated through most of the interviews was that each MP should try to make their community and electoral district a better place. The MP should listen to the citizens who he or she represents and actively participate in community life. The promises made during an election should be honoured and MPs should always consider, as

described by John, “themselves an equal with the people they are representing ... they should never forget why they’re in power.”

When it came to participants’ perceptions of how MPs viewed youth, only three participants felt that MPs were starting to focus on youth. Amanda and Molly felt that politicians were trying to attract the youth vote as they were soon to enter the workforce. Amanda described politicians as using a “higher level” of language that made it difficult for youth to understand. She hoped they would start to simplify the language, shorten their speeches and try not to overwhelm potential voters with information.

Molly took a different view than Amanda. To her, politicians were no longer “dumbing it down” and were reaching out to youth to explain why they needed their vote. This was achieved, she thought, by making information easily accessible and by sending representatives to the universities to educate people about politics.

Eleven of the participants viewed the government as being focused on older voting cohorts rather than youth or simply not caring about the youth vote. Jennifer said “they stick with their own age group because that’s their social circle and that’s the people they hang around with.” She felt they targeted specific groups, such as university students (who do vote). Here are some of the other comments and the table summarising their views:

...you know we’re not big corporations, we’re not paying that much taxes yet you know most of us in our age group are living at home or drawing student loans and not... you know, we’re not really putting that much into the economy as of right now, I mean eventually we will, but this age group right now just doesn’t seem to be of high importance for them.

“[T]eenagers ... [as] stuck up or like you know they’re sort of spoon fed or they don’t have any good work ethics or they’re very like inconsiderate, especially towards older people and that ...

[Youth are not taken seriously] because we’re young, we don’t have enough wisdom or experience or something like that. Like it’s just the stereotype you know.

4.4 (d) *Participants' perceptions of Member of Parliament's viewpoint of youth*

This section explored what the role of the MPs should be in the community and how the government viewed the youth cohort. The participants' responses indicated there was a lot of cynicism and expressions of alienation. With the exceptions of Andrew,²² Amanda, Molly, and Bob, the other 12 participants felt the MPs and the government focused on older age cohorts and courted these cohorts rather than the youth vote. This supports Adsett's (2003) arguments discussed in the theory chapter. Some participants felt alienated because of the level of language used by politicians, the lack of youth-friendly events and information booklets, or the view that "they stick with their own age group because that's their social circle and that's the people they hang around with," (Jennifer).

If this were the sole influencing factor in voting behaviour, the alienation perspective would predict only Amanda, Molly, and Bob would vote. However, in reality, while they both voted in elections, there were four other participants who voted as well. The table highlights how all of those who have never voted also felt that MPs do not focus on youth.

²² Andrew did not provide a clear answer to this question while Molly and Bob felt that MPs and the government looked favourably on youth.

Table 4-14. Participants' perceptions of Members of Parliament viewpoint of youth

Voting Behaviour	Participant Name	Do MPs focus on youth?	
		Yes	No
Ever Voted	Tom		X
	Molly	X	
	John		X
	Jennifer		X
	Bob	X	
	Amy		X
	Amanda	X	
Total		3	4
	Wendy		X
	Jill		X
	Paul		X
	Mary		X
	Joe		X
	Jane		X
	Brent		X
	Andrew	N/A	N/A
		0	7

4.4 (e) *The good, bad and the ugly: Opinion of government and its politicians*

This section explores the participants' opinions of the government and politicians. The purpose was to see if there were feelings of cynicism among youth about who was in power or why people chose to run for office. I wanted to investigate Delli Carpini's (2000) argument that political alienation of youth had been compounded by the broader devaluation of politics and government discussed in the theory chapter.

Thirteen participants were asked their opinions about the government. The following is a synopsis of the responses:

Table 4-15. Opinion of government

Voting Behaviour	Participant Name	None	Neutral	Positive	Negative
Ever Voted	Tom			X	
	Molly			X	
	John			X	
	Jennifer	X			
	Bob			X	
	Amy				X
	Amanda	X			
Total		2		4	1
	Wendy		X		
	Jill				X
	Paul		X		
	Mary	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Joe	X			
	Jane	X			
	Brent			X	
	Andrew	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total		2	2	1	1

Four had no opinion or felt they did not have enough knowledge to properly answer the question. Five participants, Bob, Brent, John, Tom, and Molly, had a positive opinion about the government. Even though Brent thought the system had some flaws, it was still a good system. Of the remaining four participants, two were neutral in their comments while two had opinions that ranged from mild criticism, such as politicians are boring, to very negative comments. Wendy felt that the majority of the time the right decisions were made. However, she also felt decisions had been made that placed self-interest ahead of the benefit of citizens. She also felt the government was not always honest in what decisions it has taken. Amy had the harshest view and described the government as incompetent, especially in a minority government situation.

When asked their opinion of politicians, only Jane had no opinion. Bob, John, and Tom were neutral as they described politicians in both a positive and negative light and Paul was indifferent to them as he did not care about them as long as the politicians did

their job. Only four participants – Amanda, Molly and Wendy – had positive views of politicians, with Brent making one caveat to that. He described some politicians as trying to make the right decisions, while others he described as “power-crazy.”

The remaining five participants had negative views of politicians. John, although I classified him as neutral, assumed there were MPs who were only there “to fill their pockets.” Many of the participants shared this sentiment or the sentiment that the MPs made decisions based out of self-interest. Jennifer said politicians made many election promises to get elected, but once they arrived in Ottawa, they no longer cared about the voter – “[e]very time there’s an election, the same stuff is said, but it’s never done.” Others went so far as to claim some politicians were corrupt before they ever decided to enter politics. Molly, despite having a positive overall opinion of politicians, felt MPs had failed in their role:

They don’t stick to the plan. They kind of stray from it. They forget what they were there to do. It goes back to campaigning and getting votes and not actually making any changes.

They’re just a waste of my time.

Here are the tables summarising participant’s opinions of politicians:

Table 4-16. Opinion of politicians

Voting Behaviour	Participant Name	None	Neutral	Positive	Negative
Ever Voted	Tom		X		
	Molly			X	
	John		X		
	Jennifer				X
	Bob		X		
	Amy				X
	Amanda			X	
Total		0	3	2	2
	Wendy			X	
	Jill				X
	Paul		X		
	Mary				X
	Joe				X
	Jane	X			
	Brent			X	
	Andrew				X
Total		1	1	2	4

In examining the opinions the participants had of politicians and the government, it would be difficult to predict who would vote because if one was happy with the government, they would continue to vote. However, those who are unhappy with the current government and its politicians might be motivated to vote, so it could change. Of the eight who had a neutral or good opinion of government, five of them had voted before, while three had not voted. Among the youth who voted, only two, Amy and Jennifer, had negative comments and perceptions of politicians. It is interesting to note that of those who did not vote, the majority had no opinion or a negative opinion about politicians.

4.4 (f) *Does it matter who is in power?*

Thirteen participants felt that it mattered who was in power, as you want an individual “that’s going to listen ... do something for you and not themselves,” (Molly), or as Jane said, “the person is offering and if it’s going to benefit you or benefit the whole society.” Paul’s perspective as to the importance of who held power had to do with the need to have people with different ideas come to the table and promote the ideas to enact changes.

Finally, 14 of the participants were asked what motivates people to run for political office. Eight participants felt that many wish to promote their own self-interest. Tom saw election campaigns as ego contests, as “eccentric popularity contest[s],” and those who run as wanting to add “another notch to the belt” by becoming politicians. Brent felt politicians started out wanting to enact change for the good of their constituents, but once they were in office, they started to make decisions that would get them the most votes, which may not necessarily be the best decisions for their constituents.

A lot of politicians who go into politics normally come from big business, so [they] need the ability to help with their business and their economy (Amy).

Ten participants felt that people ran for office with the intention of representing and improving their community. John and Amanda saw politicians running for both negative and positive reasons. Their positive views reflected what the other participants had said, such as having passion for the issues in the community and when elected, helping to enact change. Their negative views also echoed what the other participants had said - that politicians ran for office out of self-interest to raise their social profile and gain

power. The table highlights an interesting relationship between the reasons politicians run for office and voter behaviour. The majority (six of the seven) of youth who voted believed that politicians ran out of self-interest and/or for power, while only two of those who did not vote thought the same. Among those who did not vote, six of the eight felt politicians ran for office to improve the community.

Table 4-17. Does it matter who is in power?

Voting Behaviour	Participant Name	Does it matter who is in power?		Why do you think politicians run for office?	
		Yes	No	Power and/or self-interest	Improve the community
Ever Voted	Tom	X		X	
	Molly	X		X	X
	John		X	X	X
	Jennifer	X		X	
	Bob	X			X
	Amy	X		X	
	Amanda	X		X	X
Total		6	1	6	4
Never Voted	Wendy	X			X
	Jill	X			X
	Paul	X			X
	Mary		X		X
	Joe	X		X	
	Jane	X			X
	Brent	X		X	X
	Andrew		X	N/A	N/A
Total		6	2	2	6

This last section highlights a theme of alienation that runs throughout the data.

While there was no strong support for any of the supply-side perspectives, the participants interviewed felt alienated from the government and the politicians and elected officials who make up the political system. Many of the participants echoed Adsett's (2003) argument that youth feel government ignores them, and only three agreed that MPs focused on the youth cohort. John, who had voted in several elections but not the 2008 Federal Election, felt youth were ignored while politicians targeted older age cohorts such

as the middle-aged and seniors, and Jennifer echoed this same sentiment. This supports Henn, Weinstein, and Wring's (2004) findings of alienation towards the political by youth. There were very negative views of the government, politicians, and politics in general. Amanda even described it as a "couple of guys standing up, arguing back and forth their views." This can be tied to the belief among the majority of participants that the government could not deal with their issues.

This echoes my earlier argument that the traditional electoral system reinforces the status and the power of the dominant groups (i.e. baby boomers and pre-baby boomer generations) at the expense of youth. These dominant groups have the resources to support the political parties that represent their interests. The negative perception that the participants held, despite not having a significant influence on their voter turnout at the time of the study, may affect their decision to vote in the future.

Chapter 5

The decline in youth voting is concerning if we wish to preserve a healthy democracy in Canada. Voting among youth has been declining in Canada for the past 30 years, and nowhere more precipitously than in Newfoundland and Labrador where youth voter turnout has always been significantly lower than its Canadian counterparts.

Newfoundland is a relatively new province which has undergone significant economic and social change since joining Confederation. The negative impact of the collapse of the cod fishery and outmigration has seen rural areas of the province decline. This context is unique in Canada and I wanted to test some of the leading scholarly explanations of the decline in youth voting to see whether any of them can account for this situation.

To that end, I adopted Colin Hay's (2008) framework of demand-side and supply-side politics to organise my theoretical perspectives and construct my interview guide. I had initially set out to recruit twenty youth from three small, rural communities located in Gros Morne National Park. However, after exhausting my telephone list, I resorted to snowball sampling which included youth from the Corner Brook area as well. I was successful in recruiting fifteen participants for my study which consisted of asking qualitative, semi-structured questions.

Overall, the perspectives put forth in the supply-side and demand-side frameworks were not supported in my study. Scholars have argued that youth do not vote because they are experiencing *delayed maturity* but this was not supported amongst my sample. It has

also been suggested that the role of the Internet is important in voting behaviour but again this was not supported.

The most alarming trend among my small study was the lack of knowledge participants had about politics and the influence and role government plays in each citizen's life. As my study demonstrated, those who had high or medium levels of knowledge were more likely to vote than those who had little or no knowledge of the function of government and/or political parties. That said, it should be noted that some participants appeared to simply be repeating common discourse heard in the political chatter in the province: "the fish is out there..."; "the feds don't care about us out here – she's gone b'ye"; "tuition's too high"; "the same stuff is said but nothing gets done." Therefore, future studies that explore whether youth think it is important to be politically knowledgeable in order to vote in an election should take into account whether the knowledge shared is the participant's own opinions and beliefs, or whether they are just repeating "common knowledge."

It was also shown that the majority of youth who felt their ballot "counted" were least likely to vote. These youth overwhelmingly believed that politicians ran for office to improve their community while the majority of those who did vote, believed the politicians ran for power. This is an interesting sentiment that suggests that participating in formal politics might actually *contribute* to the political cynicism of youth. Future studies might explore this possibility, as well as the possibility that those who feel their ballots are important may not vote because they feel they do not possess the knowledge they believe is required to vote.

An overall theme appearing throughout the study is alienation and its role in influencing youth's voting behaviour. When participants were asked whether they felt political leaders focused on the youth cohort, the participants who had never voted had all felt that the political leaders did not focus on them. Amongst the youth that voted, four supported the non-voters opinion while three felt that political leaders focused on them.

I asked some of the participants if they felt the public perception of youth as politically apathetic was correct and the answers they provided supported the alienation perspective. Youth are not apathetic, they said; this is a negative stereotype, or as Tom explained, youth feel no one cares about them. They want leaders to reach out and talk to youth about politics and the issues, and how these affect them. Politicians need to stop talking only about tuition fees to university students. Following on this theme of needing to educate youth, Amanda, Jill, and Paul all agreed it was not apathy that was the issue but their lack of political knowledge .

Despite a sense of alienation, New Social Movements did not play a role in the voting behaviour of the youth I interviewed. It could be suggested that it is because the participants mostly agreed that politics and political activity occurred in a formal realm rather than in the informal realm of society. While all participants utilised social media, it was not to enact change but to stay informed on local events or to socialise. Since the data for this study was collected, the Occupy movement spread to many parts of the world. It was born out of frustration with the growing inequality between the "1% and the 99%" and the inability of governments to deal with the continuing recession. The movement had sites across Canada, including St. John's, NL. For many youth, this was the first new

social movement that had such popularity. It would be worth pursuing whether this and other recent youthful movements, such as the Quebec students' movement and Idle No More, might affect youth voter turnout in the future.

While much has changed since the interviews took place in 2008 and 2009, the youth voting rate has not. The average voting percentage for Canadian youth between 18 and 24 years of age was only slightly higher at 38.8 percent (Elections Canada 2012) in the 2011 General Federal Election compared to the 37.4 percent of the 2008 Election. Provincially, in the 2008 General Federal Election, 34.4 percent of youth voted. In the most recent election of 2011, the provincial breakdown of the vote included gender with age. In Newfoundland and Labrador, there was a decrease amongst the male youth vote with only 27 percent voting and the female youth vote also decreased to 32 percent of the vote (Elections Canada 2012).

A further study could analyse whether the popularity of former Premier Danny Williams, who was Premier at the time of this study, influenced youth voter behaviour. As highlighted in the previous chapter, participants would often refer to Premier Williams as a good leader (one even identified him as the Prime Minister) and said that they trusted him. It would be worth exploring whether this "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" sentiment, combined with a lack of political knowledge concerning provincial and federal levels of government and their respective responsibilities, deterred youth from voting. Throughout the province's political history, it is often the leader and his/her actions that are remembered, not the ruling party.

Further studies should also take into consideration whether our concept of youth needs to be more clearly defined. As discussed, the literature tends to place all youth in one large category when exploring political participation. This discounts the lived realities of youth in regard to their education, income, class, religion, culture, region, etc. and these influences on their decision to vote or not vote. It may be that to truly understand the decline in youth voter turnout, future research will need to account for the complexity and diversity of “youth.”

My study has helped to explore whether the perspectives put forth by various scholars are relevant in Newfoundland and Labrador. Despite working with a small sample size, I was able to establish that some of these perspectives do not seem to be relevant to the province’s youth while others need further exploration to determine their validity in the general population.

Hay (2008) developed a concept of politics focused on choice, the capacity for agency, (public) deliberation and a social context. Choice is central to politics as power is exercised when a choice is made and choice is needed to hold politicians accountable for their decisions. The capacity for agency among citizens is also important as political decisions have to make a difference or else politics would be fatalistic. Choice and agency create the capacity that must exist to allow for public deliberation of the choices available to those in power. This leads to the final feature of politics as social interaction because once a decision is made, for it to be political it must have collective consequences; it must affect the public (Hay 2008:65-70).

It is important to keep this concept of politics in mind when working on future research of youth voter turnout, especially in Newfoundland and Labrador. Youth need to be advised of and be permitted to make *choices* that matter to them in order for them to exercise political *agency* and hold politicians accountable for their decisions. This is essential if we believe, as a society, in truly *public* deliberation, deliberation that includes the voices of everyone, including youth. More practically, we need youth to start voting because voting at a young age has been linked to continued voter participation throughout one's lifetime. Voter turnout has to be a priority for youth and the general public because the people we elect are tasked with making choices on our behalf and this exercise of power affects our lives as citizens. We need to vote as a citizenry to remind and to hold our politicians accountable for the choices they make on our behalf.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

Political participation among youth in Newfoundland

Welcome

- Introduce myself as the researcher
- Go through the consent form, what it means to participate, how the interview will work
- Possible questions before beginning the interview

Taping commences

Things to note: Age, sex, community, where the interview took place (the environment, i.e. what did the room look like? Which room did the interview take place?)

Researcher Questions	Interviewer Questions
1. Do social factors such as gender, class and education play a role in voter turnout?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What do you do?• Cover transitions
2. Why did the participant vote or not vote?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Did you ever vote in an election?<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Follow-up with their reasons for voting or not voting*
3. How does the participant obtain news and information? (Political knowledge affects voter turnout)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How do you get your news?• If you need information, where do you go to get it?• What do you look at when you are on the internet?• Do you use Facebook*?<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Explore whether they are part of NSM groups, interest groups.• Can you tell me anything about how the government works? (Can be about passing laws, making policy decisions, etc.)

<p>4. How does the participant define political participation? Do they differentiate between formal and informal politics; do they only see the formal as political participation?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would you define <i>political activity</i>? • How would you define <i>politics</i>? • Can you tell me anything about the different political parties?
<p>5. Is the participant involved in New Social Movements (NSM)? Do they see this as being politically active?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you volunteer? • Have you volunteered in the past? • Are you involved with a sports club? • Do you donate money to any causes? • Do you ever fundraise? • Do you sign petitions? • Have you ever protested?
<p>6. Representation/alienation: Does the participant feel that MPs and/or the government represents them or excludes them?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What issues do you care about? • Do you think the government focuses on these issues? • Do you think the government has the capacity to deal with these issues? • Do you think your vote counts in an election? • What role do you think the MP should perform once elected? • What relationship should the MP have with you? • What relationship should the MP have with your community? • How do you think MPs and/or the government view people of your age group?
<p>7. Does the participant have a cynical view of government, politics and politicians?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your opinion of politicians? • What is your opinion of government? • Does it matter who is in power? • Why do you think people run for office?

- If the participant is not providing much information in his/her answers, then try to put them on defensive with comment: I was reading an article that said youth don't care about politics and it seems to me like you're doing it."
- Make sure to explore Facebook: If they join groups trying to affect change, ask them what effect they think these groups have.