Political Support and Participation in Canada:
Digging Deeper into the Drivers of Unconventional Participation

Sophie Courchesne

A Thesis
in
The Department
of
Political Science

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts (Political Science) at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

April 2025

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY
School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: Sophie Courchesne

Entitled: Political Support and Participation in Canada: Digging Deeper into the Drivers of Unconventional Participation

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (Political Science)
complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the final Examining Committee:

_____ Chair
Dr. James B. Kelly

_____ Second Reader
Dr. Daniel Salée

_____ Supervisor
Dr. Mebs Kanji

Approved by _____
Dr. James B. Kelly Graduate Program Director

April 28th, 2025 (Date of Defence)

_____
Dr. Pascale Sicotte Dean, Faculty of Arts and Science

Abstract

Political Support and Participation in Canada:
Digging Deeper into the Drivers of Unconventional Participation
– Sophie Courchesne

For the past 40 years, scholars have been concerned with the decreasing electoral turnout in established democracies such as Canada. Around the same time, political participation occurring outside of state-sanctioned avenues – otherwise called unconventional forms of political participation – appeared to be increasing. As citizen participation is a core ingredient of democracy, it is important that we strive to understand how Canadians participate and why. Yet, the literature offers no consensus about what is driving Canadians to what forms of unconventional political participation, nor what that could mean for Canadian democracy. This thesis asks what unconventional political participation looks like in Canada, what drives it, and what the implications of those findings are. Using Easton's Systems Theory as a framework, this study contextualizes unconventional political participation as a consequence of the larger political system's outputs to explore the role of political support in the various forms of political participation. The survey data used in the analysis is from the Political Communities Survey Project 2017 dataset. By conducting analyses that consider both voters and nonvoters separately, this thesis demonstrates that Canada is not facing a shift away from electoral participation, but rather a broadening of the repertoire of actions used by citizens who already participate electorally. It also concludes that political support plays a different role in electoral participation than unconventional participation, but that in both cases, increased support generally leads to increased participation. In sum, unconventional participation in Canada is more so evidence of an engaged citizenry than a dissented one.

I am extremely grateful for every single person who makes up my support system, without whom this would have been a far lonelier process. To anyone who has sat with me through a writing session in a coffee shop, a living room, or a Montréal park, who has listened to me vent about the research process, who has read over some paragraphs and chapters, who has indulged me in TV marathons to decompress, or who has encouraged me through the harder moments,
merci.

I am also very thankful to Kerry, who has encouraged through this journey, helped me with my endless coding, and who continuously inspires me to explore my full potential.

This endeavour would simply not have been possible without the encouragement, guidance, and support of my supervisor, Dr. Mebs Kanji, who has inspired be from my undergraduate studies to pursue this degree, and who offered me numerous opportunities that have not only shaped my graduate experience but shaped who I am as researcher. Thank you.

Special thanks to my committee:

Dr. Daniel Salée and Dr. James B. Kelly

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Chapter 1
The Changing Patterns of Political Participation

Participation as a Core Ingredient of Democracy

Democracy is the rule *by* the people and *for* the people (Freeman 2017). This understanding of democracy as a method of governance implies a focus on the citizen not only in terms of what's going into the political system but also of what comes out of it. In principle, this means that people living in a democracy share the rule and benefit from its outcomes. Political participation and citizen engagement are thus inherently important for the wellbeing of a democracy, as a system is only democratic to the extent that it is *by* the people. Indeed, it is widely agreed that "mass participation is the lifeblood of representative democracy" and that citizen engagement makes for "better citizens, better policies, and better governance" (Norris 2002, 5). Mass participation is also indirectly responsible for giving democratic regimes legitimacy because it is more likely to breed or maintain mass approval (R. J. Dlton 2004; Christensen 2016b; Oser and Hooghe 2018). Not only is widespread engagement and participation how we learn what citizens require of their political systems, it is also how we can attempt representation. Following that idea, the more citizens participate and provide input, the better the outputs governments provide.

However, most established democracies, including Canada, have been seeing declining electoral participation since around the mid-80s (Norris 1999b; 2002; Ramos and Rodgers 2015). Voting has long been used as a measure of political participation because it is both easy to measure and very common – it is theoretically accessible to all citizens and it is a form of participation that requires very little effort from individuals (O'Neill 2007; Peters 2017). As stated above, participation is crucial for democratic health and therefore voter turnout has also been used as the main way to gauge the health of a democracy, and declining turnout has become "the most common symptom of democratic ill health" [1] (Norris 2002, 4). This seemingly growing tendency of citizens to not show up to vote raises the concern that citizens in democratic societies are becoming disengaged from politics, or even disengaged from community life altogether (Putnam 2001). This argument is made more compelling by remembering that the reason voting is used as a measure of participation and democratic health is because it is accessible to all citizens and requires very little and infrequent effort, and yet, less and less people are showing up to participate in elections. If it is truly the case that citizens are disengaging from politics and community life, it could bring significant consequences on the quality and representativeness of government decisions and actions, which depend heavily on citizen engagement. In other words, it could be said that without the basic ingredient of citizen input, democracy cannot work.

[1] This has especially been argued when it comes to younger generations as the future of these countries (Pitti 2018; Chou et al. 2017; Norris 2004; *Youth Voter Turnout in Canada* 2016; Pitti 2018; Chou et al. 2017).

Participating Differently – The Secret Third Option of "To Participate or Not to Participate"

Is decreasing engagement truly what we are seeing cross-nationally and in Canada? Making assessments of citizens' political participation solely based on electoral turnout can be misleading, and if used to inform policy, can even be dangerous for our democracy. Around the same time that voting started to decline, non-electoral forms of political participation – ranging from signing a petition to engaging in violence for political reasons – started gaining popularity and were increasingly being used by citizens to engage with politics (Norris 2002; Smith 2014; Christensen 2016b). Studies then started to emerge concerning these contradictory trends and they speculated about the possible broadening of the participation repertoire in advanced industrial states (Barnes and Kaase 1979; Norris 2002; R. J. Dalton 2008).

The early expansion of political participation was mainly attributed to contextual social movements (Norris 2002; Ramos and Rodgers 2015). From these movements, new ways of political engagement emerged and more decisively changed the patterns of participation. The internet and social media, for example, have increased the transparency and the potential for accountability between citizen and state. A greater number of people can now easily share their grievances and see and evaluate how governments are responding to the information available to them (Daenzer and Rees 2018). More specifically, it has allowed for the emergence of internet activism and facilitated transnational policy networks, amongst other new avenues of engagement (Norris 2002; R. J. Dalton 2008; Ramos and Rodgers 2015)[2]. Indeed, with voting becoming increasingly criticized for its inefficiency in being a canal for making demands, "it is becoming increasingly apparent that publics throughout the advanced industrial world are trying out [alternative avenues of participation]" (Nevitte 1996, 76). This is creating a contradiction where citizens appear to be disengaging from already established avenues of participation while seeking more and different ways to engage with their political systems.

The literature on alternative forms of engagement cross-nationally suggests that citizens increasingly desire, or have already begun, to take up alternative forms of engagement that range from being unconventional, legal, and not very demanding, to unconventional, illegal, and more demanding (Nevitte 1996; Norris 2002). Unconventional forms of participation like demonstrations, protests, petitions, and boycotts seem to be becoming increasingly popular, but we are still trying to make sense of this change in terms of the nature of these forms, how widespread they are and whether it is replacing electoral participation. It may even be that democratic systems are by nature conducive to citizens finding other different ways to engage. From this idea emerge two propositions concerning the repertoire of political actions, meaning the various ways in which citizens engage with their political system. It may be that the repertoire is broadening or that it is shifting. If the repertoire is broadening or expanding, it would mean that in addition to electoral participation, citizens are now also partaking in other forms of participation in order to make their voices heard. On the other hand, instead of an expansion in political participation, we could also be facing a shift, where people may be turning away from voting and state-sanctioned avenues of

[2] The internet and social media platforms' main contribution to alternative forms of participation concerns the "scope of and access to participatory democracy" (Daenzer and Rees 2018, 164). In fact, on top of helping people shape their political views, they empower people to organize and engage in civil and political activities (Richez et al. 2020; Boulianne and Ohme 2022).

engagement toward more alternative opportunities. This raises a question that is not yet clearly answered in the existing literature: who is participating unconventionally, voters or nonvoters?

Should we be facing a shift in the repertoire rather than an expansion of it, this could explain lower voter turnout without implying lower political engagement. There are indeed some structural explanations as to why citizens would seek alternative forms of participation. Elections do provide an opportunity to get the feedback of all eligible citizens and also provide clear numbers on citizen input (Howe 2010). Yet, in most Western democracies such as Canada's, elections are only occasional and leave significant stretches of time in between where governments are generally under no particular obligation to poll their citizens on their potentially changing views and demands (Freeman 2017). More so, it is difficult, in-between elections, for citizens to make demands of their governments and hold them accountable to their election promises and their constituencies. In Canada, only the province of British Columbia has had the mechanism in place for recalling elected officials in-between elections since 1995, and Alberta followed suit just two years ago ("Recall" 2024; "Holding Elected Officials Accountable" 2024)[3]. With this lack of official avenues for citizens to influence the state in-between elections, it may be that alternative forms of engagement are a more adapted and consistent way for citizens to seek to influence their governments.

Political Participation in Canada

Canada has not been immune to these trends that have emerged across established democracies, although the changes started slightly later. Indeed, when it comes to electoral participation, the federal voter turnout used to average around 75% up until 1988, when it started declining, joining the observed trends in other established democracies (Turcotte 2015; López, Dubrow, and Polacko 2020; Canada 2023). Since the year 2000, national turnout has averaged in the low 60s with a significant dip in 2008 at 58.8% and a slight raise in 2015 and 2019 at 68.3% and 67% respectively (Canada 2023). This decline and these consistently low numbers of voter turnout shows that "all is not well with Canadian democracy" (Howe, Johnston, and Blais 2005, 10). From the outside looking in, Canadian democracy seems to be doing very well. The country ranks extremely high in global indicators like quality of life, with U.S. News ranking Canada second "best country overall" (U.S. News, n.d.). And, up until two years ago, Canada ranked 5th in the Economist Democracy Index; however, it now ranks 13th (Fair Vote Canada 2024). While this rank still classifies Canada as a "full democracy", this drop is symptomatic of a larger issue (Canada Action 2024). Indeed, when we shift our perspective and look at evaluations coming from within the country instead of using external objective indicators, the story changes.

> New survey data show a *worrying trend of disaffection* among Canada's citizens *with traditional democratic institutions* and increased levels of support for non-democratic alternatives, such as rule by experts or the military. Canada's citizens feel that they have little control over their lives, a sentiment that has been compounded by pandemic-related restrictions on individual freedoms. Canada's worsening score raises questions about whether it might begin to suffer from some of the same afflictions as its US neighbour, such

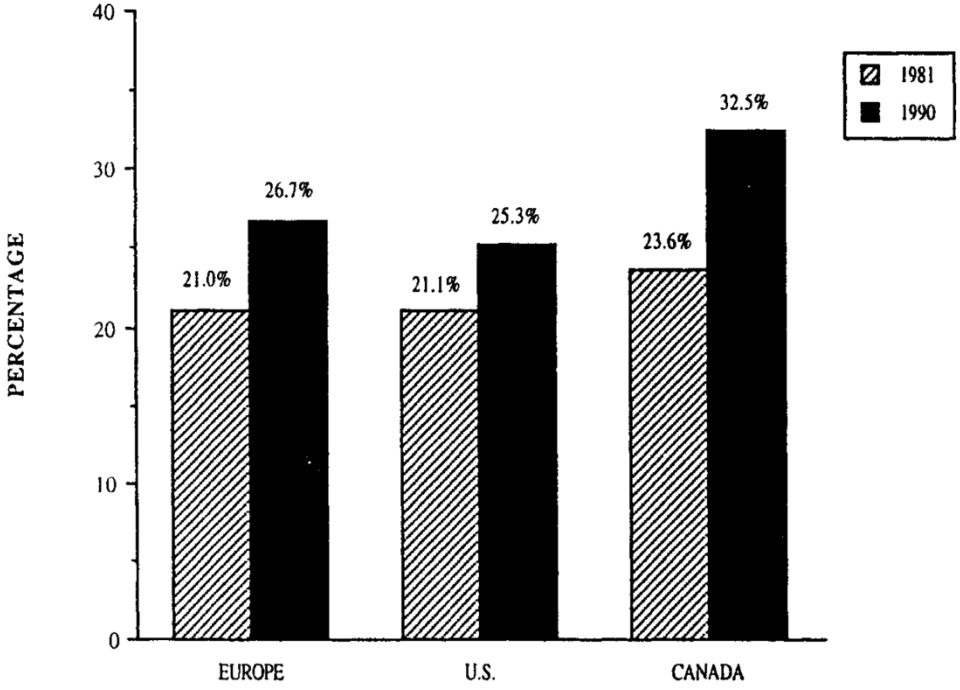
[3] In 2014, Michael Chong made a speech in Parliament concerning Bill C-586, concerning candidacy and caucus reform, meant to address an observed "democratic deficit" in Canada ("Debates of May 27th, 2014" 2014).

as *extremely low levels of public trust in political parties and government institutions* (Economist Intelligence 2022, emphasis added).

The EIU's 2021 report issues a warning to various democracies, and specifically to Canada due to its proximity to the United States' recent unsteadiness[4]. Growing disaffection with and lowering trust toward traditional institutions are only some indicators that Canada's democracy needs attention. In fact, when assessing Canadians' satisfaction with the way democracy works in Canada, few report being "very satisfied", and as much as a third report only "little satisfaction", which is not reflective of Canada's apparent international standing (Nevitte 2002, 20).

Similarly to observed patterns cross-nationally, Canada is also seeing higher levels of unconventional participation. In fact, not only are Canadians some of the most protest-oriented when polling various established democracies, but the country has also seen one of the biggest rise in unconventional participation (Nevitte 1996). *FIGURE 1.1* shows those specific numbers in Canada. In 1981, 23.6% of Canadians had done at least one of four protest behaviours: joining in boycotts, attending unlawful demonstrations, joining unofficial strikes, and occupying buildings.

FIGURE 1.1 "THOSE THAT 'HAVE DONE' AT LEAST ONE OF THE FOUR PROTEST BEHAVIOUR" FROM NEVITTE (1996,80)



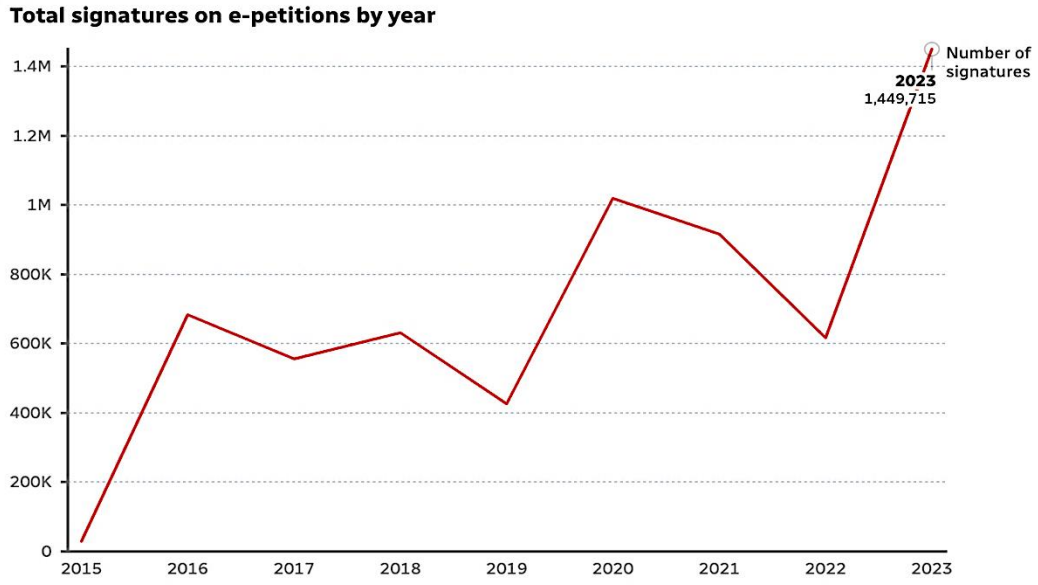
Four protest behaviours include: joining in boycotts, attending unlawful demonstrations, joining unofficial strikes, and occupying buildings or factories.

[4] At the time of this EIU's report, the unsteadiness reported about the United States concerned mainly Joe Biden's inability to reinvigorate American democracy after its decline of the past decades, especially in the face of increasing distrust and cynicism (2022). This unsteadiness has arguably gotten worse over the past few months, with the Trump administration's executive actions, which many deem unconstitutional, further eroding trust and spreading uncertainty (Liptak 2025; "President Trump Actively Destroys the Rule of Law He Claims to Be Restoring" 2025).

In 1990, a mere nine years later, that number jumped by nearly 10%, while the US and the European average only climbed by about 5% (Nevitte 1996). The proportion of Canadians who would "never do" any of these four forms of participation also went down from 67.9% in 1981 to 56.9% in 1990, showing an increasing openness to these direct action forms of participation.

More recently, these past few years have seen record numbers of e-petition signatures, representing only one example of the role of the internet and social media in the rise of political participation (Mendelsohn and Parkin 2005; Paas-Lang 2024). And, although we only have exact numbers for House of Commons online petitions, there are many more out there. The House of Commons established e-petitions in 2015, and the number of signatures has grown every year since (see *FIGURE 1.2*). When comparing even the most signed House of Commons petitions during specific parliament, we see that the most signed petition during the 42nd Parliament had 130 452 signatures and called for a serious look at electoral reform ("Petition E-616 - Petitions," n.d.). In the 44th Parliament, so far, the most signed petition has almost triple the amount of signatures at 387 487 signatures, this time calling for a vote of no confidence ("Petition E-4701 - Petitions," n.d.).

FIGURE 1.2 "TOTAL SIGNATURES ON E-PETITIONS BY YEAR", FROM PAAS-LANG 2024.



E-petitions were first enabled partway through 2015. Data for 2023 includes partial data for some e-petitions that are still open for signatures.

There have also been since the beginning of the millennium some notable protests and social movements across Canada. For example, both the *Printemps Érable* in 2012 and the #IdleNoMore movement that started that same year heavily used social media to mobilize and organize protests (Richez et al. 2020; Boulianne and Ohme 2022). In 2019, Montreal saw the biggest protest in Quebec history when half a million Quebeckers joined the march and strike for the global day for climate action (*CBC News* 2019). There have also been notable protests and marches concerning COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions – the Freedom Convoy being particularly disruptive – and continuous protests against pandemic measures even eventually drew out counter-protests in support of the measures (Murphy 2022; CBC News 2022). And, for now over a year, the events

concerning Israel and Palestine have driven Canadians to sign petitions, march, strike, boycott, and occupy buildings and spaces. The movement also included a national march in Ottawa that attracted Canadians from all over the country ("Petition E-4649 - Petitions," n.d.; Perez 2024; Evans 2023).

These are only some examples of large-scale movements that have used unconventional forms of political participation to voice their concerns and opinions and attempt to influence politics. Social movements are not new and did not emerge in the 80s, but their growing frequency and scale outline a story, especially when considering the increasing numbers relating to the various forms of participation. It encouragingly suggests that we are facing a change in the ways in which Canadians engage with their political system, rather than a disengagement of the citizenry implied by a decline in electoral participation. It indeed suggests that Canadians are still getting involved and engaging with politics and their communities but doing so in different ways than before.

Even so, the fact remains that low voter turnout is concerning. To ensure the health of Canadian democracy, it is not only important to increase any political participation, but we also need to find a way to engage more Canadians in ways that our system can receive. There is already a willingness within the political and academic communities to look for ways to address this issue, whether that be through electoral reform or through specific methods like more recurrent referendums (Freeman 2017; Howe, Johnston, and Blais 2005; Mendelsohn and Parkin 2005). Such studies are actively looking at the possibility of making Canadian democracy more participatory, but there is little idea as to how to achieve that in practice.

In order to properly address this issue, we need to better understand how we got here and what the role of protest in politics and representation is in Canada, which includes understanding the nature of these new forms of participation and what drives people to use them both cross-nationally and in Canada specifically. While we already know little about that globally, the scope of our understanding is even narrower when looking at Canada's context, mainly due to the minimal available data (Pitti 2018; Stephenson et al. 2022; "World Values Survey: Round Seven - Country-Pooled Datafile Version 5.0" 2022; O'Neill 2007).

The Purpose of this Thesis

Gaining a better understanding of whether and why citizens are increasingly engaging in alternative ways is crucial and could potentially point to gaps or faults within the political system. A proper grasp of what we are observing will help inform our decisions for improvement and reform and ultimately could lead to a better match between citizen's demands and governments' supply. For a democracy to be *by* the people and *for* the people, it needs the engagement of its citizenry in ways that it can properly receive and process it. To uphold that principle, a democratic system needs to be aware of changes and concerned about bridging the gaps that inevitable changes over time will create. Participation is crucial to the functioning of democracy as "without the assertion of demands the political dominant members of a system could not orient themselves to the major problems requiring their attention nor could they bring their energies to a focus" (Easton 1965, 49). If citizens are looking for more ways to engage and express their opinions more often, political systems need to be conscious of it and find ways to keep up with them. Indeed, with new and continuously emerging forms of participation, the link between demands and government decisions dissipates. The communication line between government and people becomes fuzzy and distorted, which makes it difficult to accurately assess the extent to which the *for the people* part is working – to

know what it is the people are asking for, and therefore how good of a job the government is doing in addressing demands.

We need to know what we are dealing with in terms of changes to political participation by probing more deeply and systematically so we can reassess, if required, based on how pervasive the shift is and why it is happening. Furthermore, as participation and engagement are necessary to a healthy democracy, studies exploring the changes in participation and their drivers have the potential to suggest reforms that could better the reception of demands within the political system (Cho and Rudolph 2008; Stockemer 2014). This is especially relevant right here in Canada where talks of electoral reform have been afoot in recent elections, in part to specifically address alarmingly low levels of electoral participation (Meng 2020; Wherry 2024).

We currently know very little about what this change in participation patterns looks like, and how voters and nonvoters fit into it. We also lack a clear understanding of the drivers of this change, and what this means for Canadian democracy. This thesis will build on what we already know and bring in new data[5] that has not yet been explored to add onto that existing knowledge. After a more in-depth literature review of both cross-national trends and Canada-specific studies, it will share some new findings that emerge from an analysis of new data. The conclusion will offer some thoughts as to what this means for the future of Canadian democracy.

The Research Questions

RQ1: What Does Unconventional Participation Look Like in Canada?

This first question seeks to contribute to our understanding of the pervasiveness of unconventional participation in Canada as well as offer a first look at who participates in what way. It will do so by comparing conventional and unconventional participation, and by looking at the unconventional repertoire in Canada to see what actions are popular among Canadians. The debate between a shift and a broadening of the repertoire will be addressed by this first question, where the difference in unconventional participation between voters and nonvoters will be investigated.

What is the extent of unconventional participation in Canada, and is it the same picture for all Canadians? So far, it has been unclear what to make of the contradictory observed trends concerning political participation. With unconventional participation rapidly changing, continuous studies are needed to track the changes and keep from lagging behind. It also remains unclear whether we are facing a *shift* in participation – where citizens are choosing other forms of participation instead of voting – or an *expansion* of the political participation repertoire – where voting citizens are seeking additional ways to participate (Dalton 2008; Pitti 2018). But whether we are facing a shift or a broadening of the participation repertoire, failing to account for those other and still emerging forms of participation may lead to the underestimating of actual levels of political participation in various segments of the population (Theocharis and van Deth 2018). Perhaps even more concerning, is that it could also lead to faults in representation where some

[5] The Political Communities Survey Project (Kanji and Tannahill 2017a) has been developed and rigorously tested first in Quebec in 2012 and then across Canada starting in 2014. This thesis uses its 2017 survey data. The PCSP has gone back in the field in December 2023 in Canada, the US, the UK, and Poland, and its next waves will be administered in late 2024-early 2025, providing another time point for the study of political participation, as well as an extended questionnaire.

grievances are left unheard and unaddressed, which may lead to further apathy (Christensen 2016b). If we wish to keep being a rule *by* the people, investigating political participation trends is necessary to keep accounting for voices and provide appropriate response. Although we know some things about this broadening repertoire in advanced democracies and in Canada, there is not much systematic work done to try and understand how pervasive it is.

Whether a shift or an expansion is taking place has very different implications for the current and future state of Canadian democracy. In the case of an expansion, the same people who are already voting are also using unconventional means of political participation, and therefore have more say and influence than people who do not vote nor participate through other means. To address this issue and gain a deeper understanding of what is happening with participation in Canada, a country-specific study needs to occur to account not only for the complexities within political participation but also within the Canadian context. Canada is a democratic federation with three different levels of government that serve a very diverse population containing many political cultures, and all of these qualities make it difficult to simply apply global trends to its context without further investigation (Nevitte 2002b).

RQ2: What Drives Unconventional Participation, for Both Voters and Nonvoters?

This second question aims to better understand the drivers of unconventional participation by testing the consistency and robustness of existing theories in the Canadian context. The story is unlikely a straightforward one, and this thesis will account for the main explanations in the literature to see how they hold up against one another.

There are various explanations in the literature for unconventional participation; these explanations range from performance explanations to sociocultural ones. Many have also linked political support with political participation, both in terms of electoral participation and participation through alternative forms (Barnes and Kaase 1979; Milbrath and Goel 1982; Norris 1999a; Christensen 2016b; Pitti 2018; Martini and Quaranta 2020). While there is no consensus yet as to what exactly that relationship with political support looks like for unconventional forms of participation, often referred to as "protest" or "elite-challenging" forms, they have often been linked to dissatisfaction with politics (Norris 1999a; R. J. Dalton 2004; Stockemer 2014; Quaranta 2015; Christensen 2016b; Pitti 2018). One global example is the environmental movement that has seen many forms like strikes, marches, petitions, and boycotts in various countries (Boulianne and Ohme 2022; Taylor 2021). At their root, these forms of participation are in reaction to political authorities not responding to environmental concerns in the way that these people think is necessary, which anecdotally seems to support the idea that they are linked with dissatisfaction. Yet, the picture remains unclear as satisfaction with democracy and politics is linked with general political participation (Quaranta 2015).

It is important to gain an understanding of the link between satisfaction and participation if we are to maintain or reach *for the people, by the people*. On the one hand, if this disengagement from electoral participation and increased participation in protest is a sign of citizens thinking more critically about their political system and governance, this can be beneficial to democracy and make it stronger. However, if these trends are solely about disaffection and alienation, the implications turn negative (Christensen 2016a). While these observations were made generally in established democratic societies, we will need to dive into more specific contexts to learn more.

RQ3: What Are the Implications of Unconventional Participation? Do These Differ for Voters and Nonvoters?

Tying the findings to existing studies, this third question proposes to think about what the answers to the first two questions might imply about changes in political participation and, by extension, our democracy.

As aforementioned, both the narratives of the *shift* and of the *expansion* of the political participation repertoire have different implications. If we are facing a shift, are we simultaneously facing the death of voting? If we are facing an expansion, are we in for more aggressive engagement? The two first questions will offer a clearer image of political participation in Canada and what it may mean for Canadian democracy and society. This third and last question attempts to provide some indication of where we might be heading next in terms of citizen engagement in Canada.

Chapter 2
Political Participation – Definitions, Explanations, Implications

Political participation is a concept that seems simple enough, but defining it is anything but a simple task. With politics in constant evolution, political participation – conventional and unconventional – is becoming an increasingly convoluted concept. This chapter presents an overview of how far we have come in terms of our understanding of political participation both internationally and in Canada, and proposes definitions for this study of the Canadian context. It also jumps into what we know so far about what drives these various types of participation, both globally and in Canada.

Defining Concepts of Political Participation

When defining and categorizing political participation, the most common distinction to make is between conventional and unconventional participation; it is also the most important one for the purpose of this thesis. There are many different terms for these two categories – formal vs. informal, institutional vs. extra-institutional, electoral vs. non-electoral, traditional vs. non-traditional – which all carry varying implications, but in the end, it amounts to the same core aspect: conventional participation has a direct line to the state/government, while unconventional participation seeks to affect it from the outside (Kaase and Marsh 1979a; van Deth 2014). Conventional participation is most often operationalized only through voting, but more detailed accounts also use other actions like citizen consultations, party membership, and contacting elected representatives (Milbrath and Goel 1982; Nevitte 1996; Norris 2004). Because unconventional participation lacks this clearly defined setting, its conceptualization is more difficult and requires us to go back to how we think of political participation more generally.

When attempting to understand the evolution of the trajectory of the participation/engagement literature, a good place to start is with Milbrath and Goel's (1982) definition from their second edition of *Political Participation*, which is often referred to in the literature. 40 years ago, they defined political participation as "those actions of private citizens by which they seek to influence or to support government and politics […]; it includes not only active roles that people pursue in order to influence political outcomes but also *ceremonial* and *support* activities" (2). The first edition of *Political Participation* had been published in 1965 and the changes that occurred in those 17 years are substantial. While political participation is a concept that remains contested in the literature, most scholars agree on four characteristics of political participation, which take root in Milbrath and Goel's definition (van Deth 2014; Pitti 2018). Using characteristics to define a concept as wide and subjective as political participation has the advantage of being flexible while still setting important boundaries. These characteristics keep it from being too much of a static definition and allow for the conceptualization to be applied to various contexts and actions. In fact, as political participation evolves and grows, static definitions

run the risk of having the discipline of political science lag behind (Norris 2002). That being said, the four characteristics emerging from the literature are:

1. Political participation is active; it is an action, not simply an opinion, attitude, or interest.
2. Political participation is voluntary; in this sense, any mandatory action would not count.
3. Political participation is done by people as citizens; it is not actions performed by people in their roles of politician or other professionals.
4. Political participation is directed toward the political system, aiming to influence it; it occurs within, or targets, the political sphere.

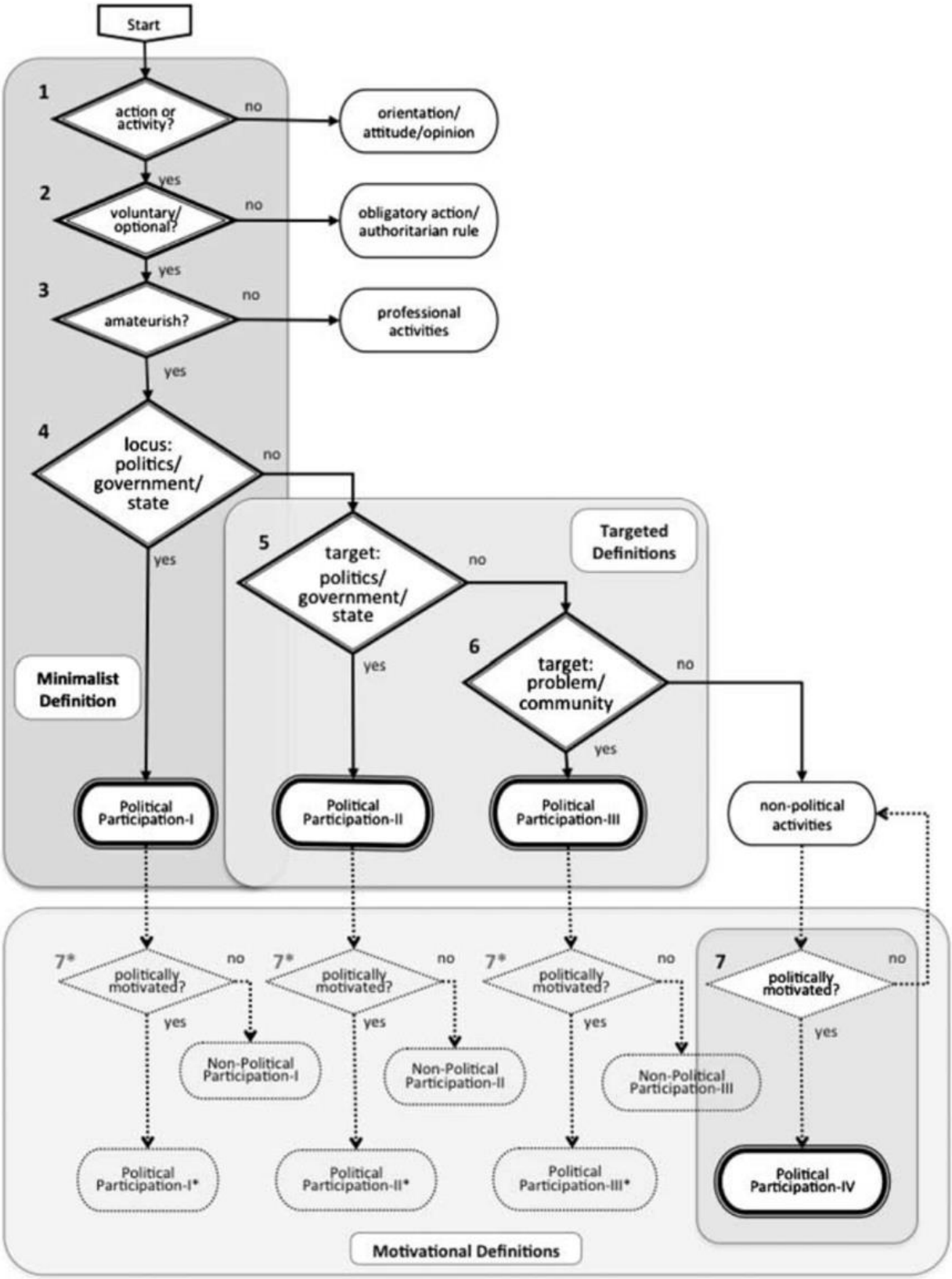
The distinction between conventional and unconventional participation therefore happens at the fourth characteristic, conventional methods taking place *within* the political and unconventional ones *targeting* the political. To complete both conceptualizations, we need to determine what exactly defines the political sphere.

What Makes Political Participation… "Political" Participation?

Defining what counts as "political" participation is not as simple as it may seem. The idea of the "political" has become more and more convoluted as the political sphere has bled into most aspects of citizens' lives. Indeed, over the past 50 years, the world has seen increasing globalization which has caused a decline in the autonomy of states (Norris 2002). This has implications for the definition, as according to our characteristics political participation aims to influence political decisions; therefore, if the state is less autonomous, or shares its autonomy with various international or local actors in the public, private, or non-profit sectors, then participation aimed at those other actors would not count as political. Because of this blurring of autonomy and state borders, others consider that the boundaries between the political and the nonpolitical are disappearing almost completely and that therefore political participation also applies to the social, economic, and cultural spheres (Putnam 2000; R. J. Dalton 2008). Yet, it is important to be critical in our use of these all-encompassing conceptualizations as they prove problematic for the specific analysis of the political. If we remain too strict about what counts as political, then we run the risk of omitting important phenomena occurring right outside of these bounds. However, declaring everything as political dilutes our observations and can lead to flawed conclusions.

Therefore, rather than drawing rigid lines around what we might consider the "political sphere", which fluctuates with time and from one context to another, it is more relevant for the purpose of this thesis to determine parameters of what makes a form of participation "political" – once again relying on characteristics and conditions rather than simply a definition. Referring to *FIGURE 2.1**Error! Reference source not found.***, participation can be political if it occurs within the state, if it targets the state, or if it addresses a collective problem (van Deth 2014; Pitti 2018). Indeed, van Deth suggests a multi-level definition that asks questions, setting parameters, instead of statically defining it or simply listing political acts. This operational definition emerged from the rapid expansion of the political participation repertory that in turn caused a lack of a common understanding of the concept. Van Deth offered this definition as a way to catch up the discipline with what was being observed in

FIGURE 2.1 A CONCEPTUAL MAP OF MINIMALIST, TARGETED, AND MOTIVATIONAL DEFINITIONS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION, FROM VAN DETH (2014), P.355



various societies, as "actual conclusions about important changes in democratic societies depend on the participation concept used" and without a common understanding, it becomes difficult and even counter-productive to build on those conclusions (van Deth 2014). As demonstrated in the illustration, van Deth starts by asking the four base questions that make up the characteristics of what he calls the minimalist definition. This first category of political participation occurs *within* the state and comprises of conventional participation. If political action does not occur within the state but *targets* it, it becomes unconventional participation. Then, if actions neither occur within the state, nor target the state, but target a collective problem, we fall into what most would categorize within the category of larger civic and community participation. Finally, non-political activities can still be considered political participation if they are politically motivated, making up personalized or lifestyle politics.

In sum, using these parameters allows us to apply it to any context, and even account for different types of regimes. In Canadian studies more specifically, we also make similar distinctions between minimalist and targeted definitions, marking distinct categories for conventional, unconventional, and civic participation (Hilderman et al. 2015). However, these categories remain ambiguous and lack preciseness if we are to draw useful conclusions.

Unconventional Participation

Using van Deth's conceptualization, the thing that delineates the difference between conventional and unconventional participation[6] is whether acts are performed *within* the state or *target* it. This criteria follows the parameters of the first organized definition of unconventional political participation, offered by Barnes and Kaase's *Political Action* (1979), defining it as being direct political action that is non-institutionalized. Propelling the literature on unconventional participation after observing a wave of protest movements across Western democracies and a lack of available conceptualization for it, *Political Action* highlights the relevance of dynamic definitions and explain that "the systemic perspective [they] have applied to political action is essential in order not to fall prey to a static conceptualization of the problem" (Kaase and Marsh 1979b, 41). Today, nevertheless, over 40 years after this definition was first suggested, there is still debate in the literature about the way we think about unconventional participation both in terms of nature and impact.

While there is a tendency in the literature to associate unconventional participation with negative attitudes, some still go as far as positing that it is detrimental to democratic political system. For example, Smith (2014) argues that the line between the conventional and unconventional can be drawn by asking "whether a type of political participation can lead to arrest and punishment" (105). More specifically, he defines unconventional participation as "political pressure exerted on the establishment that exceeds the boundaries of socially and legally acceptable behavior" (218). Although this definition also has the advantage of being easily transferable from

[6] As will be explained and justified throughout these pages, this thesis will be using the term "unconventional" to refer to any act that is not simply non-electoral, but also non-institutional. I want to emphasize here that while this terminology might imply a certain judgement or rank (vs. conventional), it is employed here because it is the most commonly used term to refer to this category of political actions in the political participation literature. I hope to show through this thesis that new terminology is needed to define the various ways in which citizens can engage with politics and communicate their opinions and demands.

one system to the next, it is not always clear what would be considered socially "unacceptable", and a lot of the complexities surrounding unconventional participation is lost in the simplicity of the definition. The issue in defining unconventional participation seems to stem from trying to lump all of its forms under one category, whether legal or illegal, violent or non-violent. What is needed is therefore a definition that allows for the complexities that occur within the very concept of unconventional participation.

Addressing this need is Dalton's operational definition, who goes about defining unconventional participation the same way researchers have come to approach political participation. Indeed, building on that literature, he brings it a step further and suggests that there are different "levels" of unconventional participation, and that the repertory may be hierarchical based on specific, but flexible, characteristics:

> [T]he first threshold indicates the transition from conventional to unconventional politics. Signing petitions and participating in lawful demonstration are unorthodox political activities but still within the bounds of accepted democratic norms. The second threshold represents the shift to direct action techniques, such as boycotts. A third level of political activity involves illegal, but nonviolent, acts. Unofficial strikes or a peaceful occupation of a building typify this step. Finally, a fourth threshold includes violent activities such as personal injury or physical damage. (R. J. Dalton 1988, 65)

Here, Dalton suggests forms of unconventional participation without defining each threshold simply with a list of actions. In the first category we find actions that are not conducted within states, but for which states still provide clear avenues to partake in them. In the case of Canada, both petitions and lawful demonstrations are protected rights and have protocols, put in place by the state, for citizens to take part in them (Bosc and Gagnon 2017; "The Right to Protest and Gather - Canada," n.d.). These unconventional forms of participation, in the case of Canada, would fall in this first threshold. Next is a category that includes legal, nonviolent direct action techniques for which the state neither provides avenues nor obstacles. For example, boycotts in Canada are not illegal nor are they facilitated by the state. The last two categories comprise illegal acts, one of them nonviolent ones and the other violent ones.

This definition still adheres to Barnes and Kaase's by keeping unconventional participation as something that takes place "without the intermediation of institutional actors" (Quaranta 2015, 24). Moreover, many of its examples of unconventional participation overlap with theirs: "petitions, boycotts, rent or tax strikes, unofficial industrial strikes, occupation of buildings, blocking of traffic, damage to property, and personal violence" (Marsh and Kaase 1979, 59). This overlap shows a certain level of consistency in the acts that make up unconventional participation, without confining it to those acts. What Dalton does here that is different is offer a conceptualization that, while somewhat restricted to established democracies that share these democratic norms, permits us to measure unconventional participation. What it also achieves is a more tangible and precise way to talk about unconventional participation. Indeed, while it may be inaccurate to suggest that unconventional participation aims to "disrupt or threaten" democratic political systems, using this threshold approach could allow us to be more nuanced and explore the possibility of different conclusions for various types of unconventional participation (Pitti 2018, 10). This approach is extremely relevant as it offers the language and the theoretical logic to

consistently group individual actions for analyses instead of conducting act-by-act or overly general analyses.

In sum, it is as relevant to establish some categories within unconventional participation as it is to do so within political participation at large. Without a nuanced approach to political participation, scholars have run the risk of coming to incomplete conclusions about citizen participation rates. Lumping all unconventional participation together also carries risk in properly understanding its role in established democracies. Dalton's threshold approach also has significant operational value, which comes in handy when conducting data analysis and striving to better understand both what influences unconventional participation and what its implications may be.

Explaining Political Participation

Now that we have established the various definitions relating to political participation, we turn to its drivers. Understanding what drives people to participate in politics has long been a topic of study but has mainly been focused on electoral participation. As voting has long been used as the main indicator for political participation as a whole, many have studied voting behaviour to better understand who votes and how they go about it. Various explanations for voter turnout have emerged in Canada, made possible in part due to the Canadian Election Study, which has been gathering data on voting in Canada since the 60s ("Canadian Election Study," n.d.). For example, we know that certain socioeconomic and demographic factors make it more likely for citizens to vote. Indeed, earning a higher income, being more educated, and older generations tend to vote more than their counterpart (Turcotte 2015). Canadians who feel a sense of duty to vote or even who are more interested in politics also are more likely to vote than those who do not (Turcotte 2015; Blais and Achen 2019). These studies are crucial to evaluating the representativeness of our democracy as groups who do not vote are less likely to be accurately represented in decision-making (Hilderman et al. 2015). Along those same lines, they are also important in determining strategies to attract groups who do not vote into the political process.

With turnout on the fall, it is increasingly clear that it is just as important to gain a better understanding of why Canadians participate in unconventional ways. That is made especially evident when we consider that 69% of Canadians had taken part in at least one unconventional participation form in 2014, while only 61% of eligible Canadians had turned out to vote in the previous federal election (Hilderman et al. 2015). That gap might not be big, but it goes to show how much political engagement and expression occurs in-between elections; and, contrary to voting, we have very little idea as to who engages that way and why. While voting and unconventional acts are both forms of political participation, we cannot assume that both are driven by the same factors. Understanding what drives unconventional political participation will also help in figuring out if we are facing a *shift* or an *expansion* of political participation.

What Drives Unconventional Political Participation?

As established, there are many avenues of explanations for electoral participation and political participation more generally, and we find those same avenues for unconventional political participation. Unconventional participation has been explained through demographic arguments, institutional and resource explanations, socio-cultural changes such as post-materialism, and political support. While all of these are relevant and important in fully understanding what drives

unconventional political participation, they also have their individual purpose. After a review of the explanations found in the literature, it is clear that an analysis of the relationship between political support and unconventional political participation is needed.

Institutional Explanations

One avenue of explanation for unconventional participation is rooted in an institutional approach, which tends to focus on how the structure of a given political system makes it more likely for citizens to participate (Norris 2002). Using the World Values Survey data, Stockemer (2014) posits that unconventional participation is more prominent in democracies and even more so in democratic federations, as citizens have the right to engage in those forms and because decisions are taken at different levels of government. The argument is that this offers more opportunities for deliberations with the public, and because some decisions are taken at a more local level that is closer to the public, it encourages citizens to be more involved. This macro-explanation tends to be applied in isolation from others and is not used as much as others but remains useful in contextualizing unconventional participation. Because it is a contextual explanation, however, it is applicable only when comparing two different contexts. In the case of Canada, this approach has the potential to provide insight when comparing various metropolitan regions, for example comparing Montreal with its second-tier government and Toronto which does not have a level of government between the municipal and provincial levels (Medicoff 2023). There is also evidence that this extra layer is fertile grounds for establishing new and progressive opportunities for citizen participation, which has implications for the study of unconventional participation but also possible emerging conventional actions (Blanc 2006). Given these extra opportunities, this extra level of government has proven to help with the efficiency of provided services, work toward preventing policy fragmentation, and bring about more progressive political results (Medicoff 2023; Blanc 2006). Alas, when looking at Canada as a whole, it may be relevant to keep this in mind when considering our findings, other explanations prove more relevant for a country-wide analysis.

Individual-level Explanations

The other more prominent lines of explanations all bleed into each other, highlighting the importance of controlling for all of them when focusing on any single one of them. To start with, demographics and resources both have been found to play a significant role in participation in unconventional forms. According to resource theory, for example, with the improvements in social and political lives, people have access and take advantage of better education and are generally more interested in politics than before (Nevitte 1996). However, while this would technically mean that people are potentially more able and willing to participate in politics, it is not the voting trend that is observed. Instead, those with "higher participatory potential" are not using that potential to participate in conventional forms of political participation, but in unconventional ones (Nevitte 1996, 84). As franchise grew and society changed, "mass political participation has continued to become more active and more issue-specific, as increasingly educated electorates have extended their repertory of techniques designed to influence elite decision making" (Inglehart 1997). Indeed, some evidence points towards the fact that citizens with more resources such as civic skills, time, and money, tend to participate more often and in a more diverse range of ways (Krueger 2002; Kaase 2010). This explanation still leaves many stones unturned and remain close to the macro-level rather than leaving contextual factors for more individual-level ones.

When narrowing it down to individual characteristics, we see that the resource theory tends to overlap with the demographic ones as resources are often caused by things like age and

education. Indeed, we have known for decades that older and more educated people tend to participate in politics more; however, that argument has mainly been focusing on conventional participation (Inglehart and Klingemann 1979; Nevitte 1996; Turcotte 2015). Youth, on the other hand, have long been centered in discussions and analyses of "protest" participation, argued to be pulling away from traditional political spheres, disinterested, or even apathetic to politics (Pitti 2018). Within the argument that age – more specifically, young age – is a central driver of unconventional political participation reside two different approaches: life-cycle and generational (Marsh and Kaase 1979a; Norris 2004; Pitti 2018). The life-cycle approach centers on the idea that "protest" behaviour is specific to that phase of age. It is rooted in the idea that "protest is simply the *fact* of generational conflict that is built into modern society" (Marsh and Kaase 1979a, 101). This approach to youth participating in unconventional ways is highly reductive to both youth and unconventional participation, as is illustrated in the proverb that goes: "*He who is not a revolutionary at twenty has no heart. He who is still a revolutionary at forty has no head*" (Marsh and Kaase 1979a, 101, emphasis added). Insinuating that unconventional participation belongs to a phase on the way to becoming more mature reduces the role and power of unconventional forms of participation as well as the place of youth in our political systems. The generational approach ties unconventional participation to the youth not through age alone but through the more meaningful concept of a generation, where youth are bound and connected to each other not solely because of their young age but because they share a common future and face similar issues. If unconventional participation is to be seen as being more issue or cause-oriented than conventional forms as Norris (2004) posits, the generational approach would be a more relevant one in accounting for higher participation rates for young people. The Canadian youth also follows this trend as they are overrepresented in unconventional forms of participation rates, just as they appear to be less involved in conventional modes (Howe 2010). However, "middle-aged Canadians manage to be *equally* involved in non-traditional ways and *more* involved in traditional forms of politics" than the youth, which would seem to support the argument that youth people are still altogether less involved in politics than older generations (Howe 2010, 27; Nevitte 1996). This goes to show that age and demographics alone are not enough to properly explain why some participate in unconventional ways more than others.

Value Change Theory

This focus on differences between generations brings us to the value change theory, which explores how shifts in societies' values may have impacted people's relationship with the state. This theory, cemented by Ronald Inglehart, suggests that contextual changes like institutional transformations, changes in wealth levels, sources, and distribution, the expansion of technology as well as transformations in information and communication all participate in changing the values held dear by societies (Inglehart 1997; Nevitte 2002a). This transformation to Postmaterialism implies "that the institutions of democratic governance, designed and shaped during the industrial era, now operate in a profoundly different environment" (Nevitte 2002a, 6). As an explanation of political participation, the phenomenon of value change plays a more significant role for unconventional than for conventional participation. This makes sense when considering that in this view, unconventional participation forms are elite-challenging, issue-driven, and new and therefore no longer aligned with "old" values. Inglehart indeed explains that:

> The "new" mode of political participation tends to be far more issue-specific and more likely to function at the higher thresholds of participation than was true of

> traditional elite-directed politics. It is new in that it relies less heavily on a permanent – and hence relatively rigid – organizational infrastructure. It is new in that it is apt to employ relatively disruptive "unconventional" forms of political participation. And it is new in that it depends on exceptionally high levels of ideological conceptualization among mass publics, and on value orientations that seem to have emerged only recently (Inglehart and Klingemann 1979, 208–9).

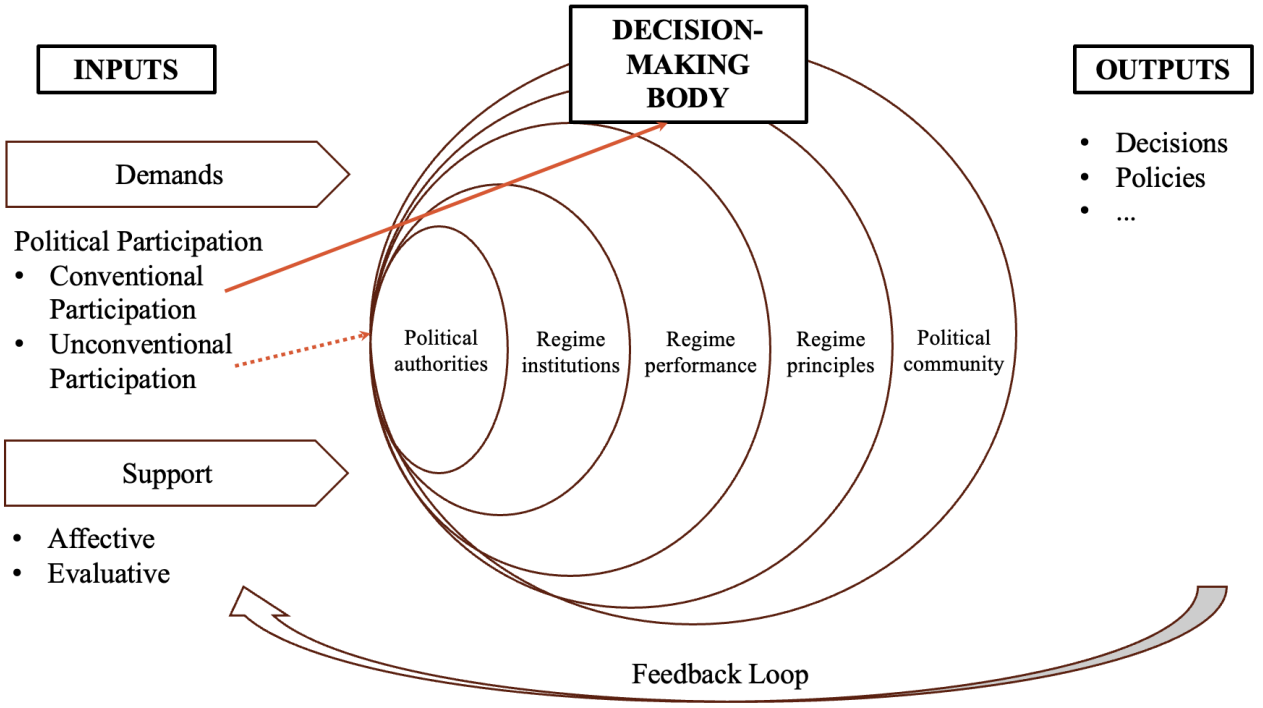
Canadian scholars have worked with Inglehart's theory, who already had included Canada in its analyses, in order to better understand the Canadian context and its implications (Inglehart 1997). Nevitte, a leading scholar in value change theory in Canada reaffirmed that this structure and value change has also occurred in this country and has linked it with the observed rise in unconventional participation, as well as the decline in conventional forms of participation (Nevitte 1996; 2002a). Contrary to during the more industrial phase of the country, Postmaterialism implies that citizens are less worried about their basic needs and becoming more involved in new issues and social movements. This observation also encompasses the introduction of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in Canada in 1982, as it gave a more important role to the courts for addressing policy issues, therefore creating a new avenue of participation and input for citizens (Nevitte 1996). Although the Charter alone did not bring about this change, it is both symptomatic of the change in values and a propulsor of the expansion of the repertory of political actions. Due to the fact that Postmaterialism represents a shift away from traditional values and that therefore political systems are perhaps no longer adapted to operating in this new context, it would be expected that postmaterialists are not the most satisfied with their political systems. More than that, "we would expect those with Postmaterialist values to be (…) ready (and able) to seek change through any effective means – whether conventional or unconventional", thus linking dissatisfaction with unconventional participation (Inglehart and Klingemann 1979, 211; Inglehart 1979). Nevitte also suggests a link between confidence (or lack thereof) and unconventional participation. Indeed, he argues that it is not just this change in values and the rise of Postmaterialism that has caused the increase in unconventional participation, but many things like increased levels of education and of interest in politics along with a decrease in confidence in institutions (Nevitte 1996). As Canadians become less confident in their institutions, less compliant, and less deferential, they seem to be turning to more elite-challenging and unconventional modes of participation in order to influence their political system. Finally, this leads us straight to the last avenue of explanation that will be addressed in this section, and the one at the center of my analysis, which concerns itself with political support.

A Systems Approach to Participation

As hinted to in the value change explanation, there appears to be a gap between citizens' expectations and what they perceive to be receiving from their political system. David Easton's *A Systems Analysis of Political Life* (1965b) shows us that what people expect from their government does matter and influences both their support of their governments and how they participate in politics. Indeed, the existing literature on the relationship between unconventional political participation and political support is rooted in Easton's framework (Norris 1999b).

Before jumping into what scholars have found out about the influence of political support on unconventional political participation, it is important to first understand the systems approach in which these findings are embedded. Easton's conceptualization of the political system has been the

FIGURE 2.2 THE POLITICAL SYSTEM, BASED ON EASTON'S SYSTEMS ANALYSIS (1965)



basis of most political support studies that followed, and important political participation works have inserted themselves in this general structure as well. As seen in *FIGURE 2.2*[7], conventional participation is shown to have a direct influence on the political system while unconventional participation seeks to influence it from the outside. On the other hand, political support can be directed toward different political objects that make up the political system. In 1999, Norris added the elements of political objects in order to distinguish the objects of citizens' political support, from the most specific to the most diffuse: political authorities, regime performance, regime institutions, regime principles, and the political community. In this systemic view, both political participation and political support are significantly influenced by the feedback loop, where citizens' support and participation are heavily influenced by their perceptions of the outputs they receive of their political system. Each element of the political system is influenced by the other, and this framework helps to emphasize the importance of gaining a better understanding of the inputs and how they might relate to each other. In fact, the theory of political support suggests that people's perceptions of their system's performance (more specifically, of the working and performance of the objects of support) eventually either build up or erode their affective orientations towards the system (Easton 1965b). This makes sense theoretically and has also been operationalized in studies looking at political support (R. J. Dalton 1999; Martini and Quaranta 2020). The theory, which is

[7] *FIGURE 2.2* includes political support concepts developed by Norris, and political participation concepts by Barnes & Kaase and Dalton. The mapping of those concepts is also in great part inspired by Tannahill (2024, 24).

explored in more detail below and is tested in this thesis, is that people's support of the various objects of the political system influence whether and in what ways they participate politically. As that participation makes up a significant part of the inputs, which are what the decision-making body translates into various decisions, participation is crucial for quality outputs. And so, if demands are not properly received or understood, it could lead to unsatisfactory outputs, which in the end impacts (in one way or another, which is what this study aims to determine) participation. This larger understanding of the context in which the relationship between support and participation occur is useful if we are to properly grasp the implications of the findings.

Now that the framework of the explanation has been established, it is time to turn to the mixed findings about how political support and political participation are related. The majority of scholars seem to link low political support to elite-challenging or unconventional forms of engagement (R. J. Dalton 2004; Stockemer 2014; Quaranta 2015; Christensen 2016b; Pitti 2018). The logic behind it is that satisfied citizens have little reason to engage in unconventional forms of political participation while dissatisfied citizens might feel that conventional forms are not enough (Stockemer 2014). This argument echoes the value change one, where there is a gap between expectations and perceived outputs. Indeed, "as citizens become disenchanted with electoral methods of political input, they turn to other channels of interests articulation – especially if some of the social forces producing this distrust also encourage new orientations towards political participation" (R. J. Dalton 2004, 24). Attempting a more specific explanation than general dissatisfaction, Nevitte (1996) argues that elite-challenging activities and unconventional participation are linked to believing that more respect for authority is not a good thing, going hand-in-hand with the value change explanation. While most of these studies look at the trends in participation in a more global way, this relationship between low support and unconventional participation has also been observed in Canada. More specifically, low confidence in public institutions, namely in Canadian media, is associated with a lower likelihood of voting but a higher likelihood of participating in unconventional ways such as signing petitions and boycotting products for political reasons (Turcotte 2015).

Some findings and theories contradict this view and posit that sometimes, political support is positively linked with unconventional participation. A strong argument in the literature is that satisfied and supportive citizens tend to participate more, as strong democratic values and positive expectations usually lead to more engagement within democratic institutions from the part of citizens (Quaranta 2015). A study done in the 1980s found some variation in the way different racial groups viewed protest activities. Milbrath and Goel (1982), when surveying in the United States, found that Black people and White people viewed protest activities differently, varying in their degrees of how wrong they perceived these various acts. While considering the context and history it may not be surprising that White people generally evaluated the acts as being worse than Black people, what's interesting is that there was some variation within these two groups about how they evaluated the different acts, finding some worse than others. Most notably, it was found that "most protestors see nothing wrong or unpatriotic about protesting" and even, "among [Black people], there was a positive correlation between protesting and being patriotic" (Milbrath and Goel 1982, 15). This implies that, in at least some contexts, some forms of unconventional participation are not necessarily acts of "protest", but an expression of political support.

It remains unclear how exactly political support may be linked with political participation – both conventional and unconventional. Although some general trends and specific explanations were found, we are still missing a comprehensive understanding of how political support can serve

as an explanation for unconventional participation globally and in Canada. Even if we adhere to the most argued side in the literature that says that negative political attitudes are a significant explanation in the expansion of political participation, "it remains unclear what kinds of political dissatisfaction are channeled into the political decision making through political participation" (Christensen 2016, 20). Even if negative attitudes tend to cause unconventional participation, that is not necessarily to say that unconventional participation is to be viewed as a threat to our political system. As Norris explains in her *Critical Citizens*, these observed trends could…

> … ultimately strengthen democratic government if this signifies the growth of more critical citizens who are dissatisfied with established authorities and traditional hierarchical institutions, who feel that existing channels for participation fall short of democratic ideals, and who want to improve and reform the institutional mechanisms of representative democracy (1999, 27).

Indeed, disenchantment and disillusionment may be qualities of citizens' participation with the state rather than obstacles (Pitti 2018). On the other hand, withdrawal from traditional spaces for participation can also raise some concerns for the equity and inclusivity of the political system, as raised by Canadian scholars Daenzer and Rees (2018). What is clear, however, is that political participation's relationship with political support is very complex and may very well necessitate a combination of explanations to account for its expansion and for the drivers of unconventional participation, more specifically. It is also clear that gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between political support and participation is key in better understanding the current state of Canadian democracy. Previous studies have been too broad and not specific enough to Canada's context. A study that looks at the various objects of support and different levels of government is needed to flesh out the picture of unconventional participation in Canada – that's where this thesis comes in.

Chapter 3
Methods – Presenting the Data

In order to look at unconventional participation in the Canadian context, we need an approach that is up to the task of allowing us to generalize and look at various actions and potential explanations. That is not an easy task and is not always possible to do in as much detail as we would like. This chapter presents the plan to realise that task. It starts by showing how a quantitative approach is the most appropriate for this study. Then, it turns to the Political Communities Survey Project (PCSP) as the most useful dataset for this particular examination, as it offers new and unexplored data that allow me to shed a new light on this question.

Data and Analysis

This thesis is a quantitative, cross-sectional study using survey data to address the questions detailed in the introduction. Simply stated, that is because when beginning an exploration of trends and tendencies within a large population, a quantitative approach is the most appropriate. This is a cross-sectional study in the sense that the dataset was collected in a specific year and provides a one-time assessment. I use survey data collected by the Political Communities Survey Project (PCSP), a project that aims to explore political support and participation specifically in Canada's complex political context (Kanji and Tannahill 2017a). These next sections will elaborate on the choice of approach and of dataset and show that despite some limitations, both make for a compelling way to answer the research questions.

Methods of Analysis

To elaborate on the various qualities of this study, quantitative methods comprise various types of statistics, each of which help address a specific type of question. Mainly, quantitative research can mathematically show what is and infer on the relationship between two variables. It allows to quantify and statistically determine causes and effects of phenomena, and can compare by putting a measure on the importance of those factors (Mood, Morrow, and McQueen 2020). A quantitative analysis will be able to determine whether there is a causal relationship between two factors, to "specify an explanation into what is and is not important, or influencing, a particular population" (Burrell and Gross 2017, 2). However, like in any type of research, the theory will guide the interpretation of those relationships. In sum, the numbers that come out of my analyses will help answer not only *what is*, but also *why it is* – this type of data, coupled with the existing literature, allows me to make statements on the state of unconventional participation in Canada and why that may be.

In addition to being quantitative, this study is also cross-sectional, because the data used were collected in a single point in time and therefore provides a one-time assessment of the year 2017.

This presents a limitation because ideally, a proper assessment of the change in political participation would use panel data, where the same participants are surveyed over time. This is a limitation that most studies looking at unconventional participation have. While the PCSP stands out by containing the variables for unconventional participation as well as the theoretical explanations all in one survey instrument, it remains only one point in time. This is, however, only the first step of where this study might go, as the PCSP is coming out with new data in 2025 that will contain expanded unconventional variables that will be able to more accurately account for the new and emerging forms of participation.

Finally, this thesis uses survey data, which means it uses self-reported data from a sample of Canadians. Surveys are useful in measuring the frequency and magnitude of specific phenomena within a population, but they also "allow us to examine in detail the preferences and motivations of the public" (Berinsky 2017, 310). However, because a sample is used to generalize conclusions to a much larger population, that sample needs to meet specific conditions. If we want to uphold what Sidney Verba said almost 30 years ago – that "surveys produce just what democracy is supposed to produce – equal representation of all citizens" – we need to address the issues with sampling and self-reported data (as quoted in Berinsky 2017, 310). As a basic rule, a sample needs to be proportional to the population it represents. The degrees to which that proportionality extends will be indicative of the quality of the study. When dealing with a political survey, two main issues arise: overreporting and the nonresponse bias. Both of these can be linked to the notion that most people who take the time to answer surveys about politics are people that tend to be interested in politics or value politics. Overreporting refers to respondents overstating the measure in which they participate in politics; there are many occurrences of results showing a higher voter turnout than what was actually recorded (Goldberg and Sciarini 2023). Overreporting is also more common among people who show a higher interest in politics, which, as previously stated, tends to be most respondents (ibid.). The nonresponse bias is the other side of that same coin. Where overreporting accounts for respondents overstating their participation, the nonresponse bias accounts for the lack of responses from people who tend to not participate in politics and therefore tend to participate to surveys less. Whether we're talking about postelection surveys or general political surveys, voters tend to participate in surveys more than nonvoters (Goldberg and Sciarini 2023; Dahlgaard et al. 2019). There are methods commonly used to address this disproportionality between the sample population and the larger population, the main one being weighting adjustments. Weighting, in this case, would mean that each nonvoter respondent would be worth more than a single response, and is a tool "typically applied to reduce the bias that nonresponse can cause" (Berinsky 2017, 312). However, it's worth noting that to some extent, weighting your data can bias your results as it relies on the assumption that most nonvoters share the same characteristics.

When it comes to methods used in the literature, other than a few exceptions (see for example Oser and Hooghe 2018), most studies exploring the relationship between political support and political participation use quantitative methods and survey data. Indeed, a significant proportion of the studies will conduct a cross-sectional/cross-national examination (R. Dalton, Sickle, and Weldon 2010; Christensen 2016b; 2016a; Quaranta 2015; Ezrow and Xezonakis 2016), although some do look at political participation over time in a specific country (Quaranta 2012). While uncovering cross-national trends in participation may be, in a way, more theoretically relevant to contribute to the literature, it does have the limitation of not accounting for country-specific characteristics. For instance, Quaranta (2015) argues that levels of democratization play a significant role in political participation trends. In his book *Political Protest in Western Europe* (2015), he addresses this limitation by focusing only on some European nations to make his sample

of countries more homogeneous, as various other studies do (Quaranta 2015; Christensen 2016a; Oser and Hooghe 2018). Yet, in his working paper "The Rise of Unconventional Participation in Italy" (2012), Quaranta highlights the importance of focusing on a single country when looking at political participation if you are to make country-specific remarks. Indeed, the literature is lacking deep dives into societies that take into account their specific political infrastructure and voting pattern diversity. Another significant aspect when reviewing existing methodology is how these studies have conceptualized and operationalized political support. While in a significant number of studies pertaining solely to political support specifically dig deep into the various objects of support (Norris 1999b; R. J. Dalton 2004), when it comes to how political support relates to political participation, support is often reduced to a single indicator: satisfaction with democracy. Satisfaction with democracy is indeed a standard indicator but has its limits when it comes to truly understanding what exactly it is measuring.

In sum, there are, of course, limitations when it comes to conducting a quantitative survey-based study. Quantitative results, while quantifiable and generalizable, "can never be completely objective or proven beyond a doubt", as there will always be a margin of error, however small it may be (Burrell and Gross 2017, 2). Survey data also has its quirks as any conclusion drawn is in the context of what respondents are willing to share, and samples need to be carefully collected. Despite its limitations, this method is prevalent in the field and is the best suited to address my questions, and a big part of the reason is the chosen dataset.

The Political Communities Survey Project

The data I use to address my research questions were collected by the Political Communities Survey Project (PCSP), created by Mebs Kanji and Kerry Tannahill. I chose the PCSP both because of its data collection standards and the expansiveness of its questions. The first two rounds of data collection by the PCSP were conducted in 2012 and 2014 but only covered the province of Quebec. The data I use for this study were collected in 2017 through its first Canada-wise survey, administered in two different waves (Kanji and Tannahill 2017a). The PCSP is continuously gathering data and has completed another round of Canada-wide data collection in early 2024, with a second wave coming later this year. While the PCSP is fairly new, it uses standardized measures which "establish[es] confidence (reliability) in the ability of [these] questions to effectively measure" my subject (McNabb 2010, 109). Its surveys are collected online, which makes it easier to gather random representative numbers compared to data collected over the phone. More benefits of internet surveys are that they are more engaging and there is "evidence of less desirability bias when no interviewer is involved" (Ansolabehere and Schaffner 2018, 76), which is in direct relation to the overreporting bias. While it can't be said that internet surveys have no bias, they do carry the least bias in terms of survey data collection. Moreover, this dataset does not use weighting when it comes to nonvoters (Kanji and Tannahill 2017a). Instead, it contains a boosted sample of nonvoters; this means that enough nonvoters are represented in this data collection to not only proportionately represent nonvoters in Canada, but the sample contains enough to be able to probe more deeply into this population that tends to not participate in conventional ways.

As stated earlier, a significant reason for our lack of proper understanding when it comes to political participation both cross-nationally but also in Canada more specifically is a lack of attention to this subject matter in data collection. The PCSP focuses, among others, on this research objective in terms of plausible outcomes to low levels of political support. While in 2017 its list of

unconventional political participation variables isn't as extensive as the most recent rounds of the Canadian Election Survey (CES) or the World Values Survey (WVS) – prevalent Canada-wide political surveys – its 2024 survey goes beyond any other survey in Canada (Stephenson et al. 2023; "World Values Survey Wave 7 (2017-2020) - Canada" 2020). Indeed, the upcoming survey round will contain an ever more expansive range of variables concerning unconventional and conventional political participation and offers the possibility for deeper and more complex analyses in the future while still being comparable to its 2017 data. Although its 2017 variables on unconventional political participation are less than other data available to me today, its comprehensive questionnaire is well suited to tackle Canada's complex political structure. Unlike the CES and WVS, the PCSP asks about voting at all *three* levels of the political system, not only at the federal and provincial levels, which is important if one is to draw any conclusion about voters and nonvoters. It also contains a greater number and more specific questions about political support, which is useful in addressing both the drivers and the implications of participation, as well as more questions about attitudes toward various reforms. The PCSP also asks various and specific questions about political participation, allowing examinations of all objects of support, using both evaluative and affective indicators. And, while support variables will not be used in this present analysis, they are available and will allow for deeper follow-up analyses. Overall, the PCSP's focus on both political participation and political support makes this dataset well suited to address my first two research questions. It also allows me to tackle this subject in a way that has not been done yet in Canada.

The Variables

Based on the plan I present, the main variables I will be using are to represent political participation and political support. For the purposes of this thesis, political participation will be split into conventional and unconventional categories, with unconventional political participation further split into legal and illegal acts. On the other hand, political support will be split first between evaluative and affective indicators, and each will be categories according to the five objects of support identified in the literature.

Political Participation

To begin, conventional participation will be operationalized through electoral participation. As conventional political participation is described as political participation that is sanctioned by the state and done within its institutions, electoral participation has often been used as a way to measure conventional participation (Milbrath and Goel 1982; Nevitte 1996; Norris 2004). The PCSP 2017 questionnaire asks respondents about four elections across Canada's three levels, and all four will be used to create a variable that measures conventional participation. The variable will therefore be made up of the most recent municipal election, provincial election, and two federal elections[8].

[8] The years of the municipal and provincial elections vary depending on the respondent's place of residence, and the federal elections are the 2011 and 2015 ones.

TABLE 3.1 OPERATIONALIZATION OF UNCONVENTIONAL POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Threshold	Description	Measure
First	First actions that go beyond the conventional and into the unconventional repertoire, still considered acceptable by democratic and social norms	Sign a petition Attend a peaceful demonstration or march Join an interest group or social movement for political reasons Provide funding or support for a political cause
Second	Direct action techniques	Join a boycott
Third	Illegal acts that remain nonviolent	Join a strike*
Fourth	Violent acts	Damage property for political reasons Engage in violence for political reasons

Inspired by R. J. Dalton 1988, 65

*Strikes, in Canada, are often legal and the survey question does not specifically ask whether the strike is official/legal or unofficial/illegal ("Labour Relations - Illegal Strikes and Lockouts" 2023; Library, n.d.). And so, while for the purposes of this analysis it will be used as a representation of the third threshold under the assumption that some of these might be illegal, no specific analysis of the second and third sector individually will be made due to the lack of appropriate measure.

Unconventional political participation, as explored in the literature review, is a concept that is in constant evolution and its measures cannot be blindly applied to every context without considering their definitions. That being said, Dalton (1988) offered a scale by which to analyse and discuss the various forms of unconventional political participation. *TABLE 3.1* shows the thresholds along with their descriptions and corresponding measures found in the PCSP 2017 dataset. The measures all come from the same set of question that asks "For each of the following, please indicate whether you have done any of these things, whether you might do it, or whether you would never under any circumstances do it: I've done it; I might do it; I would never do it" and excludes opt-out responses (Kanji and Tannahill 2017, 55-6). Because strikes in Canada are often legal and that the survey does not specify whether it asks about official or unofficial strikes, the legal vs. illegal line is drawn at illegal and violent acts. The idea behind having these categories is to see how far respondents are willing to go to express an opinion in a way that is external to existing institutional bounds. And so, in this case, drawing the line at violent acts rather than before strikes is more relevant. However, special attention will be brought to the findings regarding striking, as it remains distinct from the first two thresholds.

Political Support

As per the theory, political support will be divided into its five objects of support, ranging from the most diffuse, political community, to the most specific, political authorities (Easton 1965b; R. J. Dalton 2004; Martini and Quaranta 2020). Each object has various indicators, which can be further categorized into evaluative and affective indicators of support (see *TABLE 3.2*). Evaluative indicators comprise of evaluations citizens make of the different parts of their political system. They mainly have to do with performance and how well one thinks something is working for them.

These can vary from government to government, year to year, and even day to day. On the other hand, affective indicators have to do with orientations, emotions, and attachment. As mentioned in the previous chapter, over time, evaluations of the various indicators will build up a more solid reserve of affective orientations. For example said, the longer and more you evaluate your authorities to be performing well, the more trust you will build towards them and the more reliable you will feel they are. The specific wording of each variable, rooted in these measures, can be found in Appendix I.

TABLE 3.2 OPERATIONALIZATION OF POLITICAL SUPPORT VARIABLES

Object of support	Evaluative Indicators	Affective Indicators
Community	Best nation to live	Pride, patriotism
Regime Principles	Democracy as the best form of government (vs. other forms)	Agreement with democratic (political, social, civil) values
Regime Norms and Procedures	Satisfaction with the working of democracy	Citizenship norms, compliance with participatory norms (voting in elections)
Regime Institutions	Performance evaluations of institutions/governments (responsiveness)	Reliability of institutions (trust, confidence)
Authorities	Performance evaluations of authorities	Reliability of political actors, politicians, authorities (trust, confidence)

Inspired by R. J. Dalton 2004, 24; Martini and Quaranta 2020, 27

Chapter 4
The Expansion of Political Participation – Data from Canada

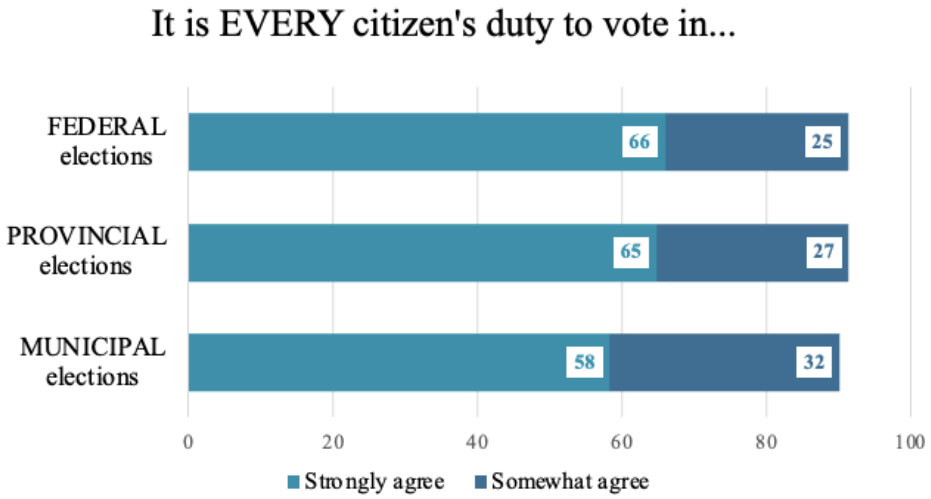
Existing research has brought us this far, but a comprehensive understanding of the expansion of political participation in Canada necessitates constant monitoring. Analyzing data from Canada that has never been used before allows us to develop our understanding of the specific trends of political participation occurring in the country. This chapter seeks to address the first research question: What does unconventional participation look like in Canada?

Political Participation in Canada

To have a proper understanding of the changing patterns of political participation in Canada, we must first have a good grasp of what it's evolving from – conventional political participation. As most studies (Milbrath and Goel 1982; Nevitte 1996; Norris 2004), we also rely on electoral participation as an indicator of how Canadians engage with their political system in conventional ways. This is especially important if we are to draw conclusions about how voters and nonvoters may have varying experiences when it comes to unconventional political participation.

In Canada, voting in the past few elections has averaged in the low 60s, but people who do not vote in one election are not the same than those who do not vote in another (Canada 2023).

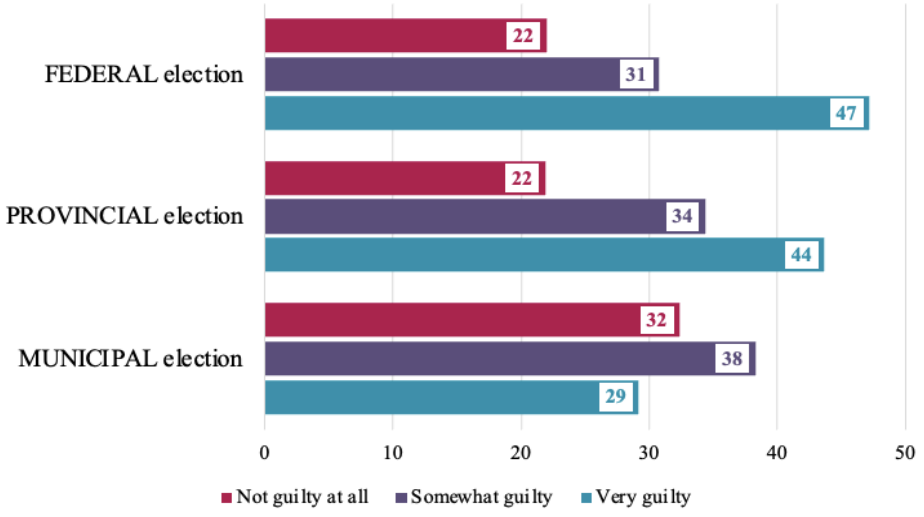
FIGURE 4.1 SENSE OF DUTY TOWARDS VOTING AT VARIOUS LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT



Data Source: 2017 Political Communities Survey Project (PCSP) | n=2654
Question: "For each of the questions below, please indicate if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. It is EVERY citizen's duty to vote in federal/provincial/municipal elections." Answers displayed are both categories for "agree".

Indeed, with people cycling in and out of voting eligibility, facing extenuating circumstances, or simply changing their mind, voting or not voting is not a constant for everyone. When polled, "Canadians generally conformed to the idea that voting was a kind of 'civic duty', and, even if they were unable to vote in a particular election, they typically expressed their intention to vote in the next one" (Pammett and LeDuc 2020, 249). In fact, *FIGURE 4.1* illustrates that about 90% of Canadians agree that it is *every* citizen's duty to vote not only in federal elections, but also in provincial and municipal ones. Although there is slight variation especially when it comes to municipal elections, a significant proportion of Canadians even *strongly* agree with that statement, supporting the claim that just because one is not being able to vote in an election, it does not mean that this person is against voting or does not have the intention to vote in the future. Further evidence of this can be seen when respondents are asked about how much guilt they would feel if they did not vote in each type of election. *FIGURE 4.2* shows that at all levels, a majority of Canadians express they would feel guilty for not voting. However, we do see higher variation here than in the previous figure. At the federal and provincial level, 78% of Canadians said they would feel guilty and over half of those said they would feel *very* guilty if they did not vote. On the other hand, at the municipal level, only 67% of Canadians said they would feel guilty, with only 29% saying they would feel *very* guilty and 32% saying they would not feel guilty at all. There are some observations that help explain this variation in perceptions of voting at different levels. One of them is that there is higher turnout when the election concerns more powerful offices, which explains why Canadians might see municipal elections differently than provincial and federal ones (Blais and Daoust 2020). But, despite that fact, it remains clear that most Canadians see voting, at all levels, as a duty and would feel some level of guilt for not voting. And so, while someone may decide to not vote in one given election, because they still see voting as a duty and might feel guilt for not voting, they have the potential to change their mind and vote come the following election.

FIGURE 4.2 LEVEL OF GUILT FOR NOT VOTING AT VARIOUS LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT

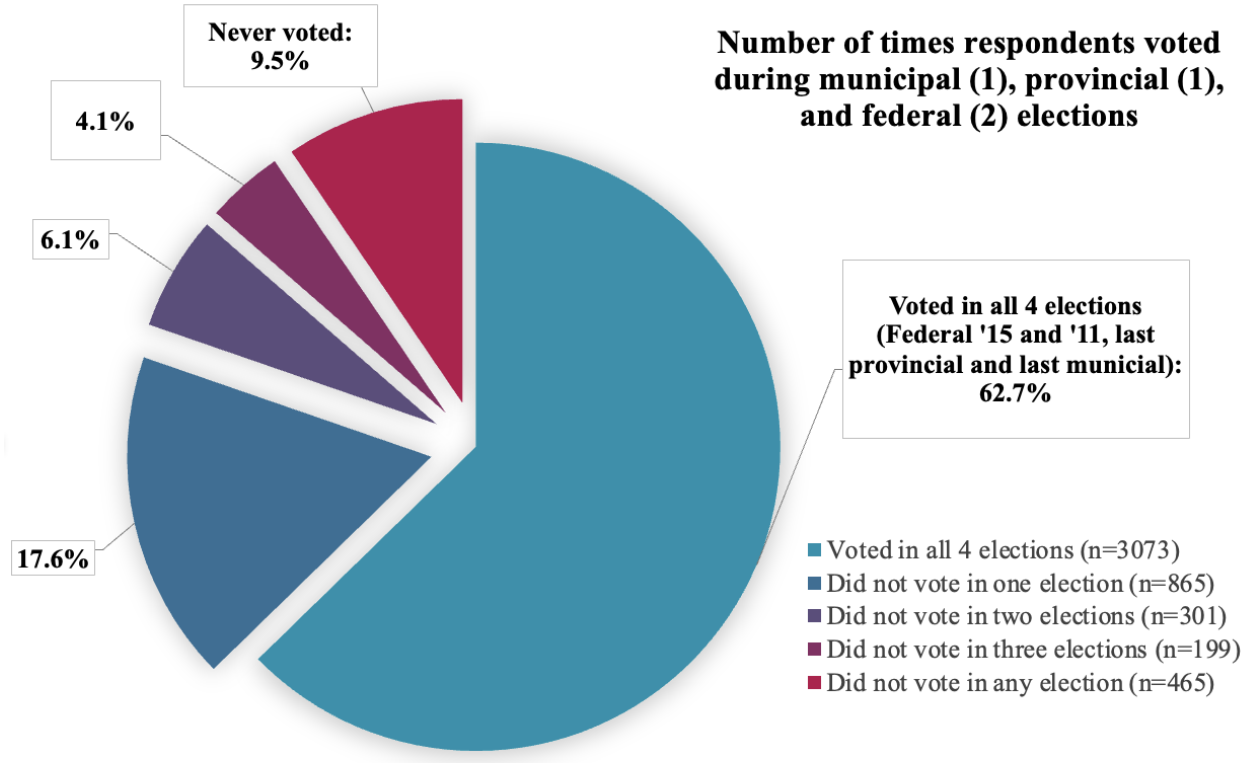


Data Source: 2017 Political Communities Survey Project (PCSP) | n=2654
Question: "For each of the questions below, please indicate if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. It is EVERY citizen's duty to vote in federal/provincial/municipal elections." Answers displayed are both categories for "agree".

Thus, voting, just like nonvoting, is not a permanent choice (Pammett and LeDuc 2020). For analytical purposes though, this makes it difficult to create a group of nonvoters across many elections. Who do we include in the "nonvoter" category? Do we only include people who have never voted and therefore arguably show little potential for becoming voters, or do we also include people who have no strong tendency to vote and miss out on some elections? While it might be easy to argue that nonvoters are people who have never voted and seem to show no intention to vote, it is important to keep in mind that there are gray zones when it comes to exploring a potential shift in participation. For the purposes of the analyses in this thesis, however, people who have voted in all four elections inquired about will be considered voters, and people who have missed one or more elections will make up the nonvoter category. While this does not account for any nuance, it will ensure clearer and more robust results and show where deeper and more nuanced analysis can be done in the future.

Now that the meanings of voters and nonvoters are established, let's turn to the actual numbers. This analysis looks at two federal elections, the latest provincial one and the latest municipal one. Consistent with public data (Hilderman et al. 2015; Canada 2023), the PCSP also reflects that turnout averages in the low 60s. *FIGURE 4.3* shows that 62.7% of respondents unfailingly voted across levels over six years, from 2011 to 2017. On the other hand, that means that almost 40% of people made the decision to not vote in at least one of those elections, with nearly 10% having voted in none of the latest elections.

FIGURE 4.3 VOTERS AND NONVOTERS – ALL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT (4 ELECTIONS)



Data Source: 2017 Political Communities Survey Project (PCSP) | total n=4903

Nonvoters (in at least 1 election): 37.3% n=1830

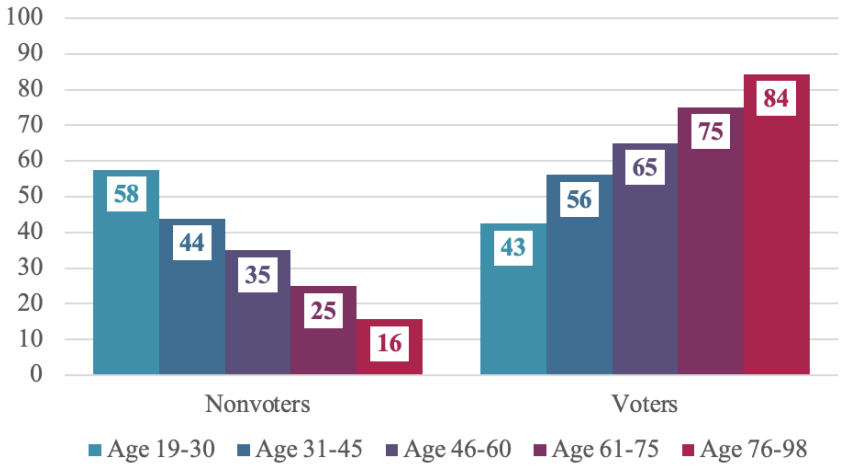
Voters (in all 4 elections): 62.7% n=3073

Note: Excludes respondents who said they weren't eligible, don't remember, or preferred not to answer

A First Look at Nonvoters

So, what does this "nonvoter" group look like? According to the literature, we should expect age to be a significant determinant of this group, as younger people have been said to participate less in elections (Inglehart and Klingemann 1979; Nevitte 1996; Turcotte 2015). *Figure 4.4* very evidently shows that trend, where the nonvoter status trends downward as people get older and the opposite is true for voters. Canadians between the ages of 19 and 30 make up the only age group where more than a majority are considered nonvoters, in this case meaning they have skipped one or more of four previous elections. It is important to stress here that these numbers exclude people who did not vote because they weren't eligible, so being underaged for one of those elections is not considered as "not voting" in that election. *Figure 4.4* shows that, although not as drastically as age, education and income remain important lenses through which to view voting patterns (Inglehart and Klingemann 1979; Nevitte 1996; Turcotte 2015). Resources – cognitive and financial – seem to have an impact on people's tendency to skip out on one or many elections. The gaps are not as big, especially when it comes to education, which only has a 9 percent gap between the lower and higher levels of completed education. On the other hand, between the lower income brackets and people whose household income is over 90,000$, there is a 20 percent gap. This means that while half of people whose households with an income of 30,000$ or less voted in every election, and half missed one or more election. But, for the other end of the spectrum, only 31% of people did not vote in at least one election, which suggests that income is a noteworthy factor in people's voting habits. Consistently, it seems that more educated and wealthy groups tend more and more to vote in every election[9].

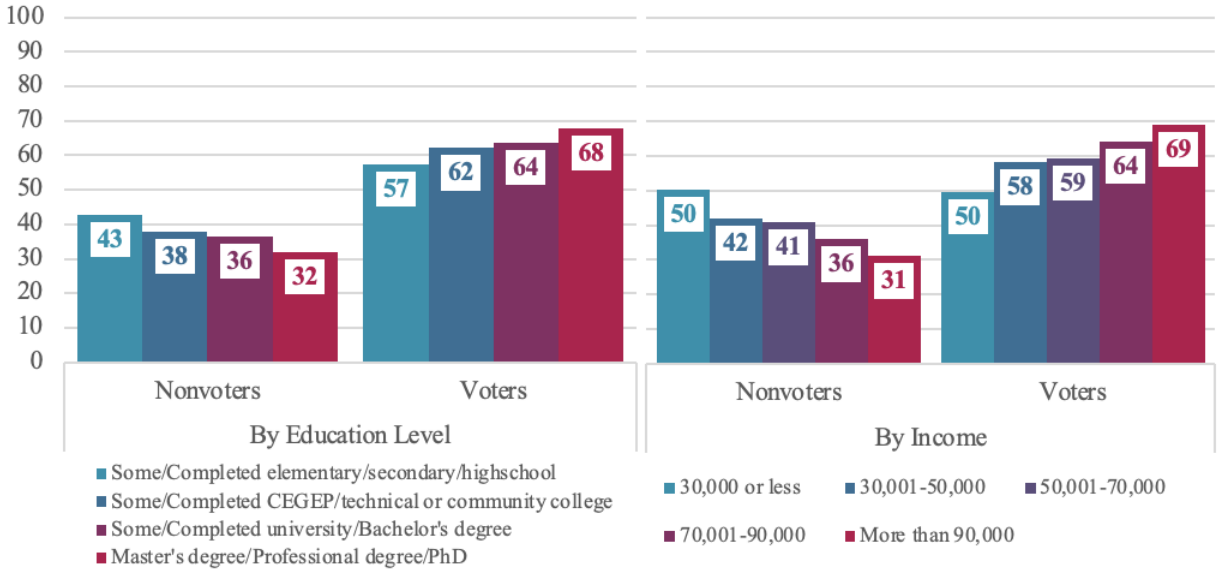
FIGURE 4.4 VOTING STATUS BY AGE GROUP



Data Source: 2017 Political Communities Survey Project (PCSP) | n=4731
Nonvoters are respondents who did not vote in one or more municipal (1), provincial (1), and federal (2) elections, while voters are respondents who voted in all four elections.

[9] Both education levels and income are significantly correlated with voting tendencies, which was determined through using the Gamma measure of association.

FIGURE 4.5 VOTING STATUS BY EDUCATION LEVEL AND INCOME

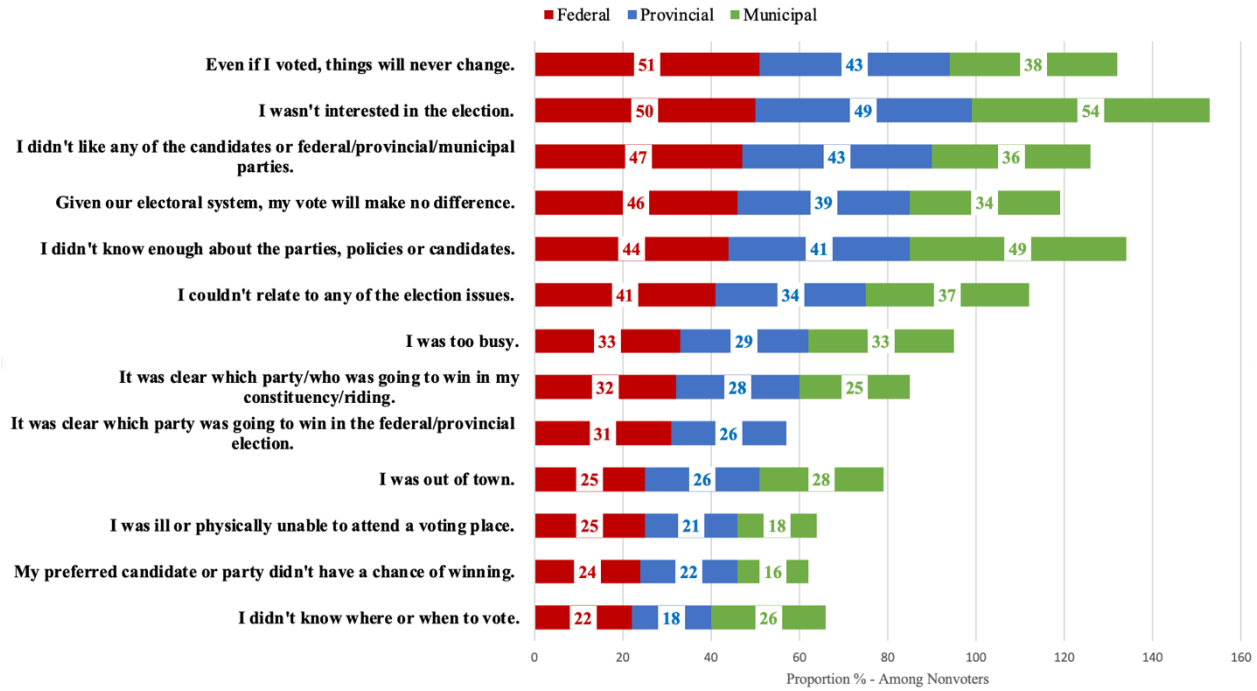


Data Source: 2017 Political Communities Survey Project (PCSP) | n=4330-4887
Questions: Nonvoters are respondents who did not vote once or more during municipal (1), provincial (1) and federal (2) elections, while voters are respondents who voted in all four elections. The education variable is based on a question that asked "What is the highest level of education you have completed, answered compiled into 4 categories. Income, in dollars, asked, "And now, what was your last year's total household income before taxes." 10 original categories grouped to make these 5. The income variable is based on household income.

Exploring who tends to participate through elections and who does not is helpful in terms of visualizing and confirming the literature's findings, but it is only one part of the picture. A significant focus has been to explain not only who votes but why they vote – or do not vote. And, when talking about low and declining voter turnout, apart from putting the focus on the younger generations, the discussion often pivots towards electoral reform (Howe 2010). For over 20 years, electoral reform has been proposed as the "easy fix" for bringing people back to voting (Nevitte 1996; Howe, Johnston, and Blais 2005; Howe 2010). The current discourse makes it seem as if the main reason people are not voting is because of the flawed electoral system and therefore using low voter turnout as an argument for reform. Simply put, by making elections more representative, various provinces and the federal level hope to address people's concerns with the electoral system and therefore encourage citizens to cast a vote (Nevitte 1996; Howe, Johnston, and Blais 2005). When we explore the various reasons people chose not to vote, whether it be at the federal[10], the provincial, or the municipal level, dissatisfaction with the electoral system only comes out fifth, or fourth if we consider only the federal level – which is not to say that it isn't a prominent explanation for not voting, but does suggest that there are other issues. In first place for the federal level is the reason that votes are not perceived as having any real influence ("Even if I voted, things will never change."). This appears to be less of a factor in people's decision not to vote at the municipal level,

[10] As indicated in *FIGURE 4.6* respondents were asked about the latest federal, provincial, and municipal elections. In this case, the latest federal election was the one of 2015.

FIGURE 4.6 REASONS FOR NOT VOTING DURING ELECTIONS AT DIFFERENT LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT



Data Source: 2017 Political Communities Survey Project (PCSP) | Federal n=822 | Provincial n=995 | Municipal n=1598
Questions: "How important were each of the following factors in your decision not to vote in the last FEDERAL/PROVINCIAL/MUNICIPAL election?" Response categories displayed are a combination total of "Very important" and "Somewhat important" for each level. Reasons are ranked according to most to least important at the federal level.

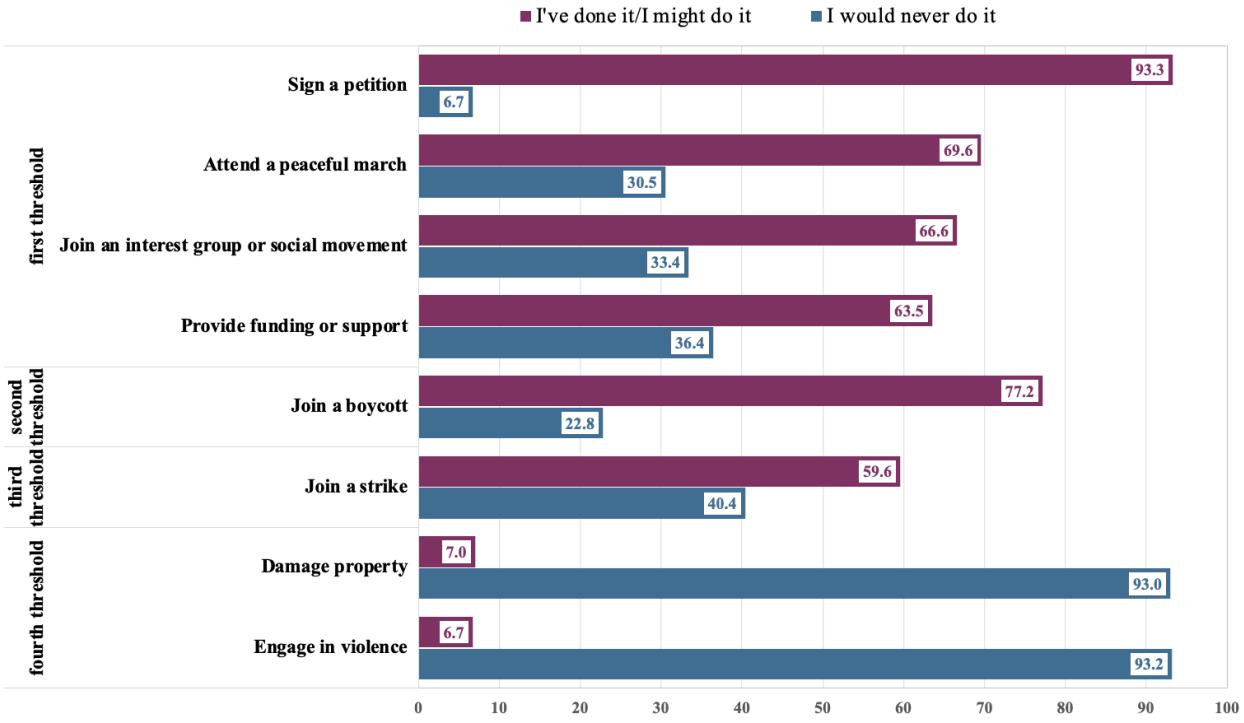
but it remains a tie for the second most important factor at the provincial level. Feeling like their vote won't make a difference *due to the electoral system* is only a few percentage points below a 46%. While there is a connection between both factors – the lack of impact of one's vote – one blames the electoral system, and one focuses on elections more generally as a method of influence. This suggests that there's a real chance that nonvoters are really frustrated not only with the current electoral system, but with voting in general and their capacity to influence politics through votes. Not only that, but those frustrations may also be more important for nonvoters than personal reasons and lack of competition. The second leading factor for nonvoters at the federal level – and leading factor at the provincial and municipal levels – is a lack of interest in the election. Indeed, 50% of Canadians who did not vote in the 2015 federal election and 49% of Canadians who did not vote in their latest provincial election expressed that an important factor in their decisions was that they "[weren't] interested in the election".

Now, whether Canadians are choosing to not vote out of frustration with the system, dislike of parties and candidates, or disinterest with the election issues, all of these factors could explain a move towards more unconventional forms of participation. As established in the literature review, dissatisfaction the current system and amount or frequency of influence have been said to lead some to unconventional forms of participation (Nevitte 1996; Smith 2014; Pitti 2018). This further shows that many factors play into a single person's decision to not vote, and that addressing turnout is not as straightforward as reforming the electoral system. If any type of reform is to succeed in increasing institutional engagement, it needs to be approached holistically and consider the other ways Canadians engage with their political system.

The Canadian Unconventional Repertoire

Now that we have looked at conventional political participation in Canada, let's turn to unconventional forms. The following figure presents the various inquired forms of unconventional participation categorized according to Dalton's thresholds (R. J. Dalton 1988). What is immediately evident when looking at *FIGURE 4.7* is that signing a petition is the most popular form of unconventional participation in Canada, with 67% of Canadians having done it and another 26% considering doing it. This means that overall, only 6.7% of Canadians express a strong opposition to signing petitions, the lowest rate out of all the nonviolent forms. It's also interesting to note that the second most popular form, although not nearly as popular as signing a petition, is joining a boycott, a direct action form. Indeed, signing a petition is more popular, but it remains a form of

FIGURE 4.7 ENGAGEMENT IN UNCONVENTIONAL FORMS OF PARTICIPATION, BY THRESHOLD



Data Source: 2017 Political Communities Survey Project (PCSP) | n=4245-4589
Question: "For each of the following, please indicate whether you have done any of these things, whether you might do it, or whether you would never under any circumstances do it:" with sub questions for the various forms of participation being: Sign a petition; Attend a peaceful demonstration or march; Join an interest group or social movement for political reasons; Provide funding or support for a political cause; Join a boycott; Join a strike; Damage property for political reasons; Engage in violence for political reasons. Responses displayed represent the combined percentage of responses for "I've done it" and "I might do it" on one side, and "I would never do it" on the other.

participation that puts the decision-making power back into the hands of the government. In Canada, while there is a process through which petitions make their way to the House of Commons, they have to be authorized by a member of Parliament before gathering signatures, and all it guarantees is that it will be presented to the House and that the government will publicly respond ("Petitions," n.d.); however, there is no decision-making on the part of the citizenry. Petitions and

most other forms in the first threshold, unlike the forms in the second or third thresholds, also ask very little of the person doing it, often requiring only time. On the other hand, direct action techniques ask more of the people engaging in them because the decision-making power falls into their own hands. Boycotting demands some level of sacrifice through changing one's habits, and at times even comes with financial costs. It also stands out from most of the other forms of unconventional participation included in the figure as one that requires commitment and is not simply something a person does once or occasionally (John and Klein 2003). Boycotting is a commitment which 24% of Canadians have experienced and half of them expressed they "might do it"[11]. While Canadians are a bit more ambivalent about joining a strike, with less people considering it and more people saying they would never do it (about 40% for each response), it is still the third most popular form of unconventional participation with 20% of Canadians having done it. While partaking in strikes is our representation of the third threshold, because the survey question does not specify whether the inquired strikes are legal or illegal, it may also very well fall within the second threshold[12]. However, whether legal or illegal, boycotts and strikes are prime examples of direct action that require a change in lifestyle and habits and some level of self-sacrifice. The fact that more than one in five Canadians have engaged in these forms and that about half are considering them is a finding in its own. If we are truly to argue that Canadians are significantly disengaged, these are numbers we would need to justify as they suggest otherwise.

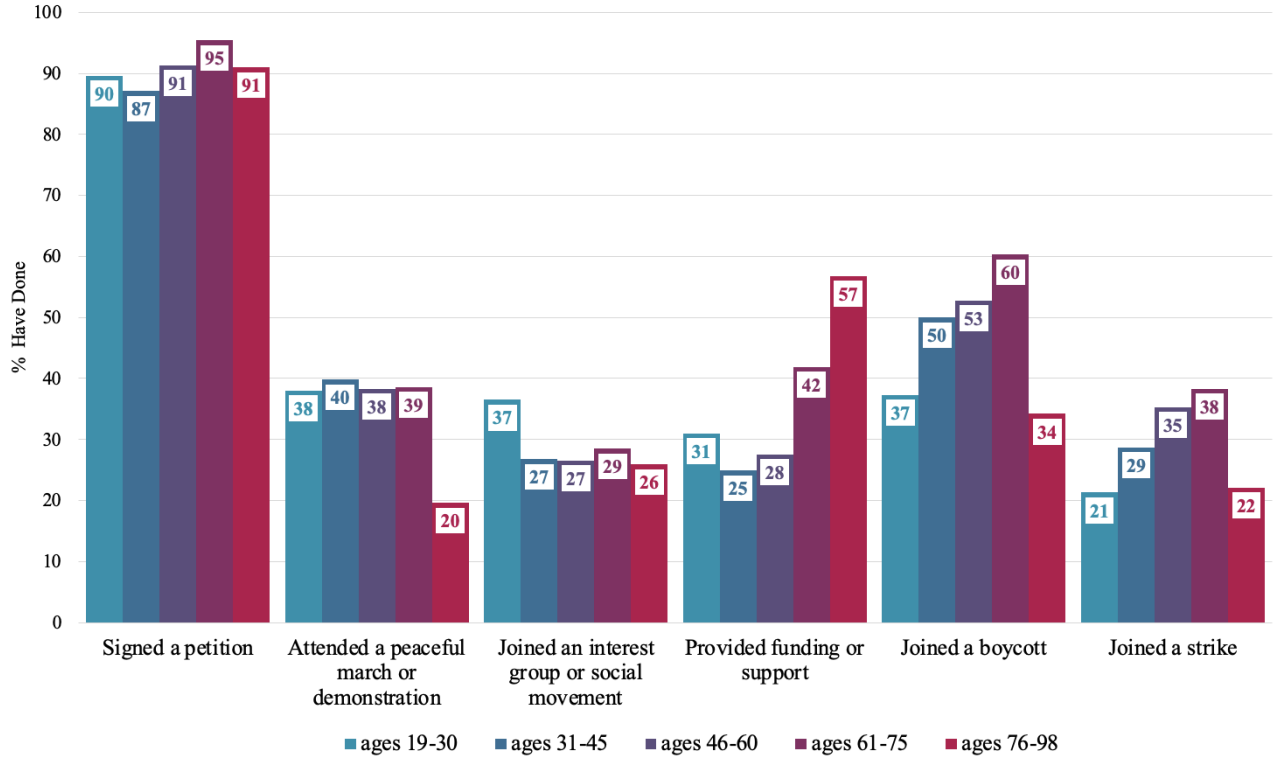
The other forms of unconventional participation that fall within the first threshold, comprising forms of participation that are still somewhat considered mainstream, are not direct action forms. Actual participation rates for attending a peaceful demonstration or march, joining an interest group or social movement for political reasons, or providing funding or support for a political cause may be lower than the other three mentioned above, but still range between 13 and 18.5%. This means that more than one out of 10 Canadians have engaged in each one of them. And, while the percentage of people who would never engage in them averages to about a third of Canadians, about half of them have expressed the possibility of doing it. It's also interesting to note that none of these forms of participation seem to be mutually exclusive. Actual participation in signing petitions is positively and significantly correlated with all the other forms of unconventional participation[13], with the exception of the illegal and violent ones. Over 40% of people who have signed a petition have also attended a peaceful march, joined an interest group or social movement, provided funding or support to a political cause, or joined a strike. And, even more striking, 3 out of 4 of people who have signed a petition have also joined a boycott. This shows that partaking in one form of unconventional participation is linked to tendency to participate in other forms, where one person does not limit themselves to one act.

[11] With the recent tariffs news coming from the United States, these numbers are likely to be much higher today, as 3 in 5 Canadians have expressed boycotting American products in grocery stores ("Shopping Shift: Four-in-Five Say They're Buying More Canadian Products in Face of Tariff Threat" 2025). Many Canadians are also boycotting American companies, such as Amazon, and other various American products (Jiang 2025).

[12] As a reminder, Dalton's second threshold comprises direct action techniques, and his third, illegal but nonviolent acts of political participation (like unofficial strikes). In Canada, strikes for unionized employees are legal when they meet the requirements of the *Canada Labour Code* ("Labour Relations - Illegal Strikes and Lockouts" 2023).

[13] This was tested through the Cramer's V measure of association between signing a petition and all the other individual forms of unconventional participation. Following percentages were determined through crosstabulations of the same variables.

FIGURE 4.8 UNCONVENTIONAL NONVIOLENT FORMS OF PARTICIPATION - BY AGE GROUP



Data Source: 2017 Political Communities Survey Project (PCSP) | n=4245-4589
Question: "For each of the following, please indicate whether you have done any of these things, whether you might do it, or whether you would never under any circumstances do it:" with sub questions for the various forms of participation being: Sign a petition; Attend a peaceful demonstration or march; Join an interest group or social movement for political reasons; Provide funding or support for a political cause; Join a boycott; Join a strike. Responses displayed represent the percentage of responses for "I 've done it".

The lack of correlation between signing petitions and the illegal and violent forms of participation could be related to the fact that an extremely low number of Canadians have reported actually having done or considering doing them. When it comes to damaging property and engaging in violence for political reasons, a vast majority of Canadians have expressed that they "would never do" these forms. However, there is still a little over 1% of Canadians who have already engaged in violence and damaged property for political reasons, and almost 6% who say they might do it. Digging deeper into these numbers, we do see a very strong and significant correlation between these two forms (Cramer's V of 0.771 at $p<0.001$). In fact, 74% of people who have damaged property for political reasons have also engaged in violence for political reasons, indicating that generally, it is the same people who engage in these illegal and violent forms of participation.

To keep investigating who engages in unconventional participation, we have to go back to what the literature said. Age was argued to be an important determinant of unconventional participation, just as it is for electoral participation, with many suggesting that youth are overrepresented in "protest" forms of participation (Marsh and Kaase 1979a; Norris 2004; Pitti 2018). However, evidence is still mixed on the matter, and it remains unclear if age is really correlated with unconventional forms of participation (Nevitte 1996; Howe 201 0). *FIGURE 4.8*

FIGURE 4.9 UNCONVENTIONAL VIOLENT FORMS OF PARTICIPATION - BY AGE GROUP

Data Source: 2017 Political Communities Survey Project (PCSP) | n=4245-4589
Question: "For each of the following, please indicate whether you have done any of these things, whether you might do it, or whether you would never under any circumstances do it:" with subquestions for the various forms of participation being: Damage property for political reasons; Engage in violence for political reasons. Responses displayed represent the percentage of responses for "I've done it".

shows the distribution of participation in unconventional forms across various age groups in Canada. At first glance, it is already evident that there is variation across age groups, but this variation is not consistent across the different actions. Very quickly, we can dismiss the argument that youth are overrepresented when it comes to unconventional participation. Other than for joining an interest group or social movement and engaging in illegal and violent forms of participation (as shown in *FIGURE 4.9*), they are surpassed by more than one older age group in every instance. There is very little variation across the age groups for signing a petition, and the only drastic variation for attending a peaceful march or demonstration can be attributed to the older segment of the population perhaps preferring activities that require fewer physical efforts. Similar contextual arguments can be made to explain the dip in participation for seniors when looking at boycott and strike numbers. For joining a boycott, the drop from 60% for people aged between 61 and 75 to 34% for 76 years olds and older might be harder to explain. Anecdotally, it could be summed up to wanting to be comfortable and sticking to habits that they have kept for a majority of their lives. The drop for joining a strike, however, can be partly explained by the fact that 93.6% of people over 75 years old identified as retired when taking the PCSP survey. Conversely, when it comes to providing funding or support for a political cause, more than half of people over 75 said to have done it. Other than that, for both direct action techniques (boycotts and strikes), there is an upward trend. Older age groups tend to partake in these forms of participation more so than younger ones, with half or more of people between the ages of 31 and 75 having joined a boycott. Where that trend is reversed is when we look at unconventional illegal and violent forms of participation. Other than joining a social movement, engaging in violence and damaging property is where younger people have been participating more than their counterparts. *FIGURE 4.9* shows that about 4.5% of people aged between 19 and 30 years old have engaged in violence or damaged property.

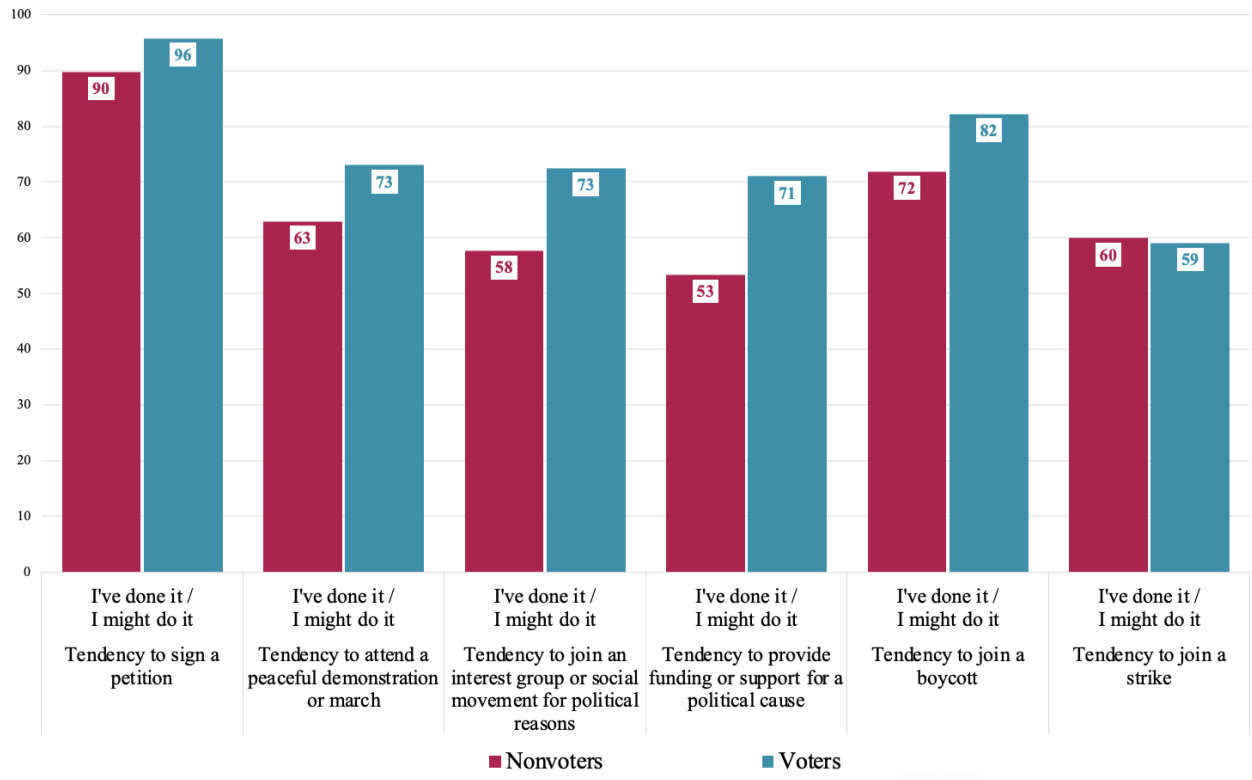
These first snapshots of actual and potential participation grouped in various ways are starting to draw a picture of unconventional participation in Canada. Except they also highlight the fact that there is much we do not yet know about it and that the answers are not all in the literature.

To keep investigating, we need to start to draw the line between conventional and unconventional participation.

Voting and Unconventional Participation

With a better understanding of citizens who chose to skip elections and a clearer picture of unconventional participation in Canada, it is now time to start to explore if nonvoters are truly disengaging from the political system or simply engaging differently. A first step to see if nonvoters are actually *shifting* to unconventional participation instead of participating in politics through elections is to look at the frequencies for unconventional participation through the lens of voters and nonvoters. If we were facing a shift in participation, the data would show that nonvoters are participating in unconventional forms more so than voters, as they are choosing to shift away from electoral participation and toward other forms. However, *FIGURE 4.10* shows a different story. With the only exception of striking, voters have either already done or have the potential to do the various

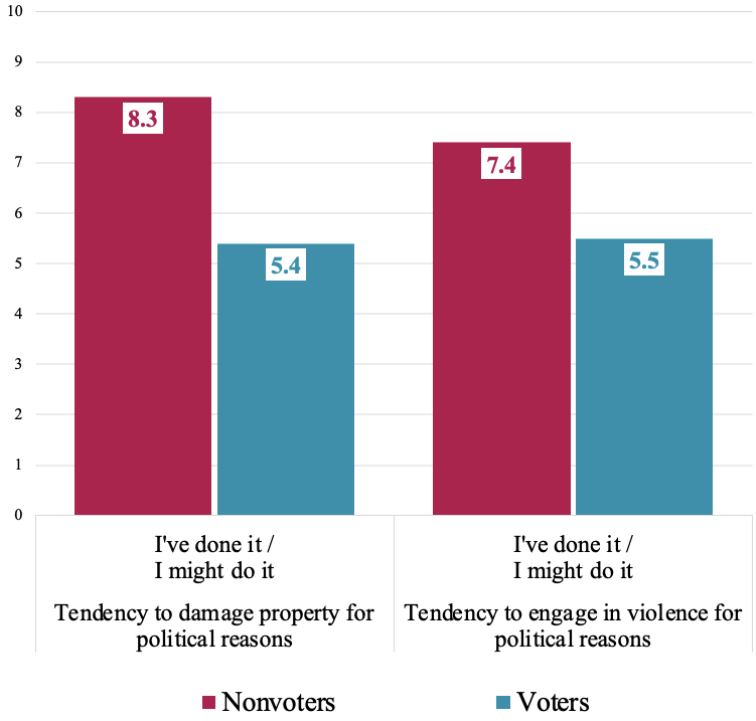
FIGURE 4.10 TENDENCY TO PARTICIPATE IN VARIOUS NONVIOLENT UNCONVENTIONAL FORMS OF PARTICIPATION BY VOTING PATTERN



Data source: 2017 Political Communities Survey Project (PCSP) | n=1775-1988
Unconventional participation questions: "For each of the following, please indicate whether you have done any of these things, whether you might do it, or whether you would never under any circumstances do it: Sign a petition; Attend a peaceful demonstration or march; Join an interest group or social movement for political reasons; Provide funding or support for a political cause; Join a boycott; Join a strike" - Responses combine "I've done it" and "I might do it" for each voting category. Voting categories include the last municipal, provincial, and two most recent federal elections (2011 and 2015).

nonviolent unconventional forms of participation in higher proportions than nonvoters. In lieu of a shift, this image where voters are also participating in unconventional ways in greater numbers than nonvoters suggests a broadening of their political participation repertoire. Just like suggested in the literature, the rise in unconventional participation could stem from the fact that people who are already engaged in politics and already vote are looking for additional ways to get their voices heard (Krueger 2002; Kaase 2010). This would mean that the gap between those who participate and those who do not is getting deeper. In some cases, like for signing a petition, the participation potential gap between voters and nonvoters is smaller (6.1%). But then, with others like the tendency to join an interest group or social movement, or the tendency to provide funding or support for a political cause, that gap is higher (14.9% and 17.7%). The gap is even bigger when we look only at actual participation and leave out the "maybes", with a very small proportion of nonvoters having actually done those things (7.6% and 2.5%). Not only are voters consistently participating in greater ways and in greater numbers, but they are also consistently less categorically closed off to these alternative forms of participation. Across the board, nonvoters are reporting in higher numbers that they "would never do" these forms of unconventional participation. Whether the gap is 13% or 42%, voters and nonvoters seem very different in how they engage with these unconventional forms of participation, and this first look suggests that people who tend to not engage with conventional participation do not shift their energy elsewhere.

FIGURE 4.11 TENDENCY TO PARTICIPATE IN VARIOUS VIOLENT UNCONVENTIONAL FORMS OF



Data source: 2017 Political Communities Survey Project (PCSP) | n=2003-2008
Unconventional participation questions: "For each of the following, please indicate whether you have done any of these things, whether you might do it, or whether you would never under any circumstances do it: Damage property for political reasons; Engage in violence for political reasons" - Response combine "I've done it" and "I might do it" for each voting category.

What contradicts that observation is when we move toward illegal and even violent forms of unconventional participation. With the question of striking potentially being understood as an illegal act, it could explain why we start to see the gap between voters and nonvoters closing. Despite being only a couple of percentage points, when it comes to illegal and violent acts, nonvoters show less opposition and more openness to them (). That on its own might not be very telling but considering the 10 or more percentage point gaps in the other direction for most other forms of unconventional

participation, it does show that nonvoters are somewhat more open to illegal and violent forms than legal ones.

In addition to looking at the simple frequencies in participation between voters and nonvoters, the correlation coefficients also support this line of thought. Indeed, looking at the isolated relationships between voting and the various forms of unconventional participation in *TABLE 4.1* reveals that there is a statistically significant and positive relationship between voters and almost all the non-violent forms of unconventional participation. This means that other than damaging property or engaging in violence for political reasons, the data shows that there is indeed a correlation between electoral participation and most forms of unconventional participation. These results barely scratch the surface of explaining what *drives* people to participate in these alternative ways, but it does show that people who vote also tend to participate in unconventional ways.

This chapter has shown that older, more educated, and wealthier people not only tend to be consistent voters, but that consistent voters also participate more than nonvoters in unconventional forms of participation. Older people also tend to participate more in legal unconventional acts, although young adults participate more in illegal unconventional acts.

TABLE 4.1 CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS BETWEEN VOTING AND VARIOUS FORMS OF UNCONVENTIONAL PARTICIPATION

Sign a petition	**0.26 (.04)** ***
Attend a peaceful demonstration or march	**0.24 (.04)** ***
Join an interest group or social movement for political reasons	**0.29 (.04)** ***
Provide funding or support for a political cause	**0.38 (.03)** ***
Join a boycott	**0.26 (.04)** ***
Join a strike	0.07 (.04)
Damage property for political reasons	-0.17 (.08)
Engage in violence for political reasons	-0.118 (.07)

Gamma Coefficients (SE)
***p<0.001

Data source: 2017 Political Communities Survey Project (PCSP) | n=1775-2008
Questions: Unconventional Political Participation variables range from "I would never do it", to "I might do it", and "I've done it". Voting ranges from respondents who voted in none of the four elections to all of them on a 5-point scale.

Chapter 5
The Drivers and Implications of Unconventional Participation

Now that we have a better idea of what unconventional political participation looks like in Canada, it's time to jump into what might be driving these people to these particular forms of political participation. This chapter will address the second and third research questions to gain a better understanding of the drivers and implications of unconventional political participation, and whether those are the same for both voters and nonvoters.

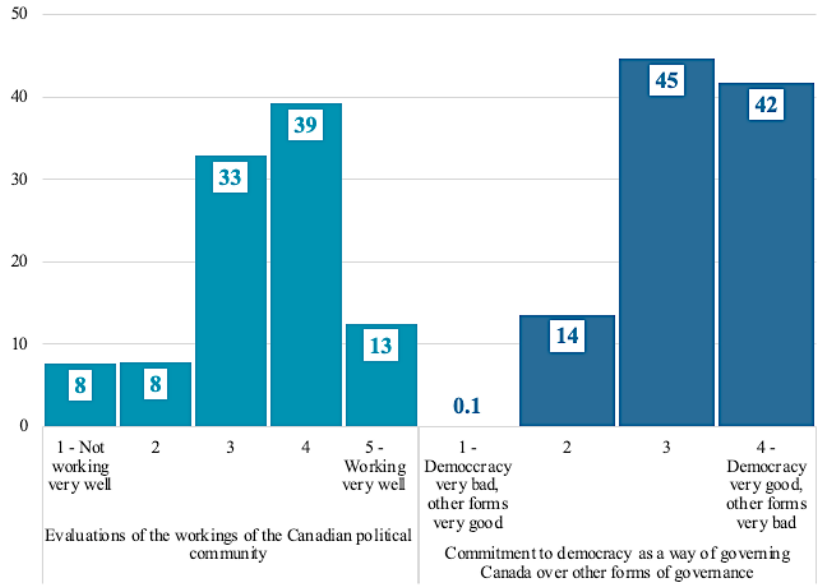
The literature review in Chapter 2 offered an in-depth review of the various explanations for unconventional participation. As previously laid out, the theories on what drives unconventional political participation can be summed up in categories. First, we found institutional explanations, which have to do with the way Canada is set up as a federation (Norris 2002; Stockemer 2014). This is not a line of explanation that will be used in this analysis as it is mainly useful for comparative studies, where Canada can be compared to other contexts. Second, we looked at individual-level explanations, which comprise demographics and the resource theory. However, those approaches have mainly been used to explain conventional political participation, with only some focus on how they might drive unconventional participation (Inglehart and Klingemann 1979; Nevitte 1996; Turcotte 2015). In the literature and the previous chapter, we found that age, education, and income, do seem to be factors in whether people are voters or not, in the sense that older, more educated, and wealthier people tend to be more consistent voters. Despite the focus on conventional participation, there is the notion present in the literature that younger people tend to participate in "protest" behaviour more than older generations, and the theory of resources favouring participation can also be applied to unconventional participation (Pitti 2018; Krueger 2002; Kaase 2010). Yet, globally and in Canada, that link remains unclear, or at the very least insufficient in explaining unconventional participation on its own (Howe 2010, 27; Nevitte 1996). The value change theory focuses on Postmaterialism and the decline of deference to show how societies' shifts in values have altered citizens' relationship with the state and therefore the way in which they engage with it (Inglehart 1997; Nevitte 1996). This then leads us to the Systems Approach to political participation, that shows us that what citizens expect of their political systems matters, and that it affects both their perceptions and support of their governments and authorities as well as their political engagement (Easton 1965b). Using this framework of political support, some have argued that low political support is positively linked with unconventional participation, while others posit the opposite, or present mixed results (Milbrath and Goel 1982; Norris 1999b; R. J. Dalton 2004; Quaranta 2015; Christensen 2016b). For example, while some studies have suggested that low confidence in institutions might be driving people to unconventional forms of participation (Nevitte 1996; Turcotte 2015), others have correlated being patriotic to protest behaviour (Milbrath and Goel 1982). Indeed, as people lose confidence in their institutions and in their ability to properly represent them, they might find themselves drawing away from conventional – institutional – avenues of participation toward unconventional ones. Yet, it could

also be that having high political support and confidence in one's political system would lead to more engagement, no matter the type or avenue. These various findings fit in the larger narrative that there exists a relationship between political support and unconventional political participation. The first step is therefore to figure out what types of political support might be related to the various forms of unconventional participation, as that remains unclear in the literature, both globally and in the case of Canada (Christensen 2016b).

Evaluative Support and Unconventional Political Participation

A descriptive look at the various indicators of evaluative support shows us that overall, evaluations of the performance of the Canadian political system are good, but not great. For the political community and regime principles objects of support, support is relatively high.Figure 5.1 The State of Political Support in Canada - Evaluative Indicators (Political Community, Regime Principles) *FIGURE 5.1* shows Canadians' evaluations of both the Canadian political community and their commitment to democracy as a good way of governing their country, as opposed to other modes of governance. It is quick to see that most Canadians seem to think that their political community is working well, but only a small proportion (13%) think it is working *very* well, and over a third seem split on the matter. On the right hand side, the graph shows that 42% of Canadians think that democracy is a very good way of governing Canada, all while believing the alternatives – having a strong leader, experts, or the army rule and make decisions – are very bad. But, while 45% still are of the opinion that democracy is a good way of governing, they are not as committed to democracy and do not completely reject the other ways of governing. And, although only a small proportion, the fact remains that more than one in 10 Canadians are leaning away from democracy as a favoured way of governing the country. This hints at the notion that people in Canada do not overwhelmingly evaluate their

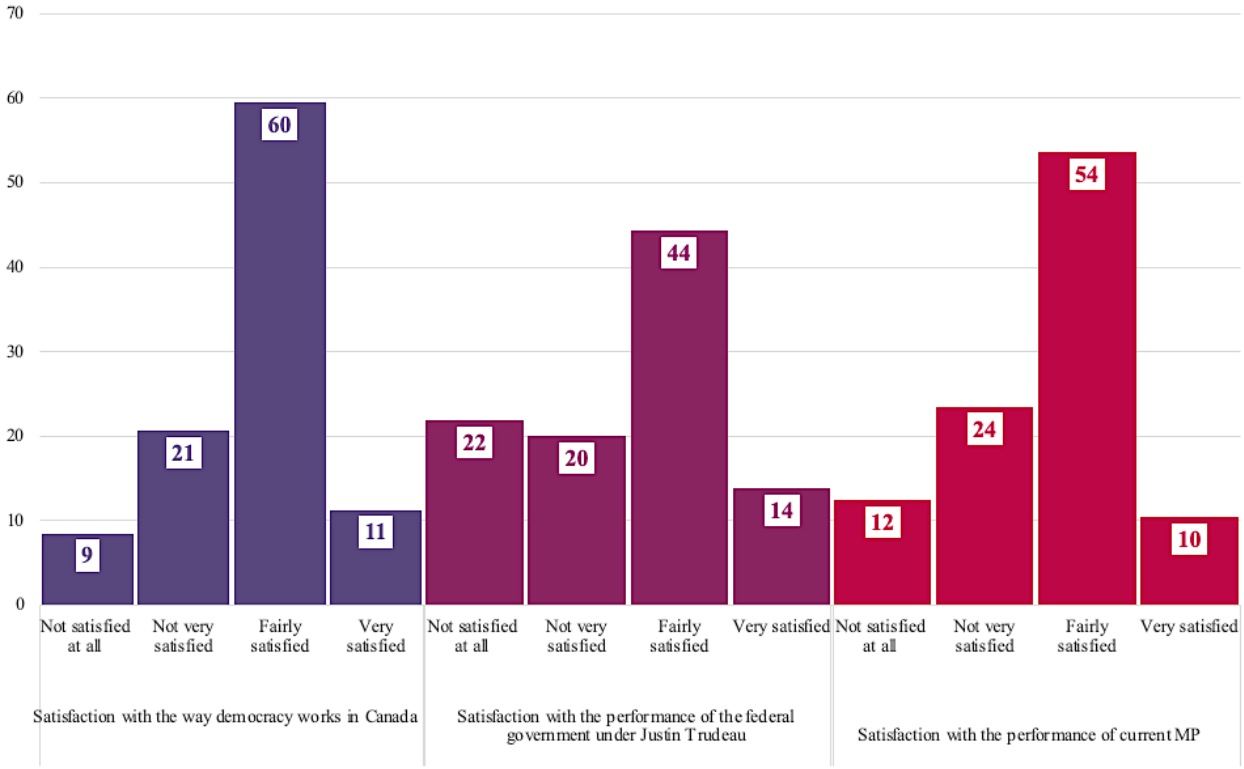
FIGURE 5.1 THE STATE OF POLITICAL SUPPORT IN CANADA - EVALUATIVE INDICATORS (POLITICAL COMMUNITY, REGIME PRINCIPLES)



Data Source: 2017 Political Communities Survey Project (PCSP) | n=5415-6527
Questions: Performance of the Canadian political community based on "On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 means 'working extremely well' and 0 means 'not working well at all', how well do you think the following political communities are working: Canada" and commitment to democracy built from an index from "For each of the following would you say it is a very good, fairly good, fairly bad, or very bad way of governing this COUNTRY? | Having a democratic political system | Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with legislatures and elections | Having experts, not government, make decisions according to what they think is best for the count | Having the army rule"

democracy to be performing that well. When we move to the other objects of support, we observe similar tendencies (see *FIGURE 5.2*). While a majority of Canadians express being satisfied with the way democracy works in Canada, the performance of the federal government under Justin Trudeau,

FIGURE 5.2 THE STATE OF POLITICAL SUPPORT IN CANADA - EVALUATIVE INDICATORS (REGIME PERFORMANCE, REGIME INSTITUTIONS, AUTHORITIES)



Data Source: 2017 Political Communities Survey Project (PCSP) | n=4911-6405
Questions: "On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in CANADA?" | "How satisfied are you with the performance of | the FEDERAL government under Justin Trudeau? | your current MP?"

and the performance of their MP, only a small proportion (ranging from 10% to 14%) express being *very* satisfied. In the case of the performance of the federal government under Justin Trudeau, 42% of Canadians expressed not being satisfied, with 22% saying they weren't satisfied *at all*. The more specific we get into the objects of support, the more they tend to vary from year to year, so it might be that in 2017, some members of parliament were or had recently behaved less than ideally, or that some were growing frustrated with Justin Trudeau's government. As the theory states[14], at this level, the greater danger occurs when negative evaluations persist and erode more diffuse and affective support.

With a clearer image of Canadian's perceptions of the performance of their political system, we can now turn to how those perceptions may influence their political engagement. Simple

[14] Refer to Chapter 2 "A Systems Approach to Participation".

crosstabs start to uncover some relationships. Every evaluative indicator in *TABLE 5.1* seems related to conventional participation, operationalized as voting, with a strong indicator being "Democracy as a good way of governing Canada (over other ways)". This makes sense when we think about what supporting democracy means – if one agrees with democratic principles and a rule by the people, one is more likely to partake in that rule through state-sanctioned avenues. Overall, this first look at those relationships show us that the more one feels like the whole of the Canadian political system is performing, the more likely one is to vote.

TABLE 5.1 EVALUATIVE INDICATORS OF POLITICAL SUPPORT AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

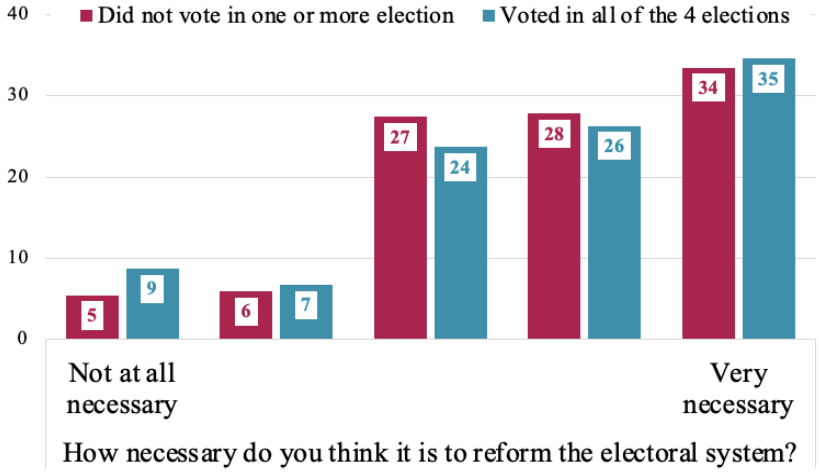
	Unconventional Participation	Legal Unconventional Participation	Illegal Unconventional Participation	Conventional Participation
Canadian Political Community (working)	**.08 (.03) ****	.04 (.02)	**.20 (.06) *****	**.07 (.02) *****
Democracy as a good way of governing Canada (over other ways)	**.17 (.04) *****	**.33 (.04) *****	**- .70 (.04) *****	**.25 (.02) *****
Satisfaction with the way democracy works in Canada	.04 (.03)	.04 (.04)	- .02 (.07)	**.14 (.02) *****
Satisfaction with the performance of the federal government under Justin Trudeau	**.10 (.03) ****	**.10 (.04) ****	.03 (.06)	**.04 (.02) ***
Satisfaction with the performance of current MP	.06 (.04)	**.09 (.04) ***	- .03 (.06)	**.17 (.03) *****
N	1351-1676	1379-1712	1905-2483	3793-4757

Gamma Coefficients (SE)
*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Data source: 2017 Political Communities Survey Project (PCSP)
Questions: See Appendix I for breakdown of the political support variables. Legal Unconventional Participation comprises: Sign a petition; Attend a peaceful demonstration or march; Join an interest group or social movement for political reasons; Provide funding or support for a political cause; Join a boycott; Join a strike. Illegal Unconventional Participation comprises: Damage property for political reasons; Engage in violence for political reasons.

What we also see is that agreeing that democracy is a good way of governing also makes one more likely to partake in legal, non-state-sanctioned avenues for political participation. This indicates that Canadian citizens, when they evaluate democracy to be a good thing over the rule of the army or experts or authoritarian leaders, they are more likely to use more than one way to participate in and influence politics, showing a commitment to democracy not only through their evaluation but through their actions. On the other hand, that relationship is reversed for illegal and violent forms of participation – the more one agrees that alternatives to democracy are a good way to govern Canada, the more they are likely to partake in illegal and violent acts for political reasons. It is important to note that although they are doing so in violent forms, these citizens are still making a decision to participate in acts for political reasons instead of disengaging from the process altogether. At this early stage, we can start to see that a blanket statement about all of unconventional participation will not be adequate; political support's relationship with unconventional political participation is more complex, and appears more positive than negative.

FIGURE 5.3 OPINIONS TOWARDS ELECTORAL REFORM BY VOTING PATTERN

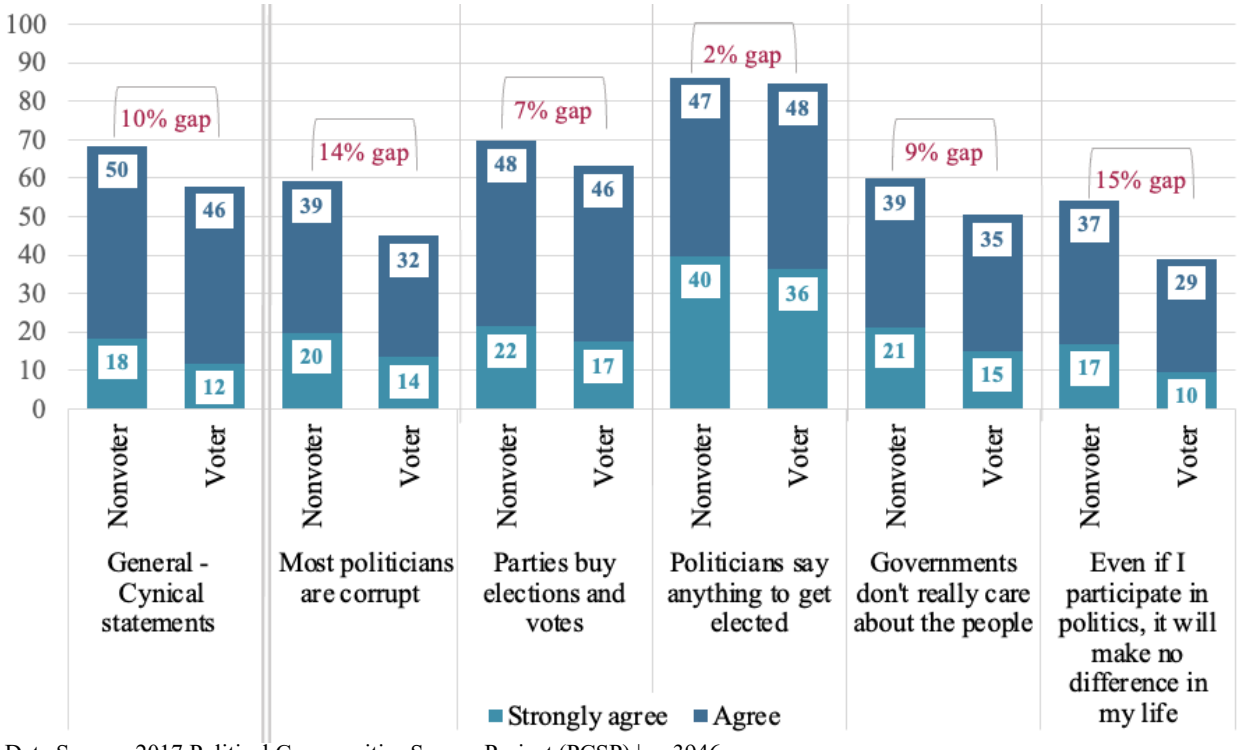


Data Source: 2017 Political Communities Survey Project (PCSP) | n=1913
Questions: "On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means 'not at all necessary' and 10 means 'very necessary', how necessary do you think it is to reform the way that the following institutions work: The electoral system"; Voting categories include the last municipal, provincial, and two most recent federal elections (2011 and 2015).

Other than the ones relating to political support, there exist other political performance indicators. From the literature, we know that people's perceptions of the working of the Canadian electoral system are central in the conversation around political participation (Howe 2010; Meng 2020; Wherry 2024). Chapter 4 offered a first overview of why people were not voting, and the reasons pointed, to some extent, to the electoral system and people's frustrations with the lack of influence of one's vote. In addition, the survey data do tell us that close to a quarter of Canadians believe that reforming the electoral system is "very necessary", with less than 20 thinking, in some measure, that it is not necessary. However, if we look at those same numbers through voting pattern lenses, we see no clear tendency between both variables, and measures of association confirm the lack of a statistically significant relationship (*FIGURE 5.3*). This tells us that whether someone thinks that electoral reform is not necessary at all or, on the opposite, very necessary, it has no effect on whether that same person will consistently vote or not. Therefore, while "given our electoral system, my vote will make no difference" came up as the fourth most important factor in people's decision to not vote across levels, this shows that people's perception of the poor performance of the Canadian electoral system is actually not what leads people to or away from the polls.

Another indicator of people's evaluations of political performance is their levels of cynicism. When asked whether they agreed or disagreed with various cynical statements, on average, nearly 60 of voters and 70% of nonvoters agreed with the negative statements. Indeed, whether by 2% of 15%, on all questions, nonvoters are more cynical than voters (*FIGURE 5.4*). The biggest gaps between voters and nonvoters occur at the opinion that "most politicians are corrupt" (59% for nonvoters and 45% for voters) and that participating in politics will make no difference in one's life (54% for nonvoters and 39% for voters). This indicates that performance of governments and political authorities matters and feeds into how people will engage in politics, especially when it comes to corruption and providing outputs that respond to people's demands. However, the fact that 39% of consistent voters believe that participating in politics makes no difference in their life shows the strength of the norm of electoral participation – voters may be participating simply out of duty (as seen in Chapter 4, about 90% of Canadians either strongly agree or agree that it is every citizen's duty vote in all elections) and belief that it is the right thing to do, without feeling like

FIGURE 5.4 LEVELS OF POLITICAL CYNICISM BY VOTING PATTERN



Data Source: 2017 Political Communities Survey Project (PCSP) | n=3946
Questions: General - Cynical statements is an index of all the following questions: "For each statement below, please indicate if you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree: Most politicians are corrupt | Parties buy elections and votes | Politicians say anything to get elected | Governments don't really care about the people | Even if I participate in politics, it will make no difference in my live". Responses displayed are "Strongly agree" and "agree" categories.

they are getting anything out of it. Milbrath and Goel share the notion of voting as a symbolic act or a sign of loyalty to democracy and one's political system more so than it is an actual political demand.

> A person casting a vote rarely believes that it will make an important difference to the political outcome. It is more likely that a person votes out of a sense of civic duty, a sense of a common social norm, and because it is a way of living up to his own definition of himself as a good member of the community. The act of voting does not require much information and motivation as do most other political activities. Many people vote who are not politically involved, and conversely some who are involved may not bother to vote. (Milbrath and Goel 1982, 12–13)

40 years later, these observations still resonate with these findings, where cynicism appears rampant among nonvoters *and* consistent voters.

While believing that the electoral reform is necessary in Canada does not seem to lead people away from the polls, it does seem to lead them to partake in legal forms of unconventional political participation. If electoral reform is understood as a way to better the voicing of opinions and the reception of people's demands, it makes sense that people who believe it is necessary are compensating through other ways to influence politics. As hinted to in the last figure, political cynicism does appear to impact electoral participation, and *TABLE 5.2* is another piece of evidence of that. The more politically cynical one is, the less they tend to vote. But, beyond even just that,

what we see here is that the more cynical they are, the less they tend to engage in all forms of legal political participation, whether conventional or unconventional. Performance therefore seems to matter for more than simply state-sanctioned participation, but overall legal forms of political participation as well. The exception to this rule is, alarmingly, illegal and violent acts. This indicates that the more cynical one is – even when it comes to thinking that participating will make no difference – the more one is likely to commit illegal and violent acts for political reasons.

TABLE 5.2 OTHER PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

	Unconventional Participation	Legal Unconventional Participation	Illegal Unconventional Participation	Conventional Participation
Electoral reform (necessary)	**.14 (.03) *****	**.16 (.04) *****	.04 (.05)	- .02 (.03)
Political cynicism (index - high)	**- .10 (.04) ****	**- .15 (.04) *****	**.29 (.06) *****	**- .23 (.02) *****
Political cynicism (participating in politics makes no difference in one's life)	**- .19 (.03) *****	**- .26 (.04) *****	**.35 (.05) *****	**- .25 (.02) *****
N	1461-1627	1491-1660	2017-2345	1913-4535

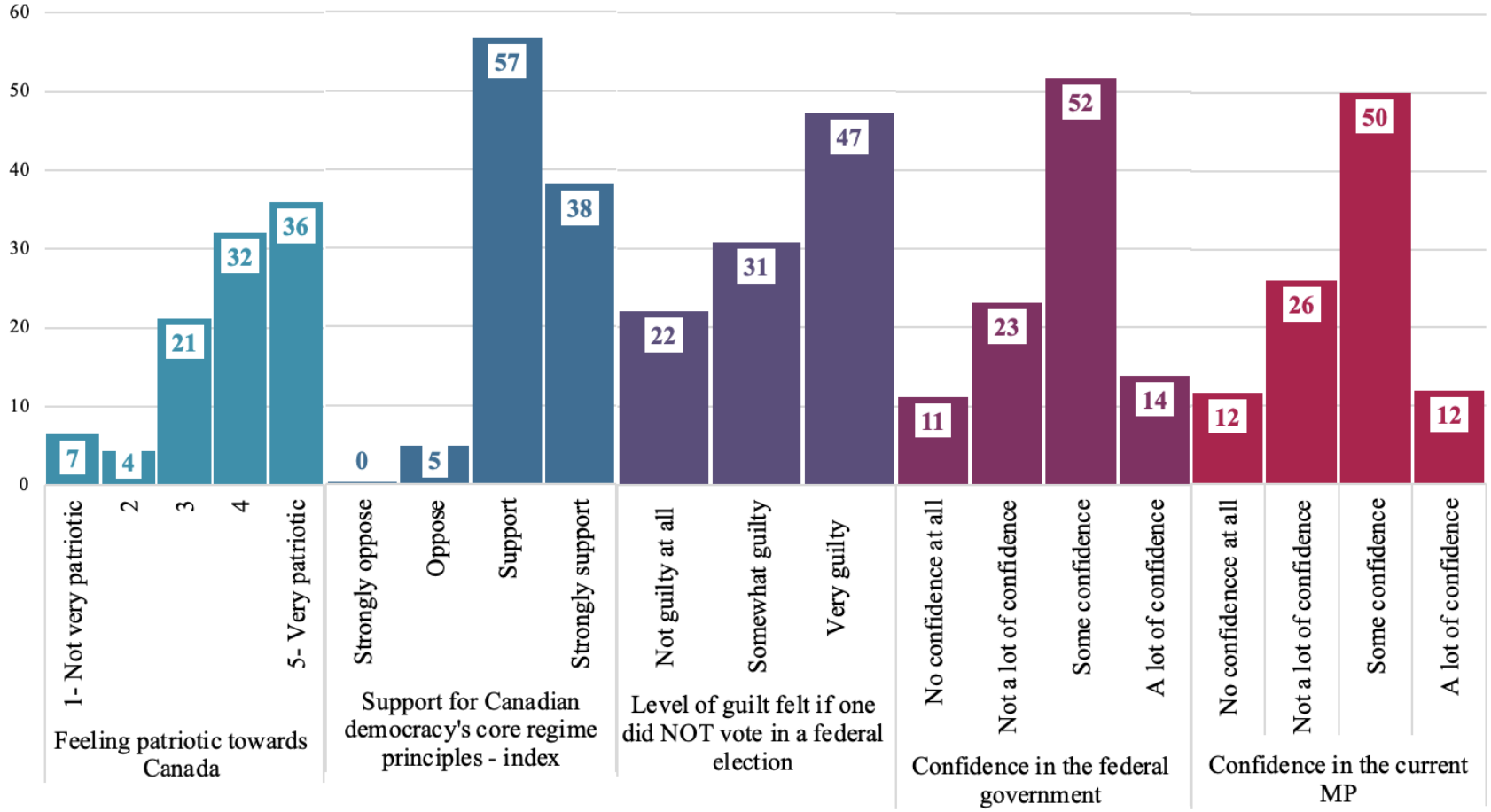
Gamma Coefficients (SE)
*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Data source: 2017 Political Communities Survey Project (PCSP)
Questions: See Appendix I for breakdown of the performance indicators. Legal Unconventional Participation comprises: Sign a petition; Attend a peaceful demonstration or march; Join an interest group or social movement for political reasons; Provide funding or support for a political cause; Join a boycott; Join a strike. Illegal Unconventional Participation comprises: Damage property for political reasons; Engage in violence for political reasons.

Explaining Affective Support

When we look at indicators of affective support in Canada, we see similar numbers than we did for evaluative indicators. Indeed, *FIGURE 5.5* shows that a majority of Canadians tend to be generally favourable towards all objects of support, but we see smaller numbers in most positive extremes. The exceptions to this are feeling patriotic, where only 7% of Canadians feel not very patriotic and that number generally grows as we move toward very patriotic, and potential feelings of guilt if one did not vote in a federal election, where almost half of Canadians would feel very guilty. Then again, while 57% of Canadians say they "support" Canadian democracy's regime principles, only 35% express strong support, echoing the evaluative indicator of support for regime principles. And so, while about only 5% of Canadians oppose those principles, not all principles are met with strong support by a majority of Canadians. Moreover, more than half of Canadians feel at least *some* confidence towards the federal government and their member of Parliament, but less than 15% express *a lot* of confidence in either of them. And, about a third or more of Canadians express little to no confidence in either.

FIGURE 5.5 THE STATE OF POLITICAL SUPPORT IN CANADA - AFFECTIVE INDICATORS (POLITICAL COMMUNITY, REGIME PRINCIPLES REGIME PERFORMANCE, REGIME INSTITUTIONS, AUTHORITIES)



Data Source: 2017 Political Communities Survey Project (PCSP) | n=2576-6560
Questions: "On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 means 'extremely patriotic' and 0 means 'not at all patriotic', how patriotic do you feel about the following political communities: Canada" and an index made up of "Canadian democracy is grounded in a variety of core principles. For each of the following can you indicate whether you strongly support, support, oppose or strongly oppose: The principle of constitutionalism | A monarch as the Head of State | Federalism | Responsible government | Ministerial responsibility | Majority of rule | Representative democracy | The Charter of Rights and Freedoms | The rule of law | Judicial review" ; "For each of the following types of election, please tell us if you would feel very guilty, somewhat guilty, or not guilty at all if you DID NOT vote in that election: FEDERAL Election" ; "Please indicate how much confidence you have in the following institutions: The federal government"; and "Please indicate how much confidence you have in the following political authorities: Your MP"

The literature tells us that short-term evaluations of the performance of various objects of support eventually either build up or erode affective orientations towards those same objects of support (Easton 1965b). The regression analysis shown in *TABLE 5.3* demonstrates that effect, as almost all evaluative indicators are positively correlated with their corresponding affective indicator. Each affective indicator of support is its own dependent variable with its own model. Testing for other explanations of support and adding demographic controls, the regressions test the relationships between each affective indicator and the various evaluative indicator. Not only does the regression analysis show that evaluative indicators are positively linked with their affective indicator, but the factors that the influence affective orientations the most are evaluative indicators of support. The one exception is "Satisfaction with the way democracy works in Canada", which is not correlated with feeling guilty for not voting in a federal election. This can be attributed to the affective indicator not being a complete measure for affective orientations towards regime performance (of norms and procedures) as much as it is for democratic principles. Cynicism, another performance measure, is also a significant factor for affective orientations, especially for confidence in the federal government. This analysis shows that the more one is cynical about politics, the less confidence they tend to have in the federal government.

TABLE 5.3 REGRESSION ANALYSIS - EXPLAINING AFFECTIVE SUPPORT

	(1) Feeling patriotic towards Canada	(2) Support for Canadian democracy's core regime principles	(3) Feeling guilty for not voting in a federal election	(4) Confidence in the federal government	(5) Confidence in the MP
Evaluative Indicators					
Canadian political community (working)	**.45 (.04) *** **	.03 (.03)	.05 (.07)	**.25 (.05) *** **	**.09 (.03) ** **
Democracy as a way of governing Canada over other forms (good)	.05 (.04)	**.19 (.03) *** **	**.29 (.07) *** **	- .07 (.05)	- .03 (.03)
Satisfaction with the way democracy works in Canada	**.07 (.04) * **	**.09 (.02) *** **	.03 (.06)	**.20 (.04) *** **	**.05 (.03)**
Satisfaction with the performance of the federal government under Trudeau	.03 (.03)	.02 (.02)	.07 (.05)	**.28 (.04) *** **	.001 (.03)
Satisfaction with the performance of the MP	- .03 (.03)	**.08 (.02) *** **	.01 (.05)	.04 (.03)	**.73 (.02) *** **
Performance explanations					
Electoral reform (necessary)	- .03 (.03)	.02 (.02)	- .01 (.04)	.00 (.03)	-. 01 (.02)
Political cynicism (high)	**- .09 (.04) * **	.02 (.03)	- .08 (.07)	**- .26 (.05) *** **	**- .08 (.04) * **
Sociocultural explanations					
Postmaterialism (vs. materialism)	- .03 (.02)	**.03 (.02) * **	- .01 (.04)	.03 (.03)	.02 (.02)
Deference (respect for authority)	**.05 (.01) *** **	**.03 (.01) ** **	.04 (.03)	.01 (.02)	- .003 (.01)
Internal political efficacy (vs. external)	.03 (.04)	**.08 (.03) ** **	**.17 (.07) * **	- .05 (.05)	.03 (.03)
Demographics					
Ideology (right)	**.08 (.03) * **	- .02 (.02)	- .002 (.05)	.003 (.04)	.01 (.03)
Age	**.09 (.04) * **	**.13 (.02) *** **	**.25 (.06) *** **	- .01 (.04)	.01 (.03)
Education	- .03 (.03)	**.04 (.02) * **	.09 (.05)	-. 02 (.04)	- .02 (.03)
Income	**.06 (.02) ** **	**.03 (.02) * **	**.10 (.04) * **	.01 (.03)	- .01 (.02)
Constant	**.31 (.06) *** **	**.29 (.04) *** **	.10 (.11)	**.36 (.08) *** **	**.14 (.05) ** **
R-squared	0.31	0.24	0.1	0.61	0.56
N	*1022*	*943*	*1004*	*527*	*1019*

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

All models statistically significant at <0.001

All variables have been standardized and recoded to range from 0-1.

Data source: 2017 Political Communities Survey Project (PCSP)

Explaining Political Participation

The previous section provided a good basic understanding of the back end of what feeds into people's affective orientations – that is, their emotional attachments and confidence in their political system. Keeping in mind that affective orientations are built up or eroded over time by people's evaluations of the performance of their political system, we now turn to how political support may be driving unconventional political participation. We do so here with the help of a fully specified regression model, dividing each regression by participation type. As it has been done in previous sections, political participation is divided into unconventional participation, followed by legal and illegal categories of unconventional political participation, and ends with conventional participation, which is operationalized as voting.

The first myth that the regression presented in *TABLE 5.4* can help counter is that unconventional political participation is a form of protest and elite-challenging, even potentially a danger to democracy (R. J. Dalton 2008; Quaranta 2015). On the contrary, when looking at the first model in the table, we see that in fact, people who tend to participate in unconventional political participation acts tend to be more confident in their MPs, and do not show any more or less respect for authority than the rest of the population. That remains true whether we look at legal or illegal and violent acts, where there is no tendency either way for people who engage in destructive behaviours for political reasons.

When we move down the line, we keep seeing that legal unconventional political participation is not driven by the same factors than conventional political participation. While voting is linked with feeling like elections are important, being confident in one's representative, and demographics (particularly being older and gaining a higher income), participating in legal unconventional forms of participation is significantly linked with supporting Canadian democracy's core regime principles and being confident in one's MP. Even when controlling for other factors, believing that electoral reform is necessary remains a significant driver for unconventional participation, but not for voting. This implies that people who sign petitions, boycott, or march are more committed to Canadian democracy, but unsatisfied with the influence they can have simply through voting.

Finally, we keep seeing variations when looking at the drivers of illegal and violent unconventional participation. A lot of things come into play, but we are not seeing a clear-cut pattern of dissatisfaction, because confidence in the federal government and the current MP makes one more likely to partake in illegal and violent forms. This finding perpetuates the notion that even violent forms of political participation are not "elite-challenging" in a "lack of respect for authority" way, and the numbers even show that greater confidence in institutions and authorities leads to more engagement, in all its forms. The strongest indicators, however, still suggest that violent participation may be driven by one's opposition to Canadian democracy's core regime principles and being cynical towards politics. And, while age does not play a role for the legal forms of unconventional participation as the literature lead us to expect, it does appear to be significant for the violent forms. According to demographic factors, people who are younger and slightly more right leaning, educated, and wealthy are more likely to be open or partake to violent acts of political participation.

TABLE 5.4 REGRESSION ANALYSIS - EXPLAINING POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

	(1) Unconventional Political Participation	(2) Legal Unconventional Political Participation	(3) Illegal Unconventional Political Participation	(4) Conventional Political Participation [Vote]
Affective Indicators				
Feeling patriotic towards Canada	.06 (.04)	.06 (.05)	.03 (.03)	.07 (.04)
Support for Canadian democracy's core regime principles	**.16 (.07) ***	**.23 (.08) ****	**- .12 (.05) ***	.11 (.07)
Feeling guilty for not voting in a federal election	.05 (.03)	.05 (.03)	.01 (.02)	**.18 (.03) *****
Confidence in the federal government	- .02 (.04)	- .04 (.05)	**.09 (.03) ****	- .07 (.05)
Confidence in the current MP	**.11 (.04) ****	**.12 (.04) ****	**.06 (.03) ***	**.12 (.04) ****
Performance explanations				
Electoral reform (necessary)	**.11 (.03) *****	**.14 (.04) *****	.02 (.03)	.04 (.04)
Political cynicism (high)	.07 (.05)	.06 (.07)	**.11 (.04) ***	- .05 (.06)
Sociocultural explanations				
Postmaterialism (vs. materialism)	**.06 (.03) ***	**.09 (.04) ****	- .02 (.02)	.03 (.03)
Deference (respect for authority)	- .03 (.02)	- .03 (.02)	- .001 (.02)	- .01 (.02)
Internal political efficacy (vs. external)	.04 (.05)	.02 (.06)	**.09 (.04) ***	.002 (.06)
Demographics				
Ideology (right)	- .01 (.04)	- .06 (.05)	**.09 (.03) ****	.04 (.04)
Age	- .03 (.05)	.05 (.06)	**-.20 (.04) *****	**.13 (.05) ***
Education	.05 (.04)	.05 (.05)	**.06 (.03) ***	.08 (.04)
Income	- .02 (.03)	.01 (.04)	**- .05 (.02) ***	**.13 (.03) *****
Constant	.02 (.08)	.06 (.10)	- .05 (.06)	**.39 (.10) *****
R-squared	0.12	0.13	0.18	0.23
N	*425*	*428*	*543*	*479*

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

All models statistically significant at <0.001

All variables have been standardized and recoded to range from 0-1.

Data source: 2017 Political Communities Survey Project (PCSP)

Dependent Variables:

Unconventional Participation indices use the variables that ranged from 0 "I would never do it" to 1 "I've done it". Legal Unconventional Participation comprises: Sign a petition; Attend a peaceful demonstration or march; Join an interest group or social movement for political reasons; Provide funding or support for a political cause; Join a boycott; Join a strike. Illegal Unconventional Participation comprises: Damage property for political reasons; Engage in violence for political reasons. Conventional participation is measured with four elections, and ranges from 0 "Did not vote in any" to 1 "Voted in all four".

Across the board of unconventional political participation, supporting Canadian democracy's core regime principles (or opposing them) turns out to be a significant indicator. When we dig deeper into the individual regime principles in *TABLE 5.5*, we see that apart from a single regime principle (having a monarch as the Head of State), all nine other principles are artistically significantly related to legal unconventional political participation. And, in fact, supporting having a monarch as the Head of State is even linked with illegal unconventional political participation, and is the only regime principle that is *positively* linked with it. This means that if one supports it, they are more likely to partake in illegal unconventional participation. However, more digging would need to occur to explain this phenomenon. Otherwise, systematically, the more one supports the core regime principles of Canadian democracy, the more one is likely to also participate in legal forms of unconventional participation. Supporting the principle of responsible government, representative democracy, and The Charter of Rights and Freedoms, is even strongly related with legal unconventional participation. Responsible government and representative democracy are also principles that are related with illegal unconventional participation with the strongest coefficients, but even stronger are the principle of constitutionalism and the rule of law. In the case of illegal acts, it is opposing those principles that makes one more likely to partake in them, which makes sense considering both indicate a rejection of law.

TABLE 5.5 CANADIAN DEMOCRACY'S CORE REGIME PRINCIPLES AND UNCONVENTIONAL POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

	Unconventional Participation	Legal Unconventional Participation	Illegal Unconventional Participation
The principle of constitutionalism	**.16 (.04) *****	**.26 (.04) *****	**- .51 (.05) *****
A monarch as the Head of State	.01 (.03)	- .02 (.04)	**.15 (.06) ****
Federalism	**.14 (.04) *****	**.23 (.04) *****	**- .31 (.06) *****
Responsible government	**.21 (.04) *****	**.31 (.04) *****	**- .44 (.06) *****
Ministerial responsibility	**.16 (.04) *****	**.25 (.04) *****	**- .39 (.06) *****
Majority rule	**.13 (.04) *****	**.23 (.04) *****	**- .39 (.06) *****
Representative democracy	**.22 (.04) *****	**.32 (.04) *****	**- .44 (.06) *****
The Charter of Rights and Freedoms	**.23 (.04) *****	**.31 (.04) *****	**- .36 (.06) *****
The rule of law	**.13 (.04) ****	**.22 (.04) *****	**- .54 (.05) *****
Judicial review	**.20 (.04) *****	**.28 (.04) *****	**- .32 (.06) *****
N	1480-1585	1511-1620	2126-2348

Gamma Coefficients (SE)
*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Data source: 2017 Political Communities Survey Project (PCSP)
Questions: For Canadian democracy's core regime principles: "Canadian democracy is grounded in a variety of core principles. For each of the following can you indicate whether you strongly support, support, oppose or strongly oppose:". Each was listed and the survey provided a short definition (see Appendix I for more details). Legal Unconventional Participation comprises: Sign a petition; Attend a peaceful demonstration or march; Join an interest group or social movement for political reasons; Provide funding or support for a political cause; Join a boycott; Join a strike. Illegal Unconventional Participation comprises: Damage property for political reasons; Engage in violence for political reasons.

Chapter 6
What Does This Mean for Canadian Democracy?

There is evidence all around us that people want to be engaged in government.
Freeman 2017, 175

Political Participation in Canada

Having citizens participate in their political system is a defining aspect of democracy. Political participation – or demands – is an invaluable input for any political system, as it upholds the *by the people* pillar of democracy. Yet, since the 80s in Canada, political participation has been said to be declining, seemingly showing evidence of citizens' growing disengagement with politics and civic life altogether (Norris 1999b; 2002; Putnam 2001). Simultaneously, other forms of political participation, not mandated by the state, gained in popularity (Norris 2002; Smith 2014; Christensen 2016b). Various theories and approaches have suggested explanations for what we are observing, but many gaps remain in our knowledge, especially when it comes to the specific context of Canada. Easton's feedback loop highlights how the outputs of a political system has direct consequences for both political support and political participation (Easton 1965b). Theoretically, unsatisfactory outputs lead to decreased political support, and are said to also negatively impact political participation (Kanji 2002; R. J. Dalton 2004). This relationship between political support and participation has been established for electoral participation, but the literature lacks a convincing argument as to how *unconventional* political participation fits in. On the one hand, satisfied citizens tend to participate more, but on the other, unconventional political participation has long been associated with dissatisfied groups and protest behaviour (Barnes and Kaase 1979; Christensen 2016b; Pitti 2018). With how important political participation is to making democracy representative, it is imperative that we make an effort to better understand how Canadians participate, who participates, and why.

An Overview of this Thesis' Findings

The Canadian Participation Repertoire is Broadening

In terms of how Canadians participate, the results of this study indicate that Canadians are still very much tied to electoral participation. A vast majority believe that it is a duty to vote in all elections and would feel guilty for not voting, and that is even true of nonvoters. While that may sound curious, it goes to show the pervasiveness of voting – Canadians still agree that voting is important and their duty, and these results would make a shift away from voting surprising. Rather than not believing that voting is a duty, the reasons that Canadians have for not voting hint at performance issues, where nonvoters indicate frustrations with their lack of influence in the electoral system, do not feel represented by election issues, and do not like the choices that the electoral system provides

them with. While there are other factors that play into people's decision of not voting in a given election, many of the important ones (using the survey question's own phrasing) suggest that reforming the electoral system would make a difference in overall turnout. The literature contains arguments for this, where electoral reform is analyzed as a solution to declining turnout (Howe et al. 2005; Freeman 2017). However, the analysis shows that opinions towards the necessity of electoral reform is not linked to voting tendencies. Whether one believes electoral participation is not necessary at all or very necessary impacts in no way their tendency to consistently vote at all three levels of the Canadian political system. Once again, this highlights how strongly embedded voting is in Canadians' minds as many consistent voters vote despite believing that electoral reform is very necessary.

The fact remains that nonvoters expressed frustrations with elections in Canada, and if changing the electoral system is not something they believe to be very necessary, it might be that they are diverting their efforts elsewhere. Indeed, existing theories seem to link both declining electoral turnout and increasing unconventional political participation to the same causes, indicating a direct relationship between both (Nevitte 1996; R. J. Dalton 2004; Pitti 2018). If nonvoters were found to be moving away from electoral participation altogether, regardless of reforming the electoral system, and participating more in unconventional ways, that would mean we are facing a *shift* in the participation repertoire. However, we are seeing a different phenomenon. This analysis supports the theory of a *broadening*, or an expansion, rather than a shift. It shows that older, more educated, and wealthier Canadians not only vote more consistently at all levels of government, but consistent voters also participate more than nonvoters in legal unconventional forms of political participation[15]. And so, voting does not seem to be going anywhere, but people who are already exercising their power to influence politics and outcomes through voting are now also seeking to influence through unconventional means. In fact, while one's opinion towards electoral reform will not impact their propensity to vote, it is related to unconventional participation. And so, while electoral reform might not impact electoral turnout, the results indicate that it might negatively impact unconventional political participation. As hinted at in the literature, it may be that voters are critical of how much influence their votes have under the current electoral system, and that this is driving them to try out additional ways to voice their opinions (Nevitte 1996).

The Canadian (Un)Conventional Participation Repertoire

Looking at the numbers more generally, significant proportions of Canadians have already done various acts of unconventional political participation. For legal actions, if Canadians haven't already done them, a majority expressed potentially doing them. While these forms of participation were originally associated with marginalized or less well-off communities, the results of this analysis continue to show that it goes beyond those who are potentially disadvantaged (Kaase and Marsh 1979b; Richez et al. 2020). While the leading form of unconventional political participation is signing a petition, with more than half of Canadians having already done it, a surprising finding was the second most done: joining a boycott. Boycotting is a direct action form, which requires more resources and commitment than others. If the Canadian citizenry were truly becoming more disengaged, this is not a finding one would expect. The results of the analysis can be interpreted as

[15] These forms being: signing a petition, attending a peaceful march or demonstration, joining an interest group or social movement, providing funding or support to a political cause, and joining a boycott.

linking back to a point in the literature review that suggested that the lines were blurring between the conventional and the unconventional. In Canada especially, signing a petition is becoming, or can already be considered as, a form of *conventional* political participation. Its widespread social acceptance and openness to it as a form of influence is one thing, but it has also been included in Canadian institutions. Signing an *official* petition could fit the definition of a conventional form of participation, although no study has officially declared it as such.

Support for Democracy Leads to More Participation – Of ALL Kinds

The literature told us that support seemed related to unconventional political participation, but the direction of the relationship remained unclear, especially in Canada (Turcotte 2015; Christensen 2016b). Most of these studies linked unconventional participation to negative attitudes, again making it seem like nonvoters were driving this change. Largely, what the analysis showed is the opposite: that more political support leads to more political participation. However, political support has a different relationship with the different kinds of political participation.

According to the model used, the story behind electoral participation is twofold, and aligns with what the literature says. Demographics play a role in a person's electoral participation, as older and wealthier people tend to vote more consistently. And, support also plays a role as positive affective orientations towards regime norms and procedures (voting) and political authorities (confidence in one's MP) makes one more likely to vote. But that story changes in for legal unconventional participation, as demographics do not influence one's tendency to participate in unconventional forms, as the literature suggested. Instead, it seems that support for Canadian democracy's core regime principles and confidence in political authorities are important factors. That would align with Norris' critical citizens theory that posits that citizens are growing more critical of their political systems but in a constructive way for democracy (Norris 1999a). So, contrary to the "old school" way of thinking about unconventional political participation as something that it dangerous and that attempts to undermine democracy, the results indicate that people who do or consider these acts tend to be more supportive of the core principles of Canadian democracy.

Unconventional political participation seems to only be dangerous when it comes to its illegal and violent forms. These Canadians tend to be younger, more cynical, and less supportive of Canada's core regime principles, showing almost no overlap with those who participate in legal alternative ways or electorally. The only overlap is at the level of confidence. Although the indicators are weaker, confidence in both the government and the MP is positively associated with illegal forms of political participation. And so, illegal acts of political engagement are also somewhat associated with positive orientations towards the political system. It may be that general negative assessments, but more specific positive ones are leading some younger Canadians to express their opinions in more destructive ways. The fact remains that we are far from stating that this is a threat to democracy as barely a percent of Canadians has ever damaged property or engaged in violence for political reasons.

The Implications of Changing Patterns

This study embeds itself in a literature that necessitates constant re-evaluations due to the ever-changing nature and patterns of political participation. The results listed above therefore supports many existing theories while also challenges others. The analysis presented in this thesis shows

that unconventional political participation is not a threat to Canadian democracy as its partakers tend to be more supportive of the political system than those who do not engage. If the results had shown that unconventional participation was driven by anti-regime orientations or political alienation, the implications might have been more dire for Canadian democracy. But the findings show that the most used forms of unconventional participation are legal and driven by critical attitudes and positive orientations, which ultimately benefit our democracy (Christensen 2016a). Additionally, gains for unconventional political participation do not come to the detriment of electoral participation. That is to say that unconventional participation does not seem to be a protest against state-sanctioned participation and political authorities specifically, but simply an addition to the various ways Canadians can be a part of democracy.

Political Equality – One Person-One Vote-…Five Boycotts?

There are, however, important practical implications to these findings. If political participation as a whole, and even more so participation in a way that the system can properly receive, is so crucial to the wellbeing of a democracy, where do we go from here? While the nature and pervasiveness of unconventional political participation is not a threat to democracy, it does raise concerns about equality of voice. Political equality, where every person has equal say and influence, is an ideal of democracy: in a system where the rule is by the people, the fundamental premise is that this rule is equally shared among the individuals under that same system. In established democracies, the way to ensure political equality was to institutionalize participation through the form of voting. The "one person-one vote principle" theoretically ensures that every person has equal chance to influence the political system (Kaase 2010, 547). And, as we've seen, citizen participation is crucial for the democratic responsiveness of elected officials and equal outcomes (Verba 1996). With voting, it seemed that political equality was taken care of.

However, the gap between the theory of political equality and how it is in practice is currently huge and, in some democratic countries, even increasing (Dahl 2006). The one person-one vote idea does not work when turnout is low and when some groups tend to vote less than others. Theoretically, one person-one vote offers equal opportunities for participation to all citizens, but in practice, resources are indeed an important obstacle to achieving political equality (Dahl 2006; Blais and Daoust 2020). Electoral turnout is already unequal, as shown in this and other studies, as the less educated and less wealthy – people with less traditional resources – tend to turn out to vote less, leading to unequal political influence, and theoretically unequal outcomes. In a representative democracy, who votes leads to who gets elected, which dictates the content of public policies. Like expressed by Blais and Daoust (2020), "if some groups are much less prone to vote than others, then voters are a biased sample of the eligible population, and we may legitimately wonder about the biases that this introduces in the policy-making process" (24). The argument for political inequality gains weight when we consider the fact that voting is being used as the measure for influence, as it is also the least demanding form of conventional participation. When accounting for the other forms of institutionalized, conventional participation (for example, contacting government officials, donating to parties or candidates, joining a party, etc.) that are more demanding and require more resource, the inequality already deepens (Lijphart 1997).

Although the one person-one vote rule arguably hasn't achieved political equality, it has put some limit on the level of influence that an individual can have through voting. On the other hand, such a cap does not exist when it comes to unconventional forms of political participation. As a matter of fact…

> …those who protest are likely to have unequal political influence. This trade-off between increased access to participation and equality of opportunity is not easily resolved. Indeed, […] this tension between participation and equality exists across vastly different contexts, and is particularly apparent in more affluent and democratic societies. Thus, the expanding repertoire of political action in these nations may raise new issues of generating the equality of voice that is essential to democracy. (R. Dalton, Sickle, and Weldon 2010, 72)

Not only are those who "protest" likely to have unequal political influences, but it is the same inequalities that exist in electoral participation that are exacerbated by the expansion of the political participation repertoire. Although resources do not show up as significant factors for unconventional political participation in Canada, the results do show a correlation between those who already vote and those who participate in unconventional ways. Because opinions and demands made through votes are also made through unconventional means, it means that consistent voters input even more bias into the political system by expanding their repertoire (Kaase 2010; R. Dalton, Sickle, and Weldon 2010). If nonvoters participate less in unconventional means, it also implies that the opinions and grievances of the groups already underrepresented in elections do not have any other way of having their demands be translated into political outcomes.

Limitations

The significant findings of this study and their implications are not without limitations. While this analysis contributes to our knowledge of the Canadian participation repertoire and what leads Canadians to partake in some forms over others, there are some conclusions that cannot be drawn from this study. Namely, the dataset's year, its questions, and the way the analysis was conducted all contribute to not being able to confirm that conventional participation beyond voting is significantly declining, or that unconventional participation is actually rising in Canada.

However, it will be detailed how despite these limitations, this thesis succeeds in offering a broad exploration of unconventional political participation in Canada that adds on to our existing knowledge.

Year of Data Collection

When it comes to the dataset, the time of data collection needs to be addressed. The data were collected in 2017 across Canada, and while there is no shelf life to these data, significant events have happened since that may or may not have changed the observations in this thesis. Indeed, it is argued in the literature that unconventional political participation owes a significant portion of its popularity to social and protest movements (Kaase and Marsh 1979b); and although unconventional political participation does not occur exclusively within larger movements, they can serve as a vehicle for greater engagement. The recent events discussed in the introduction, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the Israel-Palestine escalation, could potentially mean that the numbers of people who have participated in unconventional forms of participation could be greater today than at the time of data collection, as these events have brought many people to, for example, march and sign petitions . However, significant events and social movements have happened even before 2017, for example the #IdleNoMore movement, and will keep on happening, which simply further highlights the importance of researching participation more and more often.

The overall relationships observed remain robust findings, for one because affective support is theoretically and observably stable and unlikely to shift significantly from one data point to another (Easton 1965b). In addition, the unconventional participation questions do not ask about doing these acts in a specific time frame but rather whether people have or haven't done them. This means that compared to today, the numbers would largely be similar, especially considering that most of these analyses looked at participatory potential[16].

Variables – Question Phrasing

On the one hand, the "timelessness" of the unconventional participation questions is a strength as it allows for general and robust analyses. On the other, it does pose, to some extent, a limitation to the analysis of the *changing* patterns of political participation. As they are asked, the questions allow us to know whether someone has ever done, or might do, the various acts of unconventional participation, but that does not tell us whether that person has signed a petition 30 years ago or the day before they took the survey. Additionally, the questions do not measure the frequency of those acts for each respondent. And so, on top of not knowing whether a person has signed a petition 30 years ago or the day before, there is also no way to know whether that person has *only* signed a petition 30 years ago or signs one every week.

This study set out to find out what unconventional political participation looked like in Canada today and what is driving it, and so it goes beyond its scope to determine to what extent it has changed over the past decades. So, while it cannot demonstrate how recently and how often individuals partake in various forms of political participation, it can confidently state how many Canadians, in 2017, had done or would never do certain political acts. The dataset's strength of boosting nonvoters also makes it possible to draw conclusions about what unconventional political participation looks like in Canada for only voters or only nonvoters and therefore talk about the relationships within various forms of participation.

Conventional Political Participation – More than Voting

Finally, I have used electoral participation to measure conventional political participation. Voting is a measure for conventional participation that has been used in a number of studies on political participation for reasons that have already been established[17]. However, it has also been established that conventional political participation comprises more actions than simply voting, such as contacting an elected representative, attending a political meeting or forum, or being a member of a political party (van Deth 2014). This distinction between electoral and conventional political participation in general is missing from this thesis.

Nonetheless, by aggregating four different elections at the three levels of governments, this thesis does build a more robust indicator of electoral participation than some studies by looking at *consistent* voters (Ragsdale and Rusk 2017). This study does not claim to have conclusions that can be generalized to the whole of conventional political participation. And in any case, an analysis

[16] Participatory potential is understood in the literature and used in this analysis as the potential to participate in an activity, measured here by respondents' openness to participate in an action (Nevitte 1996). Questions asked whether respondents had done, might do, or would never do various acts of unconventional political participation, and actual and potential participation were put together to demonstrate tendencies towards unconventional political participation.

[17] See "The Variables" section of Chapter 3.

that would have included other forms of conventional participation would not have invalidated the results of this analysis, as those findings would have been separate from findings about electoral participation. For many of the same reasons that electoral participation is often solely used as a measure for conventional participation – the extent to which voting is accessible, encouraged by the state, and representative of democracy – it is not at all comparable to other state-sanctioned political acts (Marsh and Kaase 1979b; Milbrath and Goel 1982). Such an analysis would have to look at voting pattern against unconventional and conventional participation separately, which does not negate the findings of this thesis.

Recommendations for Future Research

Continuing that thought, further research is needed to add a complete measure of conventional political participation to the analysis. This would contribute to establishing whether Canadians are expanding their repertoire beyond simply voting or really moving beyond any political action that is institutionalized. Future studies should also include new forms of participation, as citizens are constantly coming up with new ways to influence politics. The PCSP will be doing just that in its next round of data collection. In 2025, it will ask these questions again and add an expansive range of conventional and unconventional acts of participation. This offers the possibility for a second round of analysis to test the findings of this study at a second time point, accounting for the multiple events that have occurred. Even more so, with its expanded questionnaire, a future study will be able to dig deeper into the various ways Canadians seek to influence their political system and draw more complete conclusions on the extent to which they participate and why. Broadening and deepening our understanding could also help advance the theory of political participation and contribute to a new term to better describe "unconventional" political participation.

Moreover, seeing as nonvoters do not participate more in unconventional ways than voters do, further research is needed to determine the cause of decreasing turnout. With this study determining that the factors for participating in elections are different than the ones for participating in unconventional ways, it might also be relevant to explore whether nonvoters skip elections for the same reasons than they avoid other means of participation. As previously mentioned, it is only through a better understanding of engagement and disengagement that we can make effective recommendations to better participation, and by the very fact, representation.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to better our understanding of political participation in Canada and has done so by answering its research questions that address the gap in the literature regarding unconventional participation. Indeed, it has contributed to our knowledge by establishing that Canada is not facing a shift in the way its citizens participate in politics but is rather facing an expansion of the actions used by Canadians to influence politics. It has also determined that contrary to most existing arguments, the vast majority of the unconventional political acts seen in Canada occurs as a result of support for Canada's regime principles and could therefore be used to better Canadian democracy. Unconventional political participation in Canada is more so evidence of an engaged citizenry than a dissented and apathetic one.

Due to the limited knowledge that exists on the subject of unconventional political participation and its drivers in Canada, survey data is the best way to get a clear and accurate

overview of what we are facing. Indeed, quantitatively analyzing data is the only way to confirm a trend on a nation-wide scale. This study follows a desire in the literature to better understand what is happening with political participation in Canada and emerged from the impression that Canadians are growing disengaged because of declining turnout. This is why it made sense to look at the apparent rise in unconventional participation through the lens of citizens' voting tendencies. The framework used, rooted in Easton's systems theory, stressed the importance and the necessity of understanding nature of the change in political participation that Canada is facing. The methodology was very effective in achieving this, and the analyses produced results that were aligned with expectations but also some that were surprising. Mainly, it confirmed the side of the argument in the literature that argued that those who participate electorally also tend to participate in other ways, and that these citizens generally do so out of support for the political system. More surprising was the impact of believing that electoral reform was necessary. With it being a central issue in Canadian politics at the time of the survey, especially when discussing electoral turnout, it is unexpected to see that consistent voters believe that electoral reform is necessary just as much as nonvoters. And so, while electoral reform might address some issues people have with Canadian democracy, it seems unlikely that it will, on its own, increase electoral turnout.

Towards a More Participatory Democracy

The whole idea behind achieving a clearer understanding of political participation in Canada – who participates, how, and why – is to better get a better idea of what needs to be done to improve political representation and bring about a better match between citizens' demands and governments' supply. Time and again, we have established that better representation leads to better outcomes, and this thesis has now contributed to the evidence that better outcomes lead to more participation. Thus goes the feedback loop: participation is necessary for representation, which is necessary for better and more equal outcomes, which lead to more participation, which is necessary for representation… The analyses presented in this thesis have concluded that while there are now more avenues of participation, these new avenues are not necessarily bringing in new people. This raised the concern of political inequality, where some groups have disproportionate say in politics. And, while further research would be needed to pin down exactly which groups those are, there are some practical recommendations to address this that emerge from the literature. The main suggestion for the case of Canada brings us back to a very well-known place: electoral reform. The first-past-the-post system in Canada has long been disputed as "wasting votes" and many calls for a more proportional system have been made, both at the provincial and the federal levels. A proportional representation system would help with turnout by "giving the voters more choices and by eliminating the problem of wasted votes" (Lijphart 1997, 7). However, even if Canada did manage to achieve electoral turnout and that it was successful in addressing the issue of uneven voter turnout, it would only be addressing inequalities within electoral political participation, and not the ones potentially within extra-electoral participation.

It may very well be that voters and nonvoters are using unconventional forms of political participation because conventional means are not satisfactory on their own. Solving the problem of turnout does not address the other issues with elections, like their frequency and the fact that voting does not convey specific enough opinions on various policy issues. Considering how Canadians are not choosing unconventional forms of participation *over* voting but *in addition* to it, one can expect them to continue using extra-electoral means to express their opinions and seek to influence the political system. So, what can be done to ensure that we continue to strive for political equality and to receive the demands made outside of elections?

All solutions point to broadening the repertoire of conventional participation. Indeed, just like citizens are broadening their own repertoires, it may be time for governments to do the same. By institutionalizing more avenues of participation, it allows some regulation of those forms to both ensure that those opinions are accounted for and are representative, or at the very least have an idea of who is being represented. One version of that could be to implement some tools of direct democracy. Mendelsohn and Parkin, in 2005, evaluated whether more frequent referendums would serve as a way to include citizens in the political decision-making process. Doing that would not only emphasize citizens over the political elite (emphasizing the *by* the people), but would also arguably help uphold Canadian democracy's core values:

- the *protection of minority interests*, so that majority rule does not become majority tyranny
- the *fairness of the political process*, so that all citizens have a reasonable opportunity to raise their concerns and to influence the views of others
- *informed decision-making*, so that citizens have access to the information they need to be able to make choices that are in their best interest
- *political accountability*, so that voters can hold someone to account for the consequences of public policy decisions
  (Mendelsohn and Parkin 2005, 319, *emphasis added*)

These core values raise important points when it comes to unconventional political participation. Addressing the inequalities in all forms of participation would make the political process fairer if it ensures that citizens have more equal opportunities to voice their opinions and influence their communities and governments. As unconventional participation seeks to not only influence but inform, bringing it into the conventional realm would also theoretically help inform decision-making (Kanji 2002; Richez et al. 2020). Finally, institutionalizing the channels that are now unconventional and outside of the system could help maintain political accountability; if there is an official register of voiced opinions, it becomes easier to hold the people responsible for considering these opinions. Future studies should address the question of what elements of direct democracy would work in Canada and how they could be implemented[18].

The findings of this thesis show that the problem of political participation in Canada is more complex than we might think, but it shares a more hopeful message for Canadian democracy than some studies on unconventional participation do. Participation is necessary for good democratic governance, and there is plenty of evidence that Canadian citizens want to get involved and are open to various avenues to do so. Implementing new ways to include citizens into the decision-making channels will not be easy, especially since governments today are faced with demands and channels that are increasing in numbers and nature. But providing more diverse avenues of participation to citizens, informed by the avenues they have chosen for themselves, would surely be healthy and enriching for Canadian democracy.

[18] Survey data shows that the referendum proposition is not popular among Canadians, as only 37% "said that they could think of an issue on which they would like a referendum held" (Mendelsohn and Parkin 2005, 317). There are examples of direct democracy in Canada where the majority of people were engaged, but most examples are from the provincial level. For example, Quebec's 1995 referendum of sovereignty gathered a 93.5% turnout (Lijphart 1997).

Bibliography

Ansolabehere, Stephen, and Brian F. Schaffner. 2018. "Taking the Study of Political Behaviour Online." In *The Oxford Handbook of Polling and Survey Methods*, 76–98. New York: Oxford University Press.

Barnes, Samuel H., and Max Kaase. 1979. *Political Action: Mass Participation in Five Western Democracies*. Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE Publications.

Berinsky, Adam J. 2017. "Measuring Public Opinion with Surveys." *Annual Review of Political Science* 20 (1): 309–29. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-101513-113724.

Blais, André, and Christopher H. Achen. 2019. "Civic Duty and Voter Turnout." *Political Behavior* 41 (2): 473–97. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-018-9459-3.

Blais, André, and Jean-François Daoust. 2020. *The Motivation to Vote: Explaining Electoral Participation*. Vancouver: UBC Press.

Blanc, Marie-France Le. 2006. "Two Tales of Municipal Reorganization: Toronto's and Montreal's Diverging Paths Toward Regional Governance and Social Sustainability." *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue Canadienne de Science Politique* 39 (3): 571–90. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423906060252.

Bosc, Marc, and André Gagnon, eds. 2017. "Public Petitions - Guidelines for Petitions." In *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, Third edition. Procedural Info. House of Commons of Canada. https://www.ourcommons.ca/procedure/procedure-and-practice-3/ch_22_2-e.html.

Boulianne, Shelley, and Jakob Ohme. 2022. "Pathways to Environmental Activism in Four Countries: Social Media, Environmental Concern, and Political Efficacy." *Journal of Youth Studies* 25 (6): 771–92. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2021.2011845.

Burrell, Nancy A., and Claire Gross. 2017. "Quantitative Research, Purpose Of." In *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods*, edited by Mike Allen. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications. https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781483381411.

Canada Action. 2024. "Canada Ranks 13th on Democracy Index 2023." Canada Action. February 15, 2024. https://www.canadaaction.ca/eiu-democracy-index-ranking.

Canada, Elections. 2023. "Voter Turnout at Federal Elections and Referendums." January 23, 2023. https://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=ele&dir=turn&document=index&lang=e.

"Canadian Election Study." n.d. Accessed March 27, 2024. http://www.ces-eec.ca/.

CBC News. 2019. "Get a Unique View inside (and above) Montreal's Half-Million Climate March," September 28, 2019. https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/get-a-unique-view-inside-and-above-montreal-s-half-million-climate-march-1.5301122.

———. 2022. "Another Weekend of COVID-19 Protests Puts Police across Canada on High Alert, Draws Counter-Demonstrations." CBC. February 5, 2022. https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/convoy-pandemic-protests-canada-feb5-2022-1.6340910.

Cho, Wendy K. Tam, and Thomas J. Rudolph. 2008. "Emanating Political Participation: Untangling the Spatial Structure Behind Participation." *British Journal of Political Science* 38 (2): 273–89. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123408000148.

Chou, Mark, Jean-Paul Gagnon, Catherine Hartung, and Lesley Pruitt. 2017. *Young People, Citizenship and Political Participation: Combating Civic Deficit?* London: Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd.

Christensen, Henrik Serup. 2016a. “All the Same? Examining the Link Between Three Kinds of Political Dissatisfaction and Protest” 14 (6): 781–801. https://doi.org/10.1057/cep.2014.52.
———. 2016b. “Political Dissatisfactions and Citizen Involvement: Political Participation in Europe during the Early Stages of the Economic Crisis.” *Partecipazione e Conflitto* 9 (1): 19–45. http://dx.doi.org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.1285/i20356609v9i1p19.
Daenzer, Patricia M., and Tim Rees. 2018. “Anti-Racism State Appeasement Strategies: Ontario 2017.” In *Civil Society Engagement: Achieving Better in Canada*, edited by Patricia M. Daenzer, 158–71. Routledge studies in North American politics 10. Abingdon, Oxon ; Routledge.
Dahl, Robert A. 2006. *On Political Equality*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
Dahlgaard, Jens Olav, Jonas Hedegaard Hansen, Kasper M. Hansen, and Yosef Bhatti. 2019. “Bias in Self-Reported Voting and How It Distorts Turnout Models: Disentangling Nonresponse Bias and Overreporting Among Danish Voters.” *Political Analysis* 27 (4): 590–98. https://doi.org/10.1017/pan.2019.9.
Dalton, Russell J. 1988. *Citizen Politics in Western Democracies: Public Opinion and Political Parties in the United States, Great Britain, West Germany, and France*. Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House Publishers.
———. 1999. “Political Support in Advances Industrial Democracies.” In *Critical Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Government*, edited by Pippa Norris. Oxford University Press. https://oxford-universitypressscholarship-com.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/view/10.1093/0198295685.001.0001/acprof-9780198295686.
———. 2004. *Democratic Challenges, Democratic Choices: The Erosion of Political Support in Advanced Industrial Democracies*. *Democratic Challenges, Democratic Choices*. Oxford University Press. https://oxford-universitypressscholarship-com.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199268436.001.0001/acprof-9780199268436.
———. 2008. “Citizenship Norms and the Expansion of Political Participation.” *Political Studies* 56 (1): 76–98. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2007.00718.x.
Dalton, Russell, Alix Van Sickle, and Steven Weldon. 2010. “The Individual–Institutional Nexus of Protest Behaviour.” *British Journal of Political Science* 40 (1): 51–73. https://doi.org/10.1017/S000712340999038X.
“Debates of May 27th, 2014.” 2014. Openparliament.Ca. May 27, 2014. https://openparliament.ca/debates/2014/5/27/michael-chong-1/.
Deth, Jan W. van. 2014. “A Conceptual Map of Political Participation.” *Acta Politica* 49 (3): 349–67. http://dx.doi.org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.1057/ap.2014.6.
Easton, David. 1965a. *A Systems Analysis of Political Life*. New York: Wiley.
———. 1965b. *A Systems Analysis of Political Life*. New York: Wiley.
Economist Intelligence. 2022. “Democracy Index 2021: The China Challenge.” Democracy Index. Economist Intelligence Unit Limited.
Evans, Pete. 2023. “Israel’s War with Hamas Brings Renewed Focus to BDS Movement and Role of Boycotts to Effect Change.” CBC News. November 29, 2023. https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/bds-boycott-explainer-1.7042139.
Ezrow, Lawrence, and Georgios Xezonakis. 2016. “Satisfaction with Democracy and Voter Turnout: A Temporal Perspective.” *Party Politics* 22 (1): 3–14. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068814549335.
Fair Vote Canada. 2024. “Canada’s Score on the Democracy Index Declines.” *Fair Vote Canada* (blog). February 22, 2024. https://www.fairvote.ca/21/02/2024/canadas-score-on-the-economist-democracy-index/.

Freeman, Bill. 2017. *Democracy Rising: Politics and Participation in Canada*. 1 online resource vols. Toronto: Dundurn. https://canadacommons-ca.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/artifacts/1880005/democracy-rising/2628957/view/.

Goldberg, Andreas C., and Pascal Sciarini. 2023. "A Reassessment of the Association Between Political Interest and Electoral Participation: Adding Vote Overreporting to the Equation." *Acta Politica* 58 (1): 141–60. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41269-022-00238-7.

Hilderman, Jane, Kendall Anderson, Alison Loat, and Samara (Firm). 2015. *Samara's Democracy 360: Talk, Act, Lead : A Report Card on How Canadians Communicate, Participate and Lead in Politics*. 1 online resource (20 pages) vols. Toronto, Ontario: Samara Canada. https://www.deslibris.ca/ID/246130.

"Holding Elected Officials Accountable." 2024. Alberta. March 8, 2024. https://www.alberta.ca/holding-elected-officials-accountable.

Howe, Paul. 2010. *Citizens Adrift: The Democratic Disengagement of Young Canadians*. 1 online resource (xx, 338 pages) vols. Vancouver ; UBC Press. https://www.deslibris.ca/ID/434595.

Howe, Paul, Richard Johnston, and André Blais. 2005. "Introduction: The New Landscape of Canadian Democracy." In *Strengthening Canadian Democracy*, by Paul Howe, Richard Johnston, and André Blais. Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy. http://link.library.utoronto.ca/eir/EIRdetail.cfm?Resources__ID=1065422&T=F.

Howe, Paul, Richard Johnston, André Blais, and Institute for Research on Public Policy. 2005. *Strengthening Canadian Democracy*. Montreal: IRPP. http://link.library.utoronto.ca/eir/EIRdetail.cfm?Resources__ID=1065422&T=F.

Inglehart, Ronald. 1979. "Political Action: The Impact of Values, Cognitive Level, and Social Background." In *Political Action: Mass Participation in Five Western Democracies*, 343–80. Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE Publications.

———. 1997. *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/toc/prin031/96053839.html.

Inglehart, Ronald, and Hans D. Klingemann. 1979. "Ideological Conceptualization and Value Priorities." In *Political Action: Mass Participation in Five Western Democracies*, 203–14. Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE Publications.

Jiang, Kevin. 2025. "Trumping the Tariffs: Inside My Canadian Attempt to Boycott U.S.-Made Everything." Toronto Star. February 5, 2025. https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/trumping-the-tariffs-inside-my-canadian-attempt-to-boycott-u-s--made-everything/article_eab4e9d8-e251-11ef-9465-534e54ad8b99.html.

John, Andrew, and Jill Klein. 2003. "The Boycott Puzzle: Consumer Motivations for Purchase Sacrifice." *Management Science* 49 (9): 1196–1209.

Kaase, Max. 2010. "Democracy and Political Action." *International Political Science Review* 31 (5): 539–51. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512110388787.

Kaase, Max, and Alan Marsh. 1979a. "Political Action: A Theoretical Perspective." In *Political Action: Mass Participation in Five Western Democracies*, 27–56. Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE Publications.

———. 1979b. "Political Action Repertory: Changes Over Time and a New Typology." In *Political Action: Mass Participation in Five Western Democracies*, 137–66. Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE Publications.

Kanji, Mebs. 2002. "Political Discontent, Human Capital, and Representative Governance in Canada." In *Value Change and Governance in Canada*, edited by Neil Nevitte, 71–106. Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press. https://canadacommons-ca.lib-

ezproxy.concordia.ca/artifacts/1871944/value-change-and-governance-in-canada/2620822/view/?page=6.
Kanji, Mebs, and Kerry Tannahill. 2017a. “Political Communities Survey Project (Canada-Wide Survey 2017, Waves 1 & 2): Technical Information and Questionnaire.”
———. 2017b. “Political Communities Survey Project (PCSP) - Cross-National.”
Krueger, Brian S. 2002. “Assessing the Potential of Internet Political Participation in the United States: A Resource Approach.” *American Politics Research* 30 (5): 476–98. https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X02030005002.
“Labour Relations - Illegal Strikes and Lockouts.” 2023. Canada Industrial Relations Board. February 2, 2023. https://cirb-ccri.gc.ca/en/about-appeals-applications-complaints/labour-relations-unlawful-strike-lockout.
Library, CIRHR. n.d. “Research Guides: Canadian Strikes : Canada-Wide.” Accessed April 30, 2025. https://guides.library.utoronto.ca/c.php?g=250906&p=1680321.
Lijphart, Arend. 1997. “Unequal Participation: Democracy’s Unresolved Dilemma (Presidential Address, American Political Science Association, 1996).” *The American Political Science Review* 91 (1): 1–14.
Liptak, Adam. 2025. “Trump’s Actions Have Created a Constitutional Crisis, Scholars Say.” *The New York Times*, February 10, 2025, sec. U.S. https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/10/us/politics/trump-constitutional-crisis.html.
López, Matias, Joshua K. Dubrow, and Matthew Polacko. 2020. “Party Positions, Income Inequality, and Voter Turnout in Canada, 1984-2015.” *American Behavioral Scientist* 64 (9): 1324–47. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764220941238.
Marsh, Alan, and Max Kaase. 1979a. “Background of Political Action.” In *Political Action: Mass Participation in Five Western Democracies*, 97–136. Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE Publications.
———. 1979b. “Measuring Political Action.” In *Political Action: Mass Participation in Five Western Democracies*, 57–96. Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE Publications.
Martini, Sergio, and Mario Quaranta. 2020. *Citizens and Democracy in Europe : Contexts, Changes and Political Support*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.
McNabb, David E. 2010. *Research Methods for Political Science: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*. 2nd ed. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe.
Medicoff, Joshua. 2023. “A Tale of Two Metropolitan Regions.” *Policy Options*, April 20, 2023. https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/april-2023/montreal-toronto-governance-differences/.
Mendelsohn, Matthew, and Andrew Parkin. 2005. “Introducing Direct Democracy in Canada.” In *Strengthening Canadian Democracy*, by Paul Howe, Richard Johnston, and André Blais, 315–58. Montreal: IRPP. http://link.library.utoronto.ca/eir/EIRdetail.cfm?Resources__ID=1065422&T=F.
Meng, Melinda. 2020. “Why Canada Needs Electoral Reform.” *Harvard International Review*, March 30, 2020. https://hir.harvard.edu/why-canada-needs-electoral-reform/.
Milbrath, Lester W., and M.L. Goel. 1982. *Political Participation: How and Why Do People Get Involved in Politics?* 2nd ed. Boston: Rand McNally College Publishing Company.
Mood, Dale, James R. Jr Morrow, and Matthew Bruce McQueen. 2020. *Introduction to Statistics in Human Performance: Using SPSS and R*. Second edition. 1 online resource (xxix, 411 pages) : illustrations vols. New York, NY: Routledge. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=2143169.
Murphy, Jessica. 2022. “Freedom Convoy: Why Canadian Truckers Are Protesting in Ottawa.” *BBC News*, January 29, 2022. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-60164561.

Nevitte, Neil. 1996. *The Decline of Deference: Canadian Value Change in Cross-National Perspective*. Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press.

———. 2002a. "Introduction: Value Change and Reorientation in Citizen–State Relations." In *Value Change and Governance in Canada*, edited by Neil Nevitte, 3–36. Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press. https://canadacommons-ca.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/artifacts/1871944/value-change-and-governance-in-canada/2620822/view/?page=6.

———, ed. 2002b. *Value Change and Governance in Canada*. Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press. https://canadacommons-ca.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/artifacts/1871944/value-change-and-governance-in-canada/2620822/view/?page=6.

Norris, Pippa, ed. 1999a. *Critical Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Government*. *Critical Citizens*. Oxford University Press. https://oxford-universitypressscholarship-com.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/view/10.1093/0198295685.001.0001/acprof-9780198295686.

———. 1999b. "Introduction: The Growth of Critical Citizens?" In *Critical Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Government*, edited by Pippa Norris, 1–28. Oxford University Press. https://oxford-universitypressscholarship-com.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/view/10.1093/0198295685.001.0001/acprof-9780198295686.

———. 2002. *Democratic Phoenix: Reinventing Political Activism*. Cambridge, UK ; Cambridge University Press. http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/toc/cam025/2002020164.html.

———. 2004. "Young People & Political Activism," January.

O'Neill, Brenda. 2007. "Indifferent or Just Different? The Political and Civic Engagement of Young People in Canada." *CPRN Research Report*, Charting the Course for Youth Civic and Political Participation, , June. https://canadacommons.ca/artifacts/1499630/indifferent-or-just-different-the-political-and-civic-engagement-of-young-people-in-canada/2158567/.

Oser, Jennifer, and Marc Hooghe. 2018. "Democratic Ideals and Levels of Political Participation: The Role of Political and Social Conceptualisations of Democracy." *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 20 (3): 711–30. https://doi.org/10.1177/1369148118768140.

Paas-Lang, Christian. 2024. "A Record Number of People Signed E-Petitions Last Year — Do They Make a Difference?" CBC News. January 6, 2024. https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/epetitions-2023-increasing-popularity-1.7074358.

Pammett, Jon H., and Lawrence LeDuc. 2020. "Voting Turnout in 2019: The Long and the Short of It." In *The Canadian Federal Election of 2019*, 2:246–64. McGill-Queen's/Brian Mulroney Institute of Government Studies in Leadership, Public Policy, and Governance. McGill-Queen's University Press.

Perez, Jackie. 2024. "National March for Gaza Draws a Massive Crowd to Parliament Hill." *CTV News*, March 9, 2024, sec. Ottawa. https://ottawa.ctvnews.ca/national-march-for-gaza-draws-a-massive-crowd-to-parliament-hill-1.6801637.

Peters, Yvette. 2017. *Political Participation, Diffused Governance, and the Transformation of Democracy: Patterns of Change*. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315294483.

"Petition E-616 - Petitions." n.d. Accessed February 26, 2024. https://www.ourcommons.ca/petitions/en/Petition/Details?Petition=e-616.

"Petition E-4649 - Petitions." n.d. Accessed February 26, 2024. https://www.ourcommons.ca/petitions/en/Petition/Details?Petition=e-4649.

"Petition E-4701 - Petitions." n.d. Accessed February 26, 2024. https://www.ourcommons.ca/petitions/en/Petition/Details?Petition=e-4701.

"Petitions." n.d. Government Website. Parliament of Canada. Accessed February 20, 2025. https://www.ourcommons.ca/petitions/en/Home/Index.

Pitti, Ilaria. 2018. *Youth and Unconventional Political Engagement*. 1 online resource vols. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. https://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=5335441.

"President Trump Actively Destroys the Rule of Law He Claims to Be Restoring." 2025. House Committee on Appropriations. March 14, 2025. http://democrats-appropriations.house.gov/news/press-releases/president-trump-actively-destroys-rule-law-he-claims-be-restoring.

Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster. http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/enhancements/fy0705/00027278-s.html.

———. 2001. *Bowling Alone: Revised and Updated: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. London, UNITED KINGDOM: Simon & Schuster. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/concordia-ebooks/detail.action?docID=4935299.

Quaranta, Mario. 2012. "The Rise of Unconventional Political Participation in Italy: Measurement Equivalence and Trend over Time, 1976-2009." *UC Irvine: Center for the Study of Democracy*, CSD Working Papers, , May. https://escholarship.org/uc/item/50x011vk.

———. 2015. *Political Protest in Western Europe: Exploring the Role of Context in Political Action*. 1 online resource vols. Contributions to Political Science. Cham: Springer Science + Business Media. http://site.ebrary.com/id/11132963.

Ragsdale, Lyn, and Jerrold G. Rusk. 2017. *The American Nonvoter*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Ramos, Howard, and Kathleen Rodgers. 2015. "Introduction: The Promise of Social Movement Societies." In *Protest and Politics: The Promise of Social Movement Societies*, 3–17. Vancouver ; UBC Press.

"Recall." 2024. Elections BC. 2024. https://elections.bc.ca/events-services/recall/.

Richez, Emmanuelle, Vincent Raynauld, Agi Abunya, and Arief B. Kartolo. 2020. "Unpacking the Political Effects of Social Movements With a Strong Digital Component: The Case of #IdleNoMore in Canada." *Social Media + Society* 6 (2). https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120915588.

"Shopping Shift: Four-in-Five Say They're Buying More Canadian Products in Face of Tariff Threat." 2025. Angus Reid Institute. https://angusreid.org/shopping-shift-tariff-threat-buy-canada/.

Smith, Raymond A. 2014. *The American Anomaly: U.S. Politics and Government in Comparative Perspective*. 3rd ed. New York, N. Y.: Routledge.

Stephenson, Laura B., Allison Harell, Daniel Rubenson, and Peter John Loewen, eds. 2022. "2021 Canadian Election Study (CES) V1." Harvard Dataverse. https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/XBZHKC.

———. 2023. "2021 Canadian Election Study Survey Codebook." http://www.ces-eec.ca/2021-canadian-election-study/.

Stockemer, Daniel. 2014. "What Drives Unconventional Political Participation? A Two Level Study." *The Social Science Journal* 51 (2): 201–11. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.soscij.2013.10.012.

Tannahill, Kerry Lynne. 2024. "Democracy's Challenges: A Comprehensive Analysis of Political Support in Quebec and Canada." Ph. D., Montreal: Concordia University. https://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/id/eprint/993730/.

Taylor, Matthew. 2021. “Global Climate Strike: Thousands Join Coordinated Action across World.” *The Guardian*, September 24, 2021, sec. Environment. https://www.theguardian.com/science/2021/sep/24/people-in-99-countries-take-part-in-global-climate-strike.

“The Right to Protest and Gather - Canada.” n.d. *CCLA* (blog). Accessed March 23, 2024. https://ccla.org/our-work/fundamental-freedoms/right-to-protest/.

Theocharis, Yannis, and Jan W. van Deth. 2018. “The Continuous Expansion of Citizen Participation: A New Taxonomy.” *European Political Science Review* 10 (1): 139–63. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773916000230.

Turcotte, Martin. 2015. *Civic Engagement and Political Participation in Canada / : Engagement Communautaire et La Participation Politique Au Canada*. Spotlight on Canadians: Results from the General Social Survey. Ottawa, Ontario: Canadian Electronic Library. https://canadacommons.ca/artifacts/1221954/civic-engagement-and-political-participation-in-canada/1775029/ on 28 Feb 2024. CID: 20.500.12592/p8svt6.

U.S. News. n.d. “Canada Ranks Among the World’s Best Countries.” Accessed March 13, 2024. https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/canada.

Verba, Sidney. 1996. “The Citizen as Respondent: Sample Surveys and American Democracy Presidential Address, American Political Science Association, 1995.” *The American Political Science Review* 90 (1): 1–7.

Wherry, Aaron. 2024. “Will Trudeau End up Regretting His Decision to Walk Away from Electoral Reform?” *CBC News*, February 2, 2024. https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/trudeau-electoral-reform-1.7101929.

“World Values Survey: Round Seven - Country-Pooled Datafile Version 5.0.” 2022. Madrid, Spain & Vienna, Austria: JD Systems Institute & WVSA Secretariat. doi:10.14281/18241.20.

“World Values Survey Wave 7 (2017-2020) - Canada.” 2020.

Youth Voter Turnout in Canada. 2016. Vol. Publication No. 2016-104-E. Ottawa, Canada: Library of Parliament. https://canadacommons-ca.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/artifacts/1207460/youth-voter-turnout-in-canada/1760568/view/.

APPENDIX I – List of Variables

Variables used in the analyses of this thesis, taken from the 2017 Canada-wide round of data collection of the Political Communities Survey Project (PCSP) (Kanji and Tannahill 2017b).

Political Participation

Political Participation – Conventional

Did you happen to vote in the last MUNICIPAL election?
First, did you vote in the last PROVINCIAL election in [year by province]?
First, did you vote in the 2015 federal election?
Did you happen to vote in the FEDERAL election in May 2011?

- Yes/No

Questions about Voting

[*Voting as Duty*] For each of the questions below, please indicate if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree.

It is EVERY citizen's duty to vote in federal elections.
It is EVERY citizen's duty to vote in provincial elections.
It is EVERY citizen's duty to vote in municipal elections.

[*Guilt of Not Voting*] For each of the following types of election, please tell us if you would feel very guilty, somewhat guilty, or not guilty at all if you DID NOT vote in that election.

FEDERAL Election
PROVINDIAL Election
MUNICIPAL Election

[*Reasons for Not Voting*] How important were each of the following factors in your decision not to vote in the last FEDERAL/PROVINCIAL/MUNICIPAL election?

I didn't know where or when to vote.
I was out of town.
I was too busy.
I was ill or physically unable to attend a voting place.
It was clear which party was going to vin in the federal/provincial election.
It was clear which party was going to win in my constituency/riding.
I didn't know enough about the parties, policies or candidates.
I couldn't relate to any of the election issues.
I didn't like any of the candidates /or federal parties.
My preferred candidate /or party didn't have a chance of winning.
I wasn't interested in the election.
Given our electoral system, my vote will make no difference.
Even if I voted, things will never change.

- Very important; Somewhat important; Not very important; Not at all important

Political Participation – Unconventional (in order of threshold)

For each of the following, please indicate whether you have done any of these things, whether you might do it, or whether you would never under any circumstances do it:

Sign a petition
Attend a peaceful demonstration or march
Join an interest group or social movement for political reasons
Provide funding or support for a political cause
Join a boycott
Join a strike
Damage property for political reasons
Engage in violence for political reasons

Political Support

Evaluative Indicators of Support

[*Community*] On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 means 'working extremely well' and 0 means 'not working well at all', how well do you think the following political communities are working:

Canada

[*Principles*] For each of the following would you say it is a very good, fairly good, fairly bad or very bad way of governing this COUNTRY?

Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with legislatures and elections
Having experts, not government, make decisions according to what they think is best for the count
Having the army rule
Having a democratic political system

[*Performance*] On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in

CANADA

[*Institutions*] How satisfied are you with the performance of…

…the FEDERAL government under Justin Trudeau?

- Very satisfied; Fairly satisfied; Not very satisfied; Not at all satisfied

[*Authorities*] How satisfied are you with the performance of…

…your current MP?

- Very satisfied; Fairly satisfied; Not very satisfied; Not at all satisfied

Affective Indicators of Support

[*Community*] On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 means 'extremely patriotic' and 0 means 'not at all patriotic', how patriotic do you feel about the following political communities:

Canada

[*Principles*] Canadian democracy is grounded in a variety of core principles. For each of the following can you indicate whether you strongly support, support, or strongly oppose:

The principle of constitutionalism (that our democratic process is based on and guided by a body of law)

A monarch as the Head of State (that the Queen's representative oversees our democratic process)
Federalism (that power and responsibilities in our democratic process are distributed among different levels of government)
Responsible government (that political Cabinets in our democratic process must maintain the confidence of the legislatures in order to govern)
Ministerial responsibility (that ministers in our democratic process are ultimately responsible for their portfolios)
Majority rule (that decisions in our democratic process are made by the majority)
Representative democracy (that in our democratic process elected officials represent citizens in political decision-making)
The Charter of Rights and Freedoms (that in our democratic process certain rights and freedoms are guaranteed to citizens)
The rule of law (that in our democratic process everyone must obey the law)
Judicial review (that in our democratic process laws are subject to review by the courts)

[*Performance*] For each of the following types of election, please tell us if you would feel very guilty, somewhat guilty, or not guilty at all if you DID NOT vote in that election.

FEDERAL Election

[*Institutions*] Please indicate how much confidence you have in the following institutions. [1 A lot of confidence; 2 Some confidence; 3 Not a lot of confidence; 4 No confidence at all]

The federal government

- A lot of confidence; Some confidence; Not a lot of confidence; No confidence at all

[*Authorities*] Please indicate how much confidence you have in the following political authorities:

Your MP

- A lot of confidence; Some confidence; Not a lot of confidence; No confidence at all

Alternative Explanations

Other Performance Explanations

[*Electoral Reform*] On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means "not at all necessary" and 10 means "very necessary", how necessary do you think it is to reform the way that the following institutions work:

The electoral system

[*Political Cynicism*] For each statement below, please indicate if you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree

Most politicians are corrupt.
Parties buy elections and votes.
Politicians say anything to get elected.
Governments don't really care about the people.
Even if I participate in politics, it will make no difference in my life.

Sociocultural Explanations

[*Postmaterialism*] People sometimes talk about what the aims of this country should be for the next ten years. Would you please say which one of these you, yourself, consider the most important:

Maintaining order in the nation
Giving people more say in important government decisions
Fighting rising prices
Protecting freedom of speech

[*Deference*] Is greater respect for authority in the future a good thing, a bad thing, or you don't mind either way:

[*Political Efficacy*] Thinking specifically about federal politics and federal politicians, please indicate if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each of the following statements:

[ext.] I don't think they (federal politicians) care much what people like me think.
[ext.] People like me don't have any say about what government (at the federal level) does.
[int.] I feel like I have a pretty good understanding of the political issues that confront our country.
[int.] I feel like I could do as good a job governing as most of the federal politicians we elect.

Demographics

[*Ideology*] In politics people sometimes talk of left and right. Please locate yourself on a general left-right dimension, taking all aspects of policy into account.

[*Age*] What year were you born in? (Calculated back from 2017)

[*Education*] What is the highest level of education you have completed?

Some elementary/secondary/high school
Completed secondary/high school
Some CEGEP
Completed CEGEP
Some technical, community college
Completed technical, community college
Some university
Bachelor's degree
Master's degree
Professional degree or doctorate

[*Income*] And now what was your last year's total household income before taxes. That includes income FROM ALL SOURCES such as savings, pensions, rent, as well as wages. Was it…

… less than $20,000
...between $20,001 and $30,000
...between $30,001 and $40,000
...between $40,001 and $50,000
...between $50,001 and $60,000
...between $60,001 and $70,000
...between $70,001 and $80,000
...between $80,001 and $90,000
...between $90,001 and $100,000
...more than $100,000