

and pursued by giant corporations and ideologues running the corporate government

responses from their incumbent government about serious risks to Canadian independence. What is Harper, who has an

advocate and author. He was named by *The Atlantic* as one of the 100 most influential figures in American history.



attachment #6

# Young voters left out in the cold

DAVID EAVES

Last weekend the *New York Times* had an interesting article about how the BBC and other major media organizations are increasingly broadcasting new television episodes simultaneously around the world.

The reason? The Internet. Fans in the UK aren't willing to wait months to watch episodes broadcast in the United States and vice versa.

Someone at Elections Canada should read the article.

Last week, Elections Canada took special care to warn Canadian citizens that they risked \$25,000 fines if they posted information about election results on social-network sites before all the polls are closed. This speaks volumes about Election Canada's poor strategy for engaging young voters.

The controversy centres around Section 329 of the Canada Elections Act, which prohibits transmitting election results before polling stations have closed. Its purpose is to prevent voters on the West Coast from being influenced by outcomes on the East Coast (or worse, choosing not to vote at all if the outcome has been decided). Today however, with Twitter, Facebook and blogs, everybody is a potential "broadcaster."

More awkwardly, it is hard to feel that the missive wasn't directed at the very cohort Elections Canada is trying to get engaged in elections: young people.

Chastising and scaring the few young people who want to talk about the election with threats of fines seems a poor way to increase political engagement. If voting is a social behaviour — and the evidence suggests it is —



L.G. PATTERSON/AP

Elections Canada is suspicious of these.

you are more likely to vote and engage in politics if you know your friends do the same. Ironically, this might make social media the best thing to happen to voting since the secret ballot. So not only is fighting this technology a lost cause, it may also be counterproductive.

Based on the experience many young voters have trying to vote, none of this comes as a surprise.

In my first two Canadian elections I lived outside the country. Both times my mail-in ballot arrived after the election and was thus ineligible. During the last election I tried to vote at an advanced poll. It was a nightmare. It was hard to locate on the website and the station ended up being a solid 15-minute walk from any of the nearest bus routes. Total commute time for someone without a car? Well over an hour and a half.

This is not an acceptable outcome. If you want people to vote, you can't make it in-

convenient. Otherwise, the only people who will vote are those with the means and the time. And that's hardly democratic.

It often feels our voting infrastructure was built by and for our grandparents. Try this out:

In the 1960s, if you were a "young person" (e.g. 20-30), you were almost certainly married and had two kids. You probably also didn't move every two years. In the '60s, the average marriage age was 24 for men, 20 for women. Thinking in terms of the '50s and '60s, what were the three institutions you probably visited on a weekly basis? How about a) the local community centre, b) the local elementary school, and c) the local church. Today, if you are between the age of 20 and 35 or under, name me three institutions you probably haven't visited in over a decade.

Do young people not vote because they are lazy? Maybe. But they also don't have a voting system designed around them like their grandparents did. Why are there no voting booths in subway stations? The lobbies of office towers? The local shopping mall? How about Starbucks and Tim Hortons? Somewhere, anywhere, where people actually congregate. Heaven forbid that voting booths be where the voters are.

The fact is our entire voting structure is anti-young people. It's designed for another era. It needs a full-scale upgrade. Call it Voting 2.0. Want young people to vote? Then build a voting system that meets their needs.

We need voting that embraces the Internet, social networks, voters without cars and voters who are transient. These changes alone won't solve the low voter turnout problem overnight, but if even 5 per cent more young people vote in this election, the parties will take notice and adapt their platforms accordingly.

Maybe, just maybe, it could end up creating a virtuous circle.

David Eaves is a Vancouver-based public policy entrepreneur and adviser on open government and open data. He blogs at eaves.ca.



## OPINION ONLINE

### More election commentary

The Prime Minister says a strong Conservative majority in Monday's election would prevent any possibility of a constitutional crisis, but Razmik Panossian, formerly of

Rights & Democracy, fears a Tory majority could revive separatist fortunes in Quebec. Catherine Fife of the Ontario Public School Boards Association, mourns the fact that the plight of native schoolchildren has been ignored during the campaign. See [thestar.com/opinion](http://thestar.com/opinion) for their commentaries.

April 30, 2011