

Reference Document

Department of Canadian Heritage

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Document de référence

Ministère du Patrimoine canadien

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Youth, Political Participation and Community Engagement in Canada

Department of Canadian Heritage

March 2017



- Forms of engagement and participation can include such activities as voting, volunteering, attending community-based events and more recently, through interacting on social media and on the wider web.
- To assess and analyse how young Canadians participate politically and engage in community associations, this study employed statistical and econometric methods using large-n social surveys from Statistics Canada.
- To permit inferences on the Canadian population, appropriate sample weights were used prior to calculating estimates. Thus, the statements “respondents aged 15 to 24” and “younger Canadians” are used interchangeably.
- The statistical significance of differences in mean responses between younger and older Canadians was tested using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) One Side t-tests. Differences in mean that were not statistically significant are indicated where relevant.
- This study also estimates what makes younger Canadians more or less likely to participate in informal political activities and to become a member in a civic association. To measure the increased odds, estimates were calculated using logistic regressions. Variables that helped predict engagement and participation are referred to here as the *determinants*.
- For further information on the specific statistical tools used in this study, please refer to the full report: *Youth Participation and Engagement*.

- Combines data from three cycles of Statistics Canada's General Social Survey (GSS):
 - GSS Social Engagement 2003 (cycle 17)
 - GSS Social Networks 2008 (cycle 22)
 - GSS Social Identity 2013 (cycle 27)

- Focuses on political participation and civic engagement of Canadians aged 15 to 24.

- Specific areas of interest:
 - Voting at elections
 - Informal political participation
 - Volunteering
 - Donating
 - Membership in civic associations
 - Social Identity
 - Social Capital
 - Citizenship and Canadian shared values
 - Identity
 - Internet and social networking

GSS Sample Sizes	
	Sample size
GSS cycle 17 Social Engagement (2003)	24,951
GSS cycle 22 Social Networks (2008)	20,401
GSS cycle 27 Social Identity (2013)	27,534
Source: Statistics Canada, GSS, 2003, 2008, 2013	



- Political participation is often associated with traditional styles of political engagement such as voting in elections and volunteering for a party or candidate.
- More broadly, political participation can include less institutionalized forms of political expression and how these influence norms and social structures.
- The 2013 GSS on Social Identity asked respondents whether they had participated (yes or no) in political activities in the 12 months preceding the survey.

- Respondents were asked if they had:

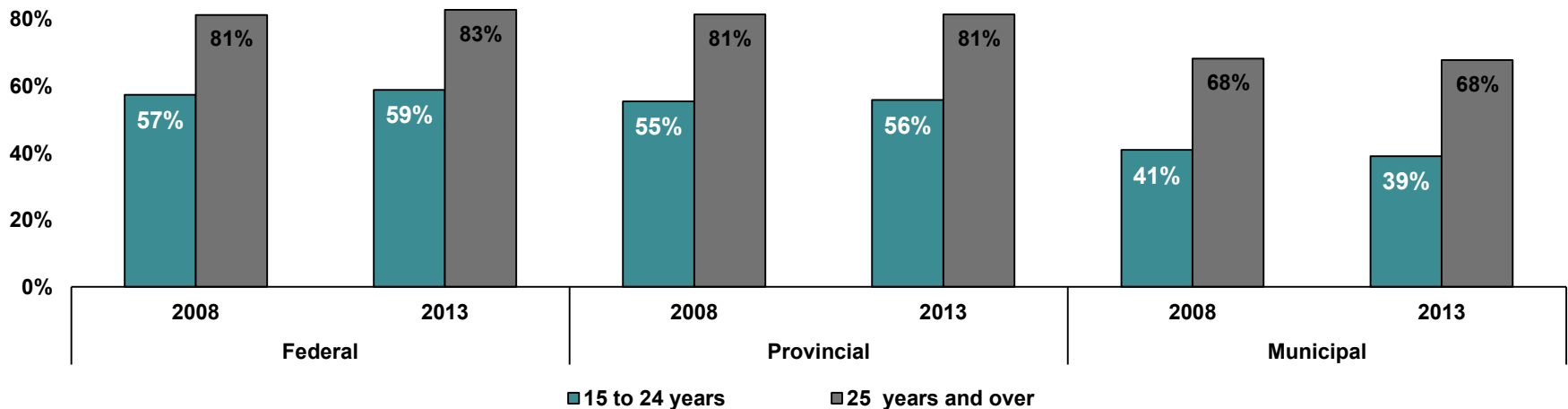
- Voted at the last election (and whether they were eligible to vote)
- Searched for information on a political issue
- Boycotted or chosen a product for ethical reasons
- Attended a public meeting
- Participated in a demonstration or march
- Expressed their views on a political or social issue to a newspaper or politician
- Volunteered for a political party

• While survey data of self-reported voter turnout tend to over-state official election data by 10 to 20% (Elections Canada, 2005), between-group differences captured by the GSS are statistically significant.

• Thus, we should analyse the following voter turnout figures in terms of their relative values, rather than their absolute values:

- Canadians aged 15 to 24 who were eligible to vote reported lower federal election voter participation rates than Canadians aged 25 and above
- Canadians aged 15 to 24 who were eligible to vote reported higher voter turnouts at federal and provincial elections in the 2013 GSS than in 2008 GSS, but this increase occurs in the context of nearly 50 years of decreasing voter participation in Canada

Voting at Elections - Federal, Provincial and Municipal (2008, 2013)



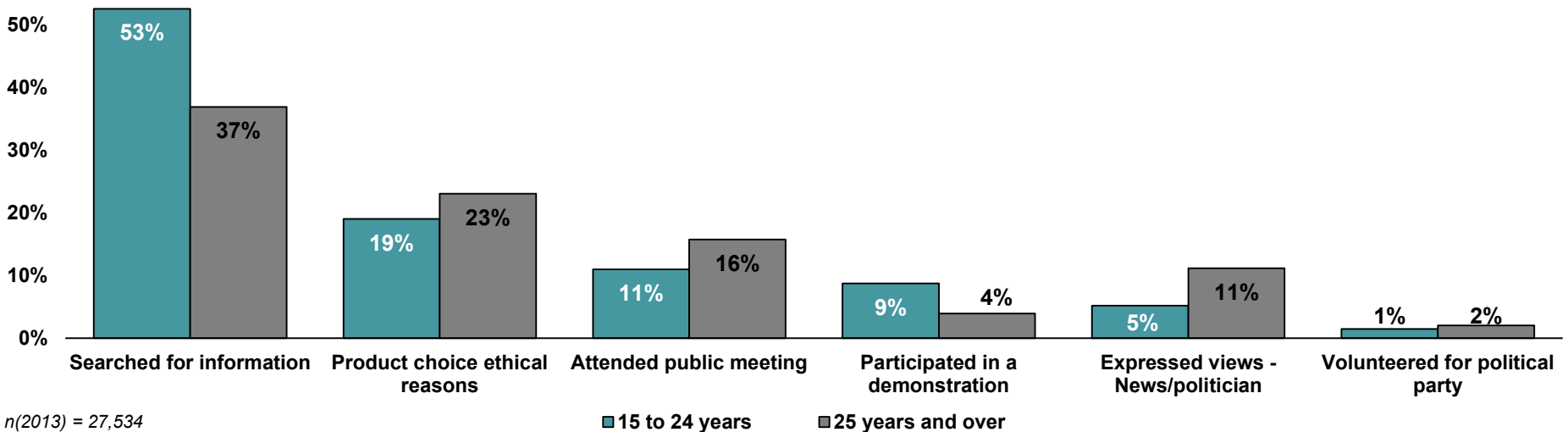
n(2008) = 20,401; *n*(2013) = 27,534

* 0.01 < *p* < 0.05; ** *p* > 0.05

Source of Data: Statistics Canada: GSS 22 SN (2008), GSS 27 SI (2013)

- Besides voting, other forms of political participation provide alternative channels of political expression. While more informal, these types of political activities permit the communication of a more nuanced political view.
- In the 2013 GSS:
 - Younger Canadians were more likely to search for information on a political issue or topic (53%) or to participate in a march or demonstration (9%) than older Canadians
 - Canadians aged 15 to 24 were less likely than Canadians aged 25 and above to attend public meetings, to buy or boycott products for ethical reasons or to express their views on an issue by contacting a newspaper or politician
 - Younger Canadians were more likely to boycott products for ethical reasons (19%) than to attend a public meeting (11%) or to express their views to a newspaper or politician (5%)

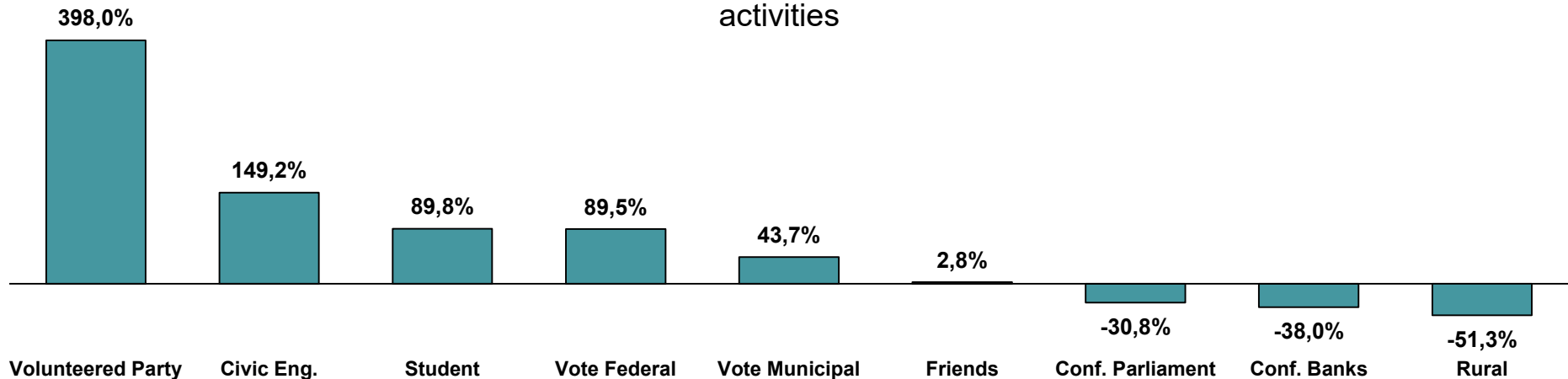
Political Participation in the Past 12 Months (2013)



n(2013) = 27,534
* 0.01 < p < 0.05 ; ** p > 0.05
Source of Data: Statistics Canada: GSS 27 SI (2013)

- Controlling for other factors, in 2013, respondents aged 15 to 24 were:
 - 398% more likely to participate in an informal political activity if they had volunteered for a political party
 - 149% more likely to participate in an informal political activity if they were also a member or participant in a civic association
 - 90% more likely to participate in an informal political activity if they were students than if they were non-students
 - 2.8% more likely to participate in an informal political activity for every close friend they had
 - Were less likely to participate in an informal political activity if they had a high confidence in either the parliament or banks, or if they lived in a rural community

Factors which increase the odds of a 15 to 24 year old to participate in informal political activities



n(2013) = 2,330
 Pseudo $R^2=0.112$; $0.01 < p$
 Source of Data: Statistics Canada: GSS 27 SI (2013)

- Civic engagement can be grouped into three principal activities: volunteering, donating to charities and organizations, and participating in civic associations.
- The 2013 GSS on Social Identity asked respondents whether they had been a member or participant (yes or no) in a civic association or group in the 12 months preceding the survey.
- Respondents were asked if they had:

- Volunteered
- Donated to a charity or community organization

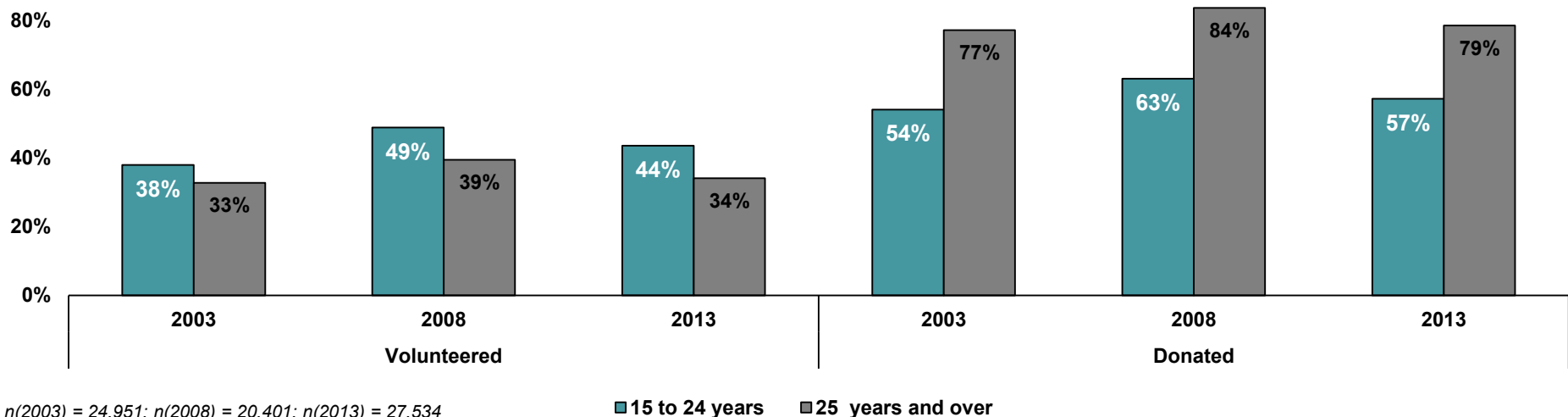
- Respondents were also asked if they were a member or participant in a:

- Sport or recreational association
- School or community group
- Cultural or educational group
- Religious group
- Service club (such as the Knights of Columbus)
- Political party or group

- Over the three GSS cycles examined in this study, younger respondents have systematically reported higher rates of volunteering than their older counterparts, which can in part be explained by compulsory volunteering requirements in high schools.

- Over the 2003, 2008 and 2013 GSS:
 - More Canadians aged 15 to 24 volunteer than older Canadians
 - A larger proportion of older Canadians donate to charity and organizations compared to younger Canadians

Volunteering and Donating in the Past 12 Months (2003, 2008, and 2013)



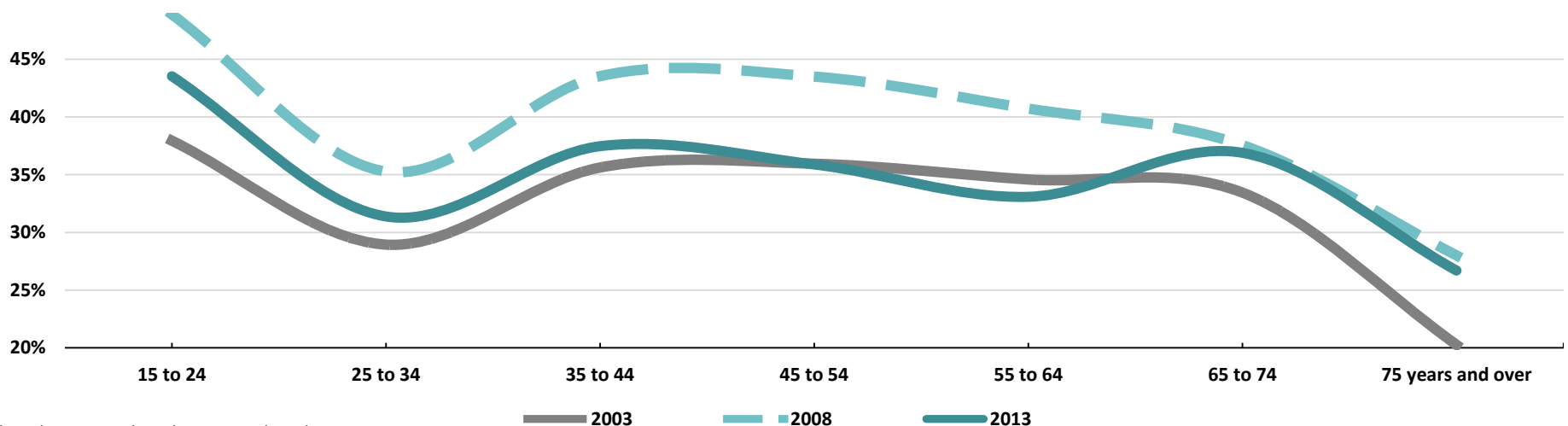
n(2003) = 24,951; *n*(2008) = 20,401; *n*(2013) = 27,534

* 0.01 < *p* < 0.05 ; ** *p* > 0.05

Source of Data: Statistics Canada: GSS 17 SE (2003), GSS 22 SN (2008), GSS 27 SI (2013)

- Sequential life phases and age cohort effects can be observed through different cycles of the GSS. Overall, relationships between age groups and volunteering rates persist over time.
- In the figure below, age groups are represented along the horizontal axis and volunteering rates from different GSS cycles are plotted in separate lines.
 - The volunteering rate for all age groups increased from 2003 to 2008, and then decreased from 2008 to 2013
 - Canadians aged 15 to 24 were more likely to have volunteered in the past 12 months than Canadians aged 25 and above in all three GSS cycles analyzed
 - Volunteering rates were lowest for respondents aged between 25 and 34, as well as for respondents aged 75 years and over

Volunteering in the Last 12 Months by Age Group (2003, 2008, and 2013)



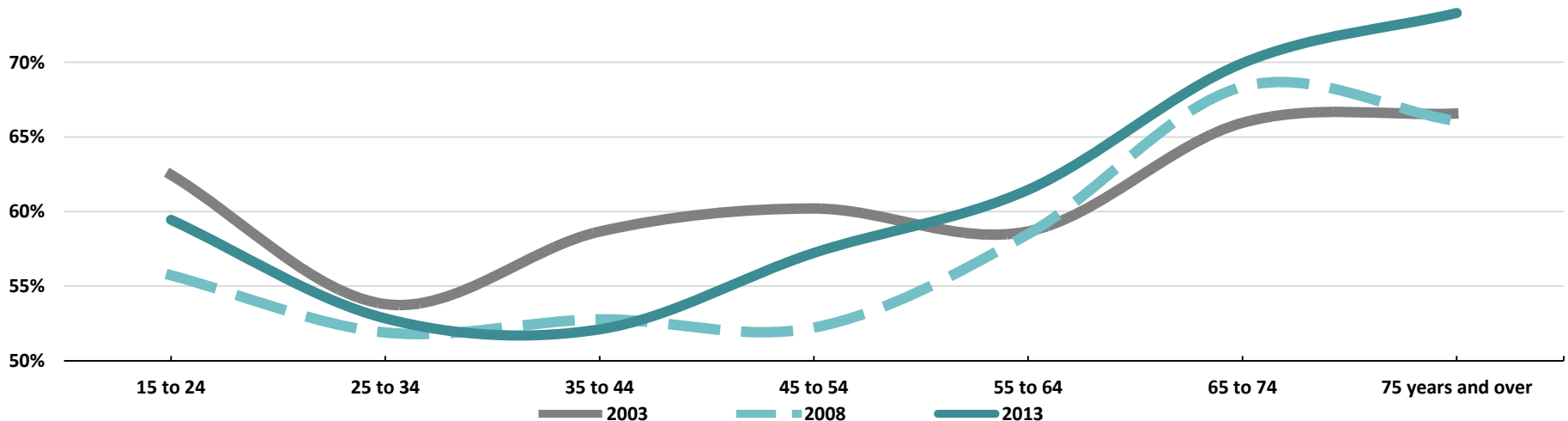
n(2003) = 24,951; *n*(2008) = 20,401; *n*(2013) = 27,534

Source of Data: Statistics Canada: GSS 17 SE (2003), GSS 22 SN (2008), GSS 27 SI (2013)

• Sequential life phases and age cohort effects can also be observed with respect to the amount of time Canadians volunteer. Among volunteers, Canadians aged 15 to 24 are less likely to volunteer more than 5 hours per month than Canadians aged 25 and above.

- The figure below illustrates the relationship between age groups and volunteering more than 5 hours per month:
 - The proportion of volunteers who contributed more than 5 hours per month increased from 2008 to 2013
 - 15 to 24 year old volunteers were less likely than those aged above 25 to have volunteered more than 5 hours per month in 2008 and 2013
 - Among volunteers, those aged 75 years and over committed the most time

Average Monthly Volunteering Above 5 Hours by Age Group (2003, 2008, and 2013)



n(2003) = 8,265; *n*(2008) = 8,397; *n*(2013) = 9,302

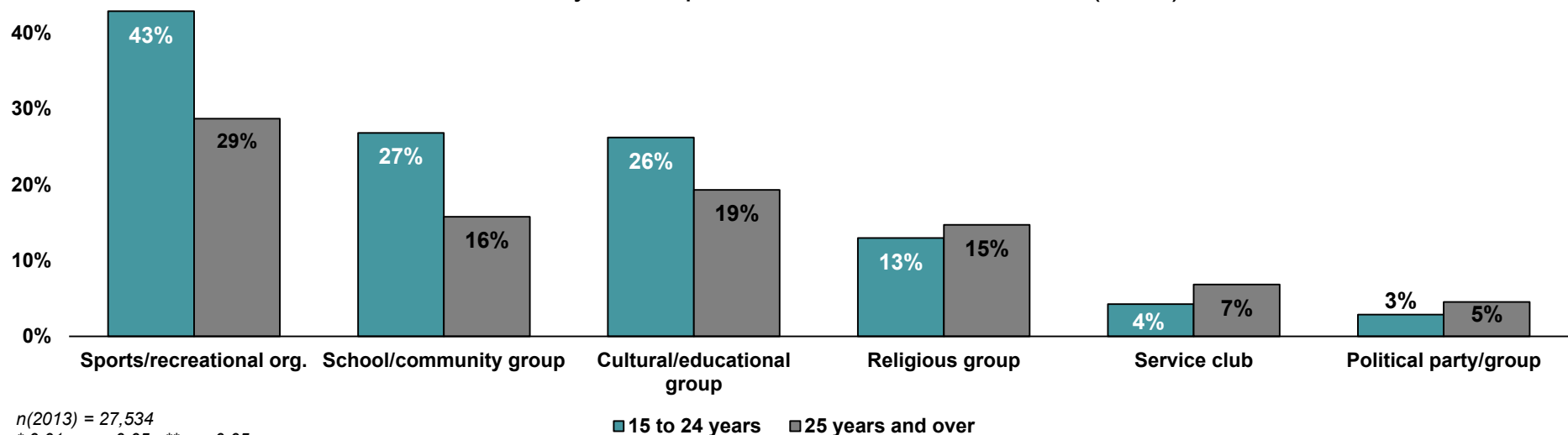
Source of Data: Statistics Canada: GSS 17 SE (2003), GSS 22 SN (2008), GSS 27 SI (2013)

•Civic engagement can take on many forms, including membership and participation in community associations. Voluntary organizations can help shape civic attitudes and skills necessary for political participation.

•In the 2013 GSS:

- Canadians aged 15 to 24 were most active in sports/recreational organizations (43%), school/community groups (27%) and cultural/educational groups (26%)
- Younger Canadians were less likely than their older counterparts to be a member or participant in a religious group, a service club or a political party/group
- Canadians aged 15 to 24 were more likely to join a religious group (13%) than to join a service club (4%) or political party/group (3%)

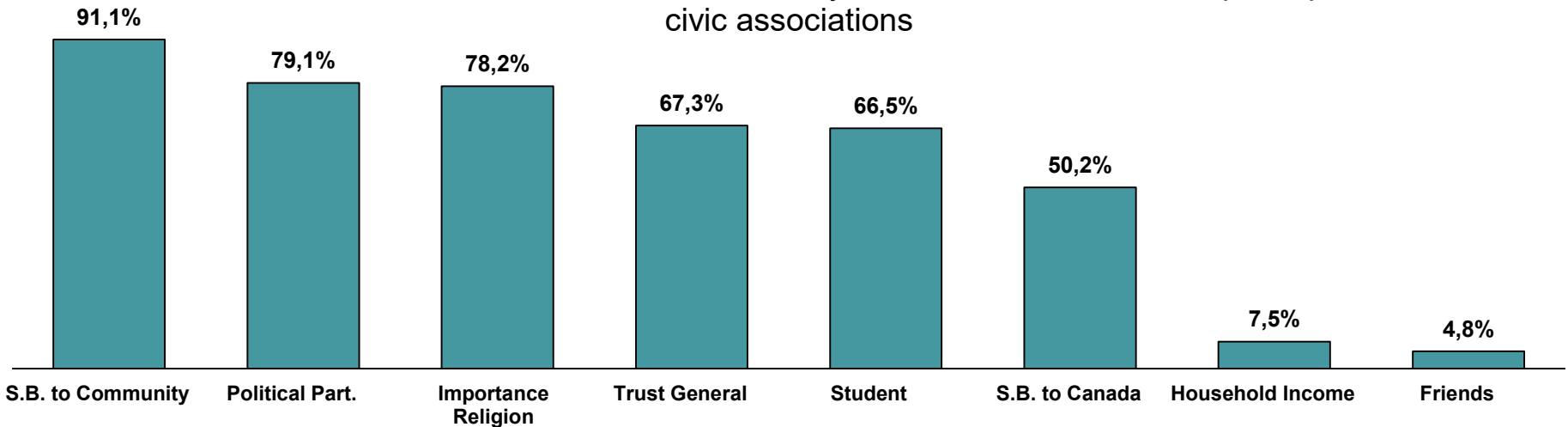
Community Participation in the Past 12 Months (2013)



n(2013) = 27,534
 * 0.01 < *p* < 0.05 ; ** *p* > 0.05
 Source of Data: Statistics Canada: GSS 27 SI (2013)

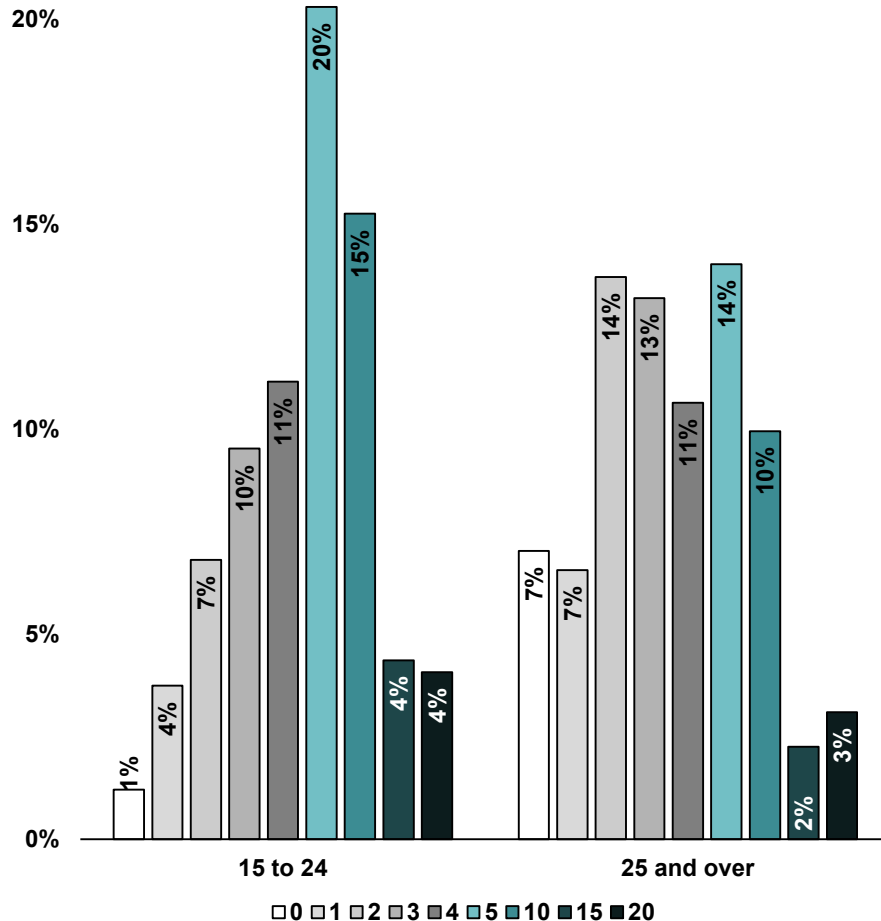
- Controlling for other factors, in 2013, respondents aged 15 to 24 were:
- 91% more likely to engage in a civic association if they felt a strong or somewhat strong sense of belonging to their community
- 79% more likely to engage in a civic association if they also participated in informal political activities
- 67% more likely to be engaged in a civic organization if they were students than if they were non-students
- More likely to engage in a civic association if they thought religion was important (78% more likely) or if they felt that they could trust people in general (67% more likely)
- 4.8% more likely to engage in a civic association for every good friend they had

Factors which increase the odds of a 15 to 24 year old to be a member or participant in civic associations



- This study also focuses on the social identity components of participation and engagement by considering four themes:
- **Social capital and trust** considerations suggest that relationships matter and that social networks are assets
- **Citizenship and shared values** contribute to shaping and maintaining national identity, while also constituting symbols of unity and reflecting the bonds that unite Canadians
- **Identity building** and associated norms of reciprocity tend to improve conditions for the group as a whole
- **Engagement 2.0** reflects the reality that younger generations are increasingly expressing themselves through new channels

Number of Close Friends (2013)

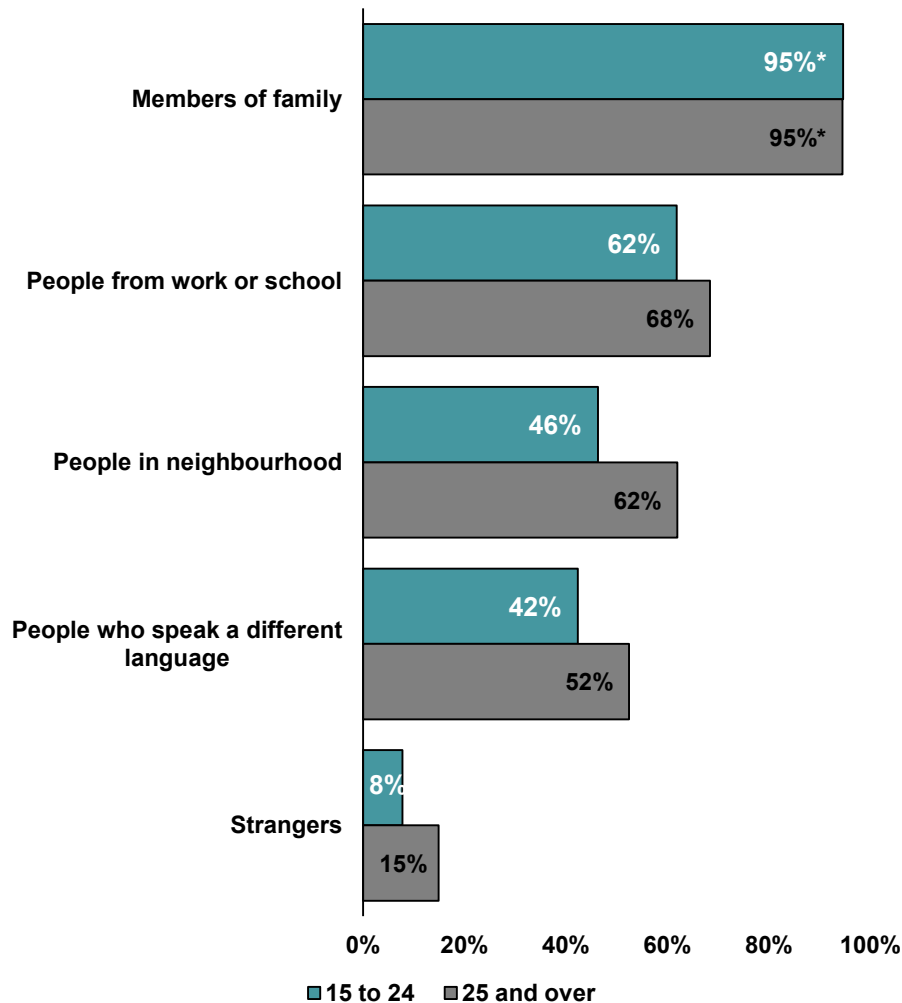


- *Bonding social capital* refers to the links and relationships that develop between people who share similar characteristics

- In the 2013 GSS:

- Younger Canadians reported having more close friends than Canadians older than 25
- 66% of 15 to 24 year olds reported having 5 close friends or more, compared to 48% for those aged 25 and over
- Only 1% of respondents aged 15 to 24 reported not having any close friend, compared to 7% for Canadians older than 25

Trust in Similar and Dissimilar People (2013)



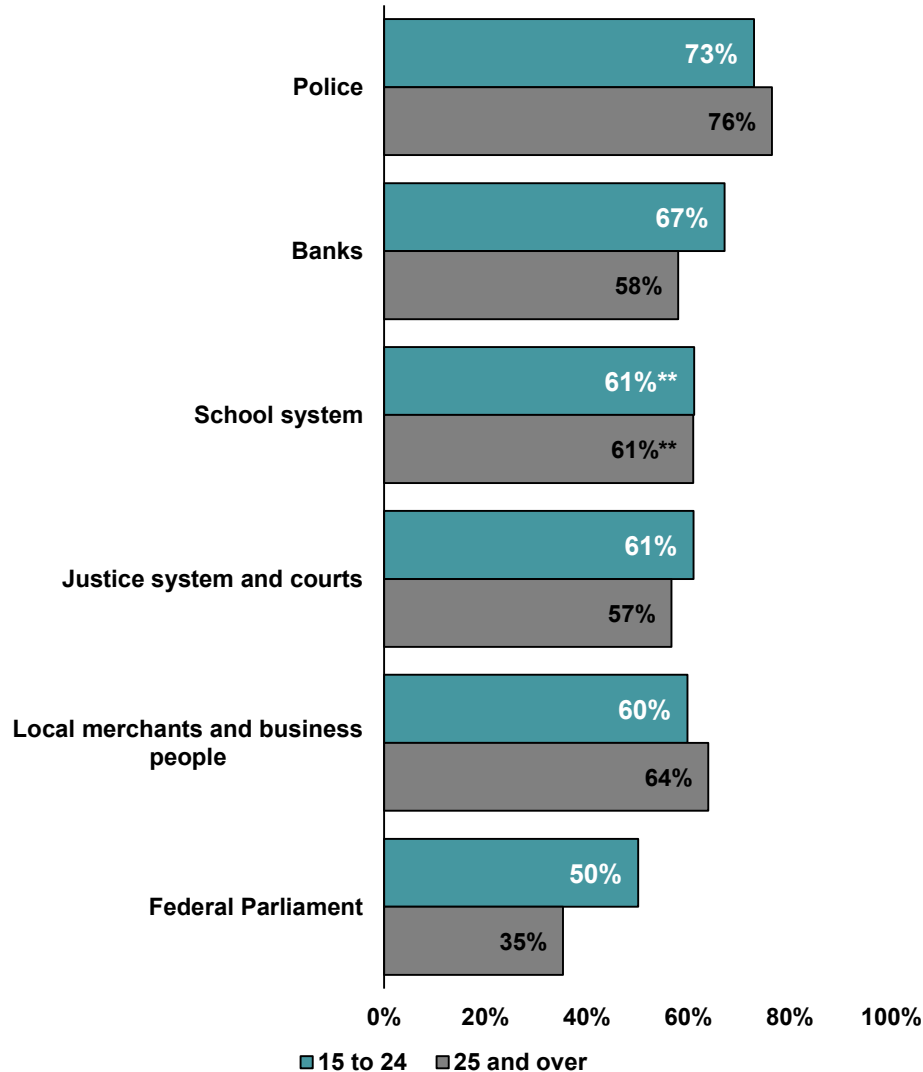
- *Bridging social capital* describes levels of trust, mutuality and respect between individuals who are dissimilar

- In the 2013 GSS:

- Respondents aged 15 to 24 felt their family members could be trusted the most (95%)
- Respondents 15 to 24 years old reported trusting people from their work or school (62%) more than people in their neighbourhood (46%) or people who speak a different language (42%)
- Younger respondents reported trusting strangers (8%) less than older respondents do (15%)
- Overall, respondents aged 15 to 24 were less trusting than respondents aged above 25

n = 27,534
 * 0.01 < p < 0.05 ; ** p > 0.05
 Source of Data: Statistics Canada: GSS 27 SI (2013)

Confidence in Canadian Institutions (2013)



- *Linking social capital* defines trusting relationships between people and explicit or institutionalized authority gradients in society

- In the 2013 GSS:

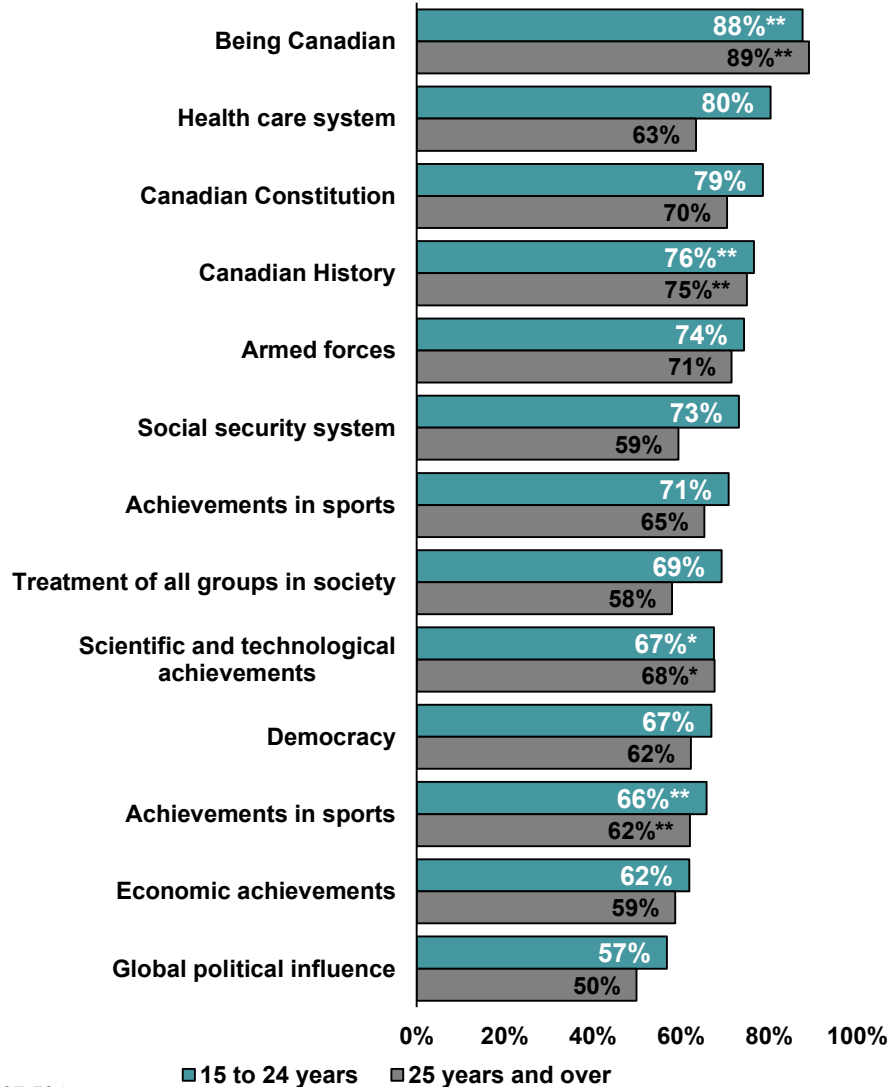
- The police was the Canadian institution most trusted by 15 to 24 year olds (73%), followed by banks (67%), the school system (61%), the justice system (61%) and business people (60%)
- Out of the Canadian institutions mentioned in the GSS, the Federal Parliament was the least trusted by younger Canadians (50%)

n = 27,534

* 0.01 < p < 0.05 ; ** p > 0.05

Source of Data: Statistics Canada: GSS 27 SI (2013)

Pride in Canadian Achievements (2013)



- The 2013 GSS asked respondents the extent to which they were proud of Canadian achievements:

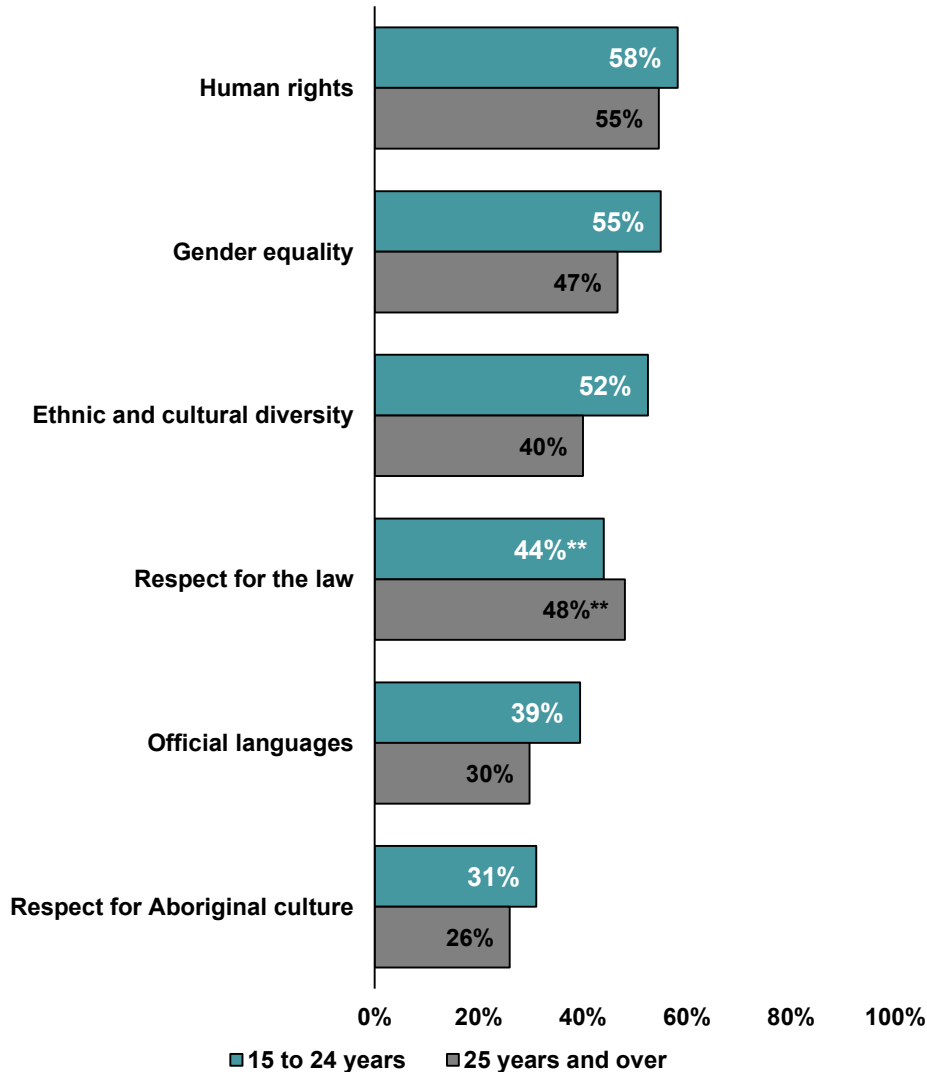
- 88% of younger respondents reported being *proud* or *very proud* to be Canadian
- Overall, more respondents aged 15 to 24 reported being *proud* or *very proud* of Canadian achievements than older respondents
- Respondents aged 15 to 24 felt most pride in the health care system (80%), the Canadian Constitution (79%), Canadian history (76%), the armed forces (74%) and the social security system (73%)

n = 27,534

* 0.01 < p < 0.05 ; ** p > 0.05

Source of Data: Statistics Canada: GSS 27 SI (2013)

Perceived Canadian Shared Values (2013)



- The development of shared meaning and values contributes to shaping and reinforcing conceptions and pre-conceptions of what it means to be Canadian

- In the 2013 GSS:

- Respondents aged 15 to 24 most widely perceived human rights to be a Canadian shared value (58%), followed by gender equality (55%) and ethnic and cultural diversity (52%)

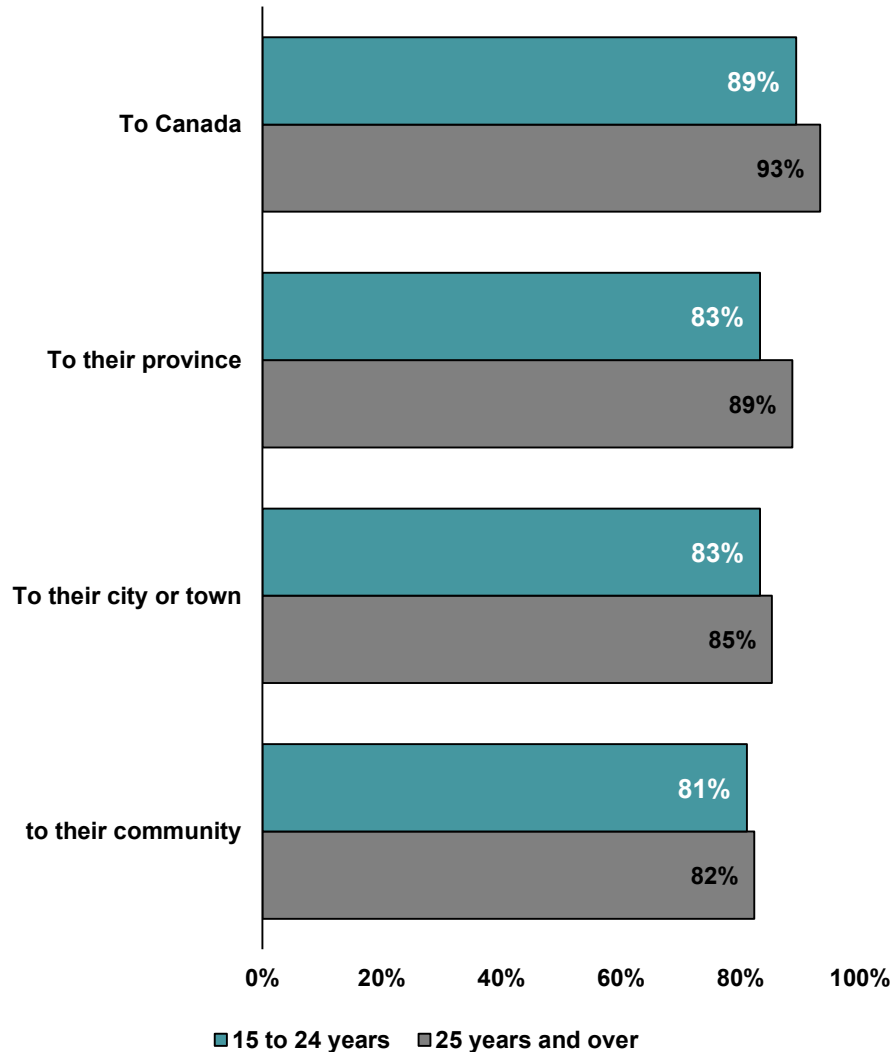
- Among options given to respondents, Canadian official languages and respect for aboriginal culture were the least likely to be perceived as Canadian shared values

n = 27,534

* 0.01 < p < 0.05 ; ** p > 0.05

Source of Data: Statistics Canada: GSS 27 SI (2013)

Sense of Belonging (2013)



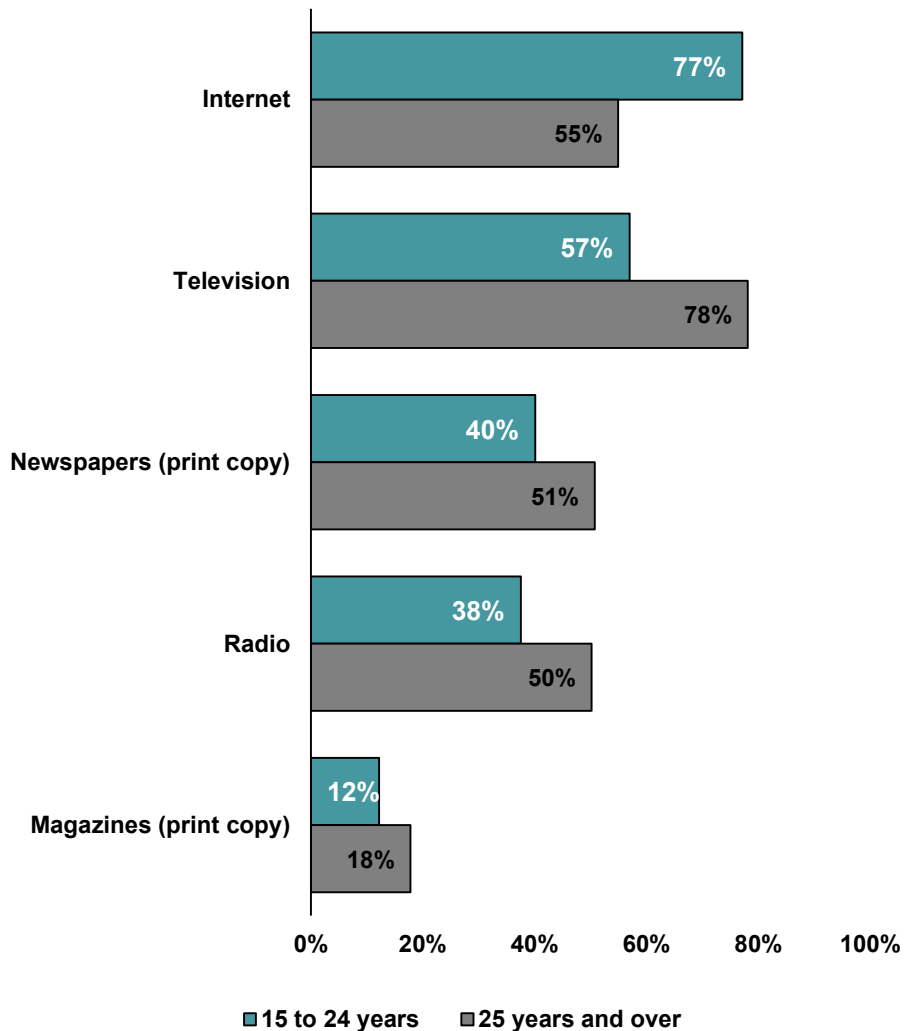
- When institutions embody an identity, individuals who share this identity will tend to support and commit to these institutions more
- In the 2013 GSS:
 - 89% of respondents aged 15 to 24 reported feeling a *strong* or *somewhat strong* sense of belonging to Canada, along with 93% of those aged above 25
 - Respondents 15 to 24 year were most likely to feel a *strong* or *somewhat strong* sense of belonging to Canada than to their province (83%), to their city (83%) or to their community (81%)

n = 27,534

* 0.01 < p < 0.05 ; ** p > 0.05

Source of Data: Statistics Canada: GSS 27 SI (2013)

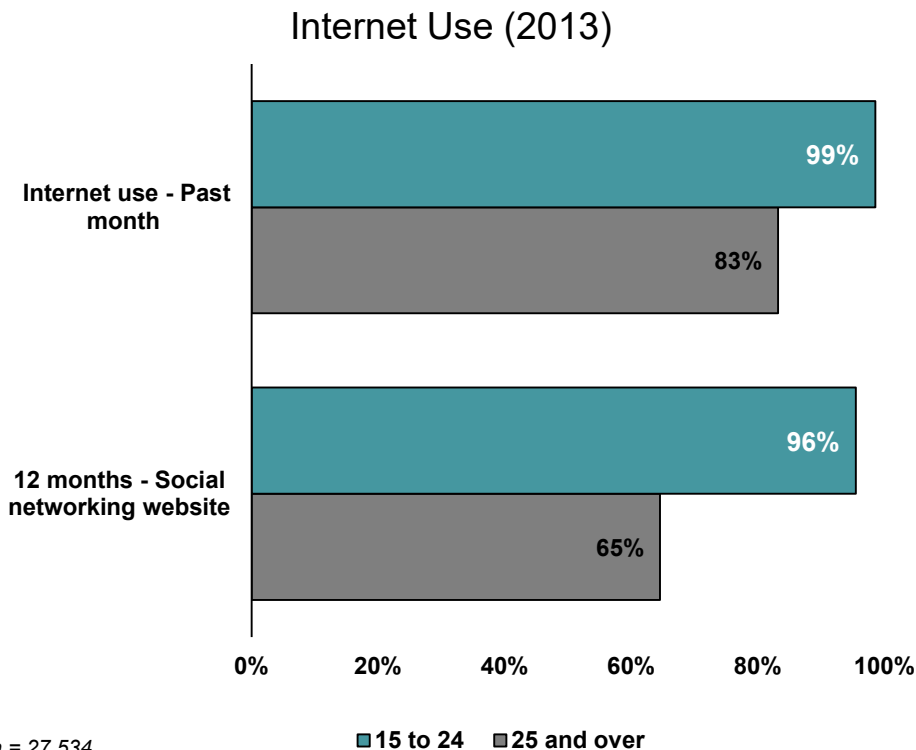
Use of Media to Follow News and Current Affairs (2013)



- The 2013 GSS asked respondents how they become informed about news and current affairs:
 - 77% of respondents aged 15 to 24 reported using the Internet to follow the news and current affairs, compared to 55% for older respondents
 - 57% of younger respondents reported using the television to follow the news and current affairs, compared to 78% of respondents aged 25 and above
 - The radio (38%) and magazines (12%) were the least used media among respondents aged 15 to 24

The pool of available avenues towards participation and engagement is increasingly diversified through online platforms and peer content sharing

- The adoption by young Canadians of the Internet and of social networking as a means to become informed and to connect with others is much more pronounced than for older Canadians



- In the 2013 GSS:
 - 99% of respondents aged 15 to 24 reported having used the Internet in the past month, compared to 83% of respondents aged 25 or above
 - 96% of respondents aged 15 to 24 reported having connected with friends via a social networking website in the last 12 months, compared to 65% of respondents aged 25 and above

n = 27,534

* $0.01 < p < 0.05$; ** $p > 0.05$

Source of Data: Statistics Canada: GSS 27 SI (2013)

- This study demonstrates differences and estimates relationships between civic participation rates and attitudes such as feelings of pride and sense of belonging of younger and older Canadians.
- A review of the research on youth participation and engagement as well as an analysis of Statistics Canada's General Social Survey highlights the relevance of four themes related to participation and engagement.
- It concludes that participation and engagement styles are evolving, and while formal political participation has declined, participation and engagement styles and opportunities are increasingly diversified.