YOUTH FEDERAL ELECTION
VOTING INTENTIONS UPDATE:

A Statistical and Graphical Analysis of Newspoll Quarterly Data
Election Poll 2010 to March 2013

Having an influence, not just a voice

Dr Ron Brooker

August 2013
Acknowledgement

The Whitlam Institute within the University of Western Sydney, with various partners, including the Foundation for Young Australians, has been examining questions of young people and the future of Australian democracy — and the particular question of political participation by young people — for several years.

The *Youth Federal Election Voting Intentions Update* follows on from a statistical and graphical analysis of Newspoll Quarterly Data 1996-2010, published by the Whitlam Institute in June 2011. Many thanks are due to Dr Brooker for conducting the following analysis of Newspoll quarterly data from the Election Poll in 2010 to March 2013.

This update was only possible due to the generous support of Newspoll by the way of the provision of the data from relevant quarterly surveys for the period 2010-2013. We are particularly indebted to Martin O’Shannessy, CEO at Newspoll, for his enthusiastic support and advice.

Prepared by Dr. Ron Brooker
Editing: The Whitlam Institute
ISBN: 978-1-74108-252-4
Copyright: The Whitlam Institute within the University of Western Sydney, 2013
Foreword

The Youth Federal Election Voting Intentions Update is the fifth in a series of reports produced under the banner of the Young People Imagining a New Democracy project initiated by the Whitlam Institute in 2008.

The impetus for this project was the stark fact that as of the time of the 2004 Federal election only 82% of 18 – 25 year olds were registered to vote. Just prior to the 2010 poll that number had dropped further to 77.5% (AEC, 2010). The obvious question was and remained: why?

Trying to better understand why such a significant number of young voters would be absent from the rolls, particularly given that voting is compulsory in Australia, seemed important. It was to be expected that there would be a variety of factors: inadequate systems for notifying and registering young voters; increased mobility; youthful neglect. However, could there be more to it: was this a warning sign that all is not well with Australian democracy? If so, what are the implications for the future of this democracy?

It was not long before the original question on electoral participation shifted to the broader landscape of young people’s democratic (both political and civic) participation. This expanded scope was driven by advice from those young people, scholars and youth organisations who suggested that there is a more fundamental ‘generational’ shift in play with respect to young people’s attitudes and behaviours.

This has proved to be the case, as is detailed and discussed in three earlier reports:

- Young People Imagining a New Democracy: Literature Review (Collin, 2008)
- Young People Imagining a New Democracy: Young People’s Voices Focus Groups Report (Horsley & Costley, 2008)
- Putting the Politics back into Politics: Young People and Democracy in Australia. Discussion paper (Arvanitakis & Marren, 2009)

This earlier work revealed, amongst other things, that while there has been voluminous research exploring the new forms of political participation, there was virtually none providing insight into the actual impact young people might be having by way of political influence.

Defining and measuring political influence is difficult and contested, but important.

Somewhat unexpectedly, it is the electoral impact of younger voters that came to dominate this consideration of the broader question of young people’s influence.

In 2011 Newspoll made available to the Whitlam Institute its Federal voter intention quarterly survey data. This detailed the weighted percentage voting intentions of various age groups and gender groupings for all the political parties, both major and minor, for each quarter from January 1996 through to the polling just prior to the August 2010 election. Though polling eligible rather than actual voters, Newspoll’s estimates of the electorate populations in the various age groupings are generally in close proximity to both Australian

---

1 The gender divisions, male and female, were sub-divided by the age groupings of 18-24, 25-34, 18-34, 35-49, and 50+.
Electoral Commission (AEC) and Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data and they provide a clear indication of the influence of each age and gender group.

The data analysis was conducted for the Whitlam Institute by Dr Ron Brooker and published in August 2011 in its report *Youth Federal Election Voting Intentions: A Statistical and Graphical Analysis of Newspoll Quarterly Data 1996-2010* (Brooker, 2011).

This current report updates the original with an analysis of Federal voting intention data for the period 2010 to 2013. The data has again been provided by Newspoll to the Whitlam Institute for this purpose.

The central conclusion of the 2011 analysis was that young people exert an unexpectedly significant influence upon Federal election outcomes. The report noted that young voters (under 35) represent some 30 percent of the electorate. Consequently a major shift in the youth vote (which the analysis showed was not uncommon) could be sufficient to change an election outcome notwithstanding the lower level of voter registration (especially among the 18-24 year-old cohort).

Bearing these factors in mind, it was observed that a conservative reading of the Newspoll data indicated that the youth vote had a substantial, possibly determinative, impact on the outcomes of the last four (2001, 2004, 2007 and 2010) Federal elections.

The implication may be lost on younger voters themselves but it is apparent that electoral participation still matters and that young people’s participation in elections does have an impact. At the same time, as the analysis and earlier research suggests, we are operating in and witnessing the emergence of a quite different electoral environment.

Eric Sidoti
Director
Whitlam Institute within the University of Western Sydney

---

Introduction

The health of Australian democracy and its constituent parts (citizens, political parties, parliament and civil society) have been subject to growing debate for some years. This concern has escalated further with the 2010 Federal election resulting in the first minority Federal government since the successive Menzies, Fadden and Curtin governments during the war years (1940-43).

The focus of these deliberations shifts constantly.

For many their attention is directed towards political organisation (the decline of political party membership; party structures and rules; campaigns), electoral matters (voter demographics, voting patterns and voter behaviours) and the implications for government (the rise of Independents or minor parties — most recently the Greens — as well as Parliamentary practices).

For others the core issue is citizenship which encompasses political and civic participation as well as questions of alternative democratic models. These in turn canvass a further layer of possibilities: direct democracy, deliberative democracy, distributed or networked governance.

Recent scholarship attempts to come to grips with the changing democratic realities and the inter-play between formal ‘Politics’ and informal ‘politics’ of the everyday (Saha et al, 2007; Norris, 2004; Bang, 2004).

The authors would agree that there is a quite fundamental shift underway. They have tentatively concluded previously that the political behaviours and attitudes they were discerning among young people were not generationally exclusive but rather that young people might be understood as providing a lead indicator of developments among the broader population. The analysis of voter intention survey data over five Federal elections from 1996 through to 2010 (Brooker, 2011) added further weight to that conclusion. The update to Brooker’s 2011 report that follows extends that analysis.

This introduction simply offers for consideration relevant observations on the electoral context prompted by Brooker’s analysis. While conscious of the impending election, these observations concern themselves more with the emerging trends and possible implications for the longer term.

An Electoral Maelstrom

Australia, not unlike other western democracies, is in the midst of uncertain electoral times.

There is a view, noted in our previous reports, that there is a widening gap between the so-called ‘big P’ Politics and everyday politics. Implicit in this is the prospect that the gap becomes a rupture, severing the relationship between political and civic activity and institutionalised politics.

The Australian Electoral Survey (as cited in McAllister & Clark 2008), for example, shows a steady increase in the proportion of people who had ‘a good deal’ of interest in politics rising from 18 percent to 39 percent over the past 40 years suggesting that “voters are interested in politics but are turning away from ‘party’ politics” (as cited in Rodrigues & Brenton 2010, p. 11).

At the same time, there are indications supporting the view that the levels of specific electoral disillusionment may be growing.
The Australian Electoral Commission’s [AEC] report (2011) on informal voting at the 2010 Federal election highlights that the national informality rate (5.5%) at the 2010 House of Representatives election was substantially higher than that recorded at the 2007 House of Representatives election (3.95%) and is the highest recorded since the 1984 election.

While more than half of all informal ballots in 2010 had incomplete numbering or were totally blank, 2010 was also the first Federal election, since informal ballot paper surveys began, where the proportion of blank ballots (28.9%) was higher than the proportion of number ‘1’ only ballots (27.8%).

Overall, there was a substantial increase in assumed intentional informal voting (in particular, blank ballots) at the 2010 House of Representatives election.

Though the escalation in the number of intentional informal ballots can be confirmed, the intent itself cannot: is it a frustration with the political parties and candidates on offer or a rejection of Politics per se?

The AEC’s final report on enrolments for the 2013 federal election similarly suggests a mixed story. The AEC reported that there had been a significant increase in voter registrations (624,000 since the 2010 election). The Commission suggested the additional 25,000 voters in the 18-24 year old cohort was also a ‘positive’ while acknowledging some 400,000 (20 percent) of eligible young people in that age group had failed to enrol.

As disturbing as findings such as these may be, and the associated risk of a fragmented citizenry, they do not necessarily point to a democratic crisis so much as the uncertainty that accompanies the process of an apparent democratic re-invention and electoral re-alignment that is clearly underway.

**Shifting support for Political Parties**

It is true that support for the major political parties has dropped with respect to both party membership and electorally as reflected in primary votes.

Moreover, there has been a clear decline in the nature of that support such that Party allegiance is much weaker with the numbers of ‘rusted on’ supporters (members and voters) shrinking. The 2008 Australian Electoral Survey, for example, reveals that the proportion of people that have voted for the same major party over their lifetime has decreased from 68 percent to 44 percent over the last forty years (Australian Electoral Survey as cited in Rodrigues & Brenton 2010, p.10).

This change from the past may be due to particular reasons relating to party politics and the parties concerned, as well as to a change in social behaviours when it comes to joining and actively participating in membership organisations of all sorts.

That said, care needs to be taken in interpreting these trends as terminal decline. It is true that first preference votes for the major parties in the House of Representatives declined from about 92 percent over the 1950s to the 1980s to an average of 84 percent since the 1990s with the most dramatic drop being that between the 1987 (91.8 percent) and the 1990 (82.6 percent) elections (Rodrigues & Brenton, 2010).

---

\(^3\) AEC ‘Online enrolment drives record 14.7 million Australians ready to vote’ Media Release 16 August 2013
The 2010 election saw it hover at just over 81 percent suggesting this decline may be relatively stable. If you add the Greens 2010 primary vote of close to 12 percent then you have a primary vote of 93 percent for substantial political parties: that is, higher than the average for the post war years to the 1980s.4

The point worth noting here is that the vast majority of voters continue to back a very select group of parties and the levels at which they do so are basically stable. However, the new element is that increasing numbers will no longer be bound to any one party in perpetuity.

Indeed, the suggestion that young people, rather than being entirely distinct from other age cohorts with respect to their issues-orientation, diminished organisation allegiance and forms of political participation, may also be lead indicators with regard to voting behaviour.

The Two Party System

While the point is made above that voters still back a select group of parties, it is worth noting further that they did so when there was an array of options available including 23 registered parties nationally (2010) in addition to the multitude of Independent candidates. The fact remains that the 19 remaining parties and all independents combined could only muster 6.94 percent of the primary votes at the 2010 Federal election; that is, 860,724 of the 12,402,363 formal votes cast and only marginally higher than the 729,304 informal votes. Notably, this situation occurred in an election in which the traditional protagonists were floundering and campaigned poorly.

Seen in this light it is difficult to argue that voters have utterly rejected political parties so much as fired a substantial ‘shot across their bows’. By refusing to pledge their votes, a significant and growing number of citizens are making it clear that their support will need to be earned and not assumed.

It is more difficult though to determine whether the rise in the Greens primary vote represents a rejection of the two-party system that has defined Australian politics since the formation of a united political opposition to the ALP in May 1909. Notwithstanding the rise and fall of the Democratic Labor Party (DLP), Australian Democrats and, to a lesser extent, One Nation, some political commentators have rushed to judgement: one claiming, for example, that the ALP would ‘never again’ be able to claim a majority in the House of Representatives and Senate in its own right and the Coalition has a limited window to do so.5

While our analysis would argue that it is a mistake to talk of ‘long-term votes’ being tied to any particular Party, the survival of the two-party system is likely to remain an open question for some time to come. While some assert that the two-party system is in its death throes and while others fervently desire it, in advocating a radical transformation of our democratic system, neither claim is sufficient in itself to make it so.

It may be that the rudiments of a two-party system will remain with any change largely confined to a re-arrangement of the political ‘deck chairs’, or alternatively, it may be the case that the traditional rivals will re-assert themselves.

---

4 For background on support for Independents over time in the Federal Parliament, see Rodrigues and Brenton (2010).
5 Peter Botsman, ‘Reports of the death of the two-party system may not have been greatly exaggerated’ in The Australian, 23 October 2010
What is certain though is that the environment in which the political parties operate has changed and changed permanently such that for their future it is a case of adapt or die. So it is that the answer to the question as to whether the two-party system thrives is found largely, though not entirely, in the political parties themselves.

**Young Voters’ Influence**

While the preliminary observations above suggest that change is afoot, the nature and extent of that change is thrown into stark relief when considered in the light of the political behaviours and voting intentions of young people, specifically. In doing so, it is possible to discern their profound influence on the electoral landscape; an influence that has gone largely unrecognised.

**The ‘new electorate’ is fluid not swinging**

One of the more significant changes in the electoral landscape is the emergence of what can be characterised as the *fluid* electorate.

The Labor Party’s *It’s Time* campaign heralded the beginning of the modern era in electoral campaigning. Conceived in 1971 and executed in the 1972 Federal election, the campaign brought Gough Whitlam into Government thereby ending twenty-three consecutive years of Conservative rule. The campaign strategy (Rubensohn et al 1971)\(^6\) adopted advertising and branding methods to shape the campaign introducing such novel ideas as focus groups in the process. These methods were applied explicitly towards influencing the outcomes in specific marginal seats in which there was a likelihood of shifting a relatively small number of votes to change the result.

The rudiments of this 1972 campaign have been the basis for increasingly sophisticated marginal seat campaigning ever since and the ‘swing voter’ became the most sought after of all electoral prizes.

While the swing voter–marginal seat paradigm has continued to frame electoral discourse and strategising, it has been seen that these unaligned voters have soared in number with new generations of voters in the vanguard.

Throughout the 14 year, five-election period covered in the 2011 analysis of Newspoll voter intention data (Brooker, 2011), younger voters were consistently at the extremes in terms of their frequency and scale of changing voter intentions such that as a group they are not so much ‘swinging’ as in constant electoral motion. The update of that 2011 analysis that follows suggests that these general trends are still evident though they may not be as pronounced in this last period.

While a party may still accrue some advantage from the first-time voter’s support, the general research on youth political participation, the present analysis of the data and the documented dramatic drop in life-long voting allegiance, all tend to suggest that this first-time voter’s allegiance is equivocal. While it can still be assumed that securing a first-time voter’s support is a boon to the chosen party, the weakened bonds imply it is indicative at best of an electoral leaning holding only faint promise (and no surety) of future support.

---

\(^6\) In April 2011, the Whitlam Institute made public the first of only ten original copies of the *It’s Time* campaign proposal. This was made possible by Graham Freudenberg’s donation of his papers to the Whitlam Prime Ministerial Collection.
The shift in voting intentions among 25-34 year-olds in the period 2010-2013 evident in the latest Newspoll data reinforces this view.

There are two further points regarding younger voters’ electoral behaviour that emerge from the analysis of voter intention survey data that warrant further mention. The first is that, notwithstanding the degree of fluidity highlighted in the two voting intention survey reports, younger voters tend to be progressively inclined. The second is that gender matters.

Brooker’s review of the periods leading up to the five Federal elections from 1996 to 2010, has shown the youth voting intentions have consistently been different to those of the other age groups. While the 25-34s have occasionally been the group that takes its support in a particular direction, it is the 18-24s that have been most extreme in supporting the ‘progressive’ parties and rejecting the Coalition. In spite of the significant narrowing of the gap shown in this current update, the under 35s combined Labor-Green support continues to surpass that for the Coalition.

Waves of support or rejection are discernible amongst the younger groups that contrast with the steady, generally conservative, support of those over 50. The 50+ cohort are the only age group to record a majority support (hovering round 50 percent) for any one party (the Coalition) in the period 2010-2013.

On the question of gender, earlier research points to important gender differences in both attitudes and experiences of informal participation (Collin, 2008). The analysis of voter intention data highlights this further revealing that while young people broadly tend to support the ‘progressive’ parties, young women tend to do so more consistently. At times the split is more marked as in the case of the dramatic shift in support towards the Coalition in 2001 among young men (Brooker 2011).

This is also evident in the trend data which shows that young women, even when tending in the same direction as young men, will be more supportive of Labor or the Greens and less supportive of the Coalition than their male counterparts. It is the case both for 18-24 and 25-34 year old cohorts. These conclusions find further support in Brooker’s analysis of the same data comparing the number of times the genders were different in their support for the respective parties over the fourteen years 1996-2010: again most starkly illustrated by looking at the 18-24 year olds.

The data in this current update indicates that this continues to be the case notwithstanding the identified shift in voting intentions towards the Coalition among the 25-34 year old cohort.

The analysis of voter intention data lends weight to the view that as a nation we are witnessing a fundamental change in the body politic which can be described as the emergence of a fluid electorate that is being shaped and defined by the electoral volatility and political behaviours of young people. If so, we have entered uncharted electoral waters in which no political party will be able to assume a substantial core of sustained primary voter support.

A fluid electorate is distinct from the dominant view of the electorate as essentially comprising safe and marginal seats with the focus being on the relatively small number of swing voters in those marginal seats.

This perspective may well have been true for a time but the new reality of a fluid electorate suggests picking the marginals will become increasingly difficult and that the number of predictable votes in the majority of electorates will also reduce to the point that each is contestable in its own right. Predicting uniform trends will be an increasingly risky basis for political tactical decisions.
Moreover, a fluid electorate accentuates the potential electoral impact of political moments. In other words, as the analysis of young voter intentions suggests, a growing number of footloose voters with an increased inclination to vote on the alignment of their values and a priority issue, are more likely to respond more quickly and more decisively to a single, major incident. It could be ‘children overboard’ or 9/11 or dropping a major policy or an environmental disaster or even a scandal.

The electoral stakes of even a single blunder become disproportionately high. In a campaign context they are even higher when you consider the trend towards ‘late deciding’ which may well leave the election outcome susceptible to real or perceived failures (whether an inadequate response to a natural disaster or a late-breaking ministerial indiscretion) on the eve of polling day.

While the change in behaviours appear to have been recognised by the political stakeholders, it is far from clear whether their responses to these changes have been informed by an underlying explanation of what is shaping those behaviours.

**The Electoral Impact of Younger Voters**

Disenchanted as they may be, young people may not themselves realise just how significant their votes have been.

The authors’ interest lies in trends and their implications and the analysis of the Newspoll voter intention survey data was directed to that end. Consequently, neither the analysis nor the accompanying work has focused on the electorate-by-electorate ‘numbers’ that occupy so much attention by political strategists and commentators. In the same vein it should be emphasised that the data itself is voter intention rather than actual votes and that these observations recognise but do not analyse the impact of the level of voter registrations, informal votes or preferences.

That said, the potential significance of the analysis outlined in this paper is amplified by the likelihood, inferred from the Newspoll data, that younger voters have largely determined the outcome of the past four Federal elections and may well have become the most electorally influential demographic as a consequence.

Young voters represent some 30 percent of the electorate [26.4 percent of enrolled voters at the time of the 2013 election]. This substantial proportion means that a major shift in the youth vote (which this analysis suggests is not uncommon) will be sufficient to change an election outcome notwithstanding the lower level of voter registration (particularly among the 18-24 year olds).

Bear in mind, as reported previously, a conservative reading of this Newspoll data indicates that the youth vote may have determined the outcomes of the last four (2001, 2004, 2007 and 2010) Federal elections. The collapse of the youth vote for Labor between the 2007 and 2010 elections, for example, saw a drop of well over 15 points among 18-34 year olds and their intentions to switch to the Greens (by roughly the same number) goes a long way to explaining the hung parliament.

The relative voter stability of older age cohorts makes the fluid nature of the youth vote more electorally significant.
Conclusion

The extent to which this analysis provides a guide to future action remains open. Younger voters are making a powerful point but whether they are forging a new path or making sensible decisions in the absence of genuine alternatives will only be revealed in time.

What is certain though is that as political leaders and party officials confront serious questions about party membership and structures, younger voters are developing electoral habits of their own making.

Eric Sidoti & Dr Ron Brooker
Whitlam Institute 2013
Youth Federal Election Voting Intentions Update

Statistical and Graphical Analysis of Newspoll Quarterly Data

Election Poll - 2010 to March 2013

Six months prior to the Federal Election in September 2013, Newspoll Limited has generously provided the Whitlam Institute with the cumulative polling data for each quarter since the Election Poll in 2010. The analysis of that data has followed the methodology reported in the earlier publication by the Institute (Brooker, 2011) which showed the youth voting intentions to be highly variable and frequently against the trends of other age groups. In his foreword, Eric Sidoti described the observed patterns of younger voters across the five-election period as being “consistently at the extremes in terms of their frequency and scale of varying voter intentions”. Such variability he surmised was not so much a sign of the youth vote ‘swinging’ but rather an indication of the emergence of a fluid electorate wherein voters show a willingness to be either politically unaligned or only marginally attached. The current analysis of recent Newspoll data is designed to see if the youth voting intentions are continuing to show this fluidity which has been associated with the increased impact of political moments.

The ‘youth vote’ of 18 to 34s which comprises approximately 30% of the electorate has been subdivided in the Newspoll data into 18 to 24s and 25 to 34s. Each sub-group which is also separated by gender represents 12% and 17.5%, respectively, of the Federal electorate. These sub-divisions will each be examined to both confirm the previous work and to investigate whether this extraordinary era of Federal politics has continued or exaggerated the volatility of young peoples’ voting intentions.

Voting Intentions of Different Age Groupings

The first comparison of the different age groups’ voting intentions percentages (VI %) is shown below in Figure 1. As shown graphically, the most volatile are young Labor voters, both 18-24s and 25-34s, who have differed by up to 12% from one quarter to another. This pattern of inter-age volatility is presented as being indicative of the variability that exists within the limitations of the sampling error (margins of error) of the data that Newspoll has confirmed range from 3% to 8%. That is, the margins of error based on the age grouping sample sizes between the survey periods of this update are greatest with the young voters’ smaller numbers. Notwithstanding these margins of error on the difference between quarters being greatest for 18-24s and 25-34s, further statistical analyses have shown the differences in VI% for Labor and the Greens do reach significance (p<0.05) on several occasions during 2011. Based on the patterns of changes shown by Figure 1, the voting intentions of the younger age groupings can be seen as characteristic of a group that have grown up in a time of rapidly changing technology, education, industrial relations and career opportunities. While not as marked (a maximum of 5%), both groups of young Coalition voters were also more volatile than the older Coalition supporters. Support for the Coalition from all age groups of voters was greater than that for Labor, except for the 18-24 group. The split between the two major parties at each age group is more exaggerated as the age of the poll respondents increases. The leading party amongst the 18-24s has changed four times during this period while the 50+ groups are separated by up to 26 percentage points with the Coalition always above Labor.

---

7 Brooker (2011, p. iii)
8 The capacity for a political event to ignite a quick and dramatic shift in political sentiment.
Figure 1: Voting Intentions for Major Parties by Age Groups: Election Poll 2010 to March 2013.

Labor and Coalition Voting Intentions of Age Groups between 2010 Election and March 2013
Figure 2: Voting Intentions for Minor Parties by Age Groups: Election Poll 2010 to March 2013.\(^9\)

\(^9\) Please note the vertical axis (VI %) has been changed from 20-55% (in Figure 1) to 0-30% (in Figure 2) to best display the separate trends of each age grouping across the period from end of 2010 and March 2013.
The second figure above (Figure 2) shows the trends in voting intentions for the minor parties. Once again, it is the patterns of the VI% that are being reviewed rather than a statistical analysis of the differences between quarters. Of the minor parties, the Greens have clearly attracted the support of the 18-24s but appear to have gradually lost support (with the exception of the 2nd quarter of 2012) from the 25-34s. With the greater volatility in the youth vote, especially for the Greens, it would seem that their choices may be driven by issues current at the time of polling. Very few of the youth groups’ voters were attracted by the Others (comprising Family first, Christian Democratic party, Katter’s Australian Party, Another Party, and Independents), although the 25-34s did show the occasional closer combined support for Others and the Greens (2011-2nd quarter, 2012-1st quarter, and 2012-3rd quarter).

Differences between Youth Groupings and Other Ages

A feature of the first study on Newspoll data\textsuperscript{10} was the comparison of the means and their corresponding 95% confidence intervals of different age groups on their voting intentions (VIs) for each of the major parties. Following Watson (2008, p. 11) who explained “If two confidence intervals do not overlap, then the difference between the two point estimates (means) can be regarded as statistically significant”, the following Figures (3-4) are provided to indicate where these groups are significantly different.\textsuperscript{11} It is acknowledged that this method based on overlapping confidence intervals is conservative and reduces the power to the same degree as halving the sample size. Separate analyses of the differences between age groups using calculations of standard error and the margins of error\textsuperscript{12} were conducted to confirm the statistical differences reported here.

\textsuperscript{10} Newspoll data expresses voting intentions as percentages of those in each age or gender grouping that said they would vote for a particular political party. In this document, ‘voting intention percentages’ are abbreviated as VI%.

\textsuperscript{11} A detailed description of the data and the methodology being used in these studies can be found in Brooker (2011, pp. 3-5).

\textsuperscript{12} VI of Group 1 (p\textsubscript{1}) and VI of Group 2 (p\textsubscript{2}) are used to calculate an approximate standard error (SE) using formula SQRT(p\textsubscript{1}q\textsubscript{1}/n). The difference between the two groups is D = p\textsubscript{1} - p\textsubscript{2}. Assuming independence for different people, SE(D) = SQRT[(SE.p\textsubscript{1})\textsuperscript{2}+(SE.p\textsubscript{2})\textsuperscript{2}], the calculated CI for the true difference is D +/- 2*SE(D) where 2*SE(D) is the margin of error (MOE) of D. If this CI doesn't include zero, the difference is statistically significant.
Figure 3: Youth Groups and Other Ages’ Labor and Coalition Voting Intentions: Election Poll 2010 to March 2013.

As shown above (circled in Figure 3), the 18-24s are different to all the other age groupings in that their voting intentions do not differ significantly, that is, their confidence intervals (CIs) overlap whereas all the other age groupings do not overlap and are thus significantly different (MOE=2%, D=1%). It is also important to note that the 18-24s’ CIs for both major parties are closely grouped around 35% and that even though the youngest group (18-24s) with 34.3% for Labor are trailing their 35.4% for the Coalition, they are still Labor’s best supporters. The 25-34s have a similar Labor VI mean score to the Other Ages’ Labor score but their variability being twice as much appears to show that they are a more politically heterogeneous group. Equally though, the variability displayed by these two groups could be argued as being purely a function of sampling variability. It is with the voting intentions for the Coalition that the various groups are more clearly separated. Quite distinctly, the Other Ages are much stronger supporters of the Coalition than any of the youth groupings. Importantly, there is another statistically significant indication here that the 18-24s are unique. Their lack of support for the Coalition falls well below that of the 25-34s (MOE=2%, D=5%).

Figure 4 below shows the youth groupings as being very clearly separated from the Other Ages on their voting intentions for the Greens and Others. (Please note that the vertical axis of this Figure has been collapsed from 25-50% to 5-25% to account for the smaller size of the voting intentions for the minor parties). In the Greens VIs, all three groupings of the youth voters are statistically different

(p< 0.05) to the Other Ages. In fact, the youth groupings’ VIs for the Greens are all separated by at least five percent within the displayed 13% range. Once again the 18-24s are demonstrably different in that their statistically significant (p< 0.05) CIs for the Greens are higher (above the dotted line in Figure 4) that all the other groupings including the 25-34s. In fact, if the Greens mean VIs (21%) were added to Labor’s VIs (34%) this grouping even surpasses the Coalition’s Other Ages mean VIs of 47%. Once more, the age groupings are being distinguished by all of the youth ages’ Greens VIs being statistically different to those of the Others (their CIs do not overlap) while the “Other Ages…” (circled in Figure 4) do not overlap.

Figure 4: Youth Groups and Other Ages’ Greens and Others Voting Intentions: Election Poll 2010 to March 2013.

**Differences within the Youth Age Groupings**

To confirm the separation of the youth age groupings in their voting intentions during the period since the 2010 Federal Election, plots of the 18-24s, 25-34s, and 18-34s are presented below.
As shown in Figure 5, the unique character of the 18-24s compared to other age groups with their lesser support of the Coalition and their greater support for Labor and the Greens has not translated into an actual lead for either party across all of the polls. While Labor took the lead in only four out of ten yearly quarters of the 18-24s voting intentions, the Labor combined with the Greens scores would have ‘carried the day’ in all ten.

As shown in Figure 6 above, the 25-34s maintain their lesser Labor support accompanied by a loss of enthusiasm for the Greens. While there is only a 0.4% decline from the start of this period of the Federal Parliament in their support for Labor, the 25-34s have ranged from a low of 26.3% to a high of 35.3%. The associated Coalition gains are 6.5% across the term of this minority Labor Government with this enigmatic constituency. Whether this reflects the increasing challenges for maturing adults
in ‘establishing households’ or disenchantment with the current government or reaction to the handling of particular issues remains a matter for speculation.

A combined view of the conventionally described youth vote (18-34s) is presented below. As would be expected, the extremes of the 18-24s are mediated by the older 25-34s but the previously seen Labor and Coalition separation is nonetheless consistent.

![Figure 7: 18-34s Voting Intentions Trends: Election Poll 2010 to March 2013.](image)

**Gender and Age Differences within the Youth Groupings**

The following Figures are representative of the statistically significant differences between age and gender groupings of the youth voters. Figure 8 shows the 25-34 males’ statistically significant (p<0.05) lack of support for Labor during the period from the 2010 Election to March 2013. By contrast, female youth voters, especially 18-24s have been the best Labor supporters. The separation of the genders within the youth vote, reported previously, is again clearly distinguishable in Figure 8 with regard to the Coalition voting intentions. Males (both 18-24s and 25-34s) are statistically different (p<0.05) from both ages groupings of the females (MOE=3% D=4%). The 18-24 females are the lowest in their conservative voting intentions, while the 18-24 and 25-34 males have started to increase their Coalition support.
Figure 8: Gender and Age Differences in Labor and Coalition Voting Intentions: Election Poll 2010 to March 2013.

Figure 9: Gender and Age Differences in Greens and Others Voting Intentions: Election Poll 2010 to March 2013.
Youth support for the Greens with the exception of the 18-24 females has fallen in the 15 to 19% range during this period. (Please note that the vertical axis of this Figure has been changed from 25-50% to 5-30% to account for the smaller size of the voting intentions for the minor parties). This parity by the youth males and the 25-34 females is in contrast with the significantly (p<0.05) different 18-24 females whose mean score is 25%. Figure 9 also highlights the age and gender difference within the youth grouping VI’s for the Others. The 18-24 females again stand out as having different political views to their youth peers. Quite interestingly, the Others fall well short of the Greens for all of the age and gender groupings, especially the 18-24 females who appear to have been influenced by those issues the Greens are ostensibly supporting.

**Summary**

Overall this update has confirmed the youth groupings, especially the 18-24 females, have continued to support ‘progressive’ parties over the conservative ones. In general, their voting intentions across the period from the Federal Election in 2010 to March 2013 have followed the trends shown by the middle age groupings but their support has been shown to be more volatile. Political moments, as observed previously, appear to have a greater effect on the youth age groupings.

The previously found gender effect of female support for parties with ‘green’ or socially supportive policies has been mostly continued on the back of the 18-24 females. The shift in voting intentions among 25-34 year old males over this period is particularly noteworthy, driving a more conservative intent among the 25-24 year old cohort overall.

These findings are confirmed in an earlier, somewhat similar, analysis of “Young People’s Voting Patterns” by Bean (2007) using data from the Australian Election Studies conducted at the time of the 2001 and 2004 Federal elections to test the hypotheses:

1. (That) Young people will be more left-leaning in their voting choice than older people;
2. (That) Young people will be more inclined to support minor parties than older people.

These AES ‘young people’ groupings of 18-24 and 25-30 differed from those used in the Newspoll data by a further four years in only the 25-34 age group, but his findings, based on the data gathered at the time of these two elections, support those presented here. Young people are “more ideologically to the left than older people” (p.48) and the under 25 group were further to the left than both the 25-30 group and older members of the electorate. Another source of support for the present findings is Bean’s findings of gender differences amongst the youth groupings. Interestingly, it was the support for the Liberal Party that differed most between males and females in both elections. In 2001, “under 25 men (were) 15% more likely to vote Liberal than under 25 women” (p.38). Similarly in 2004. At the same election, the most significant gender difference occurred in the 25-30 age group where males expressed a “whopping 62%” electoral preference for the Liberal Party. The changes in youth voting patterns commenced in 2001 have been continued into 2013. Young women are still progressively resisting the conservative leanings of their male counterparts across both of the youth age groupings.
References


Botsman, P. (2010) “Reports of the death of the two-party system may not have been greatly exaggerated,” The Australian, 23 October 2010.


