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NEWS RELEASE

Young Canadians Score Only Slightly Higher than Their American Counterparts on Political Knowledge Test

Canada should look to Europe, not the US, as a model for increasing political awareness among its youth, says IRPP study

Montreal – Political knowledge is a democratic value. It is also an important ingredient in political participation. However, as the IRPP study being released today demonstrates, young Canadians know comparably little about politics.

In this study author Henry Milner compares survey data on civic literacy from the US and Canada. He finds that young Canadians' political knowledge is low – only slightly higher than that of their American counterparts and, therefore, well below the level of young Europeans. His research reveals that young Quebecers, whose level of political knowledge surpasses that of other Canadian youth, are the reason that Canada scores above the US. The situation requires redress if Canada is to stem the declining voter turnout and decreasing civic participation that currently plagues the country.

The results of Milner's research reveal a startling lack of political knowledge in Canada and the US:

- ◆ 56 percent of young Americans are unable to identify citizens as the category of people having the right to vote, compared with 43 percent in Canada.
- ◆ 55 percent of young Americans are unable to name one permanent member country of the UN Security Council (i.e., including the US), compared with 30 percent of young Canadians.

Looking at the higher levels of political knowledge among European youth, the author argues that European nations are better at disseminating the information and skills needed to turn young people into participating citizens. This, he says, "raises the question of whether Canadians should look there, rather than to the United States, in seeking to address the issue."

He argues that emulating the US, where youth political knowledge is lower than in Canada is not an option. Instead Milner proposes looking to European countries, where youth populations score consistently high on tests of political and civic awareness, as a model.

European countries focus on civic education programs that target lower-income students who lack the resources to acquire political knowledge on their own. According to Milner, "such young people are frequently potential dropouts, and civic education courses need to

be offered at a time they are still in school but close to voting age, and in a form most likely to appeal to them."

Political Knowledge and Participation Among Young Canadians and Americans, by Henry Milner, can be downloaded free of charge from www.irpp.org

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