

Canada's ongoing debate: the federal voting age

Valere Gaspard, 0008702344

Supervisor: Dr. Luc Turgeon

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1.0 Introduction

Voting is considered a naturally inherent right for any individual that belongs to a society (Grover, 2011). Along with citizenship (the notion of being legally considered a full member of a society), the most common criterion that an individual must reach to exercise their right to vote is to reach the legal voting age. This is because the minimum voting age is often equated with the threshold in which a society considers its members to be adults who are mature and capable of making reasonable choices (Blais et al., 2001, 43). In Canada, this threshold at the federal level was 21 years and older until 1970, when Parliament changed the minimum voting age to 18 (Library of Parliament, 1970). While the federal voting age in Canada has not been lowered since then, there have been numerous attempts to lower it to 16 years old. Currently, during the 44th Canadian Parliament – at the time this paper was written – there are two bills in the House of Commons, one bill in the Senate, and one application filed to the Ontario Superior Court of Justice, all arguing that the voting age should be lowered to 16 years old (Children First Canada, 2021; Parliament of Canada, 2022a; Parliament of Canada, 2022b; Parliament of Canada, 2022c). This research paper broadly contributes to the literature on the topic of the concept of a voting age, and specifically contributes to the literature on the federal voting age in Canada by examining the arguments used by parliamentarians to support or oppose changes to the voting age.

While this paper does not advance what the voting age ought to be at the federal level in Canada, it does concern itself with the rationale used to justify maintaining, changing, or eliminating the federal voting age. Although numerous rationales can be used by parliamentarians to advocate maintaining, changing, or eliminating the federal voting age, a specific rationale was at the core of lowering the federal voting age from 21 to 18. According to

the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, the rationale for lowering the federal voting age is rooted in three criteria: one, that the group being enfranchised has a stake in how their society should be governed; two, that the group being enfranchised has the capability of exercising a mature and informed vote; and three, that the group being enfranchised has a sufficient level of participation in activities relating to citizenship (Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, 1991a, 47). Since this was the first and only time the voting age was lowered at the federal level in Canada, this paper considers the listed criteria as the standards that would need to be met for the voting age to be changed in accordance with Canada's official rationale pertaining to its legal voting age. Taking this rationale into consideration, this major research paper will focus on the following two-part research question: "what frames are being used to support or oppose changing the voting age from 18 to 16? Are these frames consistent with Canada's voting age rationale, which was used to lower the voting age from 21 to 18?" This paper concludes that the majority of frames being used to support or oppose changing the federal voting age from 18 to 16 are not consistent with Canada's official rationale, which was originally used to lower the voting age from 21 to 18.

To examine this research question, the paper proceeds in five parts. First, a literature review consisting of the normative considerations about the concept of a voting age, the general arguments for changing, maintaining, or eliminating the voting age, and case examples from countries that have tested or made changes to their voting age are described. Second, a complete timeline about the debates, legislative changes, and historical considerations, pertaining to Canada's federal voting age are provided. Third, an explanation of frame analysis, the theoretical lens that is used to analyse the remainder of the paper, and a description of Jusić and Stojanović's frame analysis model – which is used as the model to analyse the data in this paper

– are given. Fourth, how Jusić and Stojanović’s frame analysis model is utilized in this paper, the data that is analysed, and the proposed hypotheses for this paper, are described in the “Methodology” part of the paper. Finally, the results and analysis of the data are provided in the “Results and Discussion” part of the paper. The model is split into four distinct tables to highlight significant findings for each of its levels.

2.0. Literature Review

Research that focuses on parliamentary discourse relating to the rationale behind Canada’s federal voting age and the arguments for or against changing this voting age has not been conducted to date. This is an important area of research because debates about changes to the federal voting age in Canada are a reoccurring topic in both the House of Commons and the Senate. As of 2022, the contemporary debates in Parliament regarding the voting age are about whether it should be lowered to 16 (Parliament of Canada, 2022a; Parliament of Canada, 2022b; Parliament of Canada, 2022c). Even if the federal voting age is lowered to 16, it can still be lowered again in the future, making this topic an important area of research for both academics and practitioners that are interested in Canada’s federal election law. Additionally, understanding Canada’s rationale for a voting age and the arguments about changing or maintaining it would add to the broader literature on the voting age.

There are some studies that examine specific aspects of Canada’s federal voting age in the literature. Some examples of these studies include exploring the benefits and consequences of having Canadians under the age of 18 earn enfranchisement (Pammett, 2001), the possibility of removing a voting age entirely (Hyde, 2001), and considering how a lower voting age may impact voter turnout rates in Canada (Bélanger & Mahéo, 2020). In addition to the studies that focus on Canada’s federal voting age, there is literature about the normative considerations

surrounding the concept of a voting age, general arguments about changing, maintaining, or eliminating a voting age, and case examples from different countries that either tested changes to their voting age during municipal elections or changed their voting age entirely. Therefore, to have a complete understanding of the literature on the voting age – and more specifically, Canada’s federal voting age – this literature review will be divided in three sections. First, normative considerations about the concept of a voting age will be discussed. This section will examine the relationship between the right to vote, citizenship, and participating in a democratic society. Second, general arguments about why it may be beneficial to change, maintain, or eliminate a voting age will be discussed. These arguments will primarily consist of theoretical reasoning or research studies that have been conducted on the topic. Showing the possibilities in the literature in which a country’s voting age could be maintained, changed, or eliminated, will help to contextualize Canada’s situation. Third, case examples from countries that have either tested changes to their voting age during municipal elections or changed their voting age entirely will be examined. This will help to contextualize the general arguments about the voting age from the second section of this literature review.

2.1. Normative considerations of a voting age

Part of the literature about the voting age focuses on the normative considerations for what it means to have the right to vote. These considerations consist of the relationship between the right to vote, citizenship, and participation in the society of the jurisdiction in question. There is a reoccurring idea in the literature that the right to vote is something intrinsically valuable (Eichorn & Bergh, 2020). This is demonstrated through the notions that universal suffrage is required for an election in a jurisdiction to be considered democratic (Blais et al., 2011), and that the right to vote is considered a natural inherent right for any human that belongs to a particular

society; whether that right is recognized or not recognized in the law (Grover, 2011). Therefore, while exploring the purpose of having a voting age or the criteria that should determine what the voting age is set at, it is important to establish whether having citizenship is sufficient for voting. This is because a young citizen is still considered a member of their society, even if they have not reached the voting age of their society.

While having citizenship is a requirement to vote in Canadian federal elections (Government of Canada, 2022c, s. 3) and in national elections in essentially every democratic country (Beckman, 2006, 154), parts of the literature argues that the criterion for voting should be extended passed citizens to non-citizen residents in the country. For example, Beckman explains that when it comes to voting rights, there is a “principle of membership” and an “all affected principle” (2006, 154). Under the ‘principle of membership’, any individual that is considered a member of a perceived community has the right to vote, while the ‘all affected principle’ allows any individual that is affected by the actions of a government to have voting rights (Beckamn, 2006, 154). While Beckman discusses this debate in the context of non-citizen residents of a country, it is important to mention that even if voting rights were extended to non-citizens, it would only apply to individuals that are considered adults members of the society (Beckman, 2006, 153). This demonstrates that even in scenarios where it is argued that all individuals that are impacted by a government should have the right to vote, it does not necessarily mean that it would be extended to individuals below the voting age in that society.

Even though having a voting age may seem to contradict the ‘all affected principle’ – since individuals below the voting age are still impacted by the actions of a government – a potential justification for this would be that the right to vote is grounded in an individual’s autonomy and respect for that individual’s autonomy (Peto, 2020). This would imply that having

a voting age is justifiable because it would be the age that society considers an individual to be autonomous. While the notion of a voting age contradicts the idea that the right to vote is a natural inherent right for any individual that is a member of their society – since members of the society below the voting age do not yet have the right to vote – limiting who can vote based on age is accepted in most of the literature. This is because having this age threshold ensures that groups of individuals that have not yet developed the competency or capacity to make rational judgements are outside of the decision-making process (Baumtrog, 2021, 42). In addition to having the capacity to make rational judgements, there are arguments about ensuring citizens receive formal education about what it means to have the responsibility of voting prior to reaching the voting age. However, this notion presupposes citizens below the voting age will not acquire the responsibility or critical thinking needed to vote on their own, prior to reaching the voting age (McLean, 2010). Due to these concerns about competency and capacity for rational decision-making, a significant part of the debate about the voting age is determining at what age does an individual or group of individuals possess significant cognitive competencies to vote.

When discussing cognitive competencies in the Canadian context, it should be noted that these considerations do not discriminate against or target individuals above the voting age with diminished cognitive or mental capacities. While some jurisdictions – for example, parts of the United States – allow for individuals to be disenfranchised based on their mental capacity (Schiffler, 2022, 658), Canada removed any disqualification on the basis of having a mental disability in 1993 as part of Bill C-114 (Elections Canada, 2022a, 133). However, some arguments in the literature suggest eliminating the concept of a voting age and having it replaced with procedural tests that could determine if an individual is competent enough to be part of the electorate (Cook, 2013). While these kinds of suggestions would enfranchise individuals based

on their maturity and competency (instead of the maturity and competency of an age group as a collective), it may disenfranchise adults that are currently above the voting age that would not be able to pass these procedural tests. While not being able to vote if an individual fails a procedural test contradicts the notion of the right to vote being a natural inherent right, it could be consistent with the right to vote if it is presupposed that a certain level of cognitive capacity is needed for discovering one's rights (Grover, 2011).

Overall, the normative considerations of the literature on the voting age highlight the following three considerations: first, that the right to vote is a natural inherent right for any individual that belongs to a society (in practical terms, this means possessing citizenship); second, determining when an individual or group of individuals are considered sufficiently autonomous, mature, and capable of making rational decisions are a significant part of determining a voting age; and third, that in the absence of a voting age, the rights of individuals with diminished cognitive or mental capacities would need to be considered depending on the method chosen for determining who possesses the right to vote in a society.

2.2. Changing, maintaining, or eliminating the voting age

In addition to the normative considerations about a voting age, there are several arguments in the literature about the specifics of setting a voting age. These can be divided into three broad categories that contain specific arguments within each: changing the voting age of a society, maintaining the voting of a society, and eliminating the vote age of a society. It should be noted that most arguments about changing the voting age primarily consist of lowering it from the age of 18 to 16, since the age of 18 is the current norm and standard in most democratic countries (Nelkin, 2020). However, there are some cases where it is suggested that lowering the voting age to 12 or the age of six is plausible (O'Neill, 2022).

2..2.1 Changing the voting age

When discussing changing the voting age, it is primarily rooted in the idea that age is a measurement for having a broad set of motivational and cognitive capacities; thus, having the right to vote demonstrates that a certain threshold of these broad capacities has been reached (Nelkin, 2020). Supporters of changing the voting age from 18 often assert this threshold can be reached at the age of 16, while scholars that do not support changing the voting age suggest that 18 is the age that sufficient political maturity is reached. In 2021, Baumtrog published a paper arguing that preventing 16-year-olds in Canada from voting on the “misbelief” that they do not possess the capability of making an informed and mature vote, is an “epistemic injustice”; this is defined as wrongfully discrediting a person as a transmitter and knower of knowledge because of a systematic identity prejudice (41 & 49). Part of their argument is that to determine if enfranchisement should be extended to a lower age group, the age group should be judged based on their competency and not their excellency. This means that it does not matter “*how well* someone can make an informed decision [which consists of excellency], whereas determining competency involves the less complicated task of determining if someone can reason *well enough*” (Baumtrog, 2021, 43). Baumtrog argues that Canadian youth can reason well enough by the age of 16, by appealing to evidence that demonstrates cognitive development for reasoning only matters until the age of 14, at which point education becomes the main consideration for the ability to reason (2021, 44). This evidence is consistent with other parts of the literature which assert that the argument that 16 and 17-year-olds are not mature enough to vote is not consistent with developmental science (Hart et al., 2021).

Appealing to education to help justify lowering the voting age is done in other places in the literature as well, since O’Neill argues that the voting age in the United Kingdom can be

lowered to the age of 12, since that is when students begin their secondary level of education (O'Neill, 2022, 185). Additionally, a normative claim can be made that students in secondary education ought to be able to vote because they are citizens in a shared institutional and social environment – their schooling system (O'Neill, 2022, 192). While O'Neill acknowledges that lowering the voting age to 16 is an easier case to make politically, they point out that having a lower voting age helps to ensure that first-time young voters are eligible to vote while they are in an educational institution, despite the timing of an election cycle (O'Neill, 2022, 201-02). For example, if the voting age is 16 in a country and an election occurs every five years, if a young citizen was 15 during the last election, then they will not have the opportunity to vote until they are 20. This argument presupposes that being in a supportive environment (O'Neill, 2022, 202) at a young age (specifically, in an educational institution or under the care of parents), increases the likelihood for a young person to vote; however, the importance of this kind of environment for voting is debated (Mahéo & Bélanger, 2020, 613). Even so, this idea of having a supportive environment is rooted in a school of thought which presupposes that giving young people the chance to vote in elections and the opportunity to participate in politics in general, will better help them “fully enter the public realm” (Pammett, 2001, 14) and make them more likely to develop a habit of voting (Mahéo & Bélanger, 2020, 598). This is sometimes referred to as “the developmental theory of turnout” because it emphasizes the importance of the ‘starting point’ of going to vote, since non-voters risk developing a habit of continuing to not vote during future elections (Mahéo & Bélanger, 2020, 598).

There is also an argument in the literature that younger citizens should have the right to vote, because they will take-in more political knowledge if given the opportunity to vote; however, results have differed depending on the parameters of the conducted study (Rosenqvist,

2017). While a lot of the literature provides specific arguments about reasoning capabilities or deferring to increases to voter turnout as reasoning for why changes to the voting age should occur, another reason for change could simply be changes in public opinion about which age groups should be able to vote (Takao, 2019). Lowering a voting age may also be argued in terms of ensuring young people have a say in voicing their opinions regarding issues and policy decisions that primarily impact them. For example, if the decisions made on longer-term policy issues, such as climate change, will disproportionately impact the life of a younger person in comparison to an older person – who may not still be alive to experience the impacts – then it could be debated that there is a special case to be made to allow young people to vote to have a say on these policy decisions (O’Neill, 2022, 207). The same argument could apply to policy issues that directly impact younger people, such as school closures due to COVID-19 (O’Neill, 2022, 207) or the ability for young people that are currently below the voting age to access medicinal therapy (MacLeod, 2016, 87).

While lowering the voting age is the most common aspect of changing the voting age, there are also arguments that explore whether older citizens should eventually lose the ability to vote, to provide equal opportunities among age groups in relation to electoral outcomes (Poama & Volacu, 2021). However, this proposal contradicts the normative elements of voting rights – such as it being a natural inherent right – and does not fit well within the broader literature on voting age. Additionally, it may be difficult to justify in practice since a country that adopts this principle would have to disenfranchise citizens that were once enfranchised.

2.2.2. Maintaining the voting age

A less common argument in the literature is maintaining a voting age of 18. This may be because it is considered the norm around the world (Poama & Volacu, 2021), which makes it

seem that arguing to keep the voting age at 18 does not require much additional attention. However, one reason for maintaining 18 as a minimum voting age may be to ensure voter turnout does not decrease. When the voting age first changed from 21 to 18 in some countries, first time voters in the 20-18-year-old group experienced a lower voter turnout rate than first time voters that were 21 (Franklin, 2020). Since voting seems to be based in habit – meaning that either a voter develops a habit of voting or non-voting – some argue that lowering the minimum voting age will decrease overall turnout in the long term, since younger people are less likely to vote than older people (Franklin, 2020). This would be consistent with placing an importance on the starting point of going to vote that is part of “the developmental theory of turnout” (as discussed in section 2.3.1. “Changing the voting age” of this paper) but seems to oppose the idea of getting young people to participate as soon as possible. While this is a helpful example to consider, it seems to be an outlier in the general literature on the voting age.

In countries that have separate elections for different jurisdictions – for example, municipal elections and national elections – one reason for maintaining a voting age is ensuring that there is a consistent voting age for each election in that country (Faas, et al., 2022). While this would not apply if each jurisdiction in that country changed their voting age simultaneously, there is an argument to be made against changing it in one jurisdiction and not the other(s). In cases where an elector can vote in one election in their country but cannot vote in the next election in their country for a different jurisdiction – a concept called experiencing “temporary disenfranchisement” (Faas, et al., 2022, 1) – it was shown that losing the right to vote is significantly negative for both levels of satisfaction with democracy and external efficacy (Faas, et al., 2022, 4-5). However, both the political interest of these electors and their internal efficacy did not suffer due to this temporary disenfranchisement (Faas, et al., 2022, 5). Since this study is

the first in the literature to study the notion of ‘temporary disenfranchisement’ and was conducted using survey data from Schleswig-Holstein, Germany’s most northern state (Faas, et al., 2022, 3-5), it would be helpful to test this concept in other countries that have multiple jurisdictions of elections – like Canada – to see if results differ.

2.2.3. Eliminating the voting age

The third broad category about the specifics of a voting age consists of eliminating a minimum voting age. In 2001, Martin Hyde provided reasoning for why Canada ought to eliminate its voting age as parts of their PhD thesis. Hyde argues that having a voting age is both educationally unsound and unjust, because it excludes Canadian citizens who may be reasonably competent enough to vote and because it is not required to safeguard Canada’s democracy (Hyde, 2001, ii). To argue against the voting age legalistically, it is pointed out that Canada’s Charter of Rights and Freedom gives all Canadians the right to vote, but that the age qualification in the Canada Elections Act prevents some Canadians from voting (Hyde, 2001, 1). Hyde presupposes that this age qualification should be found unconstitutional (Hyde, 2001, 1).

While not specific to Canada, a proposal for eliminating a voting age that is suggested in the literature would be to replace the voting age with a procedural test to see if a potential elector is deemed competent enough – in terms of independence and minimal literacy – to cast a ballot (Cook, 2013). This idea presupposes that competency should be a criterion for voting and thus deems excluding non-competent citizens from participating as acceptable (Cook, 2013).

Although the cognitive abilities of an age group are discussed in other places in the literature, the argument of eliminating a voting age in this way is less common since it presupposes that excluding a specific individual from the same age group based on their competency level is

acceptable. Therefore, to have this proposed idea in practice, it must be addressed whether it is acceptable to measure cognitive abilities on either a collective or individual basis.

2.3. Case examples of changes

The final part of this literature review discusses case examples in different jurisdictions relating to the specifics of setting a voting age. It should be noted that not many countries or regions have lowered their voting age passed the age of 18. Some notable examples of countries or regions that have lowered their voting age consists of: Austria, Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador, Estonia, Germany, Malta, Nicaragua, Norway, and Scotland (Mahéo & Bélanger, 2020, 597). Additionally, some regions have tested lowering their voting age through the use of experiments but have yet to legislate the changes (Dassonneville et al., 2021). Austria is an interesting case example since it was found that the political interest of people at the ages of 16 and 17 were higher after gaining enfranchisement (Zandonella & Zeglovits, 2013). By way of comparison, the city of Ghent, Belgium, experienced different results when they ran an experiment that artificially lowered their voting age to 16, showing no evidence of more overall political engagement from this age group (Dassonneville et al., 2021). These findings exemplify how the impacts of changing a voting age may be different in some jurisdictions.

There are also some cases that demonstrate the benefits of maintaining a higher minimum voting age. A Norwegian municipal voting age trial for people between the ages of 16 and 17 demonstrated that there is a difference in maturity levels between voters that are 16 years old and voters that are 17 years old, and even between voters that are 17 years old and those that are 18 years old (Bergh, 2013). The differing findings in these jurisdictions show that the specifics of setting a voting age can still be debated both in theory and practice. However, this could potentially be addressed with more contemporary trial evidence in relation to lowering the voting

age in other countries across the globe. While many countries lowered their voting age to 18 between the 1970s and the 1990s, most have not changed it since that time (McAllister, 2014).

While the literature on voting age addresses some normative considerations about the concept of a voting age, general arguments about changing, maintaining, or eliminating a voting age, and case examples from countries that have either tested changes to their voting age or that have changed their voting age, there is still a gap in the literature relating to Canada's voting age. While some primary documents state the rationale behind Canada's federal voting age – which will be shown in the next part of this paper, “Historic summary of Canada's federal voting age” – there has been no work to date that analyses this rationale or that analyses the parliamentary discourse relating to the arguments for or against changing the federal voting age in Canada. However, the current literature on the voting age can help to address this gap in the research paper. The normative considerations in the literature can be used to provide some theoretical background that can help to contextualize the arguments from parliamentarians for this research paper's dataset. Additionally, the general arguments about changing, maintaining, or eliminating a voting age can be used to help categorize the perspectives of parliamentarians that are found in the dataset. Finally, the case examples from countries may also assist in determining how the perspectives and arguments of parliamentarians would turn out in practice.

3.0. Historic summary of Canada's federal voting age

This part of the paper will provide a historic summary of Canada's federal voting age. The historic summary will be divided into five sections to describe major changes to election laws or significant events that impacted the federal voting age. First, the pre-Confederation era will include a description ranging from 1758 to 1866. Then in the second section, changes and events from 1867 to 1920 will reflect how Canada's federal voting age developed immediately

after Confederation. Third, the advances made from 1920 to 1982, which include lowering the voting to 18, are provided. The fourth section focuses on how the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, as well as two court cases influenced the discussions about the voting age from 1982 to 1994. Finally, the fifth section focuses on the contemporary debate on Canada's federal voting age in the last period from 1995 up to the present day in 2022.

3.1. Historic summary: 1758-1866 (Voting age in pre-Confederation)

The notion of a voting age as a legal requirement to vote has been an important aspect of elections in Canada since the 18th century, prior to Confederation. In Nova Scotia in 1758, the first legislative assembly in Canadian history was made up of 22 elected officials. Only Protestant men that owned a freehold of any value, that were 21 years or older were eligible to vote during this election (Elections Canada, 2022a, 26). Some requirements to vote in parts of pre-Confederation Canada changed overtime. Some notable changes include allowing any British subject over the age of 21 that meets specific property ownership requirements and has not been convicted of a serious criminal offence in Lower Canada to vote in 1791 or adopting universal male suffrage in Nova Scotia in 1854 for British subjects that lived in the colony for a minimum of five years (Elections Canada, 2022a, 28). However, the requirement to be 21 years or older to vote remained consistent throughout all these changes. While it should be acknowledged that in both Pre-Confederation and Post-Confederation Canada, election laws have discriminated against and disenfranchised numerous voters – such as women, members of specific religious groups, and Indigenous people (Elections Canada, 2022a) – these details will not be elaborated on in-depth due to the scope of this research paper. Additionally, the history of the voting age for First Nations leadership selections – such as the voting ages listed under the

Indian Band Election Regulations or First Nations Elections Act (Government of Canada, 2022b) – will not be part of this summary, as these voting ages are separate from the federal voting age.

3.2. Historic summary: 1867 to 1920 (Changes post-Confederation)

After Confederation until 1885, reaching the age of 21 was still considered one of the three basic requirements that was needed to be an elector in any of the provinces (being a British subject, age of 21 or older, and being male). It should also be noted that at this time, apart from the three basic requirements that were present across the federation, each province decided its own electoral laws (Elections Canada, 2022a, 66). In 1885, the three basic requirements to be an elector were added to the *Electoral Franchise Act* (Elections Canada, 2022a, 71). Like in Pre-Confederation Canada, even when other conditions to become an elector changed, the requirement to be 21 years or older remained. The first instance of allowing people under the age of 21 to vote in Canada occurred on September 20, 1917, when Parliament adopted the *Military Voters Act* (Parliament of Canada, 1917). This Act entitled every ‘military elector’ to vote in a general election (Parliament of Canada, 1917, Part IV, Section 3(1)). Part IV, Section 2(c) of the Act defines ‘military elector’ as the following:

“every person, male or female, who, being a British subject, whether or not ordinarily resident in Canada and whether or not an Indian, has been, while within or without Canada, appointed, enlisted, enrolled or called out for and placed on active service as one of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, the Royal Canadian Navy, the Canadian Militia on active service, or the Royal Naval Canadian Volunteer Reserve, or has been while within Canada, appointed, enlisted or enrolled as one of the British Royal Flying Corps, Royal Naval Air Service, or Auxiliary Motor Boat Patrol Service, whether as officer, soldier, sailor, dentist, nurse, aviator, mechanic or otherwise, and who remains one of any such forces or services or has been honourably discharged therefrom, or, in the case of an officer who has been permitted to resign or without fault on his part has had his services dispensed with, and every person, male or female, who being a British subject ordinarily resident in Canada, whether or not a minor or an Indian, is on active service in Europe in any of the forces or services, military or naval, of His Majesty or of His allies” (Parliament of Canada, 1917).

While this definition primarily lists positions affiliated with the military, they are important to mention because it shows that the right to vote was also extended to all minors in non-combative positions – regardless of residency requirements – so long as they were serving in some capacity. It should also be mentioned that politically, this Act is considered to have been written with the intent of increasing the number of electors that would be in favour of the government in power at the time, due to the political issue of conscription during the First World War (Elections Canada, 2022a, 79). This helps to demonstrate that the concept of the voting age – and more generally, deciding who has the right to vote – has always contained some political elements and considerations at the federal level in Canada. Following the First World War, in 1920, the qualifications to be an elector under Section 29 of the *Dominion Elections Act* were updated to allow all British subjects residing in Canada that are over the age of 21 to vote (Elections Canada, 2022a). By 1920, the only legal qualifications needed to have the right to vote at the federal level in Canada were reaching the required age to vote and being classified as a citizen (Elections Canada, 2022a, 91).

3.3. Historic summary: 1920 to 1982 (Lowering the voting age to 18)

While not many significant events relating to the voting age occurred for a few decades after extending the franchise to all citizens that were 21 years or older in 1920, the question of the voting age was still a prevalent topic of discussion in Parliament. Records from the debates in the House of Commons about the *Dominion Elections Act* show that Members of Parliament were advocating to lower the voting age from 21 to 18 from as early as 1948 (Beelen et al., 2017). Additionally, in some discourse in Parliament – in debates about topics that were not specifically related to changing the voting age – the idea of having reached the voting age seemed to be an important distinction (or even measurement) to specify when discussing certain

topics. For example, in 1920 there were concerns about literacy rates among Canadian citizens above the voting age (Beelen et al., 2017) and in 1938, an argument was made during debates about the distribution of elector lists, that children who have reached the voting age would not need to receive a copy, since one copy could go to each householder (Beelen et al., 2017). While these topics do not directly relate to arguments about the voting age, it demonstrates that the concept of a voting age and distinguishing between citizens of voting age and non-voting age was important in parliamentary discourse during this period.

Based on the records of parliamentary debate in the House of Commons, it seems that from the late 1940s until the late 1950s, Members of Parliament that were part of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation seemed to be the primary advocates for lowering the voting age from 21 to 18 years old, and even proposed amendments to lower the voting age from 21 to 18 in 1950 and 1954 (Beelen et al., 2017). However, it should be noted that historically, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation was considered a political party that would likely benefit from young voters (Eggleston, 1934). While the voting age was being discussed in debates, it was not as prominent in Parliament as it would become in the early 1960s. A lot of the Parliamentary debate about changing the voting age occurred in the 1960s. In 1963, a committee of Parliament studied the federal voting age and recommended that it should be lowered from 21 to 18 for all Canadians. However, this recommendation was not accepted (Elections Canada, 2022c). Seven years later after more debates in Parliament, the voting age was lowered from 21 to 18. This occurred when Bill C-72, “An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (Youth Vote Participation)” received Royal Assent (Library of Parliament, 1970). While not explicitly written in the legislation, the rationale behind lowering the voting age from 21 to 18 at the time was rooted in the following three criteria: first, that the people being enfranchised have a stake in

how their society is being governed; second, that this group has the capability of exercising an informed and mature vote; third, that this group has a sufficient level of participation in activities of citizenship (Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, 1991a, 47).

It should be noted that during this decade, many democratic countries were lowering their voting age from 21 to 18. Some prominent examples aside from Canada include Britain in 1970, the United States in 1971, Australia in 1973, and New Zealand in 1974 (McAllister, 2014, 68). The sentiments of this period – in which young people were becoming more politically active – is well demonstrated in the Throne Speech given on October 23rd, 1969, for the Second Session of the 28th Parliament, which describes the governing party’s intentions to lower the voting age:

“A disturbing element in many countries of the world has been the rising tide of unrest, particularly among young people. It has expressed itself in many ways, in public debate, in peaceful protest and sometimes in violence. Our profound disapproval of the excesses must not blind us to deeply felt and legitimate aspirations. Many citizens in our own country believe that they are entitled to assume greater responsibility for the destiny of our society. Such demands, insofar as they do not conflict with the general welfare, are the expression of a truly democratic ideal. They must be satisfied if our society is to attain its goals of peace and justice. The Government believes that the time has come to extend the franchise in federal elections and it will therefore recommend to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections of the House of Commons that the voting age be lowered to eighteen” (Library of Parliament, 1969, 2).

Lowering the voting age from 21 to 18 in 1970 was considered the largest expansion of the right to vote federally in Canada since women gained the right to vote back in 1918 (Elections Canada, 2022a, 123). The first election after the voting age was lowered from 21 to 18 occurred on October 30th, 1972 (Elections Canada, 2022b). During this election, approximately 2 million young Canadians gained the right to vote (Elections Canada, 2022c). While discussions about how the voting age was lowered to 18 still occurred in Parliament throughout the 1970s, there were fewer debates about the topic during this decade (Beelen et al., 2017). It should also be noted that at this time, there was one exception to the voting age

requirement; Canadian citizens that are Canadian Forces personnel who are regular members, members of the special force, or reserve members on full-time training or active service (Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, 1991a, 47). Since any Canadian Forces personnel had the right to vote and because a Canadian that is 17 years old could be accepted into the Canadian Forces, a select group of 17-year-olds had the right to vote (Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, 1991a, 47). However, this changed in 1993, when it became required for all Canadian citizens – including those in the military – to be 18 years or older to vote.

3.4. Historic summary: 1982 to 1994 (The Charter, a Royal Commission, and Court Cases)

The next significant event that impacted the federal voting age in Canada was the creation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This is because Section 3 of the Charter affirms that: “every citizen of Canada has the right to vote in an election of members of the House of Commons or of a legislative assembly and to be qualified for membership therein” (Government of Canada, 2022a). In practical terms, this means that unless there is a reasonable and justifiable purpose for discrimination on the basis of age to the right to vote (Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, 1991b, 4), Section 3 of the Charter would technically entitle a Canadian citizen of *any age* to vote in a federal election. Effectively, before the creation of the Charter an argument had to be made for why younger Canadians should be enfranchised, while after the Charter, a case now must be made for why the franchise can reasonably be restricted (Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, 1991a, 47). As previously mentioned, the only exception to discriminating on the basis of age – by limiting the voting age to 18 – was allowing 17-year-olds serving in the military to vote until 1993.

While not directly about the voting age, the implications of the *Canada Disability Rights Council v. Canada (1988)* court case are important to the application of Section 3 of the Charter and for arguments pertaining to changing the voting age. Prior to the introduction of Bill C-114 in April 1993 (Parliament of Canada, 1993), from 1970, the *Canada Elections Act* excluded “every person who is restrained of his liberty of movement or deprived of the management of his property by reason of mental disease” (Davidson & Lapp, 2004, 15) from the right to vote. In the court case, the Federal Court of Canada declared that this section of the *Canada Elections Act* conflicts with Section 3 of the Charter and could not be saved by the reasonable limits clause under Section 1 of the Charter (Davidson & Lapp, 2004, 16). Since the reasoning for having this limitation was to require a certain threshold for judgmental capacity or mental competence, the Federal Court argued that the specific limitation in the *Canada Elections Act* was arbitrary and potentially excluded people that should have the right to vote, while potentially including people that should not have the right to vote based on the criteria of having a certain threshold for judgmental capacity or mental competence (Davidson & Lapp, 2004, 16). Specifically, Justice Reed argued that the “assumption of blanket incapacity has been widely rejected. An individual incapable of making particular types of decisions may be fully capable of making many others” (Federal Court of Canada, 1988, 626). Due to this decision, it has been argued by some that having 18 as the voting age could be found to be unconstitutional, since the Supreme Court of Canada determined in the 1989 *Irwin Toy* ruling – a ruling that is entirely unrelated to the voting age – that people between the ages of seven and twelve can distinguish between fact and fiction (Hyde, 2001, 2). This idea of maturity and having the threshold to make a capable decision is important because part of the original rationale for making the federal voting age 18 is rooted in the presupposition that this group – Canadians between the ages of 18 to 20 – have the capability

to exercise an informed and mature vote (Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, 1991a, 47). While the *Canada Disability Rights Council v. Canada (1988)* court case has not impacted the constitutionality of the voting age to date, it is important to take note of this case since using its rationale to have the current voting age of 18 be found unconstitutional remains a possibility according to some (Hyde, 2001, 2).

The next major event in the history of Canada's federal voting age was the creation of the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing (also known as the 'Lortie Commission') which studied numerous aspects of Canada's federal electoral system. At the conclusion of its study, the Lortie Commission released four volumes of its findings. In Volumes 1 and 4 of its findings, Canada's federal voting age is studied and analysed so that the Lortie Commission can provide recommendations to legislators. Its study on this topic consists of hearings with the public and receiving proposals for what ought to be done about the federal voting age. Based on archival documents from the Lortie Commission that are stored at Library and Archives Canada, the Commission also studied the following topics to help inform their recommendations: the number of 16 and 17 year old Canadians that declared a taxable income or that were working at the time of the study; civic education programs in high school in the ten provinces, as well as Yukon and the North West Territories (Nunavut was not created at this point in time); the age requirements under different Acts at both the federal and provincial levels, such as unemployment insurance, owning a firearm, or marriage (in Quebec); the voter turnout rates in other democratic countries; various legislation from jurisdictions in other countries; and the opinions expressed by various individuals and groups speaking to media outlets in Canada (Library and Archives Canada, 1998).

In Volume 1, the Lortie Commission recommends that “the voting age should be set at 18 years of age but that Parliament should revisit the issue periodically” (Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, 1991a, 49). In their report, the Lortie Commission explains that any decision that is made relating to the voting age is ultimately a reflection of when the society in question judges that an individual reaches the threshold of maturity as a citizen (Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, 1991a, 49). Since it was expressed many times in their hearings that the voting age should not be lowered, the Lortie Commission determined that it was not yet time to lower the voting age but that it was likely that as Canadian society continues to evolve, there may be stronger demands to change the voting age (Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, 1991a, 49); which is why they recommend revisiting the issue periodically. However, it should be noted that while many Canadians insisted on keeping the voting age at 18, some argued that it should be lowered, some suggested it should be raised – in one case to 55 – and others proposed eliminating it entirely (Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, 1991b, 5). When it came to the opinion of young Canadians, some believed that it would be best to keep the voting age at 18, while others thought it should be lowered (Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, 1991b, 5).

A final notable development for this period was the *Reid et al. v. Canada* case brought to the Federal Court in 1994. In this case, the plaintiff argued that because the deficit financing of the federal government would end up impoverishing children in the future, that children should have the right to vote in both referendums and elections at the age of twelve and should also be able to do so by proxy through their guardians and parents before this age (Hyde, 2001, 57). However, the Federal Court dismissed this claim with Justice Noël

asserting that it was so obvious to him that “in the context of this claim, that the age requirement embodied in the Elections Act is a reasonable limit that [he did] not require any evidence on the subject” (Hyde, 2001, 57). Overall, while this period had numerous debates relating to the voting age, the only legislative changes that directly impacted the voting age was the creation of the Charter and removing the right to vote for 17-year-olds in the military.

3.5. Historic summary: 1995 to 2022 (The contemporary debate on Canada’s voting age)

Since the legislative changes made in 1993 relating to 17-year-olds in the military, there have not been any legislative changes made that directly impact the federal voting age. Although, some legislative changes have been made to make it easier for young Canadians to vote once they reach the age of 18, such as the creation of the Register of Future Electors in 2019 (Parliament of Canada, 2019). Additionally, it seems that the advice from the Lortie Commission to revisit the topic of the voting age in Parliament is being adhered to. From 1995 to 2022, there have been numerous debates, private member’s bills, committee reviews, and some court cases about changing the voting age. For the purposes of this paper and to provide the most relevant information, only proposals pertaining to the voting age from the 44th Canadian Parliament will be mentioned. Currently, Bill C-210 and Bill C-227 are being debated in the House of Commons. Both bills consist of amending the Canada Elections Act to lower the voting age to 16 (Parliament of Canada, 2022a; Parliament of Canada 2022b). Additionally, Bill S-201, which consists of amending the voting age in the Canada Elections Act and the regulation adapting the Canada Elections Act for the purposes of a referendum to 16, is being debated in the Senate (Parliament of Canada, 2022c). In terms of court challenges, a group of 13 Canadian youth filed an application to the Ontario Superior Court of Justice with the intention of challenging the federal voting age as a violation of both Sections

3 and 15 of the Charter (Children First Canada, 2021). Overall, since the debate about the voting age is still ongoing in Canada's contemporary political environment, focusing on the parliamentary discourse pertaining to Canada's federal voting age and the arguments for or against changing this voting age will be a helpful contribution to the literature on the voting age and can assist in informing the ongoing political debate. We do so by mobilizing the literature on frame analysis.

4.0. Theoretical framework

This part of the paper is split into three sections. In the first section, a broad overview of the study of frames is provided to demonstrate how the field has evolved over time. Then, a description of how frame analysis can be used in political science is given. Finally, the frame analysis model that Jusić and Stojanović created for their work in 2015 is presented, as it serves as the model to code the data of this research paper.

4.1. The study of frame analysis

The process of framing consists of individuals developing a specific conceptualization of an issue or remodeling their thinking about a specific issue (Chong & Druckman, 2007, 103). This relates to the general objective of using frame analysis, which is to comprehend how individuals or groups attempt to frame specific issues (Creed et al., 2002, 36) or how they attempt to influence their target audiences (Danielson et al., 2008, 239). While it is well-known that frame analysis originated with Erving Goffman's work in 1974 as a lens to frame and make sense of daily interactions and other elements of social experiences (Creed et al., 2002, 36), the use of frames is traced back to Kenneth Burke's use of the concept 'frame' in his work from 1937, "Attitudes towards History" (Ness et al., 2018, 248). The concept of a frame has also been used in 1955 by Gregory Bateson in his work examining the behaviour of

monkeys (Bateson 1955) and among other authors in various disciplines such as Charles Fillmore's work from 1975 in linguistics, in 1992 with Lawrence W. Barsalou's work in cognitive psychology, in 1995 when Karl Weick declared that frames were a necessary aspect of sensemaking, and numerous topics covered by sociologists such as poverty, education, social movements, business discourse, racism, small-group conversations, historical networks, and sociocultural evolution (Ness et al., 2018, 248). It is also used in fields such as communications, media, and is also considered one of the major theoretical lenses used in research on political communication (Björnehed & Erikson, 2018, 110; Brugman & Burgers, 2018, 1).

In addition to using the concept of a frame in various disciplines, academics have focused on extending the theoretical understanding of frames and frame analysis by gaining a better understanding of different variables or factors that impact the framing process. Some of these include the psychological processes that help to explain the effects of framing (Chong & Druckman, 2007, 110; Iyengar 1991; Gross 2000; Brewer 2001), how frames are organized or identified during a communication (Chong & Druckman, 2007, 106; Entman, 2004), how moderator variables may have an impact on framing (Chong & Druckman, 2007, 111, Brewer 2001; Barker 2005; Shen & Edwards 2005), the use of master frames that cover broad and generic types of collective action frames, such as injustice and equal rights (Benford, 2013, 1), and differentiating frames and schemas to distinguish between forms of public culture (frames) and personal culture (schemas), (Ness et al., 2018, 244). An important development to the theoretical understanding of frame analysis for this research paper is how individuals may be exposed to competing frames about an issue in a political context, instead of a singular framing of an issue (Sniderman & Theriault, 2004). This is worth taking note of

because the dominant frames in the methodological section of this paper do compete with one and other.

4.2. *Frame analysis as a tool in political science*

While the literature on frame analysis explains that it is applicable in numerous fields, there are still “widespread debates about the value of political framing as a theoretical concept” (Brugman & Burgers, 2018, 1). Specifically, there are debates about how concepts should be framed; for example, if frames should have different conceptual content and if frames should be issue-specific or more generic (Brugman & Burgers, 2018, 1-2). However, in Brugman and Burgers systemic review on the use of different frame types in political-framing experiments from the 21st century, the authors found that “debates about the “true” nature of frames have had little influence on scholars’ frame choices across disciplines in previous research on political framing” (2018, 6). In addition to Brugman and Burgers research which specifically addresses the debate about using political framing, there have been studies done in political science that utilize frames and frame analysis in their work. Some examples consist of the analysis of debates about same-sex marriage in Canada’s Parliament after the proposal of Bill C-38, *An act respecting certain aspects of legal capacity for marriage for civil purposes*, in 2005 (Naderi, 2016, 1-3), the creation of a four-step frame analysis model to frame advancements in a policy process (Björnehed and Erikson, 2018, 113), and understanding the political impacts of the use of emergency frames in communications about sustainability and climate change (Brisbois et al., 2021, 841). Therefore, it appears that in the discipline of political science, it is appropriate to use different frame types and that researchers are not restricted to using a particular kind of frame analysis. Since frames have been used to analyse concepts in political science, it seems plausible for

this research paper to utilize frame analysis as its theoretical lens. To accomplish this, the frame analysis model that Jusić and Stojanović created for their research from 2015 will be utilized.

4.3. Jusić and Stojanović's model

In Jusić and Stojanović work, entitled “Minority Rights and Realpolitik: Justice-based vs. Pragmatic Arguments for Reserving Seats for National Minorities”, the authors use frame analysis to analyse two parliamentary debates about the adoption of having reserved seats for national minorities in the local parliaments of Bosnia and Herzegovina at two different levels of government (2015, 404). Specifically, they use an interpretive analytical approach to focus on the argumentation during the policy practice as a communicative practice (Jusić & Stojanović, 2015, 407). They do this by analysing the dominant frames that are used in the debates that they are examining (Jusić & Stojanović, 2015, 407).

To create their model, Jusić and Stojanović use Entman's work from 1993, which states his understanding of the four functions that frames possess (2015, 409). While Entman does not create a model in his work from 1993 that can be replicated in this paper, he does presuppose that frames serve the following four functions: frames can help to define problems, frames can be used to make moral judgements, frames can suggest remedies to problems, and frames can diagnose the causes of problems (Entman, 1993, 52; Jusić & Stojanović, 2015, 407). Since this research paper aims to understand the frames that are being used to support or oppose changing the voting age from 18 to 16, Entman's understanding about the function of frames can help to analyse the parts of the parliamentary discourse that will be examined in this research on the voting age.

To analyse the parliamentary debates about the adoption of having reserved seats for national minorities, Jusić and Stojanović use primary materials such as the transcripts of local council and assembly sessions, the minutes of public hearings, draft amendments and proposals, and materials listing the reasoning for proposed amendments (Jusić & Stojanović, 2015, 407). Since this research paper on the voting age uses the transcripts of debates between parliamentarians from October 31st, 1972, to June 24th, 2022, as its source of data, the model that Jusić and Stojanović created is replicable because they also use transcripts of legislative sessions as part of their materials. To code their primary materials, Jusić and Stojanović identify two dominant frames relating to the debate about the adoption of having reserved seats for national minorities. They identify the “Obligation Frame” which is for arguments advocating in favour of institutional reform, and the “Constituent Peoples Frame” which is for arguments that criticize the proposed institutional reform (Jusić & Stojanović, 2015, 408). While these were identified as the two dominant frames relating to the debates being analysed, both frames could be further broken down into sub-frames (Jusić & Stojanović, 2015, 408). For example, within the “Obligation Frame”, sub-frames advocating in favour of institutional reform could consist of framing the topic as an obligation towards people at the municipal level or at the level of the international community (Jusić & Stojanović, 2015, 408). These sub-frames can then be categorized under the four functions of frames that Entman identified: defining problems, making moral judgements, suggesting remedies to problems, or diagnosing problems (Entman, 1993, 52). For instance, the sub-frame of having a commitment to the international community under the “Obligation Frame” that was previously mentioned, would be labelled under ‘defining the problem’ (Jusić & Stojanović, 2015, 409).

Since the literature on the voting age shows that there are three general arguments pertaining to debates about the topic – changing, maintaining, or eliminating the voting age – these three general arguments can be used as the dominant frames for analysing the debate about the federal voting age in Canada. Then, like in Jusić and Stojanović’s model, sub-frames can be identified within these three dominant frames when analysing the materials pertaining to the parliamentary debate about the federal voting age in Canada. Finally, these sub-frames can then be categorized under Entman’s four functions of frames (defining problems, making moral judgements, suggesting remedies to problems, or diagnosing problems). These steps would follow the same steps that were used in Jusić and Stojanović’s frame analysis model. This will be explained in greater detail in the “Methodology” part of the research paper.

5.0. Methodology

The methodology of this research paper will be explained in three sections. In the first section, the frame analysis model that is used to analyse the data in this paper is described. Secondly, the materials that were gathered as the data for this research paper are listed. Finally, the three hypotheses that are tested in this research paper are provided.

5.1. Frame analysis model

As described in the “Theoretical framework” part of the research paper, the frame analysis model for this paper uses the model that Jusić and Stojanović created for their work on parliamentary debates about the adoption of having reserved seats for national minorities (2015). This model codes and analyses the primary materials that are used as the data for this paper. This model codes the data in four steps: first, using three dominant frames that are rooted in the literature on voting age (changing, maintaining, and eliminating a voting age); second, using sub-

frames that are identified during the coding process; third, classifying these sub-frames into one of the four functional frames that Jusić and Stojanović use in their model (these functional frames are based on Entman's understanding of the four functions that frames possess, from his work in 1993 (52)); and finally, seeing if these frames are consistent with the rationale that was used to lower the voting age from 21 to 18.

The first step of the model of this paper identifies the dominant frames that are used to classify arguments and discourse from the primary materials. These dominant frames help to divide the material into broad categories so that they can be further broken down in the second step with the use of sub-frames. The three dominant frames that are chosen for this research paper are: "changing the voting age", "maintaining the voting age", and "eliminating the voting age". Additionally, a separate category called "mentioned keywords but not relevant" is included to code any instances of discourse that mention this paper's listed keywords but that do not pertain to the debate about the voting age (for example, if someone uses the term "voting age" while discussing a different policy issue). The three dominant frames were identified by referring to the debates about the voting age from the literature, which helped to develop this paper's understanding of the concept of a voting age. All arguments that were identified in this literature about what ought to be done when it comes to debates about a voting age could be categorized into one of these three dominant frames. For this reason, it is expected that all arguments pertaining to the voting age from parliamentarians in Canada can be categorized in the same way. However, while these three categories should be able to broadly capture all arguments pertaining to Canada's federal voting age, it should be noted that "eliminating the voting age" is the argument that is discussed the least frequently in the literature.

After the material is coded into one of the three dominant frames, it is further broken down and categorized into a sub-frame during the second step of this model. These sub-frames are identified during the coding process to ensure that different arguments within the dominant frames can be identified and examined on their own. In the third step, the sub-frames are then classified into one of the following four functional frames that are identified in Entman's work from 1993: "problem definition", "moral judgement", "suggested remedies", or "diagnosing problems"; it should be noted that while Entman's work in 1993 identifies these four categories, it does not include a replicable model that can be used in this research paper.

The first three steps of this paper's model help to respond to the first part of this paper's research question: "what frames are being used to support or oppose changing the voting age from 18 to 16?" After the materials are classified into one of the four functional frames during the third step of this model, an additional fourth step is added to this process. While this fourth step is not part of the model that Jusić and Stojanović's created, it is added to this paper's model to help answer the second part of the research question: "are these frames consistent with Canada's voting age rationale, which was used to lower the voting age from 21 to 18?" To accomplish this, the frames that are identified in the second step of this paper's model are coded one more time into one of the following four categories: category one, "this group has a stake in how their society should be governed"; category two, "this group has the capability of exercising a mature and informed vote"; category three, "this group has a sufficient level of participation in activities relating to citizenship"; or, category four, "arguments that are not part of Canada's rationale for lowering the federal voting age". The first three categories are based on the rationale that was used for lowering Canada's federal voting age from 21 to 18 (Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, 1991a, 47), while the fourth category will

help to code all other sub-frames that are not consistent with the three listed criteria. Reoccurring themes of sub-frames in the fourth category will be specifically listed. The results of each of these steps will be shown in four tables in the “Results and Discussion” part of the paper.

5.2. Materials for the data

Historic texts from Canada’s Parliament about the voting age from October 31st, 1972, to June 24th, 2022, are used as the data for this project. October 31st, 1972, is chosen as the starting point because it is the day following the federal election of October 30th, 1972, which was the first federal election that had a voting age of 18 years old (Elections Canada, 2022b). June 24th, 2022, is chosen as the end date for the data because it is the day after the House of Commons rose for the summer period (House of Commons, 2022) and is the most recent data available at the time this paper was written. The “Linked Parliamentary Data Project” (2017) is used to collect historic texts from 1972 to 2019 for the House of Commons, as its database includes data from 1901 until 2019. To collect data from the 2020 to 2022 for the House of Commons, its “Publication Search” tool is used to fill the remaining period (Parliament of Canada, 2022d). Since the Senate is not included in the Linked Parliamentary Data Project, the chamber’s “Debates and Committee Transcript Search” tool is used to collect data from January 1st, 2010, to June 24th, 2022 (Senate of Canada, 2022).

The historic texts that are collected for this paper include parliamentary debates, committee meetings and bills (Beelen et al., 2017; Open Parliament, 2022; Parliament of Canada, 2022d; Senate of Canada, 2022). Any texts with discourse from and between parliamentarians (specifically, Members of Parliament or Senators) will be used as data for this project. This research paper specifies discourse from and between parliamentarians, since committee meetings may include discourse and arguments from witnesses asked to attend

committee meetings. Because parliamentarians are ultimately the actors that debate policies and vote on bills in Parliament, the frames that they present in their discourse are the focus of this research. To code any historic texts from the Linked Parliamentary Data Project, the House of Common's Publication Search, and the Senate's Debates and Committee Transcript Search, NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software package, is used. Historic texts were selected by using keyword searches of the terms: "voting age", "age of voting", "age to vote", "enfranchise", "vote at 16", "vote at 18", "vote at 21". These keywords were chosen by searching the term "voting age" in the Linked Parliamentary Data Project, the House of Common's Publication Search, and the Senate's Debates and Committee Transcript Search, then keywords that appeared in these texts that relate to the discussion of the voting age were added. "Voting age" was the first keyword used, as it is the most frequent term that is used in the literature on the voting age.

5.3. Hypotheses

This research paper tests three hypotheses. In the literature on voting age, most of the arguments about the concept of a voting age relate to changing or maintaining it, while very few studies discuss eliminating it. However, eliminating the voting age in Canada has been discussed in at least one study in the literature (Hyde, 2001). Since it is not one of the dominant frames in the literature on the voting age – but is still considered a potential argument – it is expected that eliminating the voting age will not be one of the dominant frames found in the parliamentary discourse on Canada's federal voting age. Considering that there is no previous work on the discourse of parliamentarians in Canada about the federal voting age, it is difficult to hypothesise about the specific sub-frames that will appear in this research. However, future studies on this topic will have more specific hypotheses about the sub-frames used by parliamentarians by referring to the findings of this study. For this reason, hypothesis one (H1) predicts that: "the

dominant frames that will be used by parliamentarians to support or oppose changing the voting age from 18 to 16, will be about changing or maintaining the voting age, and will not include eliminating the voting age”. H1 helps to address the first part of this paper’s research question, which asks: “what frames are being used to support or oppose changing the voting age from 18 to 16?”

The second hypothesis (H2), touches on the second part of this paper’s research question which asks, “are these frames consistent with Canada’s voting age rationale, which was used to lower the voting age from 21 to 18?” Specifically, H2 hypothesises that: “the majority of the sub-frames for both supporting and opposing changes to the voting age will relate to the criterion of having the capability of exercising a mature and informed vote, which was used when the voting age was lowered from 21 to 18”. H2 is rooted in the existing literature on the voting age because there are arguments that discuss the competency, cognitive threshold, and maturity level of different age groups in research about changing, maintaining, and eliminating a voting age (Baumtrog, 2021; Cook, 2013; Hart et al., 2021; Hyde, 2021; Nelkin, 2020). If the capability of exercising a mature and informed vote was only present in discussions in the literature about one of the three major arguments for setting a voting age (changing, maintaining, or eliminating) then the plausibility of H2 would decrease. Since the theme of maturity and informed decision-making is reoccurring in the three dominant frames in the literature, it seems likely that this will be a prominent part of the parliamentary discourse for this topic. However, this research paper remains open to coding the emergence of new rationales that are not explicitly listed for H2, to ensure that all frames are captured.

Like H2, the third hypothesis (H3) will touch on the second part of this paper’s research question about if the sub-frames being examined are consistent with the rationale that was used

to lower the voting age from 21 to 18. A primary point of debate between changing or maintaining the voting age is determining whether lowering the voting age has a positive or negative impact on voter turnout. There is no conclusive data about how voting age impacts voter turnout, even though there have been numerous studies and case examples in different jurisdictions that examine it, or topics that relate to it (Bergh, 2013; Dassonneville et al., 2021; Faas, et al., 2022; Franklin, 2020; Mahéo & Bélanger, 2020; O’Neill, 2022; Pammett, 2001; Rosenqvist, 2017; Zandonella & Zeglovits, 2013). While the literature does not conclude how voter turnout is impacted by the voting age, it is discussed and examined frequently, making it plausible that sub-frames about voter turnout will be used in the debate about the voting age. This seems likely to occur, even though voter turnout is not part of the three criteria that was used in Canada to lower the federal voting age from 21 to 18. Therefore, H3 predicts that: “sub-frames that support changing the voting age and that do not relate to any of the three criteria that are part of Canada’s rationale will be about changing the voting age to increase voter turnout”. The “Results and Discussion” part of the paper discusses whether H1, H2, and H3 are supported or not supported by the data for this research.

6.0. Results and Discussion

This part of the paper shows the results of the data and highlights the significant findings of the model. Each level of the model is discussed in turn to organize the findings of this paper. Each level of the model is represented in four distinct tables: “Table 6.1.” for level one, “Table 6.2.” for level two, “Table 6.3.” for level three, and “Table 6.4.” for level four. It should be noted that by using the keywords listed in the “Methodology” part of the paper, a total of 278 instances of discourse were collected. An instance consists of any kind of discourse from a parliamentarian (whether it be from debates or legislation), that include at least one of the listed keywords. This

means that an instance could contain multiple keywords and would therefore only be counted as a single instance. Additionally, the length of each instance varies; some instances were very detailed and lengthy, containing multiple sub-frames, while others were a single sentence with a single sub-frame.

6.1. Dominant Frames (Level One)

In the first level of the model (as shown in “Table 6.1.”), the 278 instances of discourse are coded into four different categories. From the three dominant frames, it is interesting to note that “changing the voting age” has 125 instances while “maintaining the voting age” only has 39. This gap likely occurred for two reasons: first, some of the parliamentarians that are in support of changing the voting age brought up their willingness to change it numerous times (either through arguments or introducing legislation); and second, since maintaining the voting age consists of keeping with the status quo of the country, it’s possible that parliamentarians that are opposed or indifferent to changing the voting age did not feel the need to discuss it as often. This would be similar to the literature on the voting age, since the argument to maintain a voting age of 18 is less common than arguments about changing it.

Table 6.1. (Level one of model: Dominant Frames)

Level one of model: Dominant Frames			
Changing the Voting Age	Maintaining the Voting Age	Eliminating the Voting Age	Mentioned Keywords but not Relevant
Total number of discourse instances: 125	Total number of discourse instances: 39	Total number of discourse instances: 0	Total number of discourse instances: 114

The third dominant frame, “eliminating the voting age”, had no instances of discourse from parliamentarians. While some sub-frames – which will be shown in level two of the model (“Table 6.2.”) – discussed the notion that the voting age could be lowered indefinitely if it is lowered to 16, or that the Charter does not set an age limit on voting, no sub-frames advocate in favour of eliminating the concept of the voting age in its entirety. Therefore, H1 which states that “the dominant frames that will be used by parliamentarians to support or oppose changing the voting age from 18 to 16, will be about changing or maintaining the voting age, and will not include eliminating the voting age”, is fully supported. While this finding is consistent with the literature on the voting age – since there are very few articles about eliminating it in practice – it may be worth exploring why parliamentarians do not consider eliminating the voting age as an option. Some possibilities may be that it is so far away from the current status quo that it does not seem like a reasonable frame for the debate on the voting age, or, that parliamentarians are unaware or have not thought of a way to eliminate the voting age that would function in practice.

The final finding to mention for “Table 6.1.” is that the fourth category, “mentioned keywords but not relevant”, has a total of 114 instances of discourse. This category is not considered a dominant frame because it is only used for the purpose of coding instances of discourse that contain one or more of the listed keywords, but that do not relate to the debate on the federal voting age. Two notable examples of this include the following: first, mentioning the term “voting age” as a way to categorize a group, such as “Canadians of voting age”; and second, the debate about lowering the voting age in the Indian Act from 21 to 18 for leadership selection in First Nations (which is different from the debate about the federal voting age). While these instances were not about the federal voting age, it is important to point out how in the first example the notion of reaching the voting age is used as a way of categorizing Canadians. This is

<p>“Appeals to improve, strengthen, or fix democracy in Canada”: 58</p> <p>“Young people should have a say in their future”: 56</p> <p>“Changes made in other countries or other kinds of jurisdictions”: 52</p> <p>“Appeal to experts or research about the subject”: 51</p> <p>“There is a desire from young people to vote”: 47</p> <p>“Have them start voting while supported by their community, school, or home”: 43</p> <p>“Appeal to the age of other legislation”: 42</p> <p>“Young people have the right to participate or vote”: 40</p> <p>“Appeal to the history of voting as reasoning for change”: 34</p> <p>“I am open to changing it but would like more information or would like more research done before finalizing my decision”: 33</p> <p>“Young people contribute to and have a stake in society”: 29</p> <p>“Young people work and pay taxes”: 23</p> <p>“Young people already participate in political parties”: 22</p> <p>“Young people are most impacted by government”: 21</p> <p>“It’s the right time to change it”: 16</p> <p>“Lowering the voting age or this legislation, is supported across political parties”: 13</p> <p>“Lowering the voting age is not a new idea or concept”: 10</p>	<p>“Committee or commission recommendation to keep it at 18”: 9</p> <p>“The House of Commons should enact changes (Senate specific argument)”: 7</p> <p>“Educated and informed first, then vote after”: 7</p> <p>“Let young people be young people”: 6</p> <p>“Concerns with the proposed legislation”: 6</p> <p>“If it is lowered, what would stop it from being further lowered? ”: 5</p> <p>“Insufficient Desire from Young People”: 5</p> <p>“Court decision to maintain voting age”: 5</p> <p>“Appeals to the responsibilities of citizenship”: 5</p> <p>“Comparison to provincial voting ages or legislation at provincial level”: 4</p> <p>“Insufficient political importance”: 4</p> <p>“Current age works for now”: 4</p> <p>“Insufficient societal support”: 4</p> <p>“In support of maintaining the voting age in principle”: 4</p> <p>“Appeal to the history of voting as reasoning for maintaining the voting age”: 3</p> <p>“Change it at a different level, not the federal level”: 3</p> <p>“Voting is a big responsibility”: 3</p> <p>“Changing the voting age did not help voter turnout internationally”: 2</p> <p>“Young people are not supposed to work permanently or are not always taxed, so no representation”: 2</p> <p>“Do not lower the voting age for partisan reasons”: 2</p>
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<p>“Give young people more opportunities to voice their opinion”: 8</p> <p>“Let the Senate help young people”: 8</p> <p>“Court cases are ongoing to lower it”: 7</p> <p>“Responsibility of citizenship”: 7</p> <p>“Young people can vote independently”: 7</p> <p>“Normatively unjustified not to change / we ought to change it”: 6</p> <p>“No age limitation in the Charter”: 5</p> <p>“Lowering it will cause positive societal changes”:4</p> <p>“Appeal to the feedback from the Lortie Commission or other commissions”: 4</p> <p>“Lower voting age but keep candidacy at 18”: 3</p> <p>“I support it in principle”: 3</p> <p>“We need to focus on issues impacting young people”: 3</p> <p>“We need to be more forward thinking:” 3</p> <p>“Appeals to young world leaders”: 2</p> <p>“Politics will be more fun with more young people”: 1</p> <p>“Let’s test it at other levels then change it”: 1</p>	<p>“Do not lower the voting age to protect the privacy of young people (on the voters list)”: 1</p> <p>“We should proceed with caution”: 1</p> <p>“Not the time yet”: 1</p> <p>“Must change all levels if we change one”: 1</p> <p>“Must be guided by consistent principles”: 1</p> <p>“Insufficient participation from young people”: 1</p> <p>“Teachers can influence students in school”: 1</p> <p>“May hinder the participation of new Canadians unless other legislation is changed”: 1</p> <p>“Being confident and eager is not a reason for change”: 1</p> <p>“Lowering it would give people access to campaign in high schools”: 1</p>
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For “changing the voting age” 38 different sub-frames were used by parliamentarians, while 36 sub-frames were used for “maintaining the voting age”. Additionally, there were 1017 instances of sub-frames – or 1017 arguments – for “changing the voting age”, while there were only 186 instances of sub-frames for “maintaining the voting age”. This is an interesting finding for two reasons: first, it demonstrates that in parliamentary discourse, there can be multiple

sub-frames within a dominant frame (which is why for “changing the voting age”, there are 1017 instances of sub-frames within only 125 discourse instances); and second, it shows that even though there are almost as many sub-frames for “maintaining the voting age”, the total instances in which these sub-frames are used are significantly fewer than the sub-frames that are used for “changing the voting age”. Like in the first level of this model (“Table 6.1.”), this difference in the number of instances may be explained by how maintaining the voting age consists of keeping with the status quo, so parliamentarians do not feel the need to state these sub-frames as often. This would imply that while there are just as many arguments to maintain the voting age as there are to change it, parliamentarians do not think it is necessary to provide their reasoning to maintain it as frequently, especially since no legislative changes or actions would be required to maintain the voting age. Another possible explanation could be that while there are almost as many sub-frames to maintain the voting age, parliamentarians are less willing to argue in favour of them.

The list of sub-frames under each dominant frame and their individual number of instances also provide some helpful findings regarding the debate about the federal voting age. For both changing and maintaining the voting age, the sub-frame with the highest number of instances both relate to how mature or how informed Canadians under the age of 18 are. While this seems to partially support H2, which states that “the majority of the sub-frames for both supporting and opposing changes to the voting age will relate to the criterion of having the capability of exercising a mature and informed vote, which was used when the voting age was lowered from 21 to 18”, if the sum of all the sub-frames are considered, then the capability of exercising a mature and informed vote does not consist of the majority of the sub-frames. It is

further demonstrated in Level Four of the model (“Table 6.4.”) that H2 is not supported, when the sub-frames are categorized in the different frames of the Lortie Commission.

It is also worth comparing the five sub-frames with the most instances in each dominant frame. Under “changing the voting age”, the top five sub-frames are about: young people being engaged and informed; increasing turnout; increasing participation; young people being mature and competent; and introducing legislation, opening arguments, or procedural arguments. Since the fifth sub-frame is related to parliamentary procedures – instead of a sub-frame that is rooted in a specific rationale for changing the voting age – it is worth noting that the sixth sub-frame consists of making appeals to improve, strengthen, or fix democracy in Canada. For “maintaining the voting age”, the top five sub-frames are about: young people not being mature enough; comparing the voting age to other legislation with a prescribed age; saying that turnout and participation can be increased with different solutions; saying that changing the voting age will not help voter turnout; and comparing voting in a federal election to participating in a political party. When these top sub-frames are compared, it becomes clear that both advocates of changing and maintaining the voting age are concerned about maturity, voter turnout, participation in Canada’s democratic system, and the state of Canada’s democracy. This demonstrates that while the dominant frames oppose one and other, the most common sub-frames in debates about Canada’s federal voting age stem from the same topics.

Additionally, there seem to be other sub-frames from each dominant frame that share commonalities with sub-frames from the other dominant frame. However, these sub-frames differ in how often they are used in both sides of the debate (for both the number of instances in which they are mentioned and their overall ranking relative to other sub-frames within their dominant frame). For example, while discussing the willingness of young people to vote came up

in 47 instances and is ranked the 10th most popular sub-frame among advocates of changing the voting age, the desire of young people only came up in five instances and was ranked 12th among advocates of maintaining the voting age. Other sub-frames with differing instances on both sides include: young people working and paying taxes (23 instances and ranked 17th for change, with 2 instances and ranked 24th for maintain); appealing to other jurisdictions (52 instances and ranked 8th for change, with 10 instances and ranked 6th for maintain); and, appealing to the Lortie Commission or other commissions as its reasoning (4 instances and ranked 31st for change, with 9 instances and ranked 7th for maintain). Overall, this highlights that many of the sub-frames that are used by parliamentarians in the debate on Canada's federal voting age stem from similar ideas or starting points but are communicated differently to justify either of the two dominant frames. Furthermore, these results shows that while the topic of a sub-frame can be used for both sides of the debate, its prominence in the debate may vary depending on the dominant frame that is being used; as shown by the variation in the number of instances and the overall ranking of the listed sub-frames.

6.3. Functional Frames (Level Three)

Level Three of the model (as shown in “Table 6.3.”) uses the four functions of frames that Entman identifies (1993, 52) to categorize the sub-frames from the second level (“Table 6.2.”). This is based on Entman's understanding of frames, which states that all frames can be categorized into one of these four functions. The purpose of the third level of the model is to examine the breakdown of the sub-frames being used by parliamentarians, to better understand the functions of these sub-frames in the debate on Canada's federal voting age.

Table 6.3. (Level three of model: Functional Frames)

Level three of model: Functional Frames
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<p>“Problem definition”</p> <p>Total Number of Sub-Frames: 1 (1 Change + 0 Maintain)</p>	<p>“Moral judgement”</p> <p>Total Number of Sub-Frames: 30 (18 Change + 12 Maintain)</p>	<p>“Suggested remedies”</p> <p>Total Number of Sub-Frames: 23 (13 Change + 10 Maintain)</p>	<p>“Diagnosing problems”</p> <p>Total Number of Sub-Frames: 20 (6 Change + 14 Maintain)</p>
<p>List of Sub-Frames (Changing):</p> <p>“Introducing legislation, opening argument, or procedural arguments”: 60</p> <p>Total number of instances: 60</p>	<p>List of Sub-Frames (Changing):</p> <p>“Young people are engaged and informed”: 86</p> <p>“Young people are mature and competent”: 61</p> <p>“Young people should have a say in their future”: 56</p> <p>“There is a desire from young people to vote”: 47</p> <p>“Appeal to the age of other legislation”: 42</p> <p>“Young people have the right to participate or vote”: 40</p> <p>“Young people contribute to and have a stake in society”: 29</p> <p>“Young people work and pay taxes”: 23</p>	<p>List of Sub-Frames (Changing):</p> <p>“Changing the voting age will increase voter turnout”: 78</p> <p>“Changing the voting age will increase participation”: 70</p> <p>“Appeals to improve, strengthen, or fix democracy in Canada”: 58</p> <p>“Changes made in other countries or other kinds of jurisdictions”: 52</p> <p>“Have them start voting while supported by their community, school, or home”: 43</p> <p>“I am open to changing it but would like more information or would like</p>	<p>List of Sub-Frames (Changing):</p> <p>“Appeal to experts or research about the subject”: 51</p> <p>“Appeal to the history of voting as reasoning for change”: 34</p> <p>“Lowering the voting age or this legislation, is supported across political parties”: 13</p> <p>“No age limitation in the Charter”: 5</p> <p>“Appeal to the feedback from the Lortie Commission or other commissions”: 4</p> <p>“Politics will be more fun with more young people”: 1</p>

	<p>“Young people already participate in political parties”: 22</p> <p>“Young people are most impacted by government”: 21</p> <p>“It’s the right time to change it”: 16</p> <p>“Lowering the voting age is not a new idea or concept”: 10</p> <p>“Court cases are ongoing to lower it”: 7</p> <p>“Responsibility of citizenship”: 7</p> <p>“Young people can vote independently”: 7</p> <p>“Normatively unjustified not to change / we ought to change it”: 6</p> <p>“I support it in principle”: 3</p> <p>“Appeals to young world leaders”: 2</p> <p>Total number of instances: 485</p>	<p>more research done before finalizing my decision”: 33</p> <p>“Give young people more opportunities to voice their opinion”: 8</p> <p>“Let the Senate help young people”: 8</p> <p>“Lowering it will cause positive societal changes”: 4</p> <p>“Lower voting age but keep candidacy at 18”: 3</p> <p>“We need to focus on issues impacting young people”: 3</p> <p>“We need to be more forward thinking:” 3</p> <p>“Let’s test it at other levels then change it”: 1</p> <p>Total number of instances: 364</p>	<p>Total number of instances: 108</p>
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List of Sub-Frames	List of Sub-Frames	List of Sub-Frames	List of Sub-Frames
<p data-bbox="261 258 430 289">(Maintaining):</p> <p data-bbox="282 317 409 348">None listed</p> <p data-bbox="253 438 440 470">Total number of</p> <p data-bbox="277 497 415 529">instances: 0</p>	<p data-bbox="544 258 738 289">(Maintaining):</p> <p data-bbox="521 317 792 348">“Not mature enough”: 22</p> <p data-bbox="540 380 773 470">“Appeal to the age of other legislation”: 19</p> <p data-bbox="527 501 786 653">“18 is the norm in other countries or jurisdictions”: 10</p> <p data-bbox="521 684 792 835">“If it is lowered, what would stop it from being further lowered?": 5</p> <p data-bbox="557 867 756 1018">“Appeals to the responsibilities of citizenship”: 5</p> <p data-bbox="532 1050 781 1140">“Current age works for now”: 4</p> <p data-bbox="532 1171 781 1323">“In support of maintaining the voting age in principle”: 4</p> <p data-bbox="521 1354 792 1562">“Appeal to the history of voting as reasoning for maintaining the voting age”: 3</p> <p data-bbox="565 1593 748 1684">“Voting is a big responsibility”: 3</p> <p data-bbox="532 1715 781 1869">“Young people are not supposed to work permanently or are not</p>	<p data-bbox="875 258 1053 289">(Maintaining):</p> <p data-bbox="829 317 1101 590">“There are other solutions to increasing turnout and participation or strengthening democracy”: 15</p> <p data-bbox="829 621 1101 829">“The House of Commons should enact changes (Senate specific argument)": 7</p> <p data-bbox="837 861 1092 951">“Educated and informed first, then vote after”: 7</p> <p data-bbox="850 982 1079 1073">“Let young people be young people”: 6</p> <p data-bbox="837 1104 1092 1255">“Change it at a different level, not the federal level”: 3</p> <p data-bbox="829 1287 1101 1438">“Do not lower the voting age for partisan reasons”: 2</p> <p data-bbox="829 1470 1101 1684">“Do not lower the voting age to protect the privacy of young people (on the voters list)": 1</p> <p data-bbox="829 1715 1101 1806">“We should proceed with caution”: 1</p>	<p data-bbox="1187 258 1365 289">(Maintaining):</p> <p data-bbox="1141 317 1412 468">“Changing the voting age won’t help voter turnout or it will make it worse”:</p> <p data-bbox="1260 499 1292 531">10</p> <p data-bbox="1141 562 1412 714">“Voting is different than participating in a political party”: 10</p> <p data-bbox="1195 745 1359 835">“Committee or commission recommendation to keep it at 18”: 9</p> <p data-bbox="1141 867 1406 957">“Concerns with the proposed legislation”: 6</p> <p data-bbox="1141 989 1406 1079">“Insufficient Desire from Young People”: 5</p> <p data-bbox="1141 1110 1406 1201">“Court decision to maintain voting age”: 5</p> <p data-bbox="1141 1232 1406 1352">“Comparison to provincial voting ages or legislation at provincial level”: 4</p> <p data-bbox="1159 1383 1388 1474">“Insufficient political importance”: 4</p> <p data-bbox="1159 1505 1388 1596">“Insufficient societal support”: 4</p>

	<p>always taxed, so no representation”: 2</p> <p>“Not the time yet”: 1</p> <p>“Being confident and eager is not a reason for change”: 1</p> <p>Total number of instances: 79</p>	<p>“Must change all levels if we change one”: 1</p> <p>“Must be guided by consistent principles”: 1</p> <p>Total number of instances: 44</p>	<p>“Changing the voting age did not help voter turnout internationally”: 2</p> <p>“Insufficient participation from young people”: 1</p> <p>“Teachers can influence students in school”: 1</p> <p>“May hinder the participation of new Canadians unless other legislation is changed”: 1</p> <p>“Lowering it would give people access to campaign in high schools”: 1</p> <p>Total number of instances: 63</p>
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Based on the total number of sub-frames in “Table 6.3.”, 40.5% are categorized as making a moral judgement, 31.1% as suggesting a remedy, 27% as diagnosing the problems, and 1.4% as defining the problem. Additionally, based on the total number of instances (for both changing and maintaining the voting age), 46.9% of instances consist of making a moral judgment, 33.9% for suggesting a remedy, 14.2% for diagnosing the problems, and 5% for defining the problem. These results demonstrate that a plurality of both sub-frames used, and instances of discourse articulated by parliamentarians consist of making a moral judgement about

the federal voting age. Furthermore, the order of the second, third, and fourth functional frames are the same for both sub-frames and instances of discourse (“suggested remedies” as second, “diagnosing problems” as third, and “problem definition” as the fourth).

In short, a plurality of frames from parliamentarians to justify changing or maintaining the voting age are moral judgements, while the rest of the frames – excluding the 1.4% of sub-frames and 5% of discourse instances for defining the problem – are a mix of suggested remedies and diagnosing problems. These findings help to inform the kinds of debates that are taking place between parliamentarians about the voting age, as well as the types of functions that they use to justify wanting to maintain or change the current voting age. In addition to informing the debate on the federal voting age, these findings also contribute to the broader topic of how frames are used in parliamentary discourse and discussions about policies. Since frames are used by individuals or groups (in this case, parliamentarians) to attempt to influence their target audiences (Danielson et al., 2008, 239) – such as other parliamentarians or the public – it is interesting to find that making moral judgements are considered the most popular way to influence their target audiences. This broader topic about the use of functional frames in parliamentary discourse during policy debates may be worth exploring further, as examining the breakdown of functional frames in other policy issues could highlight what parliamentarians believe are the most influential types of frames.

6.4. Frames of the Lortie Commission (Level Four)

The fourth level of the model (as shown in “Table 6.4.”) establishes the number of sub-frames that are consistent with the three criteria that were used as part of the rationale for lowering the voting age from 21 to 18 years old. Based on the number of sub-frames in each of the four categories, only 31 (41.9%) of the 74 sub-frames are consistent with Canada’s three

criteria for lowering the federal voting age, while 43 sub-frames (58.1%) are not part of Canada's rationale. This shows that the majority of sub-frames being used to argue in favour of maintaining or changing the voting age do not relate to Canada's criteria of when change is merited. This finding is also true for the total number of instances of discourse. There are 581 instances of discourse (48%) that are consistent with the three criteria, while 622 (52%) do not relate to the three criteria. Even though the difference in percentage between the number of instances of discourse is smaller than the difference between the number of sub-frames, the majority of instances still do not relate to the three criteria. Therefore, an important finding of this paper regarding the parliamentary debate about Canada's voting age is that the majority of frames being used to argue in favour of maintaining or changing the voting age, do not relate to Canada's official rationale of when change to the voting age is merited.

Table 6.4. (Level four of model: Frames of the Lortie Commission)

Level four of model: Frames of the Lortie Commission			
<p>“This group has a stake in how their society should be governed”</p> <p>Total Number of Sub-Frames: 11 (8 Change + 3 Maintain)</p>	<p>“This group has the capability of exercising a mature and informed vote”</p> <p>Total Number of Sub-Frames: 9 (3 Change + 6 Maintain)</p>	<p>“This group has a sufficient level of participation in activities relating to citizenship”</p> <p>Total Number of Sub-Frames: 11 (5 Change + 6 Maintain)</p>	<p>“Arguments that are not part of Canada’s rationale for lowering the federal voting age”</p> <p>Total Number of Sub-Frames: 43 (22 Change + 21 Maintain)</p>
<p>List of Sub-Frames (Changing):</p>	<p>List of Sub-Frames (Changing):</p>	<p>List of Sub-Frames (Changing):</p>	<p>List of Sub-Frames (Changing):</p>

<p>“Young people should have a say in their future”: 56</p> <p>“Appeal to the age of other legislation”: 42</p> <p>“Young people have the right to participate or vote”: 40</p> <p>“Appeal to the history of voting as reasoning for change”: 34</p> <p>“Young people contribute to and have a stake in society”: 29</p> <p>“Young people are most impacted by government”: 21</p> <p>“Give young people more opportunities to voice their opinion”: 8</p> <p>“We need to focus on issues impacting young people”: 3</p> <p>Total number of instances: 233</p>	<p>“Young people are engaged and informed”: 86</p> <p>“Young people are mature and competent”: 61</p> <p>“Young people can vote independently”: 7</p> <p>Total number of instances: 154</p>	<p>“There is a desire from young people to vote”: 47</p> <p>“Young people work and pay taxes”: 23</p> <p>“Young people already participate in political parties”: 22</p> <p>“Responsibility of citizenship”: 7</p> <p>“Appeals to young world leaders”: 2</p> <p>Total number of instances: 101</p>	<p>“Changing the voting age will increase voter turnout”: 78</p> <p>“Changing the voting age will increase participation”: 70</p> <p>“Introducing legislation, opening argument, or procedural arguments”: 60</p> <p>“Appeals to improve, strengthen, or fix democracy in Canada”: 58</p> <p>“Changes made in other countries or other kinds of jurisdictions”: 52</p> <p>“Appeal to experts or research about the subject”: 51</p> <p>“Have them start voting while supported by their community, school, or home”: 43</p> <p>“I am open to changing it but would like more information or would like more research done</p>
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			<p>before finalizing my decision”: 33</p> <p>“It’s the right time to change it”: 16</p> <p>“Lowering the voting age or this legislation, is supported across political parties”: 13</p> <p>“Lowering the voting age is not a new idea or concept”: 10</p> <p>“Let the Senate help young people”: 8</p> <p>“Court cases are ongoing to lower it”: 7</p> <p>“Normatively unjustified not to change / we ought to change it”: 6</p> <p>“No age limitation in the Charter”: 5</p> <p>“Lowering it will cause positive societal changes”: 4</p> <p>“Appeal to the feedback from the Lortie Commission or other commissions”: 4</p>
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			<p>“Lower voting age but keep candidacy at 18”: 3</p> <p>“I support it in principle”: 3</p> <p>“We need to be more forward thinking.” 3</p> <p>“Politics will be more fun with more young people”: 1</p> <p>“Let’s test it at other levels then change it”: 1</p> <p>Total number of instances: 529</p>
<p>List of Sub-Frames (Maintaining):</p> <p>“Appeal to the age of other legislation”: 19</p> <p>“Insufficient societal support”: 4</p> <p>“Appeal to the history of voting as reasoning for maintaining the voting age”: 3</p> <p>Total number of instances: 26</p>	<p>List of Sub-Frames (Maintaining):</p> <p>“Not mature enough”: 22</p> <p>“Educated and informed first, then vote after”: 7</p> <p>“Let young people be young people”: 6</p> <p>“Voting is a big responsibility”: 3</p> <p>“Teachers can influence students in school”: 1</p>	<p>List of Sub-Frames (Maintaining):</p> <p>“Voting is different than participating in a political party”: 10</p> <p>“Insufficient Desire from Young People”: 5</p> <p>“Appeals to the responsibilities of citizenship”: 5</p> <p>“Insufficient political importance”: 4</p>	<p>List of Sub-Frames (Maintaining):</p> <p>“There are other solutions to increasing turnout and participation or strengthening democracy”: 15</p> <p>“Changing the voting age won’t help voter turnout or it will make it worse”: 10</p>

	<p>“Being confident and eager is not a reason for change”: 1</p> <p>Total number of instances: 40</p>	<p>“Young people are not supposed to work permanently or are not always taxed, so no representation”: 2</p> <p>“Insufficient participation from young people”: 1</p> <p>Total number of instances: 27</p>	<p>“18 is the norm in other countries or jurisdictions”: 10</p> <p>“Committee or commission recommendation to keep it at 18”: 9</p> <p>“The House of Commons should enact changes (Senate specific argument)”: 7</p> <p>“Concerns with the proposed legislation”: 6</p> <p>“If it is lowered, what would stop it from being further lowered? ”: 5</p> <p>“Court decision to maintain voting age”: 5</p> <p>“Comparison to provincial voting ages or legislation at provincial level”: 4</p> <p>“Current age works for now”: 4</p> <p>“In support of maintaining the voting age in principle”: 4</p>
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			<p>“Change it at a different level, not the federal level”: 3</p> <p>“Changing the voting age did not help voter turnout internationally”: 2</p> <p>“Do not lower the voting age for partisan reasons”: 2</p> <p>“Do not lower the voting age to protect the privacy of young people (on the voters list)”: 1</p> <p>“We should proceed with caution”: 1</p> <p>“Not the time yet”: 1</p> <p>“Must change all levels if we change one”: 1</p> <p>“Must be guided by consistent principles”: 1</p> <p>“May hinder the participation of new Canadians unless other legislation is changed”: 1</p> <p>“Lowering it would give people access to campaign in high schools”: 1</p>
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			Total number of instances: 93
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In addition to discussing the overall number of sub-frames and instances of discourse for the four categories, it is worth examining each category on its own. From the categories representing the three criteria in “Table 6.4.”, the individual breakdowns are as follows for both changing and maintaining the voting age: “this group has a stake in how their society should be governed” has a total of 11 sub-frames and 259 instances; “this group has the capability of exercising a mature and informed vote” has 9 sub-frames and 194 instances; and finally, “this group has a sufficient level of participation in activities relating to citizenship” has 11 sub-frames and 128 instances. While the individual sub-frames about maturity or being informed have the highest number of instances for both changing and maintaining the voting age – as discussed in section “6.2. Sub-Frames (Level Two)” – it is important to note that as an overall criterion, there are more sub-frames relating to groups having a stake in how their society should be governed. This provides additional reasoning for why H2 – which states that “the majority of the sub-frames for both supporting and opposing changes to the voting age will relate to the criterion of having the capability of exercising a mature and informed vote, which was used when the voting age was lowered from 21 to 18” – is not supported. In terms of the broader literature on the voting age, this finding demonstrates that even though a specific kind of frame is the most common and reoccurring argument in the academic literature, it does not mean that it will be the most common frame used in debates between parliamentarians about the federal voting age.

As previously mentioned, there are 43 sub-frames and 622 instances in the fourth category of “Table 6.4.”, which consists of arguments that are not part of Canada’s rationale for lowering the federal voting age. There are 22 sub-frames and 529 instances that are under changing the voting age for this category, while there are 21 sub-frames and 93 instances under maintaining the voting age. For both changing and maintaining the voting age, the top two sub-frames and the highest number of instances in this fourth category both relate to concerns about increasing voter turnout or voter participation. For changing the voting age there are 78 instances of sub-frames stating that changing the voting age will increase voter turnout and 70 instances of sub-frames arguing that changing the voting age will increase participation. For maintaining the voting age there are 15 instances of sub-frames suggesting that there are other solutions to increasing voter turnout, participation, or strengthening democracy aside from lowering the voting age, and 10 instances of sub-frames arguing that changing the voting age will not help increase voter turnout. This finding, specifically about changing the voting age, relates to this paper’s third hypothesis, since it predicts that: “sub-frames that support changing the voting age and that do not relate to any of the three criteria that are part of Canada’s rationale will be about changing the voting age to increase voter turnout”. While having 148 instances in two sub-frames out of a total of 22 sub-frames is significant – since the instances in these two sub-frames would consist of 28% of the total – it does not constitute the majority of instances or sub-frames, let alone all of them. For this reason, H3 is not supported. This finding further demonstrates that in the parliamentary debate about Canada’s federal voting age, there are numerous kinds of sub-frames that are not part of the country’s three criteria that are being articulated by parliamentarians. Additionally, it is another example which shows that even if an argument

reoccurs very often in the academic literature on the voting age – such as increases to voter turnout – it will not necessarily be the same during parliamentary debates.

Overall, while this discussion of the results highlights several important findings about the parliamentary debate surrounding Canada's federal voting age, the primary conclusion of these findings is that the majority of frames being used to support or oppose changing the voting age from 18 to 16 are not consistent with the rationale that was used to lower the voting age from 21 to 18. This was demonstrated in the fourth level of the model ("Table 6.4."), since 31 out of 74 sub-frames (41.9%) and 581 instances out of 1203 (48%) were consistent with Canada's three criteria that form its rationale for making changes to the voting age, while 43 sub-frames (58.1%) and 622 instances (52%) do not relate to the three criteria. This is a major finding for the discussion about Canada's federal voting age, as it demonstrates that the majority of sub-frames and instances of parliamentary discourse from 1972 to 2022 are not consistent with Canada's established criteria for making changes to the voting age.

7.0. Conclusion

This research paper examines the instances of discourse between Canadian parliamentarians about supporting or opposing changes to the federal voting age. It addresses the following two-part research question: "what frames are being used to support or oppose changing the voting age from 18 to 16? Are these frames consistent with Canada's voting age rationale, which was used to lower the voting age from 21 to 18?" By examining the historic texts about the federal voting age from the House of Commons between October 31st, 1972, to June 24th, 2022, and from the Senate between January 1st, 2010, to June 24th, 2022, this paper lists the types of sub-frames that were used to support or oppose changes to the voting age, while also confirming the number of instances in which these sub-frames were used. These sub-frames

were categorized using Jusić and Stojanović's model of analysing parliamentary discourse, while adding an additional level to their model for this project. The additional level of this project ("Table 6.4.") consists of confirming whether the sub-frames that are identified in this paper fit into one of the three criteria that make up Canada's rationale for making changes to the voting age. By conducting this additional level of analysis, this paper concludes that the majority of frames being used to support or oppose changes to the voting age from 18 to 16 are not consistent with the rationale that was used to lower the voting age from 21 to 18. This is a major finding for the discussion about Canada's federal voting age, as it demonstrates that the majority of sub-frames and instances of discourse being used by parliamentarians are not consistent with Canada's established criteria for making changes to its federal voting age.

In addition to this major finding, the paper tested three hypotheses. First, H1 predicted that "the dominant frames that will be used by parliamentarians to support or oppose changing the voting age from 18 to 16, will be about changing or maintaining the voting age, and will not include eliminating the voting age", which was fully supported. Second, H2 advanced that "the majority of the sub-frames for both supporting and opposing changes to the voting age will relate to the criterion of having the capability of exercising a mature and informed vote, which was used when the voting age was lowered from 21 to 18", which was not supported. Third, H3 stated that "sub-frames that support changing the voting age and that do not relate to any of the three criteria that are part of Canada's rationale will be about changing the voting age to increase voter turnout", which was also not supported. H2 and H3 are significant contributions to the literature on the voting age, as exercising a mature and informed vote is a very popular topic of research but is not the criterion that is used the most by parliamentarians. Additionally, while the impacts of voter turnout are one of the primary arguments discussed in the literature, it is not

exclusively used by parliamentarians that refer to topics outside of Canada's three criteria for making arguments to change the voting age. These findings and the research conducted in this paper broadly contribute to the general topic of the voting age, while specifically adding to the debate about Canada's federal voting age and the types of arguments that are used by parliamentarians.

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