

LOCAL VIEWPOINT

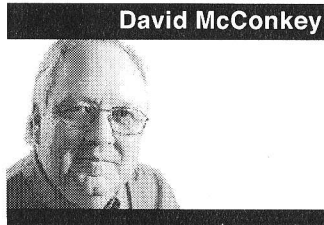
Voting results reveal new generation gap

We saw it in last year's federal election. We have seen it in recent American presidential campaigns. Now we see it confirmed in the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom. We are in a new political reality, with a dividing line between young and old. A new generation gap.

A generation gap in our 2015 election was a no-brainer. Obviously, older voters identified with the old-fashioned and stodgy Stephen Harper. And younger voters flocked to the stylish and cool Justin Trudeau.

In the U.S., young voters were instinctively drawn to Barack Obama, and they helped ensure his two election victories. And rebellious youth were naturally attracted to Bernie Sanders and his radical message. And as a lagniappe, there was the Sanders promise of free college education!

But the Brexit vote was something different. Young



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CITIZEN ACTIVE

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people favoured remaining in the EU. But that was also the “establishment” position; the “Remain in the EU” campaign was led by that straight-laced Conservative, former prime minister David Cameron.

What’s going on here? Here are five themes that run through this new generational reality.

NEW WORLD

The young are at home in the 21st century global village.

They have grown up with the Internet, smartphones and other mind-blowing technologies. They are comfortable interacting with different ethnic groups and different cultures. They see as normal the new rights and roles for women and LGBT individuals. In other words, the young are at ease with the future.

NEW PARADIGM

The new emerging politics goes beyond the traditional split between the right wing and the left wing. In the Brexit campaign, both Conservative and Labour were on the same side. In the current U.S. election, often Donald Trump is to the “left” of Hillary Clinton.

For today and into the future, many big issues defy a right-left breakdown. When dealing with global challenges like climate change, terrorism or the refugee crisis, we will need new

approaches that are innovative and non-ideological.

LEARNING

Young people are better educated than old people. And young people put more stock in learning, research and evidence-based thinking. The young are curious and they look forward to what is coming: new scientific breakthroughs in genetics, new technologies like virtual reality and artificial intelligence. Whatever. Bring it on!

In contrast, look at politicians who appeal to older voters: like Stephen Harper or Donald Trump. Those politicians dismiss facts, science and “university types.” They are openly anti-intellectual; they revel in shallowness and simplicity.

COMPLEXITY

Young people know that things are complicated. For example, take the EU. Britain

remaining in the EU means regulation, taxation and international entanglements. It means cultural diversity. It means more co-operation and more competition — both with those who live in foreign countries and with those who immigrate to Britain. Youth in Britain are OK with that complexity. For young people, the EU spells opportunity: to live and work not only in a vibrant U.K., but also in 27 other countries. Like, if you were young, wouldn't you want to be more European?

INVOLVEMENT

Brexit highlights the importance of actually getting out to vote. In the Brexit referendum, 72 per cent of those eligible voted. But only 36 per cent of those aged 18 to 24 voted. Yet the young have to live the longest with electoral consequences. Kids, remember that you are citizens. Vote!

One proposal to increase

youth participation is to lower the voting age to 16. In a poll done after the Brexit vote, more than 80 per cent of those aged 16 and 17 favoured remaining in the EU. If the voting age had been lowered, the Brexit result might have been different.

One supporter of lowering the voting age to 16 is Richard Branson — British billionaire, EU booster and hip old guy. Because of new media, he says, young people are, more than ever, “interested, motivated and informed.” Teenagers, he says, are, time and again “on the right side of history.”

One British teen interviewed after the Brexit vote put it more bluntly. “It’s very frustrating for me as a 17-year-old to see decisions being made by people who will, no doubt, die within the next 10 years while I am unable to have a say,” he said.

“The future belongs to us, the youth.”