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Federal election 2016: 'politicians seem like the enemy'

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Young voters Lee Cody, 23, and 22-year-old Tom Ward in the seat of Batman in Victoria: 'We're all for the Greens'. Picture: Stuart McEvoy

Young people in marginal seats are moving away from Labor towards the Greens as they nominate climate change, gay marriage and treatment of asylum-seekers as the most pressing issues.

A new marginal-seat poll of almost 1000 people aged 17-25 has found that about half of young people are undecided on how to vote on July 2, with almost 8 per cent saying they have no interest in taking part in the election.

Youth Action, a non-political NSW-based advocacy group, says the findings of the poll of 56 marginal seats show the need for major parties to better engage with youth. The survey finds of those who have decided, 44 per cent say they will vote Greens, 40 per cent Labor, and 16 per cent Liberal.

The top five issues nominated as most important for young people were treatment of asylum-seekers, climate change, marriage equality, education policy and unemployment. When broken down by gender, men nominated tax policy as a key priority — an issue not listed by women — and marriage equality was a priority for women but not for men.

Youth Action policy and advocacy manager Jacqui McKenzie said young people were more motivated by issues than party ties.

“Young people are overwhelmingly engaged with the issues,” she said. “(But) I think it shows that young people are a little bit disenfranchised; they have seen the major parties talking to each other and not talking directly to young people. And there are still a lot of young people who don’t see parties representing their core issues.”

Skateboarding in Northcote in the inner-Melbourne seat of Batman yesterday, 22-year-old Tom Ward said he would probably vote for Greens candidate Alex Bhathal over Labor incumbent David Feeney, who holds the seat with a 10 per cent margin over the Greens but has had a troubled campaign.

“In discussions with my friends, we’re all for the Greens at the moment,” Mr Ward said, admitting he had paid scant attention to the election. “Young people just lose interest because it seems like a lot of politicians are like the enemy.

“There’s a lot of facade and bullshit, but we’re in an age where it’s getting better.”

The poll shows 41.5 per cent of young people in marginal seats have decided how they will vote, compared with a national average of about 33 per cent; about 13 per cent say they do not intend to vote.

Voting intention varies markedly by age and gender, with men aged 20-25 more engaged than first-time voters. Only 5 per cent in the older category were not interested in voting compared with 17 per cent of those aged 17-19.

Young women were more engaged, with 6.6 per cent in the younger category not interested.

Men aged 20-25 are the group most likely to vote Greens. They are twice as likely to do so than men aged 17-19, who are more attracted to Labor or the Coalition, with Liberal preferred by 29 per cent. Of women aged 20-25, 40 per cent nominated the Greens as their preferred party. About 10 per cent of them would vote Liberal.