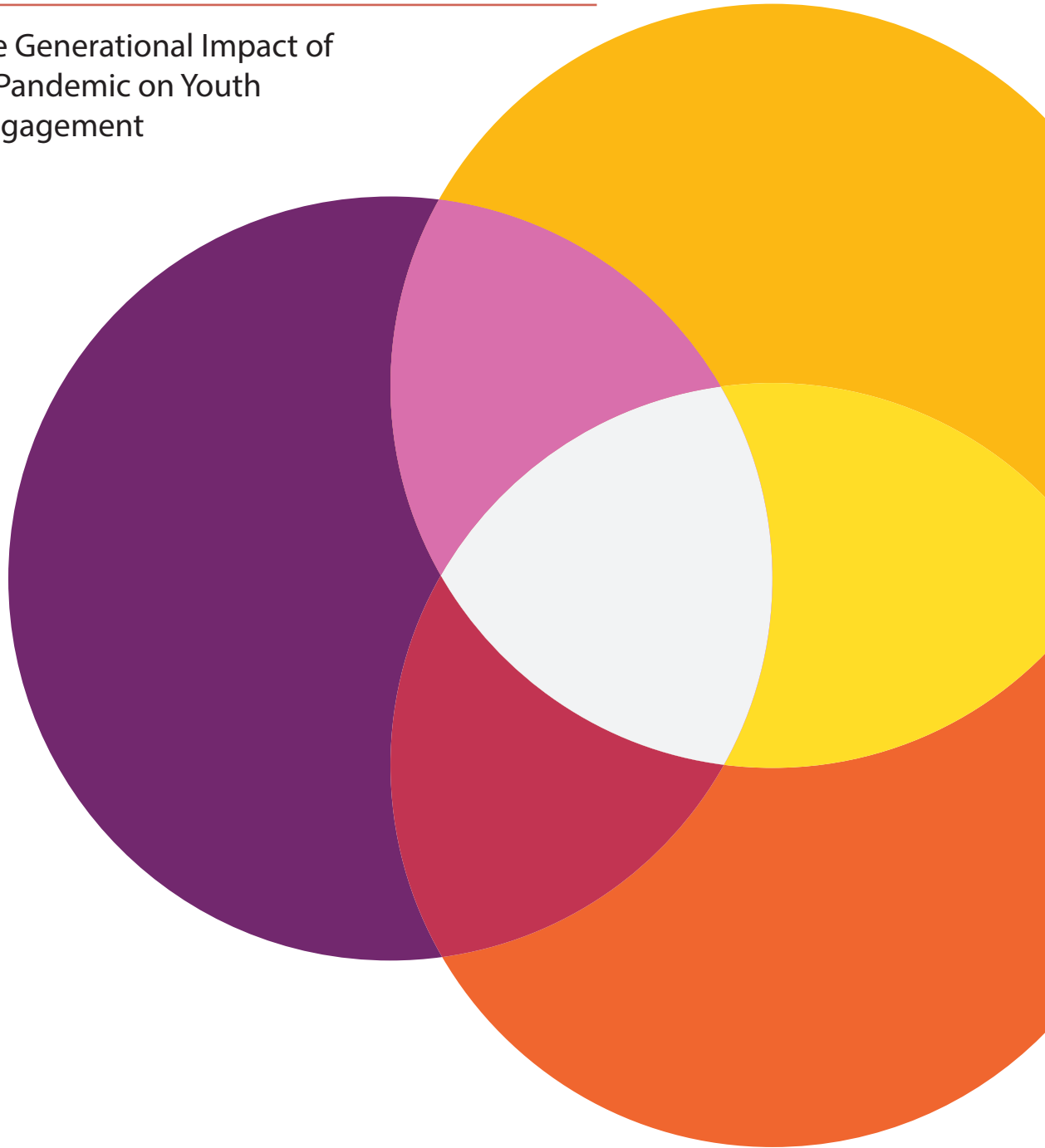


LEARNING LOSS AS CIVIC LOSS

Addressing the Generational Impact of
the COVID-19 Pandemic on Youth
Democratic Engagement



LEARNING LOSS AS CIVIC LOSS:

Addressing the Generational Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Youth Democratic Engagement

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About the Learning Loss as Civic Loss Report

The Learning Loss as Civic Loss Report is an effort by the Rideau Hall Foundation (RHF) to better understand the current state of youth civic engagement in Canada and to use these findings and recommendations to help inform RHF's work with one of its signature programs, the Forum for Young Canadians (Forum). It seeks to maximize Forum's impact and strengthen its unique value within a broader ecosystem of youth engagement that champions a healthy democratic culture through programming and inspires young people to become effective change agents for their communities and country. This report, Learning Loss as Civic Loss: Addressing the Generational Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Youth Democratic Engagement, was produced in partnership with The Samara Centre for Democracy.

This report explores a selection of organizations and initiatives representative of current civic literacy and civic engagement efforts in Canada but does not constitute an exhaustive list.



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About the Rideau Hall Foundation

The Rideau Hall Foundation (RHF) is an independent and non-political charitable organization established to amplify the impact of the office of the Governor General as a central institution of Canadian democracy, and to better serve Canadians through a range of initiatives linked to learning, leadership, giving and innovation.

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About the Samara Centre for Democracy

The Samara Centre for Democracy is a non-partisan charity that is committed to securing an accessible, responsive and inclusive democratic culture in Canada. The Samara Centre's insights make it a go-to resource for active citizens, public leaders and the media. A samara is the winged "helicopter" seed that falls from the maple tree. A symbol of Canada, it is also a reminder that from small seeds, big ideas can grow.

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected youth across Canada, negatively impacting their education, employment, and mental health.¹ This circumstance threatens to create a 'lockdown generation' that could face severe social and economic barriers for years to come.² In many instances, existing barriers have been exacerbated by the pandemic, particularly for youth that identify as Black, Indigenous or as a person of colour. Among the hardest hit are those who also identify as women or gender diverse youth, youth that are 2SLGBTQIAA+ or youth that are living with disabilities.³

Over the course of the pandemic, young people have faced unprecedented challenges to accessing services and opportunities. Yet, they have not stayed silent. With lockdowns and other public health measures restricting in-person forms of community organizing, young people have increasingly turned their use of social media toward civic ends. On Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and other platforms, young people have expressed their opinions about the government's handling of the pandemic, shared health and safety information, and participated in global movements for social, racial, and climate justice.

Despite this engagement, however, young people remain less likely to vote than older age groups and are less interested in 'traditional' forms of democratic participation. According to Statistics Canada, young people are more likely to participate in non-electoral activities such as signing a petition or participating in a demonstration than older people.⁴ In addition, Elections Canada has found that the gap in voter turnout between young people and seniors is increasing. In 2015, there was a 20% gap between these groups. By 2019, this gap had increased to 25% with 54% of youth aged 18-24 voting compared with 79% aged 65-74.⁵

- 1 Anjum Sultana and Anjum Sultana and Jessica Lue, 'Preventing a Lockdown Generation: A Plan to Support Canada's Youth in Post-Pandemic Recovery' (YWCA Canada, YMCA Canada, August 2021), <https://www.preventingalockdowngeneration.ca>; J. Brown, N. Summers, and P. Sundar, 'Return to School During COVID-19: Evidence Summary For Community Service Providers' (Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health, 2020), <https://cmho.org/wp-content/uploads/Return-to-school-during-COVID19-Evidence-summary-for-community-service-providers.pdf>; Susana Puerto Gonzalez, Drew Gardiner, and Jo Bausch, 'Youth & COVID- 19: Impacts on Jobs, Education, Rights, and Mental Well-Being', Survey Report (Geneva: International Labour Organisation, 2020), https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_753026.pdf;
- Kelly Gallagher-Mackay et al., 'COVID-19 and Education Disruption in Ontario: Emerging Evidence on Impacts' (Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory Table, 4 June 2021), <https://doi.org/10.47326/ocsat.2021.02.34.1.0>.
- 2 Gonzalez, Gardiner, and Bausch, 'Youth & COVID-19'; Sultana and Lue, 'Preventing a Lockdown Generation'.
- 3 A Guttman et al., 'COVID-19 in Immigrants, Refugees and Other Newcomers in Ontario: Characteristics of Those Tested and Those Confirmed Positive, as of June 13, 2020' (ICES, 2020), <https://www.ices.on.ca/Publications/Atlases-and-Reports/2020/COVID-19-in-Immigrants-Refugees-and-Other-Newcomers-in-Ontario>;
- James T. Brophy et al., 'Sacrificed: Ontario Healthcare Workers in the Time of COVID-19', *New Solutions: A Journal of Environmental and Occupational Health Policy* 30, no. 4 (1 February 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1048291120974358>;
- Martin Turcotte, 'Political Participation and Civic Engagement of Youth' (Canada: Statistics Canada, 7 October 2015), <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2015001/article/14232-eng.htm>;
- Martha Paynter and Linda Mussell, 'Worsening Conditions in Prisons during COVID 19 Further Marginalize Criminalized Women', *Dalhousie News*, 2020, <https://www.dal.ca/news/2020/10/19/worsening-conditions-in-prisons-during-covid-19-further-marginal.html>;
- Ryan Rocca, 'A Look at What Has Gone Wrong in Ontario Long-Term Care amid the Coronavirus Pandemic', *Global News*, 2020, <https://globalnews.ca/news/7471775/what-went-wrong-ontario-long-term-care-coronavirus/>;
- Sultana et Lue, 'Preventing a Lockdown Generation'.
- 4 Turcotte, 'Political Participation'.
- 5 Elections Canada, 'Youth Voting Trends', Elections Canada's Civic Education, 2022, <https://electionsanddemocracy.ca/canadas-elections/youth-voting-trends>

While this circumstance is complex, a key element, particularly during the pandemic, is that young people feel largely ignored by politicians and decision-makers despite the fact that their futures are on the line.⁶

In such a context, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to revitalize democracy by solidifying youth civic engagement as a democratic competency. Doing so will require robust and creative solutions that secure what we are calling civic onboarding. Civic onboarding refers to the process of introducing young people to the knowledge, skills, and habits they need to become active and engaged members of their communities. This is not a top-down approach to civic literacy but rather one that speaks to, and alongside, the diverse experiences and concerns of youth in Canada. It is a process that requires listening to the voices of young people and meeting them where they are at to build trust and connection.

The Rideau Hall Foundation partnered with The Samara Centre for Democracy to learn more about the state of youth civic learning and engagement in the context of the current pandemic and the potential generational impact this will have on young people in Canada. As we begin to emerge from the pandemic, we are met with the opportunity to address the tremendous challenges facing Canadian youth by investing in their civic literacy. Doing so would accelerate Canada's recovery from the pandemic and revitalize our democracy. This is an urgent matter. The generational impact of the pandemic risks entrenching disproportionate inequities that hinder the democratic participation of diverse communities. We cannot allow the learning loss caused by the pandemic to become our civic loss.

Solutions to encourage youth civic engagement must be responsive and authentic. In this report, we consider the effects of the pandemic on Canadian youth civic literacy, we identify gaps in our current civic literacy landscape, and we provide key recommendations to advance a new chapter for youth civic engagement in Canada. Our findings highlight the need for structural as well as cultural change in how we approach civic onboarding for youth in Canada. Making these changes will be vital if we want young people to become active and engaged citizens.

The material presented here builds on the Samara Centre for Democracy's 2019 report *Investing in Canadians' civic literacy: An answer to fake news and disinformation*.⁷ We take a broad definition of youth and consider initiatives that target the age group of 5-25 years, both inside and outside of the school setting (elementary, secondary, post-secondary). In addition, we define civic literacy as the individual-level tools, skills, and knowledge that make democracy work. Being civically literate means knowing about the institutions of government and how they work, having awareness of the issues of the day, understanding how to take political action to pursue a cause, and carefully consuming media both on- and offline.

6 Hasina Samji et al., 'Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Health and Well-Being of Young Adults in British Columbia' (British Columbia Centre for Disease Control, 2021),

http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Professionals-Site/Documents/COVID-Impacts/BCCDC_COVID-19_Young_Adult_Health_Well-being_Report.pdf;

Laurie Day et al., 'To Lockdown and Back: Young People's Lived Experiences of the COVID-19 Pandemic', 2020,

<https://www.guc19.com/pdf/resource-bank/to-lockdown-and-back-research-report.pdf>.

7 Michael Morden et al., "Investing in Canadians' Civic Literacy: An Answer to Fake News and Disinformation." (Toronto: The Samara Centre for Democracy, 2019), https://www.samaracanada.com/docs/default-source/reports/investing-in-canadians-civic-literacy-by-the-samara-centre-for-democracy.pdf?sfvrsn=66f2072f_4

THE PANDEMIC CONTEXT

Disruptions and Divisions

To halt the spread of COVID-19, many governments and private institutions around the world instituted lockdown and social distancing measures. For young people, this significantly affected their schooling, as classes were hastily moved online. Globally, over 70% of youth were affected by the closure of schools, universities, and training centres. One in eight saw their education and training halt completely. The result was that 65% of youth reported that they had learned less since the beginning of the pandemic.⁸ Similarly worrying results were visible in Canada. In Ontario, for example, the pandemic is deepening and accelerating inequities in education outcomes, affecting in particular students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, racialized and Indigenous groups, newcomers, and students with disabilities.⁹

The switch to remote learning underscored the 'digital divide' amongst students. Worldwide, UNESCO reported that half of the total number of students forced to study at home – approximately 826 million students – did not have access to a household computer; not only that, but 43% had no internet at home.¹⁰ In Canada, the pandemic equally revealed disparities between communities that do and do not have reliable internet access. In rural areas, only 40% of households have internet connections with the recommended speed; in First Nations communities, this figure drops to 30%. One in 10 households in Canada have no internet connection at all.¹¹

With their education and employment plans upended or thrown into doubt, many young Canadians worried about the future. Indeed, while older Canadians were more likely to be concerned about their own health, young people were more likely to be concerned about the social and economic consequences of the pandemic.¹²

This is understandable given that young people are more likely to lose their jobs than people in other age groups during economic downturns, and they continue to face high levels of unemployment. In British Columbia, for example, 13% of young people (18-30 years) were unemployed in February 2021 — 60% higher than the previous year, pre-pandemic.¹³

Given these disruptions, young people's mental health significantly worsened during the pandemic.¹⁴ In Europe, researchers found that nearly two-thirds of young people may be affected by anxiety or depression due to the pandemic.¹⁵ Here in Canada, one study reported that more than 70% of school-aged children (aged 6 to 18 years) experienced a deterioration in their mental health.¹⁶

8 Gonzalez, Gardiner, and Bausch, 'Youth & COVID-19'

9 Gallagher-Mackay et al., 'COVID-19 and Education Disruption in Ontario'

10 UNESCO, 'Startling Digital Divides in Distance Learning Emerge', UNESCO, 21 April 2020, <https://en.unesco.org/news/startling-digital-divides-distance-learning-emerge>.

11 Briar Stewart, 'How COVID-19 Worsens Canada's Digital Divide', CBC, 23 September 2020, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/covid-19-highlights-urban-rural-digital-divide-1.5734167>

12 'Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians: First Results from Crowdsourcing', The Daily (Statistics Canada, 23 April 2020), <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/200423/dq200423a-eng.htm>

13 Samji et al., 'Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic.'

14 Meenu Minhas et al, "COVID-19 Impacts on Drinking and Mental Health in Emerging Adults: Longitudinal Changes and Moderation by Economic Disruption and Sex," *Alcoholism, Clinical and Experimental Research* 45 no.7 (2021).

15 Dan Moxon, Cristina Bacalso, and Adina Serban, 'Beyond Lockdown: The "Pandemic Scar" on Young People' (Europe. Brussels: European Youth Forum, 2021), <https://tools.youthforum.org/policy-library/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/European-Youth-Forum-Report-v1.2.pdf>

16 Katherine Tombeau Cost et al., 'Mostly Worse, Occasionally Better: Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on the Mental Health of Canadian Children and Adolescents', *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 26 February 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-021-01744-3>

Experts point out that the pandemic will likely have long-term mental health consequences on children and youth, particularly those from vulnerable backgrounds.¹⁷

Overall, the generational impact of the pandemic on youth internationally can be understood as “systematic, deep, and disproportionate.”¹⁸ Due to the educational loss, economic loss, and poor mental health brought on by the pandemic, some have argued that this extended emergency should be understood as a scar that will mark the lives of young people for years to come.¹⁹ Growing up Under Covid-19 is a transnational action research project that aims to provide insights on the impact of the pandemic on young people’s lives. A key finding is that young people bristle at their negative portrayal in the media — i.e. they are either painted as ‘victims’ of the pandemic due to educational loss, or villains due to their supposedly irresponsible behaviour that led to surges in infection rates.²⁰ This relates to Canadian research during the pandemic that found young people report feeling disempowered and cut off from decision-making processes, despite the fact that they are disproportionately affected.²¹

Civic Power and Well-Being

The pandemic’s effects on youth civic engagement are mixed. On the one hand, globally, one in three young people reported the pandemic having a significant impact on their ability to participate in political processes.²² This, after all, is unsurprising given that lockdowns and social distancing measures have made it difficult, if not impossible, for young people to participate in ‘traditional’ forms of civic engagement such as in-person political campaigning or voter registration drives.

On the other hand, the pandemic has accelerated a trend that was already visible pre-pandemic: young people increasingly turned to social media to engage civically. In addition to the extended emergency, events such as the 2020 U.S. election and the rise of social and racial justice movements have resulted in young people both consuming and producing political content at unprecedented levels.²³ They used social media to raise money for frontline workers and encourage others to shelter in place.²⁴

One example is the [On Canada Project](#), which originated as a youth-led grassroots initiative on Instagram to share health and safety advice related to COVID-19, particularly for young and marginalized Canadians. It has since expanded to address a wider set of political and social justice issues and has added more than 150 youth volunteers from diverse backgrounds to its 128,000 followers on Instagram. Its mission is explicitly civic: “Building a Canadian community of change agents to disrupt the status quo.” Even before the pandemic, research had shown that young people are less interested in ‘traditional’ forms of civic engagement and instead use digital tools and platforms to express their thoughts, opinions, and civic identities in innovative ways.²⁵

17 Mark Wade, Heather Prime, and Dillon T. Browne, ‘Why We Need Longitudinal Mental Health Research with Children and Youth during (and after) the COVID-19 Pandemic’, *Psychiatry Research* 290 (August 2020): 113143, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2020.113143>

18 Gonzalez, Gardiner, and Bausch, ‘Youth & COVID-19’

19 Moxon, Bacalso, and Serban, ‘Beyond Lockdown: The “Pandemic Scar”’.

20 Day et al., ‘To Lockdown and Back’.

21 Day et al., ‘To Lockdown and Back’; Samji et al., ‘Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic’.

22 Gonzalez, Gardiner, and Bausch, ‘Youth & COVID-19’

23 ‘Young People Turn to Online Political Engagement During COVID-19’, Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning & Engagement, 2020, <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/young-people-turn-online-political-engagement-during-covid-19.young-people-turn-online-political-engagement-during-covid-19>

24 Zoë Pelter, ‘Pandemic Participation: Youth Activism Online in the COVID-19 Crisis’, UNICEF Office of Global Insight & Policy, 2020, <https://www.unicef.org/globalinsight/stories/pandemic-participation-youth-activism-online-covid-19-crisis>

25 Henry Jenkins et al., *By Any Media Necessary: The New Youth Activism, Connected Youth and Digital Futures* (NYU Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9781479829712.001.0001>

Although the pandemic has taken a major toll on young people's mental health, it seems that this was less the case for young people who were civically active. In one American study, youth who are civically engaged during the pandemic report higher well-being.²⁶ This aligns with wider research from the US that links civic participation to health and well-being.²⁷ Indeed, whether youth were struggling, maintaining, or activating during the pandemic depended on their access to civic power.²⁸ This can inform some direction in Canada - that encouraging young people to become civically engaged might take on even greater significance as we learn to live with COVID-19. In fact, emphasizing the link between civic engagement and well-being could be an opportunity to revitalize participation in our democracy and shape a new generation of engaged citizens. It is important to appreciate that civic engagement is more than simply casting a ballot. Actions ranging from signing petitions, contacting elected representatives and volunteering to more seemingly mundane activities such as posting a tweet about social policy or even reading up on local issues all constitute forms of civic engagement and speak to the ways in which civic participation can be understood as a normalized part of everyday life.

Apathy is Boring and Future Majority

Does our political discourse do enough to engage youth? For non-profit youth organizations Apathy is Boring and Future Majority the answer is a resounding "no." Their work makes clear that young people feel as though politicians, candidates, and political parties do not listen to them or care about their concerns. This ultimately creates a negative feedback loop where young people who feel as though they're not being listened to see no point in participating in the democratic process. One initiative seeking to encourage youth engagement is Future Majority's platform Votetube, which provides information about where each party stands on youth issues from climate change and mental health to affordability and Indigenous reconciliation. By making these resources accessible on one platform, young people can decide for themselves whether or not political actors really have their interests at heart.

In another initiative, Apathy is Boring's RISE program helps youth develop and create community projects. As RISE Ambassadors, young people receive 22 weeks of skills and engagement training alongside their peers. The program has resulted in young people learning new civic skills and feeling more confident in their ability to meaningfully participate in their communities.²⁹ RISE is currently running in seven cities: Edmonton, Ottawa, Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, Halifax, and Vancouver.

26 'Despite Pandemic, Civically Engaged Youth Report Higher Well-Being,' Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning & Engagement, 2021, <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/despite-pandemic-civically-engagedyouth-report-higher-well-being>

27 Parissa J. Ballard and Emily J. Ozer, 'The Implications of Youth Activism for Health and Well-Being,' in *Contemporary Youth Activism: Advancing Social Justice in the United States*, ed. Jerusha Conner and Sonia M. Rosen (ABC-CLIO, 2016).

28 Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning & Engagement, 'Despite Pandemic'.

29 Tara Mahoney, Samantha Reusch, and Caro Loutfi, 'Together We Rise: Youth-Led Democratic Innovation in Canada' (Apathy is Boring, 2020), https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/apathyisboring/pages/355/attachments/original/1582735627/ApathyisBoring_-_Together_We_Rise_Report.pdf?1582735627

Blurred Lines: Online and Offline

Although more young people are turning to online spaces to express themselves politically, challenges remain. In their online lives, young people must contend with digital surveillance, data breaches, predictive algorithms, trolling and online harassment, and the often-dubious reliability of the information that flows through online channels.³⁰ In 2021, 65% of Canadian youth reported seeing some form of disinformation online at least once a week.³¹ This estimate most likely skews low given that we know most people are ill-equipped to identify disinformation in the first place. This circumstance amounts to a crisis of informed citizenship that destabilizes our democracy.^{32, 33} As we discuss below, this moment affords a critical opportunity to strengthen our civic infrastructure by transforming Canada's approach to digital media literacy for young people.

Let us consider this sobering reality: spending more time online — which Canadians are doing during the pandemic — also means increasing the possibility of being exposed to radical or extremist content. Although the proportion of rightwing extremists using social media is small when compared to the overall number of social media users in Canada, their reach is sizeable.³⁴ During the pandemic, there was a concerning rise in their online activity on Facebook, Twitter, and 4chan. TikTok, whose popularity skyrocketed during the pandemic, particularly among young people, is not all fun dance videos. It has also emerged as a platform where content supporting white supremacy, extremism, terrorism, and genocide denial is easily shared.³⁵ In this context, civic education and digital media literacy may become increasingly important from a security standpoint, helping to prevent radicalization and extremism.

Even as we pay attention to young people's online political engagement, we have to be mindful of not drawing distinct boundaries between online and offline realms. Research shows, in fact, that young people who engage in online political activity are more likely to engage offline as well.³⁶ For today's youth, the 'online' and 'offline' cannot be understood as entirely separate domains.

Is online engagement REAL politics?

If young people are increasingly living their political lives online, how exactly do researchers measure digital civic engagement? 'Liking' a political post on social media is often derided and dismissed as 'clicktivism.' However, researchers argue that online political engagement can be effective, particularly when it comes to circulating non-mainstream ideas.³⁷ Others argue that we need to develop a different analytical framework to better understand young people's digital engagement. One approach suggests a framework of voice/instrumental and thick/thin.³⁸ This means asking a different set of questions, such as: is a digital act geared towards expressing voice, a worthy end in and of itself, or is it oriented towards a more instrumental end, such as passing a law? Are youth required to just show up to a civic act, or are they expected to be more actively engaged? The intention with this approach is to see youth digital engagement as nuanced and existing on a continuum rather than simply labelling particular acts as political or apolitical.

30 Alexander Cho et al, Digital Civic Engagement by Young People (UNICEF Office of Global Insight and Policy, 2020). <https://www.unicef.org/globalinsight/media/706/file/UNICEF-Global-Insight-digital-civic-engagement-2020.pdf>

31 'Revisiting News Consumption and Democratic Engagement' (Abacus Data & Apathy is Boring, 2021), https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/apathyisboring/pages/687/attachments/original/1629743211/Abacus_Report_Data_2021_EN_v4.pdf?1629743211

32 Pavlounis et al., 'The Digital Media Literacy Gap.'

33 Edward Greenspon and Taylor Owen, 'Democracy Divided: Countering Disinformation and Hate in the Digital Public Sphere', The Shattered Mirror Series (The University of British Columbia School of Public Policy and Global Affairs, 2018), <https://ppforum.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/DemocracyDivided-PPF-AUG2018-EN.pdf>

34 Jacob Davey, Mackenzie Hart, and Cécile Guerin, 'An Online Environmental Scan of Right-Wing Extremism in Canada' (ISD, 2020), <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/An-Online-Environmental-Scan-of-Right-wing-Extremism-in-Canada-ISD.pdf>

35 Ciarán O'Connor, 'Hatescape: An In-Depth Analysis of Extremism and Hate Speech on TikTok', (ISD, 2021) https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/HateScape_v5.pdf

36 'So Much for "Slacktivism": Youth Translate Online Engagement to Offline Political Action', Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, 2018, <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/so-much-slacktivism-youth-translate-online-engagement-offline-political-action>

37 Deen Freelon, Alice Marwick, and Daniel Kreiss, "False Equivalencies; Online Activism from Left to Right," Science 369 no. 6508 (2020).

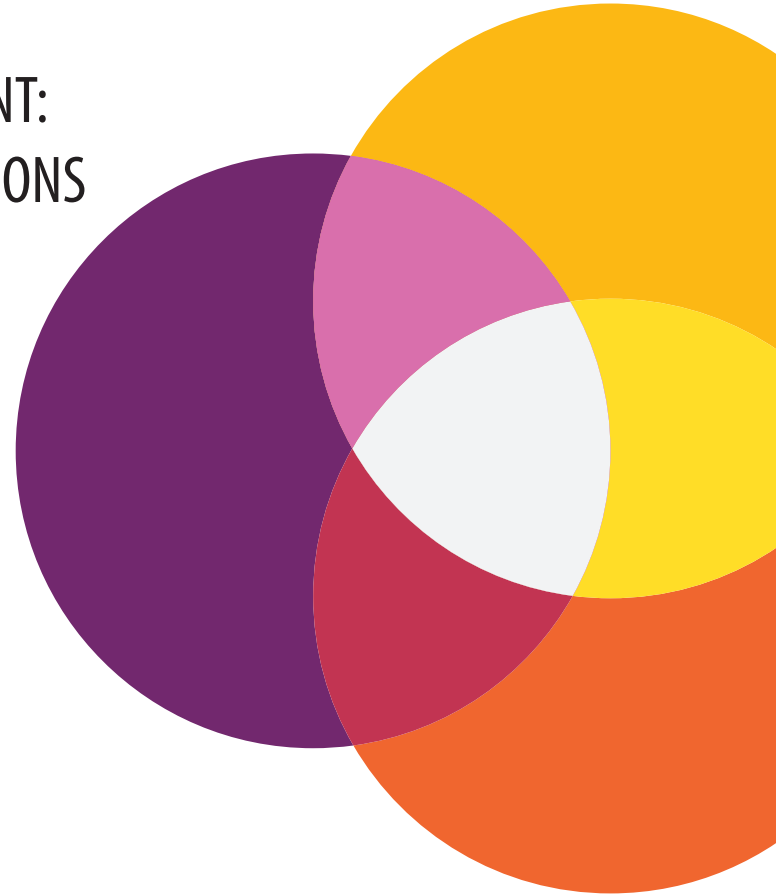
38 Cho, Byrne, and Pelter, 'Digital Civic Engagement'; Ethan Zuckerman, 'New Media, New Civics?', Policy & Internet 6, no. 2 (June 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1002/1944-2866.POI360>

ENHANCING YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: OPPORTUNITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As we emerge from the pandemic, we are presented with the opportunity to address the tremendous and complex challenges facing our youth with dedicated civic onboarding support. The following section presents three key areas that could make a meaningful difference in the lives of diverse youth across Canada while also revitalizing our democracy. These recommendations are not exhaustive but have the potential to make a critical difference in activating a new generation of youth to be civically engaged.

INVEST IN DIGITAL MEDIA LITERACY

If young people are engaging politically online now more than ever before, digital media literacy becomes even more important. While digital media literacy is currently being taught in secondary schools across Canada — and media literacy more widely has been taught in schools since the 1990s — how exactly it is taught varies widely based on province and territory.³⁹ Much of the material has not been updated to reflect our changed media landscape; in other cases, even if excellent programs exist, they are not mandatory.⁴⁰ While we highlight in this report the important work that youth-focused organizations such as MediaSmarts and CIVIX (particularly its CTRL-F program) are doing in this space, we stress that more consolidated and strategic work needs to be done. A national digital media strategy, for example, would go a long way to ensuring students receive comprehensive and up-to-date digital media literacy training in their schools.⁴¹ This in turn would make them better prepared to participate in our democracy, which is increasingly, though not exclusively, being lived online.



39 Michael Hoechsmann and Helen DeWaard, 'Mapping Digital Literacy Policy and Practice in the Canadian Education Landscape' (Lakehead University, 2015), <http://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources/digital-literacyframework/mapping-digital-literacy-policy-practice-canadian-education-landscape>

40 Brenna Owen, 'Kids Need Media Literacy Education to Match the Rise of Social Networks: Experts', CTV News, 11 December 2020, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/sci-tech/kids-need-media-literacy-education-to-match-the-rise-of-social-networks-experts-1.5226764>

41 Hoechsmann and DeWaard, 'Mapping Digital Literacy'.

A growing body of literature argues that ‘traditional’ media literacy, which focuses on skill attainment, content, and critique, does not sufficiently prepare young people for an online media ecosystem wherein misinformation and conspiracy theories flourish. In fact, research shows that critical thinking and source evaluation, as traditionally taught, do not necessarily work to counter misinformation, and can in some cases do more harm, amplifying extremist messages.⁴²

To face our current moment, researchers suggest that media literacy should instead focus on ‘civic intentionality’, foregrounding the values of agency, caring, persistence, critical consciousness, and emancipation.⁴³ Civic intentionality is about framing media literacy initiatives through an explicitly civic lens. Another way to say this is that media literacy should focus on bringing people together to find solutions to social problems and create spaces for dialogue and meaningful, sustained engagement.⁴⁴ In another approach, scholars argue that we need to cultivate ‘ecological literacy’ in order to better understand the flows of online information and whether or not our online behaviour affects others.⁴⁵ The emphasis here is on moving away from focusing on the individual user (and their rights) to instead consider networks, neighbourhoods, communities, and wider structural factors.⁴⁶ We should ask: how does an (online) action affect not only me individually, but others around me, particularly marginalized communities? What (unintended) harm might certain (online) actions cause?

Organizations such as MediaSmarts are leading the way in digital media literacy.

With resources geared towards schools, homes, and communities, they offer a wide-ranging and award-winning collection of resources for digital media literacy (and media literacy more generally). Secondary school teachers can access material that teaches students the foundations of digital media literacy, including lesson plans, classroom tools, and interactive games, for free on their website. MediaSmarts’ own research has made clear the need for up-to-date digital media literacy curricula.⁴⁷ This includes addressing the impact of artificial intelligence, machine learning, and algorithmic data collection on young people’s lives, and raising awareness about their privacy rights.

Young people who are not sufficiently knowledgeable about these issues risk being excluded from online spaces and become more vulnerable to risks. ‘Algorithmic literacy’ is all the more vital in the context of the pandemic, with young people spending more time online.

CIVIX, a non-partisan civic education charity, equally provides extensive resources on digital media literacy for teachers to use in their classrooms. Its CTRL-F module, for example, teaches young people the empirically validated skills needed to evaluate all forms of online information, including blatant misinformation and other more subtle forms of false or misleading information. Key to this approach is an emphasis on ‘lateral reading’ skills, meaning that instead of relying on out-of-date strategies to verify digital information — such as looking for signs of professionalism on a website or checking its URL — CTRL-F stresses the need to leave the website in question and open a new tab to conduct research.

42 D. Pavlounis et al., ‘The Digital Media Literacy Gap: How to Build Widespread Resilience to False and Misleading Information Using Evidence-Based Classroom Tools’ (CIVIX Canada, 2021), <https://ctrl-f.ca/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/The-Digital-Media-Literacy-Gap-Nov-7.pdf>; Joel Breakstone et al., ‘Why We Need a New Approach to Teaching Digital Literacy’, Phi Delta Kappan 99 (1 March 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721718762419>; Sarah McGrew et al., ‘Can Students Evaluate Online Sources? Learning From Assessments of Civic Online Reasoning’, Theory & Research in Social Education 46 (8 January 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2017.1416320>; Sarah McGrew, ‘Skipping the Source and Checking the Contents: An in-Depth Look at Students’ Approaches to Web Evaluation’, Interdisciplinary Journal of Practice, Theory, and Applied Research 38, no. 2 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1080/07380569.2021.1912541>; Whitney Phillips and Ryan M. Milner, You Are Here: A Field Guide for Navigating Polarized Speech, Conspiracy Theories, and Our Polluted Media Landscape (MIT Press, 2021)

43 Paul Mihailidis, ‘Civic Media Literacies: Re-Imagining Engagement for Civic Intentionality’, Learning, Media and Technology 43 (6 February 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2018.1428623>

44 Mihailidis, ‘Civic Media Literacies’.

45 Phillips and Milner, You are Here.

46 Phillips and Milner, You Are Here.

47 Kara Brisson-Boivin and Samantha McAleese, ‘Algorithmic Awareness: Conversations with Young Canadians about Artificial Intelligence and Privacy’, MediaSmarts, 2021, https://mediasmarts.ca/sites/default/files/publication-report/full/report_algorithmic_awareness.pdf

CHALLENGE THE CURRENT YOUTH LEADERSHIP PARADIGM

What kind of citizens do we hope civic literacy initiatives will make? In much of this programming, there is a dominant paradigm that focuses on the individual — the aim is to encourage young people to become bold leaders or changemakers who can make a difference on a national, if not international, stage. While this aim is laudable, it may risk alienating youth, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds who may not readily identify as leaders even when they possess the capability.

Moving away from a leadership model that focuses on individual achievement might encourage a wider, more representative set of young Canadians to engage in our democratic processes, as it will provide a more accessible gateway to participation. After all, there are multiple ways in which young people can become engaged in the political process, not only as movement leaders but also as creative organizers and decision makers.⁴⁸ Rather than seeing youth engagement as a hierarchical ladder, we might see it instead as a dynamic, interconnected network that offers young people multiple points of entry and engagement.⁴⁹ What if we focused not on creating individual leaders but rather on teaching young people to engage at the local level within their own communities? Healthy democracies have full participation, and the pandemic requires reinforcing the importance of our communities and the collective above the individual.

This rethinking of the leadership model also prompts reflection on a wider question: How exactly should young people understand Canada's place in the world and their role as global citizens? Civic education, after all, equally involves zooming out and considering global issues. Strengthening global citizenship means strengthening local citizenship. How social justice issues are taught in Canadian classrooms, however, might equally require adopting new pedagogical tools and frameworks.

One approach that decentres the role of the individual is Critical Global Citizenship Education (CGCE), which stresses the need to understand social justice issues through wider structures of power and inequality.⁵⁰ While older approaches focused on the colonial 'empowered individual' single handedly tackling global problems such as poverty or social inequality, CGCE advocates for a more critical perspective, centering Indigenous knowledge systems and perspectives from the Global South.⁵¹ This opens up the pathway for students to see the world as interconnected through particular social, political, and historical relations. It also asks students to see social justice issues such as poverty or inequality not as existing 'out there' in 'other' places, but within Canada and their own communities. Research suggests that Canadian students are hungry for this kind of teaching. They tell us that they want global citizenship education introduced early in elementary school and expanded upon in secondary school.⁵²

48 Mahoney, Reusch, and Loutfi, 'Together We Rise'.

49 Mahoney, Reusch, and Loutfi, 'Together We Rise'.

50 'Working Towards Anti-Oppressive Schools – Lessons from WE Charity: A Critical Review' (Toronto: Toronto District School Board, 2021), <https://pub-tdsb.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=8362>

51 Lynette Shultz, 'Public Engagement and Educating for Global Citizenship: What Do We Risk by Focusing on the "Empowered Individual"' (Edmonton, AB: Centre for Global Citizenship Education and Research, University of Alberta, 2015), <https://www.ualberta.ca/educational-policy-studies/medialibrary/cgcer/documents/publications/icngceandtheempoweredindividual.pdf>

52 'The National Youth White Paper on Global Citizenship' (Alberta: Centre for Global Citizenship Education & Research, 2015), <https://www.gcceclearinghouse.org/resources/national-youth-white-paper-global-citizenship>

Evolving the leadership paradigm proposes a shift in how leadership is approached: it's not about receiving civics training to earn a spot in our democracy (and to risk falling short). It's about instilling a sense of connection to our institutions and communities and contributing to their evolution.

This proposal to challenge the dominant leadership paradigm doesn't mean discouraging individual leadership altogether, but it does mean challenging the default understanding of what leadership looks like. Analysis from CBC/Radio-Canada illustrated that white men are disproportionately represented as political candidates and as Members of Parliaments.⁵³ Similarly, white men dominate senior roles in the legal profession, media industry and are among the country's highest earners.⁵⁴ Moving forward requires addressing systemic barriers that have limited the representation of diverse communities in decision making spaces. Presenting a nuanced and broad approach to leadership can harness critical contributions to our democracy that are currently being streamed away.

Indeed, young people at the forefront of social justice initiatives are advocating for precisely this kind of inclusive and representative approach to leadership. Activists such as Sophia Mathur, a 14-year-old climate change activist from Sudbury, Ontario, and Autumn Peltier, a 17-year-old clean water advocate from the Wiikwemkoong First Nation on Manitoulin Island, Ontario, approach their work with an explicitly intersectional and anti-oppression lens. Mathur, inspired by Greta Thunberg's Fridays for Future movement that sees students refuse to attend school on Fridays to protest global inaction on climate change, was famously Canada's first climate striker, organizing climate strikes in Sudbury. Mathur is also involved in a lawsuit against the Ontario government, alleging that its failure to take sufficient action against climate change is a violation of young people's Charter rights to life, liberty, and security of the person. Peltier, who is Chief Water Protector for the Anishnabek Nation, advocates for clean water access for Indigenous communities, and stresses the cultural and spiritual importance of water.

Peltier's work builds on the long history of activism within Indigenous communities. Her work helps to underscore the point that while young people have recently been at the forefront of climate activism, Indigenous communities and activists have been doing this important work for years, even if their contributions are often not acknowledged.

Working at both the local and global levels, Mathur and Peltier are examples of a new wave of civically engaged young leaders that are advancing a new chapter for civic engagement in our country. They bring a nuanced approach to systems change and have the capacity to not only convene but activate across age ranges.

53 Valérie Ouellet, Naël Shiab, and Sylvène Gilchrist, 'White Men Make up a Third of Canada's Population but a Majority of Mps — Here's Why', Radio-Canada.ca (CBC, 2021), <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/info/2021/electionsfederale/minorites-visibles-diversite-autochtones-racises-candidats-politique/en>

54 Amara McLaughlin and Mike Crawley, 'Sunshine List so White: Minorities Almost Invisible Among Ontario's Best-Paid Public Servants', CBC News, 2018, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/sunshine-list-so-whiteontario-public-sector-executives-1.4593238>; Jennifer Brown, 'Study Shows Law Firm Senior Leadership Still Largely White and Male', Canadian Lawyer, 2017, <https://www.canadianlawyermag.com/news/general/study-shows-lawfirm-senior-leadership-still-largely-white-and-male/274115>; Framework: Employment in Canadian Screen-Based Media - A National Profile' (EKOS Research Associates Inc. and Paul Audley & Associates Ltd., 2004), https://www.culturalhrc.ca/sites/default/files/research/Framework_-_Employment_in_Canadian_Screen-Based_Media_-_A_National_Profile-en.pdf

CULTIVATE NONCOGNITIVE ('SOFT') SKILLS

Why don't young people vote? The answer to this question can be straightforward. Elections Canada has found that getting registered to vote is a challenge for youth - those aged 18 to 24 are less likely to receive a voter information card compared to those over 25. Meeting identification requirements and getting to a polling location are also factors that hinder youth participation in the democratic process.⁵⁵ These administrative hurdles matter but there are other more subtle elements that are shaping political motivation for young people in Canada. Examining them can help us understand the bigger picture of 'the youth vote.'

Recent research argues that voting requires not only a desire to participate but also the ability to follow through with it when faced with challenges.⁵⁶ Voting, after all, requires time and preparation — registering, bringing identification, knowing where to vote — and for young people especially, these obstacles can be overwhelming. Young people often fail to vote not because they don't want to or don't intend to, but because they lack what are called noncognitive skills (also called psychosocial skills, soft skills, or emotional intelligence).⁵⁷ Or, more plainly, the skills and strategies required to follow through on an intention.

Civic education conventionally focuses on learning facts about government and politics. Yet, ironically, the pressure of being an 'informed voter' can deter young people from voting because they don't believe they are knowledgeable enough.⁵⁸ To address these issues, we might start asking: what kinds of programs and initiatives are in place that develop young people's noncognitive skills? Can we focus on teaching young people the process of voting alongside facts about the various branches of government and how they work? This kind of hands-on learning seems to be what youth themselves are demanding. They suggest that one way for civic literacy to be strengthened in secondary schools is for Elections Canada officials to visit secondary schools to discuss the voting process.⁵⁹

A fact to consider: while the most common reason for not voting in the 2019 federal election was lack of interest in politics, the second was everyday life reasons such as being too busy.⁶⁰ Simple and straightforward approaches that are responsive to this circumstance are critical to securing a lifelong commitment to democratic engagement.

Groups such as CIVIX, discussed above, have been at the forefront of efforts to create active and engaged young Canadians.

Their flagship initiative, Student Vote, is a parallel election program that combines in-class learning about government and the electoral process with an authentic voting experience that enables young Canadians to become familiar with the voting process firsthand. In 2021, more than 800,000 Canadians from 5,900 elementary and secondary schools participated in Student Vote, voting in all 338 ridings.

55 'First-Time Electors – Youth', Elections Canada, 24 September 2021, <https://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=res&dir=rec%2Fpart%2Fyth&document=index&lang=e>

56 John B. Holbein and D. Sunshine Hillygus, *Making Young Voters: Converting Civic Attitudes into Civic Action* (Cambridge University Press, 2020).

57 Holbein and Hillygus, *Making Young Voters*.

58 Holbein and Hillygus, *Making Young Voters*.

59 Spencer Izen, 'Ways to Improve Young People's Civic Participation', Policy Options, 2021, <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/october-2021/ways-to-improve-young-peoples-civic-participation/>

60 'Reasons for Not Voting in the Federal Election, October 21, 2019', The Daily (Statistics Canada, 26 February 2020), <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/200226/dq200226b-eng.htm>

THE NEXT CHAPTER FOR CIVIC LITERACY

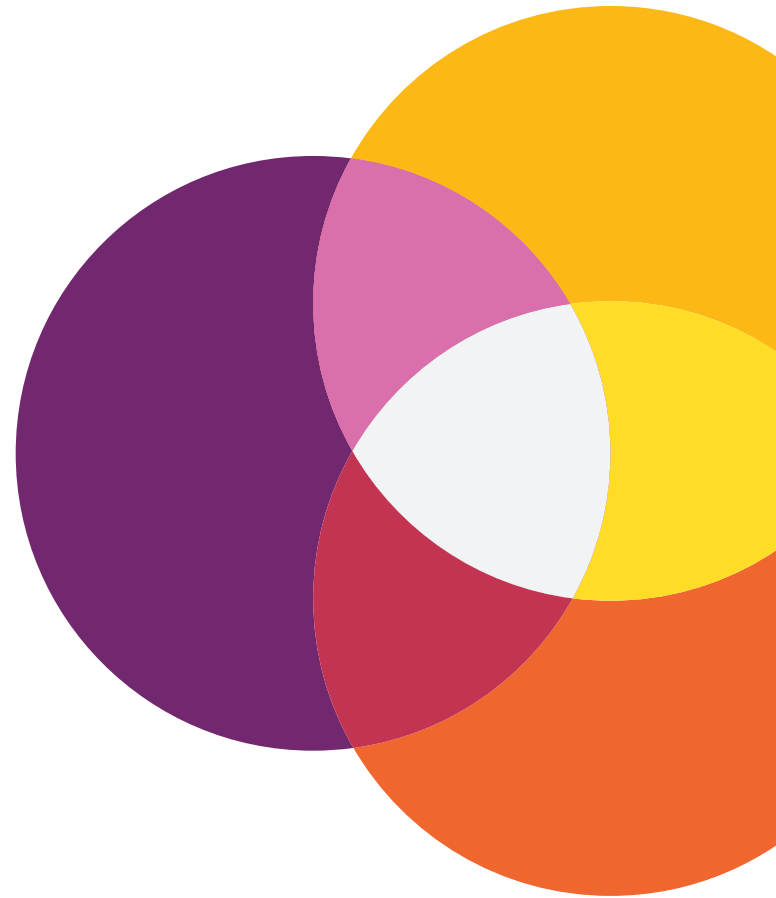
The pandemic has made clear that young people remain politically engaged and civically active — just not in ways that may be discernible based on ‘traditional’ metrics. Young people may be less inclined to vote or join a political party, but that does not mean they are politically apathetic: they may be posting political memes on Instagram or sharing their viewpoints on Twitter, TikTok, or other social media platforms. Given the correlation between civic participation and well-being, online engagement makes a difference, especially in socially distanced circumstances.

This reality presents both challenges and opportunities for civic literacy in Canada. It seems clear that digital media literacy is becoming more and more vital to a healthy democracy. While digital media literacy is taught in elementary and secondary schools across the country, what is taught varies widely. An approach that highlights both the possibilities and potential risks of online political engagement would better prepare young people to successfully navigate our complex media ecosystem. Similarly, an approach to civic education grounded in Critical Global Citizenship Education might better prepare young people to understand Canada’s role in a world shaped by asymmetrical power relations and particular histories of conquest and colonialism.

There is also an argument to be made that while we usually expect civic education to take place in elementary and secondary schools, colleges and universities could step into the breach and play a hands-on role.⁶¹ This would catch students who did not receive a comprehensive civic education earlier, and also strengthen the democratic knowledge of those who already have a solid foundation. Post-secondary students are still developing their opinions and identities, making it an ideal time for them to gain the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to become active and responsible democratic citizens. In the U.S., some colleges and universities are heeding the call, making some form of civic education mandatory. Undergraduates at Purdue University, for example, are now required to complete a civics literacy program in order to graduate.

61 Ronald J. Daniels, ‘Universities Are Shunning Their Responsibility to Democracy’, *The Atlantic*, 3 October 2021, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/10/universities-cant-dodge-civics/620261/>

In summary, dedicated civic onboarding support across the following three areas would meet youth where they are, enabling their civic onboarding in a manner that addresses the challenge posed by the pandemic and ultimately securing a generation of active citizens:



1) INVEST IN DIGITAL MEDIA LITERACY

When young people want to engage civically, they go online. Yet few have received digital media literacy training, leaving them underprepared to engage in a media ecosystem rife with misinformation, data breaches, and complex algorithms. Digital media literacy is key to keeping youth safe online and enabling them to evolve as active citizens.

2) CHALLENGE THE DOMINANT LEADERSHIP PARADIGM

The existing leadership paradigm focuses on making young people into individual leaders. Yet this model can be limiting for those who do not fit a homogeneous 'default' image of what a leader looks or acts like. Young people need to know that they do not have to be a Greta Thunberg or a Malala Yousafzai in order to be active participants in our democracy. At the same time, as a society we must ensure that we are not inadvertently streaming diverse and varied leadership potential away from our democracy.

3) CULTIVATE SOFT SKILLS

Civic literacy involves knowing about policies and how government functions, but it also entails being socialized into our political environment. Here 'soft skills' that support civility and build confidence to participate in decision-making processes are key. This approach is aimed at enabling a healthy democratic culture, one in which people understand how to disagree in a respectful manner, respond to conflict and communicate in an effective way. By steadily cultivating noncognitive skills, young people can grow to feeling empowered and secure in a range of political contexts which helps to normalize civic participation as a part of everyday life.

CONCLUSION

The pandemic provides an opportunity to revitalize our democracy. While young people are actively addressing global social, climate and racial justice issues, they are less interested in participating in 'traditional' democratic processes, such as voting, because they don't feel represented in our political processes. To address this, we must invest in civic onboarding that is responsive to the needs and evolved standards of young people. In our present moment, there is tremendous democratic potential that can have a generational impact — a dedicated and strategic effort is required to harness that power. The way forward must be explicit, intentional, and ideally measurable. It also must centre the needs and voices of young people themselves and see youth as active partners in building an inclusive and representative democracy. While this has always been true, it is of utmost importance as we start to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic.

SECURING A GENERATIONAL SHIFT

Youth civic onboarding can be achieved by diversifying partners, collaborators, and participants; establishing, standardizing, and socializing civic onboarding metrics; and committing to a bold recasting of civic engagement for young people in Canada.

INVESTING IN DIGITAL MEDIA LITERACY

- + Modernize and standardize training for secondary and post-secondary students
- + Partner with organizations doing evidence-driven work on the ground
- + Foster critical thinking
- + Support a national strategy
- + Engage communities and institutions

STAKEHOLDERS

Government, Foundations, Political parties, Technology Sector

CHALLENGING THE DOMINANT LEADERSHIP PARADIGM

- + Provide accessible gateways to participation
- + Diversify contributors
- + Legitimize varied civic contributions
- + Prioritize the group or community above the individual
- + Draw on Critical Global Citizenship Education

STAKEHOLDERS

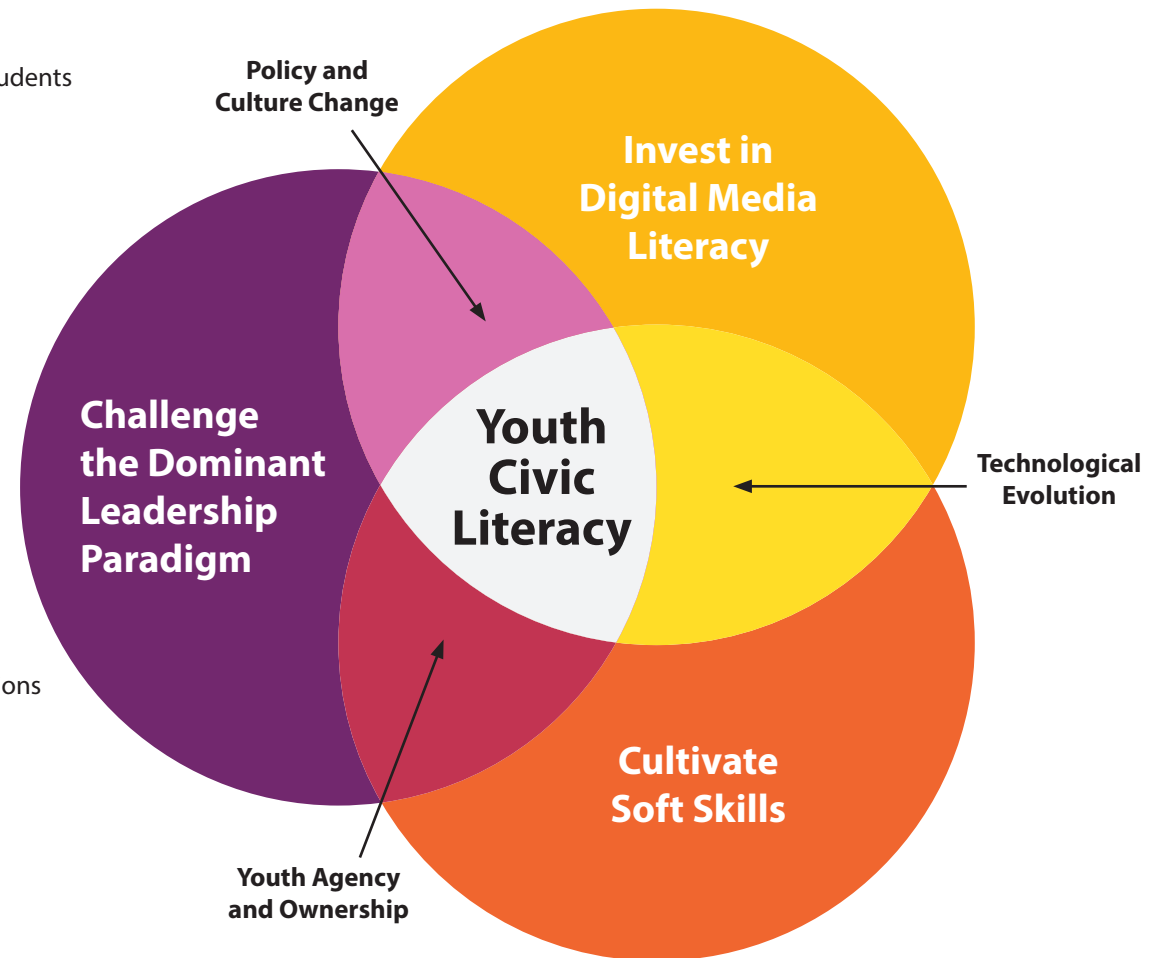
Colleges & universities, Secondary schools, Youth councils, Youth programs (extra-curricular) + teacher training, Civil society organizations

CULTIVATING SOFT SKILLS

- + Create an inclusive space for dialogue
- + Define a civic lens
- + Establish sustainable forms of meaningful engagement
- + Develop political motivation
- + Build emotional intelligence and political empowerment
- + Provide experiential learning

STAKEHOLDERS

Community organizing & training, Get out the vote groups, Participation/democracy groups, Newcomer supports



YOUTH CIVIC LITERACY ECOSYSTEM MAP

The ecosystem of youth civic literacy in Canada is dynamic and evolving. Drawing from the recommendations presented in the report, this map organizes select stakeholders in relation to potential approaches, opportunities and ways forward that can secure a generational shift in civic onboarding for youth in Canada.

APPENDIX I:

Mapping the Ecosystem of Civic Onboarding Support in Canada

Recommendation #1:

INVEST IN DIGITAL MEDIA LITERACY



These organizations place an emphasis on building resilience against disinformation, countering online hate, and empowering citizens to use technology for civic ends.

Canadian Council for Muslim Women

+ CCMW's Digital Anti-Racism Education (D.A.R.E) Project provides resources and workshops aimed at helping racialized girls and women recognize and counter online hate.

CIVIX (CTRL-F)

+ CIVIX provides elementary and secondary teachers a range of classroom-ready digital literacy resources. Their CTRL-F program is an evidence-based module to teach students how to evaluate all forms of online information.

MediaSmarts/Habilomédias

+ MediaSmarts provides numerous educational resources for the classroom and the general public on topics ranging from online disinformation and hate speech to forms of online civic engagement.

RÉCIT

+ RÉCIT is a network dedicated to developing the technology-based skills of students. The Citoyenneté à l'ère du numérique project offers classroom-ready digital literacy resources and serves as a hub connecting users to a curated collection of resources from other organizations.

Recommendation #2:

CHALLENGE THE DOMINANT LEADERSHIP PARADIGM



These organizations apply an equity lens to their leadership development efforts.

Assembly of Seven Generations

+ A7G is an Indigenous youth-led organization that focuses on cultural support and empowerment programs. They engage in community organizing and community building and create leadership opportunities for Indigenous youth.

Check Your Head

+ CYH is a youth-driven social justice oriented organization that aims to centre the concerns of marginalized youth. They offer youth leadership training opportunities to help build the knowledge and skills required to engage in grassroots community organizing.

Girl Guides of Canada

+ A core component of the Girl Guides' mission is to equip girls with the skills to engage in their local communities. Girl Guides also takes a broad, inclusive approach to leadership education that emphasizes collectivism and shared responsibility and that acknowledges the multiple ways one can exhibit leadership.

Laadliyan

+ Laadliyan aims to empower South Asian girls and women through education and engagement programming. Much of their programming emphasizes mentorship and providing young women with resources to help them navigate their academic and career paths.

Level (Vancouver Foundation)

+ Level is a youth engagement initiative that aims to build leadership capacity of Indigenous and racialized immigrant and refugee youth. They operate training programs in advocacy and public policy and offer support to youth-organized grassroots campaigns.

Platform

+ Platform provides leadership seminars, mentoring, and networking opportunities for BIPOC young women and gender diverse youth. The organization takes an explicitly anti-racist, intersectional approach to leadership training.

TakingITGlobal

+ TIG is a youth engagement organization that delivers programming to build civic capacity among young people and enable them to engage with global issues. The organization provides granting and mentorship opportunities and hosts an online platform to encourage community building.

Youth Central

+ Youth Central offers volunteer and leadership opportunities for youth aged 12-18 to equip them with community-building skills.

Youth Fellowship

+ The Youth Fellowship is a leadership development and placement program that provides Black and Muslim youth with civic engagement training and hands-on experience working with elected government representatives.

Recommendation #3:

CULTIVATE SOFT SKILLS



18

These organizations work to introduce young people to the knowledge, skills, and habits they need to become active and engaged members of their communities.

Apathy is Boring

+ Apathy is Boring is a youth-led organization that runs a variety of programs to empower youth with the knowledge and skills necessary to be active participants in democracy. Their RISE Program helps young people across Canada learn about community engagement and build community projects. The VOTE program offers resources aimed at giving young people the knowledge and motivation they need to cast a ballot on election day. The BUILD program is a 14-week training program meant to equip young Canadians with the knowledge and skills needed to advocate for policy change.

Children First Canada

+ Children First Canada serves as a strong, effective, and independent voice for children in Canada, aiming to make Canada the best place in the world for kids to grow up. Their Young Canadians' Parliament (YCP) program provides a platform for children and youth to learn to take action, get involved, and make a difference about the issues that matter most to their generation. They engage young people by working on advocacy plans to share their views with parliamentarians and speak up for their rights.

Citoyenneté jeunesse

+ Citoyenneté jeunesse is a youth-led organization aimed at supporting and encouraging youth civic participation, broadly defined. Through online resources and workshops, the organization equips young people with knowledge and skills to understand and engage with the political process. One recent project focuses specifically on amplifying and empowering culturally diverse youth within the Québec political system.

CityHive (Vancouver)

+ CityHive focuses on building youth civic capacity and provides opportunities for youth to learn about their city from local decision-makers and leaders. They deliver a number of civic education programs and provide space and support for youth to develop community-based projects.

CIVIX

+ CIVIX provides civic literacy resources for elementary and secondary teachers and manages a number of experiential learning programs. Their flagship program, Student Vote, is a parallel election program that combines classroom resources on the Canadian political process with an authentic election experience.

Elections Canada

+ Aside from serving as a hub for logistical information about voting in federal elections, Elections Canada also develops educational tools to support citizenship education in the classroom. Modules cover topics ranging from the history of voting rights to historical case studies around civic action in Canada.

FORA

+ FORA delivers education and training programming aimed at developing the leadership skills of young women in order to advance their participation in decisionmaking spaces. The Global Summit program, for instance, brings together delegates from across the world for training in advocacy, leadership and policymaking, while the Girls on Boards program places experienced young leaders on non-profit governance boards in their communities.

Recommendation #3:

CULTIVATE SOFT SKILLS



Future Majority

+ Future Majority aims to amplify the concerns of young Canadians by mobilizing young people to vote. Their online platform, Votetube, provides information on how to vote and access to videos where party leaders detail their platform on major youth issues.

Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion

+ HCCI is a local civic resource centre that aims to create an inclusive city. Their Black Youth Mentorship Program, for instance, provides group and one-on-one mentoring to Black high school students with an emphasis on building civic engagement skills to prepare them to become advocates for their community.

Institut du Nouveau Monde

+ INM aims to encourage civic participation and develop civic competencies. Among their projects, they deliver “citizenship school” programs that allow youth opportunities to engage with their political ecosystem.

MASS LBP

+ Mass LBP is an advisory organization that helps clients engage the public in democracy. Projects have included consulting on strategic planning for youth councils.

On Canada Project

+ On Canada Project is a youth-led organization that aims to foster engaged and informed citizenship by communicating directly to Millennials and Gen Z about concerns that matter to them. They use social media to disseminate credible information and to mobilize Canadian youth around equity and social justice.

Ontario Justice Education Network

+ OJEN delivers programming and develops educational tools that introduce young people to the justice system and develop the knowledge and skills required to manage legal conflicts. Their resources all frame legal capability as an essential component of civic participation.

Soft Skills & Civic Onboarding: Non-Youth Oriented

The following is a curated selection of organizations that are actively supporting civic literacy in Canada, though not oriented explicitly for youth they provide an on-ramp to active citizenship.

ABC Life Literacy Canada

+ ABC Life Literacy provides programming and resources for community learning organizations, including the Civic Voting program that includes information and activities to help adult learners understand voting basics.

Calgary Immigrant Women's Association

+ CIWA delivers programming to support refugee and immigrant women and their families. As part of their services, they offer a customized civic education program to help newcomer women develop the knowledge and skills required to achieve full and equal civic participation.

GLOCAL

+ GLOCAL focuses on grassroots initiatives to facilitate local civic engagement from a global perspective. Their YouCount.ca project is their multi-lingual civic engagement platform that aims to provide Canadians with information about Canada's democratic system so that they can more easily participate in the democratic process both at election time and beyond.

Institute for Canadian Citizenship

+ ICC conducts research and delivers programming to foster inclusivity and encourage active citizenship among new Canadian citizens. The 6 Degrees initiative is a global forum on inclusion that delivers programming and engages in advocacy to counter nativism and exclusion.

Progress Toronto

+ ProgressToronto is a political organization that advocates for progressive policies in Toronto. They engage in community organizing and also provide workshops for residents of Toronto to gain knowledge about municipal politics and acquire skills necessary to engage with their elected representatives.

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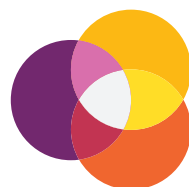
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ISBN 978-1-7781494-0-5

How to cite this Report

The Samara Centre for Democracy and Rideau Hall Foundation. (April 2022).
Learning Loss as Civic Loss: Addressing the Generational Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on
Youth Democratic Engagement. Retrieved from rhf-frh.ca/learning/learning-loss-as-civic-loss

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