

Students' Civic Engagement in Ukraine and Canada: a Comparative Analysis

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Abstract

In this article, the authors have carried out a comparative analysis of students' civic engagement in Ukraine and Canada. They have surveyed the students at Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University and compared the findings with the results of a study done by the Canadian researcher Catherine Broom at British Columbia University. Based on the research findings, the authors have identified Ukrainian students' personal political and civic experience levels and compared them with the Canadian results. The study reveals Ukrainian students' attitudes towards political and civic participation, democracy, the government in general and in comparison with Canadian data. The research results have identified the following key factors that influence Ukrainian students' civic activity: students' free time activities their attitudes and beliefs. According to the survey, gender, religious involvement, personality type, and family's political involvement do not directly influence the students' civic engagement. The survey has not reported any influence of school social study courses on civic engagement, stressing the importance of real-life experiences that result in attitudes and intrinsic motivation. The authors have also revealed examples of motivations and barriers for youth civic involvement.

Keywords: civic participation; Ukraine; Canada; students; youth engagement.

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1. Introduction

Under current conditions of democratic principles realisation – society renovation and world integration process, increasing attention of scholars is paid to the problems of civil society. Building democracy in Ukraine is impossible without the formation of active citizens, who have a sense of social responsibility. Thus, students' active engagement in civic life is the key to our society's success and progress, whereas young people comprise a considerable part of the Ukrainian population. Furthermore, civic education contributes to students' self-awareness, critical thinking, freedom of choice, comprehensive development, commitment to universal values, respect for the views of others, constructive relations and peaceful resolution of conflicts, which is crucial for both – personal development of a democratic citizen and a democratic society in general. Bright examples of youth civic activity in the last decades are student protests – the “Orange Revolution” (2004) and “Revolution of Dignity” (2014) in Ukraine and “Maple spring” (2012) in Canada. These student protests reaffirm that young people's active civic position is formed when they feel and respond to their country's needs and citizens. Nevertheless, the participation rates may rise if the youth realise that a political issue directly impacts them. Only under these circumstances, a young person is encouraged to seek change for a better life and make this world a better place to live.

These political issues in light of the latest social processes gave us the idea of comparing the Ukrainian and Canadian students' civic engagement, investigating their lived experiences, youth beliefs, and civic life actions.

2. Theoretical Background

Much research has been done in this field in Ukraine and Canada. For instance, some Ukrainian authors have focused on the issues of Ukrainian youth citizenship and civic education (Tereshchenko, 2010; Kyrlyovych, 2012) and teaching students citizenship through self-government in higher educational institutions of Canada (Vasylenko, 2009). However, we should point out that the given above works have a more speculative character and they are rarely based on empirical research. On the contrary, most Canadian researchers mainly rely on the data received from surveys with the use of different methodologies. Canadian researchers' findings illustrate the

complexity of connections between youth civic views and behaviour (Broom, 2016). Other scholars studied relationships between youth engagement and civic action. Muddiman, Taylor, Power and Moles (2019), Hooghe and Stiers (2020), White and Mistry (2016) examined the importance of families fostering youth civic participation, Martínez et al. (2016) explored how social and academic facilitators and engagement predict the performance of university students. Our study has investigated students' free time activities, and their attitudes and beliefs towards civic issues; the influence that gender, religious involvement, personality type, and family's political involvement have on students' civic engagement. Other researchers who have worked in this context are Barrett and Brunton-Smith (2014), Cohen and Chaffee (2013), Cicognani (2011), Yeung (2017), Schugurensky and Wolhuter (2020). As Broom (2016) sums up, "They refer Citizenship Education to the planned development of individuals' civic knowledge, attitudes, and skills, with the aim of developing actions towards the collective life of the community that attempt to improve that life for all" (Broom, 2016, p. 5). That explains the importance attached to the place of citizenship in teacher education. Citizenship education has been viewed from a cross-cultural perspective in the recent book "Global Citizenship Education and Teacher Education" (Schugurensky & Wolhuter, 2020) that has brought together researchers from different countries.

Along with that, the comparative pedagogical analysis of students' civic engagement in Ukraine and Canada has been carried out for the first time. So far, in Ukraine, few researchers have devoted their studies to answering the research question of why some youth are civically involved while others are not.

3. Methods

We decided to carry out the research similar to the one done at Canadian British Columbia University by Catherine Broom in 2014 and published in 2016. In her research, Broom (2016) illustrated the complexity of connections between youth civic views and behaviour, paying attention to the dynamic interaction between individuals and their lived experiences and considering citizenship education curriculum. Consequently, the objectives of our research were to compare Canadian and Ukrainian students' in the following aspects:

- Students' civic background characteristics, their free time activities and attitudes towards civic issues
- The way the characteristics mentioned above influence the students' attitudes towards civic engagement and civic activities the students participate in

The research hypothesis was that the youth in Canada and Ukraine with similar background characteristics and ways of spending free time and attitudes towards civic issues demonstrate similar civic engagement and participate in similar civic activities. Thus, the research questions are:

- Do the students' civic background characteristics in Ukraine and Canada influence their civic engagement?
- Do the students' free time activities in Ukraine and Canada have an impact on their civic engagement?
- Do the students' attitudes towards civic issues in Ukraine and Canada relate to their civic engagement?

The findings illustrate the complexity of connections between youth civic views and behaviour. Paying more attention to the dynamic interaction between individuals and their lived experiences and considering citizenship education curricula and teaching practices concerning this complexity may improve citizenship education.

Hence, in 2018 we conducted similar research at Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University students to compare the findings with Canadian study, investigating the influence of internal and external factors on youth civic engagement. The survey was conducted with students of different departments, who were the same age with Canadian peers and in the same quantity as in Canadian research. The participants in both countries were youth between the ages of 19 and 28. Ukrainian students and Canadian ones were instructed to fill out a paper form of the questionnaire that included demographic information (age/race/gender/class) and identify which free time and civic processes they are engaged in. Open-ended questions asked participants their views of government/politics, civic society/democracy and public participation, their ideal political state, and how they envisioned general public and their participation in civic life (Broom, 2016).

3.1. Ethical issues

We have written a letter to the Canadian researcher Catherine Broom (PhD, Associate Professor, Okanagan School of Education, and The University of British Columbia, an editor of Citizenship Education Research Journal) with a request to use some tools of her study. Dr Catherine Broom expressed her deep interest in conducting comparative analysis and gave us her kind permission to do that.

3.2. The survey participants

Since the research is comparative, to ensure its relevance, we have selected the same number of Ukrainian participants in the categories defined by Broom (2016) (for more information see table 1).

Table 1 The survey participants

Participants	Canadian Participants		Ukrainian participants	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Number and percentage	18 (43%)	24 (57%)	5 (11%)	37 (89%)

4. The research findings

The survey data from British Columbia University (Canada) collected by Catherine Broom (2016) and from Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University received by the authors provided the possibility to compare the students' civic background characteristics: including studying the subject "Citizenship education" in the high school curriculum, the students' personal political experience, the students' family political involvement, the students' religious involvement, the students' free time activities (for more information see table 2).

Table 2 Students' civic background characteristics

Positions	Canadian participants			Ukrainian participants		
	Yes	No	Do not remember	Yes	No	Do not remember
The students who have learnt the subject "Citizenship education" in high school and who consider this subject useful	28 (67%)	9 (21%)	5 (12%)	-	-	-
The students who have had personal political experience	11 (26%)	27(64%)	4 (10%)	10 (24%)	26 (63%)	6 (13%)
The students' politically involved families	21 (50%)	16 (38%)	5 (12%)	30 (71%)	7 (16%)	5 (13%)
	Often	Sometimes	Never	Often	Sometimes	Never
The students with religious background involvement	9 (21%)	12 (29%)	21 (50%)	5 (13%)	28 (66%)	9 (21%)

Additionally, the questionnaire contained questions about the students' free time activities concerning their spending time with friends, interacting with social media, engaging with pop culture, patriotic activities, and political activities (see table 3). These findings also established the links between the students' civic engagement and their free time activities.

Table 3 The surveyed students' free time activities

Positions	Canadian participants	Ukrainian participants
Spending time with friends	19%	21%
Interacting with social media	18%	21%
Engaging with pop culture	12%	18%
Patriotic activities	4%	2%
Political activities	1%	4%

The authors consider the research of the students' attitudes important for understanding their motives for their civic engagements within the investigated field. Thus, some survey questions concerned the students' attitudes towards political participation, democracy, and government system in their country with three answer variants: supportive (important); neutral; unimportant (do not care) (see table 4).

Table 4 The surveyed students' attitudes towards civic issues

Positions		Canadian participants			Ukrainian participants		
		supportive / important	neutral	unimportant (do not care)	supportive/ important	neutral	not supportive/ negative
Students' attitudes towards political participation		37 (88%)	3 (7%)	2 (4%)	32 (76%)	10 (24%)	-
Students' attitude towards democracy		25 (59%)	14 (34%)	3 (7%)	23 (55%)	14 (34%)	5 (11%)
Students' attitude towards government system		21 (50%)	15 (35%)	6 (15%)	2 (5%)	18 (42%)	22 (53%)

All the mentioned above issues (students' civic background characteristics, their free time activities, and students' attitudes towards civic issues) influence their attitude towards civic engagement and the choice of the civic activities the students participate in (for the former see table 5; for the latter see table 6).

Table 5 The students' attitude towards civic engagement

Position		Canadian participants			Ukrainian participants		
		active	somewhat active	rarely active	active	somewhat active	rarely active
Students' attitudes towards civic engagement		4 (10%)	18 (43%)	20 (47%)	8 (19%)	23 (55%)	11 (26%)

Table 6 Civic activities the students participate in

The choice of civic activities the students participate in positions:	Canadian participants	Ukrainian participants
Volunteering	34%	18%
Voting	31%	35%
Following political news	10%	31%
Boycotting	9%	-
Using social media to interact politically	6%	10%
Protesting	3%	2%

Discussion. The survey findings have proved the hypothesis that the youth in Canada and Ukraine with similar background characteristics, ways of spending free time and attitudes towards civic issues demonstrate similar civic engagement and participate in similar civic activities. However, the extent of the similarity may be different.

Consequently, in Canada and Ukraine among students surveyed, there were more females than males, who identified themselves as middle class. However, compared with Canadian research where there was a slight ratio difference between men and women (men 43%, women 57%), a considerable gender gap was observed (men 11%, women 89%). In our opinion, the fact that female students predominate in Ukrainian pedagogical universities is owing to the widespread belief that a teacher's profession is unpromising and not prestigious. Another reason for such discrepancy between the number of girls and boys at Ukrainian and Canadian universities, in our opinion, is that Ukrainian educational institution is single disciplinary unlike Canadian university, which is multidisciplinary. However, more research is needed in this area.

The majority of Canadian students had not had a significant lived experience related to community or governmental issues that had affected their views of government. Those who had had experiences described issues with religious Members of Parliament, the Northern Gateway pipeline, noise, zoning, transit, and politicians they did not like (Broom, 2016, p. 7). Moreover, half the young adults stated that they had grown up in politically active families in some way (voting, talking about politics or other political events). The findings that emerged from Canadian study showed that youth look at political and civic activity through the prism of volunteering, voting, following political news, boycotting and protesting (Broom, 2016).

It should be noted that Canadian youth who stated that they voted considered themselves civically active members of society. It meant that Canadian students identified voting as the significant civic activity, as those youth whose parents were active stated that their parents were primarily active by voting and some students connected their parents' actions to their levels of civic activity or their views of democratic government (Broom, 2016). Furthermore, Ukrainian students who volunteered defined themselves as civically active citizens. The beliefs of Ukrainian students about the civic engagement of young people fully coincide with the views of Canadian students, such as for them civic activism means: to take part in elections, various protests, and rallies; engage

in volunteering (help children from orphanages, homeless animals, etc.); to be a member of a public association; to attend city council meetings and classes at “Young leader’s school” etc.

The survey conducted in Ukraine showed that Ukrainian families were more actively involved in political activities (71%) compared to Canadian families (50%). However, this factor did not significantly affect the practical experience of students’ political activity. Low rates of students’ personal political experience in Ukraine and Canada (24% and 26% respectively) were explained by the fact that most of them had never involved in political activity in their country.

A small percentage of students engaged in political activity Canadian students related to such reasons: lack of time, they did not find political life relevant for themselves, they had other priorities at their life stage, or they felt powerless and believed no one was interested in youth (Broom, 2016).

Nevertheless, 88% Canadian and 76% of Ukrainian students recognised political activity as a vital task for every conscious citizen, but students contradict themselves and their own beliefs in practice. Here are some quotes of Canadian students about the importance of engaging young adults in politics: “It’s our government, we should run it, and our voice can’t be heard unless we participate, vote, protest, volunteer, make yourself represented”; “So we can change the way how politics works, and so the government does something good” (Broom, 2016, p.8).

Such lack of students’ interest in political activity in both countries, in our opinion, affected the low percentage of students (10% Canadians) and (19% Ukrainians) involving in civic activity. The vast majority of students were only occasionally active (43% Canadians, 55% Ukrainians) and the rest (47% Canadians, 26% Ukrainians) only sometimes joined community events. The most popular among Ukrainian and Canadian students’ types of civic engagement were voting and volunteering.

Based on the findings of our survey, Ukrainian students as compared to Canadian students are more active in voting participation (35% Ukrainians; 31% Canadians), are more aware of the political life of the country as they follow political news (31% Ukrainians; 10% Canadians), they are more likely to discuss politics using social networks (10% Ukrainians; 6% Canadians). Meanwhile, Canadian students more than Ukrainian youth volunteer (34% Canadians; 18% Ukrainians), boycott (9% Canadians; 0% Ukrainians), protest (3% Canadians; 2% Ukrainians),

which means that Canadian students more do than talk. Among Ukrainian students, only (2%) are members of a political party or community organisation. Though Canadian students are less likely to follow political news and do not actively discuss politics in social media, we conclude that Canadian youth, in contrast to Ukrainian students, are more focused on solving practical problems.

A small percentage of student engagement to civic activity Ukrainian students account for other priorities, lack of time and experience, and despair of a change for the better. Here are some students' quotes of Ukrainian higher educational establishment concerning their civic activity: "in our country, participation in civic activities is complicated, unprofitable and sometimes even dangerous"; "I had no opportunity to join one"; "we are too young and inexperienced"; "I don't believe in change for the better"; "I don't find it interesting"; "I don't think it's necessary", "I engage in civic activity at our university whenever there is a need"; "occasionally I join a public protest or attend rallies or community events"; "I am not invited to join", "lack of time and even money".

Thus, students in Ukraine do not believe that civic activity can change something in their country; they do not benefit from it for them and their country. Some students do not know how to engage in a civic activity or wait for a personal invitation to join it. Ukrainian youth, as well as Canadian, consider their young age and inexperience as a disadvantage that prevents them from creating a better future and being agents of change. However, 19% of Ukrainian students' answers turn out to be quite the opposite to the previous ones: "I participate in voting, provide temporary shelters for homeless pets and seek them owners", "attend Young Leader's School", "I believe in change for the better and I start working in the political sphere", "I attend city council meetings", "I am actively engaged in volunteering because I love animals and try to help them".

The findings that emerged from the survey conducted in Ukraine revealed that half of the students (53%) had a negative or not supportive attitude towards Ukrainian government, most of the rest (42%) had neutral views, and (5%) of students had a positive attitude towards political leaders of the country. On the contrary, in Canada, half of the students (50%) had positive views towards the Canadian government and another half (50%) had a neutral attitude towards it. Consequently, we found out that common for both countries were a high percentage of students who had a neutral attitude towards the political situation and government in their country. Although

youth participation in civic and political life was limited, students of both countries stated that it was important for people to participate in government state-creative and public process.

Also deserved our attention the attitude of Ukrainian and Canadian students towards democracy – (55%) of Canadian and (55%) of Ukrainian students had a positive attitude towards democracy. Recent research (Sunil & Verma, 2018) found that moral identity internalisation significantly predicted civic engagement attitude and moral identity symbolisation significantly predicted civic engagement behaviour. (41%) of Canada youth and (34%) of their Ukrainian peers had a neutral or indifferent attitude to the democratic system. It should be noted that 8% of surveyed Ukrainian students mentioned their negative attitude towards democracy, arguing that democratic system was not also perfect: “democracy is a utopia, it exists only on paper”; students even quoted Winston Churchill: “Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others”. (3%) of Ukrainian adults stated that they did not care about democracy. Meanwhile, there were no students among respondents at the Canadian university with a negative attitude to the democratic system.

Although half of the Ukrainian respondents (53%) had a negative attitude towards government, they still had a positive view of democracy (55%). We can conclude that youth in both countries value democratic forms of government and support democracy; however, they are not eager to be involved in political or civic activity, though they understand their importance.

In response to the question – “Is it necessary to engage in the civic activity?” – just over three-quarters (76%) of Ukrainian university students gave a positive answer, while nearly one quarter (24%) confirmed their neutral attitude. Here are some student quotes:

“It is important not only to complain about the political system in the country but also to do something in order to improve the situation”; “It is crucial to everyone to engage in civic activities, because if we do not do that, what kind of state we will have?”; “I believe in changes for the better, and I consider it necessary to involve in civic activity as much as one can, because the fate of our state is in our hands”; “if we want changes in the country we should start with ourselves first”, “it’s easy to say but hard to do”; “people themselves build their happiness”; “everything depends on a person - maybe someone cannot live without civic or political activity, and someone does not see any point in it”; “citizens should live like in one family where all members help and support each other”; “active citizenship determines our future and the future of our state”; “if we sit on our

hands, life in our country won't improve"; "if social activity solved something, then it would be important to me".

When students of both countries were asked to depict their ideal government, many young people described features that were often included as crucial elements of democracy: equality, fairness, responsibility, patriotism, representation of people, and listening to the people and freedom.

However, despite such disappointment with the government, 66% of Ukrainian students believed that student youth could change their country's life for the better: "Absolutely, because we are the country's future"; "we can, for sure, we are a generation of new priorities, thoughts, ideas", "students are the future of our nation, who bring new ideas that will help change the life of our country for the better"; "yes, we can, as we are the young generation with modern views and only when we get together we can change our country's life for the better"; "of course we can, students are full members of the society"; "young people are the future! We should always keep abreast of the developments in order not to allow deception, manipulation, and humiliation".

Nevertheless, 18% of surveyed Ukrainian students considered impossible for them to bring radical social change: "it's impossible, students don't get any levers of power"; "students decide anything". 16% of Ukrainian participants were not sure that students could be agents of change, they doubted or found it possible only under certain circumstances: "if not only the youth defend their rights, but the older generation as well"; "if youngsters engage in volunteering or participate in voting"; "everyone can try to change something, but a good result is possible only with the officials' support"; "in an ideal world – yes, but in real-world society is governed by oligarchic structures"; "with state support that helps youth"; "if students understand what they are doing"; "it's rather a controversial question".

Thus, we have concluded that Ukrainian students want to live in a democratic society. However, they are not eager to build it, such as they do not see a connection between democracy and civic initiative. A study suggests that Ukrainian youth do not realise that democracy is the people's government; it implies the broadest possible involvement of all citizens in state decision-making processes.

In our opinion, the low rates of students' involvement in political and civic activities are also related to the ways students spend their free time. According to our study's findings, a few students engage in political or civic activity in their free time. The survey showed that the vast majority of Ukrainian (21%) and Canadian students (19%) spent their free time with friends and interacting with social networks (21%) of Ukrainians youths, (18%) of Canadians peers. Moreover, 18% of surveyed Ukrainian students and 12% of Canadian youth liked engaging with pop culture. The least students wanted to spend their spare time on political - (4%) Ukrainian adults, (1%) Canadian youths and patriotic activity – (2% Ukrainians), (4% Canadians) respondents. It meant that surveyed Ukrainian students more than their Canadian peers spent their free time with friends, interacted on social media, and talked about the political situation in their country. Nevertheless, Canadian students, unlike Ukrainian youths, engaged more in patriotic activity in their free time.

The study results carried out in Ukraine and Canada have not confirmed any relationship between gender, personality type, learning school subjects and the level of a person's civic activity. While some studies have found associations between personality type or personality traits and forms of civic engagement, and there is emerging interest in this area (Dinesen, Norgaard & Klemmensen, 2014). According to Molyneux (2017), "Television viewers and those who pay attention to breaking news and crime are less civically engaged". Banks (2017) describes the schools' role in reducing failed citizenship and helping marginalised groups become efficacious and participatory citizens in multicultural nation-states. Evans, Marsicano, and Lennartz (2019) examine the missions, infrastructure, activities, and outcomes related to civic engagement across postsecondary institutional characteristics and conclude that a residential student population is strongly associated with an increased emphasis on civic engagement.

In contrast to the Canadian study (Broom, 2016), we have not revealed any link between religious activity and students' volunteering. Hence, we have concluded that common for both countries are: low percentage of students' civic and political involvement, which are related to the internal factor - beliefs (concerning government, democracy), which have a direct impact on students' motivation and efficacy to bring change. The findings that have emerged from our study prove Ballard's idea that: "Youth have various beliefs, concerns, desires, and interests leading them toward or away from civic involvement. Knowing what motivates youth, especially those with varying civic opportunity levels, adds to the understanding of civic development processes and has

potential practical implications for facilitating civic involvement among youth” (Ballard, 2014). Our study confirms the theory that “Experiences are real learning events through which we build key concepts that structure our thinking. Experiences have the potential to be civically empowering” (Dewey, 1916)

Based on Canadian (Broom, 2016) findings and our research, family political involvement has not been statistically significant. Muddiman et al. (2019) theory has contradicted our study results: “Parents seem to play a key role in providing a route into civic participation and encouraging our young participants to get involved – even more so than positive experience at school or through friendships with peers”. Our survey supports other researchers’ work (Bennett, Freelon and Wells, 2010) according to whom young people are primarily active in the traditional activities of voting and volunteering and this way they become dutiful citizens.

Conclusions. The research demonstrates the complexity of youth views, multiple factors that influence citizenship attitudes, and do not always coincide with students’ behaviours. The empirical study conducted at Canadian and Ukrainian universities found that in both countries there has not been an established clear relationship between civic background characteristics such as the studying of school subject “Citizenship education”, class, gender, age, temperament, religious activity, and civic engagement of young people. Unlike Canadian researcher Catherine Broom, we have not discovered the apparent connection between religious activity and student volunteering or religious activity and civic engagement. Nevertheless, the study has confirmed that young people whose parents are politically active citizens are more likely to be socially active.

The study confirms that the students’ free time activities in Ukraine and Canada have had a limited impact on their civic engagement. It appears that youth have been limited in civic engagement in everyday life and spending their free time as they consider civic involvement and political life as they are not relevant to themselves at their ages. Students think that they lack experience, knowledge, and cannot change the life of their country and its citizens significantly. These are the main reasons why Canadian and Ukrainian students have not participated much in civic duties and activities, especially while spending their own free time. The conducted study indicates that Ukrainian students have been more active than Canadian students in voting.

In comparison with Canadian students, Ukrainian students have been more knowledgeable about their country’s political life, and they have been more likely to discuss politics on social

media. In contrast, Canadian students have been more active in volunteering, boycotting, and protesting, which means they have been more focused on practical problem-solving. We suppose that having life experience related to public or civic affairs only contributes to a better understanding of the community's needs and civic activity development. In our comparative study, the theory that having personal experience of civic activity will only contribute to the citizen's active civic engagement has had some practical application, but only under the circumstance that this gained experience is positive.

It has been proved that students' attitudes toward government and democracy have had the most significant impact on students' civic engagement, even greater than studying the subject "Civic Education" at school. Students have firmly believed that civic activities involvement will only contribute to the development of democracy in their country. Overall, Canadian students have expressed a positive attitude toward government, democracy, and civic engagement. It has been found out that 50% of the surveyed Ukrainian students, on the contrary, have had a negative attitude towards the government. Ukrainian and Canadian students' views on the main features of an "ideal government" have coincided since they are as follows: justice, honesty, competence, responsibility, patriotism. A distinctive feature is that Ukrainian students' responses demonstrate some hopelessness and despair related to the authorities. Most Ukrainian students have dreamt of an incorruptible government that will care about its citizens, the government that will consist of competent officials who know their country's history and will not repeat the mistakes.

Understanding why youths are not civically active can help teachers provide opportunities for their civic engagement and help them understand that government affairs are relevant to them. Teaching the subject "Citizenship Education" for high school Ukrainian students was approved by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (Order № 1407) only in 2017. Scholars and undergraduate educators need to develop curricula that build upon the ways students currently participate in democracy (Nelson, Lewis & Lei, 2017). An underexplored area that has emerged from this study is how to engage and motivate youth's civic, political and volunteer involvement.

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