



Traditional influences and digital media's impact on political socialization and youth engagement

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Abstract

This review paper synthesizes recent literature (2010–2024) on political socialization and youth political participation, with particular attention to the changing role of traditional and digital agents. Using a systematic review approach guided by thematic analysis, studies were collected from Scopus, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and SpringerLink. The review examines the influence of family, educational institutions, peer groups, traditional media, and digital media on youth political attitudes and behaviors across diverse cultural and political contexts. The findings indicate that while family and schools remain foundational agents of political learning, digital media has transformed political engagement by expanding opportunities for participation while simultaneously increasing exposure to misinformation, polarization, and ideological fragmentation. The review also highlights differences in political socialization across democratic, authoritarian, and post-conflict societies. The study emphasizes the importance of civic education and digital literacy in fostering informed, responsible, and democratic youth participation.

Keywords: Political socialization, youth political participation, digital media, civic education, misinformation, political engagement

Introduction

Political socialization is an interaction that makes political values, beliefs and behaviors real for people and helps to explain their sense of themselves as citizens of the political community (Greenstein 1970; Jennings and Niemi 1968). Political socialization is shaped by a complex system, which contains family, educational environment, peer groups and media presentations (Furman, Szczepańska, and Maison 2022) ^[14]. As a result, scholars have claimed this process forms democratic citizens and renders the political system more efficient (Neundorff and Smets 2017^[29]; Greenstein 1970; Jennings and Niemi 1968). Nonetheless, the context in which young people are socialized into political worlds has dramatically changed over the past decades primarily because of digital technologies, especially through social media websites (Banaji and Buckingham 2010; Artamonova 2023) ^[3, 4]. Digital media has changed how youth are receiving political information, how youth are eating political content, and how youth are participating in the civic discourse. Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, and Twitter have provided young people with avenues for the expression of their politics and organizing on social issues (Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral 2018; Pennycook *et al.* 2020; Artamonova 2023) ^[3, 31, 41]. Meanwhile, these sites have brought up issues such as the spread of misinformation and increased political polarization (Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral 2018) ^[41]. The potential for young people to develop misinformed or partisan political attitudes and, in turn, intensify society's cleavages, as a result of the spread of false information, particularly on social media, has raised concerns. The possibility of youth developing misinformed or partisan political attitudes and, consequently, deepening societal divisions as a result of false information, especially on social media, has been raised. Furthermore, political socialization is different in different cultural and

geopolitical settings. Post-conflict societies may have different patterns of engagement among youth because of their different historical and social experiences (Rady *et al.* 2015) ^[32]. Youth in stable democracies, on the other hand, tend to be more engaged in formal political activities like voting and campaigning (Grasso & Ghigni 2022; Weiss 2020) ^[39, 42]. Authoritarian systems of government tend to emphasize conformity and compliance during political socialization, which restricts opportunities for critical political participation (Bochkov 2022) ^[39].

This is a review paper, which brings together the results of research studies on political socialisation and youth political participation (Ahmed 2024; Furman, Szczepańska and Maison 2022) ^[14, 33]. It is based on various cultural and political backgrounds and examines various political socialisation agents like family, education, peers and media and their impact on young people's political attitudes and behaviours (Dekker, German and De Landtsheer 2020) ^[42]. The study is centered on comparison of contemporary views to reflect on the relevance of digital media compared to the impact of new challenges, such as false information, polarization and civic disengagement. This analysis will thus be useful for having a deep understanding of the political socialization process in the current context and will be particularly helpful for policymakers, teachers, and researchers who want to engage in promoting better youth involvement in different forms of political involvement.

Methodology

The review process follows a systematic approach to review the current literature on the topic of political socialization and youth participation and is achieved by combining an analytical framework and thematic synthesis (Dekker, German, and De Landtsheer 2020) ^[31]. The methodology guarantees that major studies are correctly included,

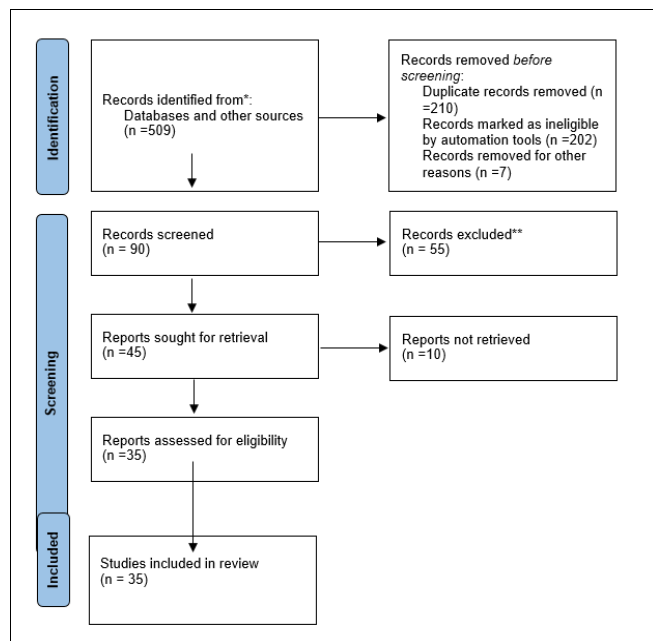
ensuring a balanced and systematic investigation (Neundorf and Smets 2017) ^[29].

Literature Search and Selection

In the Scopus, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and SpringerLink databases, a systematic search is performed (Thomsen and Olsen 2016) ^[36]. The terms used were: political socialization, youth, “South Asian”, digital media, family influence, educational impact, and political engagement (Neundorf and Smets 2017) ^[29]. Recommendations for articles published from 2010 to 2024^[1], are considered to reflect recent trends and findings (Ahmed 2024) ^[1].

Study Selection

This flowchart illustrates the selection of relevant studies from the studies that were included in the analysis, following the PRISMA guidelines below:



Thematic Categorization

1. The studies are organized into themes for analysis. These categories include:
2. Family, school and peers, traditional agents of socialization (Ahmed 2024; Furman, Szczepańska, Maison 2022) ^[1, 14].
3. Media influence – traditional and digital media and misinformation (Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral 2018; Artamonova 2023) ^[3, 41].
4. Cultural and Contextual Variations: regional differences and societal influences (Neundorf & Smets 2017; Reidy *et al.* 2015) ^[29, 32].

Data Collection and Analysis

The studies selected are summarized with the aid of an organized framework which has integrated relevant findings on the questions of agents involved, mechanisms described, and eventual results of political socialization. The observations are combined using a method of quantitative observations, while structured and analysed by theme, the observations are qualified. Comparative analysis find differences between youth's presence in democratic settings and authoritarian settings (Bochkaev 2022; Cazorla-Martín *et al.* 2023) ^[5, 8].

Reliability and Rigor

According to the guidelines an itemized review and analysis are carried out to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings. The study has reduced the bias in this aspect by cross referencing and data triangulation and validated the trends of the findings. Studies with methodological issues are critically evaluated and take into account the variety of viewpoints in the field (Bochkaev 2022) ^[34].

Findings and Discussions

a. First generation agents of political socialization:

Traditional agents of political socialization

Family is the first agent of political socialization

Among the first and most important agents of political socialization is the family (Furman, Szczepańska, and Maison 2022^[14]; Dekker, German, and De Landtsheer 2020) ^[31]. Parents and other family members teach their children simple political attitudes, beliefs and behaviors at a tender age (Çiçek 2023; Van Ditmars 2022^[11, 39]; Dekker, German, and De Landtsheer 2020; Jennings & Niemi 1968). Empirical research always reveals that children who grow up in political contexts are more likely to have strong political identifications and participate in political activity later on in life (Ahmed 2024; Furman, Szczepańska, and Maison 2022) ^[1, 14]. Authors believe that the family is the main institution in which crucial values of governance, power, and social values are embedded (Çiçek 2023; Furman, Szczepańska and Maison 2022^[3, 14]; Dekker, German and De Landtsheer 2020; Jennings & Niemi 1968). For instance, children learn about political events, their behavior and their attitudes towards social issues from their parents, who serve as role models for their children (Çiçek 2023^[3]; Dekker, German, and De Landtsheer 2020) ^[31]. This process has been proven to be an effective way of securing political continuity over the generations. Often, children come to take on the political party identification of their parents, hence establishing political affiliation across generations (Wilson 1981). As children become adolescents and adults, the effects of family socialization are bound to mingle with other forms of influence by peers and the media. Familial units are more controlling in authoritarian settings, instilling conformity to state ideologies in people (Bochkov 2022). But in democratic settings, families are more likely to encourage independent thinking, critical thinking and citizenship (Furman, Szczepańska and Maison, 2022) ^[14].

Formal and informal socialization in the educational institutions

The schools have an important role in political socialization among the youth. In these institutions, students are systematically taught about civic life in the form of history, governance, and economics, geography, and political science (Furman, Szczepańska, and Maison 2022; Thomsen and Olsen 2016) ^[14, 36]. Formal education enhances youth's civic knowledge and political efficacy that is the feeling of having a say in politics (Myong & Liu 2022) ^[20]. Furthermore, students by practicing in student elections, debates, student governments, are able to gain a first-hand experience of getting concrete political skills and a better understanding of the democratic process (Ahmed 2024; Furman, Szczepańska and Maison 2022) ^[1, 14]. Educational institutions also impart the hidden curriculum to students, aside from the formal curriculum (Beerbohm and Davis

2021)^[17]. The hidden curriculum refers to the set of standards, principles and behaviors that children learn during their daily interaction with teachers, other children, and the norms of the school (Patel 2011; Furman, Szczepańska and Maison 2022)^[14, 30]. These are informal elements of socialization that help to consolidate ideas about authority, citizenship, participation and group dynamics (Pathania 2018). For example, values like respect for authority, respect for rules, and respect for collective activity are often reinforced in schools, which shape political attitudes. The study also revealed differences between the civic involvement and critical thinking nurtured in democratic and authoritarian contexts: civic involvement and critical thinking are promoted by schools in democratic contexts, while in authoritarian contexts schools foster obedience and loyalty to the state (Furman, Szczepańska, & Maison 2022; Neundorff & Smets 2017)^[14, 29].

Social learning and political identity formation with Peer Groups.

Peer groups are one of the most important socializers of political socialisation during adolescence stage (Golden *et al.* 2021)^[17]. Peer groups are one of the key platforms in which people question, challenge and reinforce their political views (Golden *et al.* 2021; Patel 2011)^[19, 30]. According to social learning theory, people learn behaviors and attitudes through observation and interaction with their social environment. Binder *et al.* 2020^[7] found that peer discussions about politics are an important influence on the political views of young people and determine their level of engagement. Adolescents' sources of validation are peer groups. There are common discourses and interaction among peer groups that strengthen political beliefs. They are relevant and important in the formation of political identities when a change occurs in a society (such as leaving the upper secondary education system for tertiary education where they are now experiencing several belief systems on politics; Furman, Szczepańska, Maison 2022; Golden *et al.* 2021)^[14, 17]. This stage results in higher political consciousness and more independent political attitudes (Patel 2011)^[30]. Peer groups also create conducive environments for activism and political action in some instances, where young people are able to organize, protest or discuss politics in an amenable environment (Tyler & Iyengar 2022; Golden *et al.* 2021)^[17]. However, in more ideologically polarized or homogeneous peer groups, people face less political diversity (Golden *et al.* 2021)^[17].

b. Media forms of political socialization: Traditional and digital forms

A new era of media has emerged in the current political socialization process, where media is more central to the process of political socialization (Banaji and Buckingham 2010; Garramone and Atkin 1986)^[4, 15]. Traditional media, such as television, radio and newspapers have, however, traditionally formed the core of political attitude and behaviour. One theory, called agenda-setting theory by McCombs and Shaw 1972^[26], states that the media can influence public opinion by emphasizing some issues and ignoring others, which influences public opinion and political engagement. There is some evidence that young people's political attitudes are affected by the news and political programmes on traditional media, particularly if they are content with or about issues that concern the lives

of young people (Garramone and Atkin 1986)^[15]. But the influx of digital media among the younger generation has changed the nature of political socialization. Digital technologies like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, TikTok offer an interactive space for users to interact with political information, express their views, and participate in political conversations (Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral 2018; Artamonova 2023)^[3, 41]. These forums provide the opportunity for youth to hear other political opinions, which can result in more vibrant expressions of political engagement and advocacy. Social media has opened up a new space for political participation, one in which it is possible to rally, advocate for a variety of causes, and mobilize friends (Benkler 2006). On the other hand, having digital media as a tool in political socialization process also has its difficulties apart from the advantages (Chen and Stilinovic 2020)^[10]. Research has also indicated that digital media can generate more polarized political opinions since most consumers of information are likely to receive only information that is consistent with their political identity and beliefs (Vosoughi, Roy and Aral 2018)^[41]. Moreover, false news spreads faster on social media than true news, which negatively impacts political behavior and participation. Pennycook *et al.*, 2020^[42] examined the hidden truth effect, whereby when presented with false information embedded in a brief context, individuals are more likely to believe that the false claims are true. This brings into focus the importance of digital literacy in the current political socialization, particularly the struggle against false news.

Patterns and Trends of Youth Political Engagement

Youth participation in politics has always been a pivotal part in political system formation. In the past, the young have played a major role in all kinds of political movements, demonstrations and various forms of activism. But in the past few decades, a great deal has changed regarding the level of political engagement of youth. There are several reasons for the variations of political participation, such as technological changes, changes in political environment and changes in attitudes to political frameworks and institutions. This section looks at general patterns and trends in youth political engagement, as well as how new digital media are changing the way that youth engage politically.

Loss of traditional modes of political expression.

One of the most witnessed trends in the last ten years about youth participation in political activities is the decline in the traditional forms of participating in the process, such as voting and party identification (Malschinger, Valls, and Flecker 2023)^[24]. Several studies have revealed that the young are less inclined than older age groups to engage in electoral activities or feel attached to political parties (Malschinger, Valls, and Flecker 2023; Grasso & Ghigni 2022)^[24, 39]. This can be seen both in mature democracies and new political systems. This loss is due to a number of factors. For one, many young people complain about the corruption, incompetence, or absences of traditional political frameworks, and see them as not even relevant to their needs (Malschinger, Valls, and Flecker 2023; Binder *et al.* 2015)^[24, 32]. For young people, democratic systems in countries with long democratic tradition may seem to lack effective political parties to solve some of the sweeping questions that humanity is facing, e.g., Global warming, income inequality, social inequality, etc. This feeling of

disillusionment is compounded by an increase in polarization in the political arena, which could push younger generations further away from the mainstream political discourse (Malschinger, Valls, & Flecker 2023; Tyler & Iyengar 2022) ^[24, 39]. However, a decrease in more traditional forms of political engagement doesn't necessarily mean that young people are not interested in politics, it may simply be a change in how they are engaging politically. An increase in young people's political and activist expression outside of traditional channels (Malschinger, Valls and Flecker 2023) ^[24].

Digital and Non-Institutional Political Engagement: Shift of Youth Engagement.

Politics has undergone an unprecedented change, and the shift is towards digital and non-institutionalized political action. Digital media, especially social media, has drastically transformed the political engagement of young people (Gorodova *et al.* 2024; Chen and Stilinovic 2020) ^[1, 10]. Political participation has largely shifted to the online sphere for today's youth, and platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and TikTok have become key spaces for political discussion, activism and mobilization. The digital tools give youth the opportunity to obtain political information, establish friendship with similar-minded peers, and join political movements outside of the traditional institutional setting (Bekmagambetov *et al.* 2023) ^[11]. Social media has made it possible to be the first to hear news, events and ideas, and made the engagement of political matters more democratic, meaning that youth voices were heard regarding their opinions and concerns about politics (Bekmagambetov *et al.* 2023) ^[5]. Furthermore, social media can serve as a powerful mobilization platform for protests, campaigns and advocacy, primarily around issues which are social, rather than political, in nature, like climate change, racial equity and LGBTQ+ rights (Artamonova 2023) ^[3]. Digital media are not just about the passivity of receiving information. It can make a significant impact in debates in politics, mobilize people in just a short time, and encourage people to participate through online petitions, hashtag campaigns and viral content (Gorodova *et al.* 2024; Xu, Wang, and Yang 2020) ^[18, 44]. One of the best examples of digital platforms enabling global youth political activism on behalf of youth around the world would be Greta Thunberg's global youth climate strikes (Gorodova *et al.* 2024; Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral 2018) ^[18, 41].

Youth polarisation and fragmentation.

One thing is evident among younger people: polarization and polarization of political opinions. As the political world splits, more and more young people are increasingly veering toward one side or the other of ideology, driving up political polarization. Digital media is the tool through which this takes place; it is a way to produce 'echo chambers' within which an individual is likely to encounter a greater amount of content reinforcing their existing belief and identity (Bekmagambetov *et al.* 2023) ^[5]. This can exacerbate political divisions and result in a much more polarized political landscape. The social identity theory, when taken into the realm of political socialization, argues that political identity is gradually tied to social identities, like race, gender, and socioeconomic status, which further nurture a polarized and highly charged political climate (Tyler & Iyengar 2022) ^[39]. However, recent youth are more likely to

feel a connection to the political movements and causes that are more closely connected to their own personal experiences, and are therefore more likely to feel attached to their own group and less attached to the out-groups that are alien to them, leading to increased polarization (Ha 2022) ^[34].

At the same time, certain youth are giving up on traditional political affiliations altogether, adopting political identities—anti-statist and anti-authoritarian ones—that are, per se, anti-political. Political desecularization also gives rise to a situation where young people participate in various, frequently conflicting, political movements pushing for different, alternative models of society and politics (Ha 2022) ^[39].

The nature of misinformation and false news

Misinformation and fake news have become a major obstacle for youth to political participation in digital media. Misinformation is capable of affecting political beliefs, the perception of trust within institutions and even political behaviour. Vosoughi *et al.* 2018^[41] found that false information spreads faster than true information on social media, and that adolescents are more susceptible to receiving as well as sharing unverified information about politics.

In addition to being highly adept at navigating online environments, young people are also known as the digital natives; however, they are lacking in important critical media literacy skills to be able to identify trusted sources of information and misinformation. This has led advocates to propose that digital literacy should be part of school curricula and planning to ensure that young people are informed consumers of information and more equipped to navigate the increasingly complex political environment that is influenced by social media.

c. Cultural and Contextual Differences in Youth Political Socialization

This section focuses on cultural and contextual influences on youth political socialisation, such as variations in political systems, regions and history.

Political socialization among youth in a democratic setup

In democratic societies, political socialization of youth focuses on participation, civic engagement and democratic values. Voting participation, representation, and personal freedoms are emphasized in democratic settings, such as educational institutions, as political competence and political power belief (Neundorf and Smets 2017; Reidy *et al.* 2015) ^[29, 32]. The youth of most democratic nations often are taught differing viewpoints, and political dialogue, discussion, and demonstration are more often than not encouraged as vital elements of democratic life (Thomsen and Olsen 2016) ^[36]. In these cases, the young people are socialised to participate in organised political movements, such as voting and civil rights movements, and learn to respect freedom of speech and political pluralism (Bekmagambetov *et al.* 2023) ^[11]. For instance, in this case, the involvement of young people in activism in the context of democratic processes, such as climate change and racial justice activism, highlights the encouragement of young people to take action and shape political processes (Grasso & Ghigni 2022) ^[39].

The media, research and public discussions are more readily available to adolescents in democratic societies. Such

information helps to grow political awareness and informed political views. Digital media has further empowered the youth in democracies by allowing them access to global political movements and the ability to mobilize for social change (Artamonova 2023; Bekmagambetov *et al.* 2023; Xu, Wang, and Yang 2020) ^[3, 44].

Political socialization among youth in an authoritarian setup

On the other hand, adolescents in authoritarian systems have a completely different political situation. In such cases, socialization in politics is often geared towards the idea of obedience, loyalty to the state, and the adoption of the ruling party's ideology. The state generally maintains a tight grip on the educational institutions and mass media, and there is a high degree of censorship or restriction of discourse. As a result, the citizens of authoritarian regimes are less likely to be inclined to public political discussion or to voice dissenting views (Bochkov, 2022) ^[39]. Instead, political socialization is about obedience, loyalty and patriotism. Political engagement in authoritarian regimes typically takes place within the confines of state-sponsored organizations and events: Youth Clubs or events sponsored by the state where youth are encouraged to back the policies of the regime. Voting is typically the only way of engaging in political life; when not allowed, it is largely perceived as a ritual without any significant consequences for the entire political system. So, young people in these systems can begin to lose faith in politics or the legitimacy of political institutions. However, in some cases, youth in authoritarian settings can organize underground political groups and challenge the government's authority through subtle or covert action (Frolund Thomsen & Olsen 2017) ^[27].

Cultural and Regional Differences

Personal values and area factors also shape the ways in which young people enter the political arena. Youth political participation can vary greatly depending on cultural norms of authority, community, individualism and activism.

Western Countries

In most western democracies, there is a high emphasis placed on individualism, rights of the individual, and belief that people have the power to influence political outcomes (Zavershinskiy and Koryushkin 2022; Weiss 2020) ^[42, 45]. Young people here learn that they can make a difference in the world through voting, protesting or civil society (Bekmagambetov *et al.*, 2023) ^[5]. Applying pressure on individual rights can give much-needed political engagement but may, at the same time, allow for more political splintering since young people will be fostered to pay more attention to their personal political ideologies, sometimes at the cost of any group action (Tyler & Iyengar 2022; Weiss 2020) ^[39, 42].

For example, for many decades, political activism was considered a vehicle through which one could relate with their identity and express themselves. That is why youths' activism such as March for Our Lives, an advocacy movement that propagated gun control measures and Black Lives Matter, have proved the extent to which youth in Western societies mobilize to become political activists and resist mainstream politics and social norms (Grasso & Ghignani, 2022; Weiss 2020) ^[18, 42].

Asian Countries

Other cultural and societal expectations might also be involved in political socialization in Asian societies. For, instance in many Asian countries, political participation tends to be more collectivist, with a focus on social cohesion and respect to authority. This type of youth are also more inclined to not participate in protests, particularly when it threatens to upend social order (Lam-Knott and Cheng 2020) ^[23]. However, political participation can also take the form of less direct ways of involvement, such as participation in established institutions or through the traditional community structure (Lam-Knott and Cheng 2020; Neundorf & Smets, 2017) ^[23, 29]. In other countries, such as China, the politicalisation of young people is heavily shaped by the doctrines of the government and it is the responsibility of the youth to uphold the policies of the ruling party and contribute towards the goals of the country. When it is, political activism is frequently meshed with state interests such as economic development and social order. However, in a country that is seeing the emergence of youth activism such as India, this younger generation may begin to question power, and take up causes like environmental sustainability or social injustice (Bochkov 2022) ^[8].

Youth Politics socialization in post conflict societies

War-torn countries have different political socialisation problems for the youth. Teenagers tend to grow in an environment with a lack of trust in political systems and political polarization after a period of turmoil or political unrest (Ichilov 2014) ^[21]. Under such a context, the political socialisation tends to be strengthened through the adoption of a new national sentiment and confidence in the political system. Community-based reconciliation, civic education and participatory action programs are also socializing some youths, in the context of rebuilding democratic systems (Rady *et al.* 2018; Ichilov 2014) ^[21, 41].

In societies in recovery from conflict, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, young people are likely to be exposed to peace narratives, which diminishes the impact of ethnic divisions (Ichilov 2014) ^[21]. In many post-conflict countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, youth have the capacity to influence political activity that calls for justice and aims to challenge corrupt political systems; as seen in Sudan, Zimbabwe and many other countries where youth-led demonstrations have gained momentum.

Conclusion

The study sheds light on the complex, multifaceted political socialization process about the involvement of youth in a digitizing world. While traditional political socialisation actors such as family, schools and peer groups have always played a crucial role in developing early political values and behaviours, it is new digital media that has altered the rules of the game with respect to political socialisation, offering unprecedented opportunities for political participation but also the dangers of misinformation and polarization. The study highlights the key cultural and political differences in political socialisation during youth from democratic countries that foster active participation and critical thinking, to authoritarian countries with stronger emphasis on obedience and loyalty to the state.

Traditional norms in conjunction with the digital platforms have resulted in distinctive forms of political participation in South Asia, ranging from grassroots to digital politics,

where youth constitute a significant part of the demography. Yet while these developments have been encouraging, systemic inequities such as unequal distribution of economic welfare, political "elitism" and disparities in digital opportunities remain barriers to the full potential of youth participation. The effect of misinformation and formation of ideological echo chambers also contribute to the political complexity, which is why digital literacy and critical media consumption are important.

This paper calls for a different understanding of the fading away of the more classic, mainstream political actions like voting, not only as an expression of dissatisfaction with the political systems in place, but also as a possible indicator of new types of political action: Climate Justice movements, Anti-Corruption movements, and countless others initiated by young people addressing emerging social and political issues within their communities and the world around them. The effect of young people's political involvement needs to be boosted through dealing with unfair structures; governance that benefits all citizens; and equipping the youth with the skills required to handle complex political systems. This study will enable a better understanding of the changing trends in political learning and emphasise the need for team work in preparing young people as active agents of change in society.

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