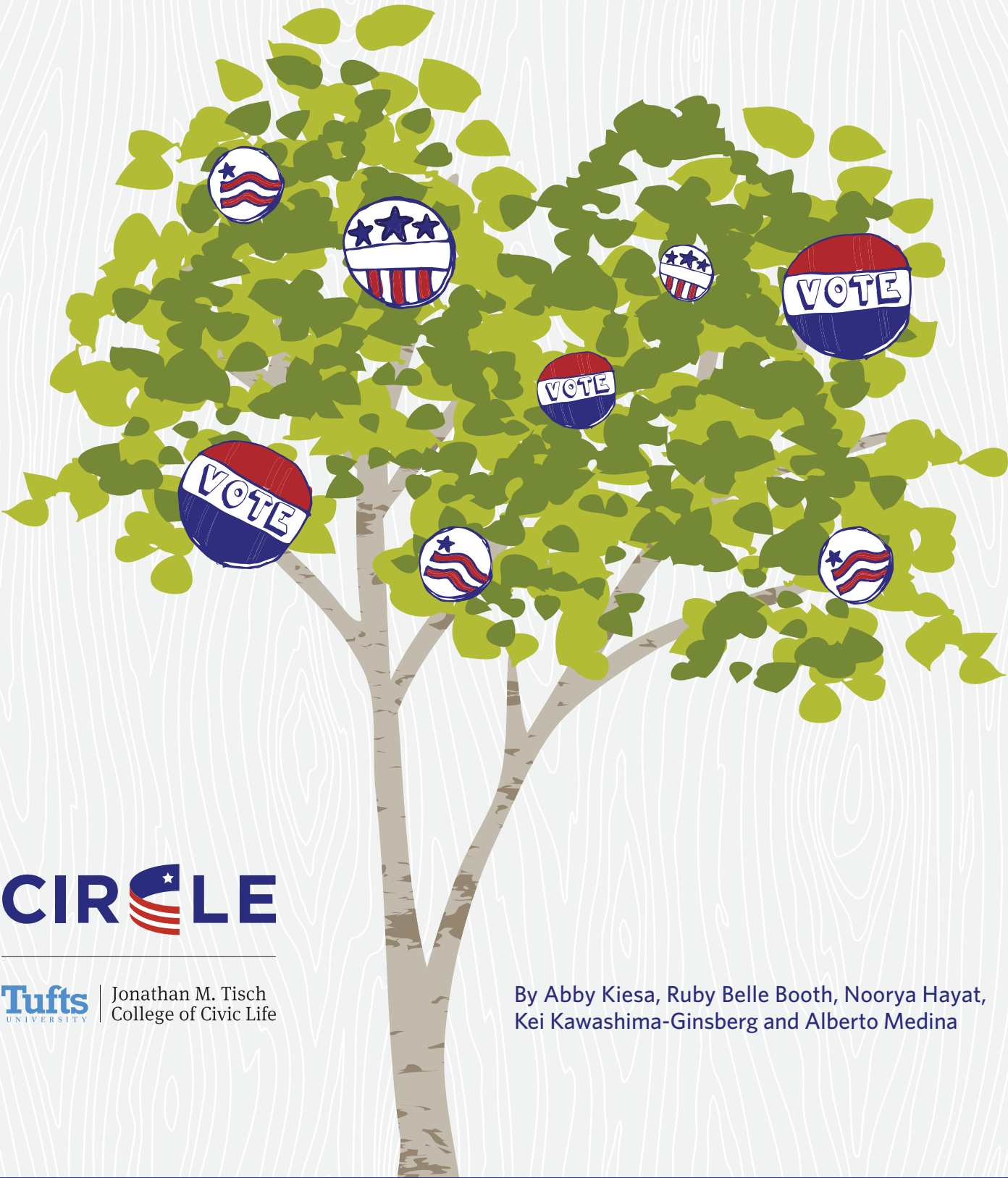


# CIRCLE Growing Voters

Building Institutions and Community Ecosystems for Equitable Election Participation



**CIRCLE**

**Tufts** UNIVERSITY | Jonathan M. Tisch  
College of Civic Life

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# Executive Summary

This report introduces and details a new framework for how institutions and communities can prepare young people—starting long before they turn 18—to become active and informed voters. We present this CIRCLE Growing Voters approach now because we recognize that, despite two recent election cycles with historic voter turnout, young people’s participation in our democracy remains inadequate and inequitable. We believe that building on these recent efforts and, especially, on the energy and enthusiasm of a rising generation of young people, now is the time to pursue a transformative shift in how we support their development into voters.

The approach outlined in this report aims to address two foundational problems identified by our own research and by decades of scholarship on youth electoral participation:

**1) There are profound inequities in access to civic learning and engagement opportunities for young people. These inequities lead to differences in voting rates by race/ethnicity, education, and other factors that prevent us from building a fully representative multiracial democracy.**

**2) The current model of bringing young people into the electorate, which relies on short-term mobilization tied to election cycles and overly focuses on “likely voters,” is grossly insufficient and further reifies existing inequities.**

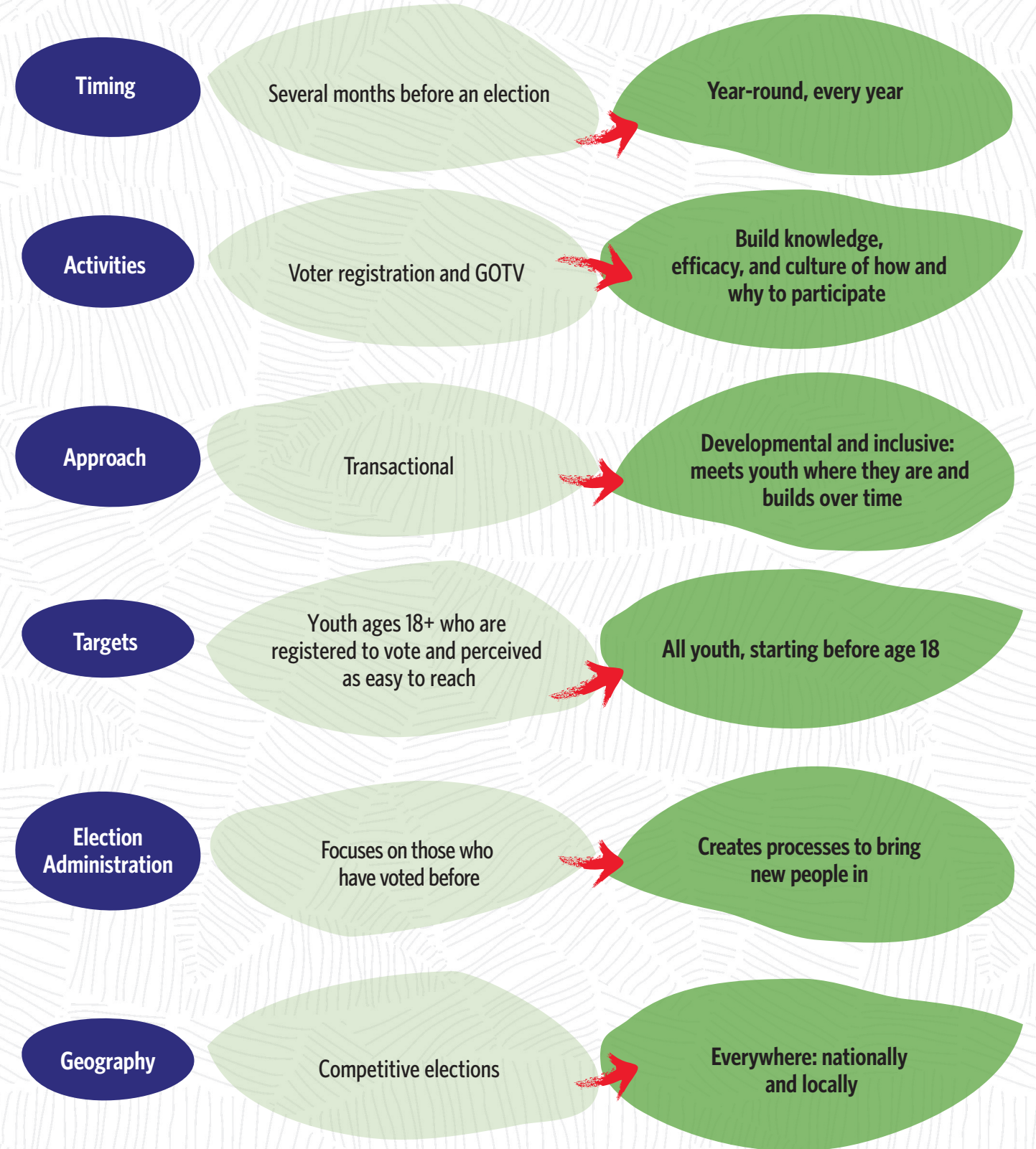
The CIRCLE Growing Voters framework is informed by exclusive new data on the civic access and experiences of teens; by what we have learned in 20 years studying youth civic education and engagement; by the findings of fellow researchers; and by what we have heard and continue to hear from educators, practitioners, organizers, and others who work directly with youth. It identifies three major elements: **Access and Exposure** to opportunities for youth to grow as voters, **Support** in the form of systems and structures that enable all youth to take advantage of those opportunities, and a **Culture** that promotes and values voting.

In each of these areas, we highlight the ways that institutions like K-12 schools, policy-makers, community organizations, media outlets, social media platforms, political campaigns, and parents/families can support the equitable development of young voters. The CIRCLE Growing Voters framework envisions and challenges these and other stakeholders to create varied, interconnected pathways to electoral participation that will be accessible and relevant to youth of diverse identities, backgrounds, and experiences.

We encourage you to read the full report, to share its recommendations, and to implement them in your own institutions and communities. Here we summarize major findings from the research in our report and the takeaways that can inform your future work.

## TRADITIONAL VOTER MOBILIZATION

## CIRCLE GROWING VOTERS



## Access and Exposure

### FINDINGS

As an institution that reaches the overwhelming majority of youth, K-12 schools have a crucial role to play in the CIRCLE Growing Voters framework. We find that some teens—especially youth of color—who do not have other opportunities to learn about voting rely on in-school civic education. At the same time, frequent and high-quality opportunities to learn about elections in school have been inequitably distributed; youth in rural areas and from lower socioeconomic backgrounds report less experience learning about voting in school.

### Civic Education

### HOW TO GROW VOTERS

Schools must include nonpartisan teaching about elections across curricula, and they should start long before students approach voting age so that young people start to build an identity as a voter. Instruction must include not just why voting is important, but the practicalities of when, where, and how to cast a ballot. Media literacy education that helps students navigate and participate in an ever-changing information landscape is also key. Opportunities like voter pre-registration in schools, mock elections, and partnerships with local election officials can enhance learning and create accessible pathways to participation. Crucially, in order to address inequities, district leaders and policymakers must ensure that schools in underserved communities have the resources to implement these educational practices and activities.

### Election Administration

### FINDINGS

State and local election officials do a remarkable job running elections, but they are not fully and equitably providing all young people with the information they need to participate in democracy. CIRCLE polling in 2020 found that half of youth did not know whether their state allowed online voter registration, and more than two-thirds did not know the felony disenfranchisement laws in their state. Other research has found that a substantial minority of newly eligible voters did not register because they did not know how, and Black and Latino youth were more likely to report not knowing about, or struggling with, mail-in voting.

### HOW TO GROW VOTERS

Election officials must adopt a CIRCLE Growing Voters mindset. That means directing their efforts and resources toward reaching newly eligible voters and even teens who are not yet eligible to vote with practical information about election laws and processes. Partnerships with schools and local organizations are key to meeting young people where they are. Election administrators should not assume apathy or disinterest, but they should also not assume knowledge about even the most basic aspects of the voting process, and see it as their role and responsibility to give all youth the tools they need to participate in democracy.

### Friends, Family, and Communities

### FINDINGS

Young people get information about elections from a variety of sources, and just as some youth rely on school to learn about voting, others who do not enjoy these opportunities in the classroom rely on their personal networks. CIRCLE polling has consistently found that friends and family are one of young people's primary sources of information about elections and voting, and peer-to-peer voter outreach was a major factor in recent elections.

### HOW TO GROW VOTERS

Parents, peers, and other influential figures in a young person's life must embrace their role and responsibility in helping them develop as voters. That can take many forms: modeling civic engagement and electoral participation, encouraging youth to develop and express their views, and having conversations about elections and issues. Those conversations are especially effective if they include practical information about the voting process. And they may be especially important for youth in rural areas, many of whom live in "civic deserts" with fewer electoral learning and engagement opportunities beyond those provided by trusted friends and relatives.

# Support

## FINDINGS

Local, state, and federal elections are invaluable opportunities for youth outreach and engagement; in each national cycle, billions of dollars are spent to try to reach and mobilize voters. But the structures and practices of campaign outreach, which are often focused on people who have cast a ballot before or others considered “likely voters” leave a lot of young people behind: in 2020 we found that almost half of youth were not contacted by either major political party or campaign. Our research has also found that young people who are in college are more likely to hear from campaigns, which reflects and perpetuates inequities in participation.

## Campaign Outreach to Youth

### HOW TO GROW VOTERS

Political campaigns and organizations must shift away from merely mobilizing voters who have cast a ballot before to focusing on growing and broadening a more representative electorate. These institutions must invest in supporting potential young voters regularly and holistically—for example, by working in concert with organizations and movements dedicated to issues young people care about—not merely asking for their votes in a cyclical fashion that can feel transactional to many youth. Outreach that goes beyond trying to convince people to vote, and actively gives new voters the tools and information they need to do so, is also important. Campaigns must look beyond the college campus in order to reach a wider diversity of young people, and they should not rely too heavily on digital outreach and social media, which is a valuable tool but not a panacea for reaching youth.

## FINDINGS

Our research has long promoted “CIRCLE Growing Voters” policies that make it easier to register and cast a ballot, such as online registration, same-day registration, automatic registration, and pre-registration for 16- and 17-year-olds. The impact of these policies on youth participation—some of which are very new, and most of which are implemented differently in different states—is the subject of ongoing research. But a new analysis conducted for this report finds a substantial positive effect for one of those policies: on average, counties with a pre-registration law in place in 2020 had a 9-percentage-point higher youth voter turnout than those that did not. Our research also found that another election-related policy, allowing teens to serve as poll workers, has myriad benefits for youth and may boost voter turnout, especially in diverse communities.

## Election Laws & Policies

### HOW TO GROW VOTERS

Policymakers should continue to enact facilitative election policies—especially pre-registration, which creates pathways to participation for youth before they’re eligible to vote. Where these and other policies already exist, elected officials and election administrators should examine their implementation to ensure that there is adequate information about them and structures in place for that information to broadly and equitably reach youth in different communities. Creating or expanding youth poll worker programs, paying youth for their time, and widely promoting these opportunities through schools and local organizations may also have a substantial positive impact.

## Local Groups & Organizations

## FINDINGS

Local groups and organizations play a critical role in a CIRCLE Growing Voters ecosystem; in 2020, more than a third of youth reported hearing or learning about the election from a community group. They can also fill gaps and reach youth that other institutions and pathways do not: newly eligible voters (ages 18-21), as well as Black and Latino youth, were even more likely to be contacted about the election by a local organization. But other gaps remain unfilled: these groups are contacting young people with college experience at a higher rate than youth who are not in college.

### HOW TO GROW VOTERS

Community groups and organizations (both those that are explicitly youth-focused and those that are not) must see bringing young people into democracy as a core part of their work. Beyond activities like voter registration drives, groups that are focused on issues young people care about have extraordinary potential to help youth connect their work to voting and elections. On the other hand, groups that are not explicitly political or issue-focused can build diverse and engaging pathways to civic engagement using art, sports, or whatever their focus. All organizations must redouble their efforts to reach youth, like those who are not on college campuses, that other institutions may be missing.

# Culture

## FINDINGS

Civic education content and curricula are not the only ways schools can help prepare young people to become informed and active voters. In our survey of teens, we found that young people were more supported and prepared to engage in democracy when they enjoyed a supportive school culture that fostered their participation, gave them opportunities to develop and use their voice, was responsive to their needs and experiences—and did so for all students of different backgrounds and identities. Unfortunately, our research also revealed inequality: white youth in urban areas are more likely to enjoy this kind of supportive school climate.

## Supportive School Culture

### HOW TO GROW VOTERS

Educational leaders must commit to transforming their schools into institutions where young people don't just learn about democracy: they practice it, live it, and see its potential to improve communities. That can take many forms, including involving students in decision-making in and out of the classroom, supporting student journalism, and actively working to create a sense of belonging for all students, but especially for those from historically marginalized communities. Adopting the principles and practices of deeper learning and socio-emotional learning can ensure that students develop key skills and strong civic agency as they grow into voters.

## FINDINGS

Both traditional and social media have an essential role to play in the work of CIRCLE Growing Voters. Our research finds that, contrary to some stereotypes, young people rely on the news media—especially local news—to learn about issues and elections. However, they do not often see their generation or the issues they care about reflected in media coverage. Meanwhile, social networks and digital platforms play an increasingly pivotal role in the ecosystem of where young people get information about voting, and young people don't just see information or content, they also contribute to it by creating and sharing media. Research has documented that youth feel they're more informed, empowered, and effective civic actors when they create media about politics.

## Empowering Young People

### FINDINGS

One of the most powerful pieces of a culture that contributes to developing voters is young people's own sense of self-efficacy, culture of engagement, and belonging to a generation that is committed to participating in democracy and pursuing social change. In our 2020 polling, we found that an overwhelming majority of youth said they believe young people have the power to change things, and those who thought so were considerably more likely to talk to friends about voting, register others to vote, and talk to peers about salient issues like racial justice. That is a powerful civic culture that contributes to voter development at work.

## The Role of Media

### HOW TO GROW VOTERS

Media institutions must embrace their roles in the ecosystem of electoral information and engagement. Both traditional and social media can provide young people with locally relevant information about elections, and in the case of social platforms—as some are already doing—put voter registration and education tools at young users' fingertips. News media should adopt norms and practices that treat young people as both a key audience and as potential co-creators, and provide opportunities for diverse youth to tell stories of the issues their communities want addressed. Digital platforms can further foster youth multimedia creation, partner with educators on media literacy, and promote online cultures that foster respectful, diverse, and equitable participation.

### HOW TO GROW VOTERS

While we highlight specific efforts and institutions under the Culture section of the CIRCLE Growing Voters report, every single stakeholder and influence in a young person's life can contribute to it. Young people themselves already do much of the work, and institutions should seek ways to support their formal and informal ways of lifting each other up. Parents and teachers can develop cultures, at school and at home, in which young people's views and participation are sought out, encouraged, and valued. Organizations of all kinds can strive to become "political homes" for youth in which they can learn, reflect, and take action together.

CIRCLE Growing Voters must involve a broad ecosystem of interconnected stakeholders and, crucially, must begin well before youth reach age 18. This approach focuses on institutions playing a role to create conditions that allow every young person to build the capacities to engage in civic and democratic life.

## Letter from the Authors

Something big needs to change in how the United States supports young people's leadership and their equitable engagement in the country's evolving multiracial democracy. The CIRCLE team believes it's possible.

This report is a distillation of both previous and brand-new research that points to the need for a new paradigm in how the country brings a wide diversity of young people into democracy. We believe we can think bigger and strive for communities where young people are thriving through and in their political engagement.

This work must involve a broad ecosystem of interconnected stakeholders and, crucially, must begin well before youth reach age 18. This approach focuses on institutions playing a role to create conditions that allow every young person to build the capacities to engage in civic and democratic life—which will benefit youth in other areas of their lives and has the potential to strengthen entire communities.

This report is a resource for anyone who believes in the possibilities for people-centered democratic practice in which young people are welcomed into electoral participation and into local and national conversations about issues that affect their communities. This CIRCLE Growing Voters framework, a term coined by our director several years ago, is one way to do this and not exclusive to others. But we believe it can serve as a critical guide for institutions in creating practices that support the development of young voters. Crucially, this paradigm requires speaking with young people in your community and collaborating with young leaders, many of whom have been shouldering this work with and for their peers. In short: communities and institutions need to step up and work with youth to build a sustainable network of access and support for voting and civic engagement.

**LET'S GO.**

# A New Paradigm

## Why and Why Now?

The United States has not sufficiently created, invested in, or sustained opportunities to help millions of diverse young people learn how to register and vote—and even fewer pathways that support the more comprehensive development of lifelong voters and civic actors. Instead, as we will outline throughout this report, a considerable amount of existing support for youth electoral participation comes from young people themselves: friends, peers, and others in young people’s networks engaging each other. Those connections are critical, but they’re not nearly enough for sustained participation without institutional support, and they can leave too many youth behind.

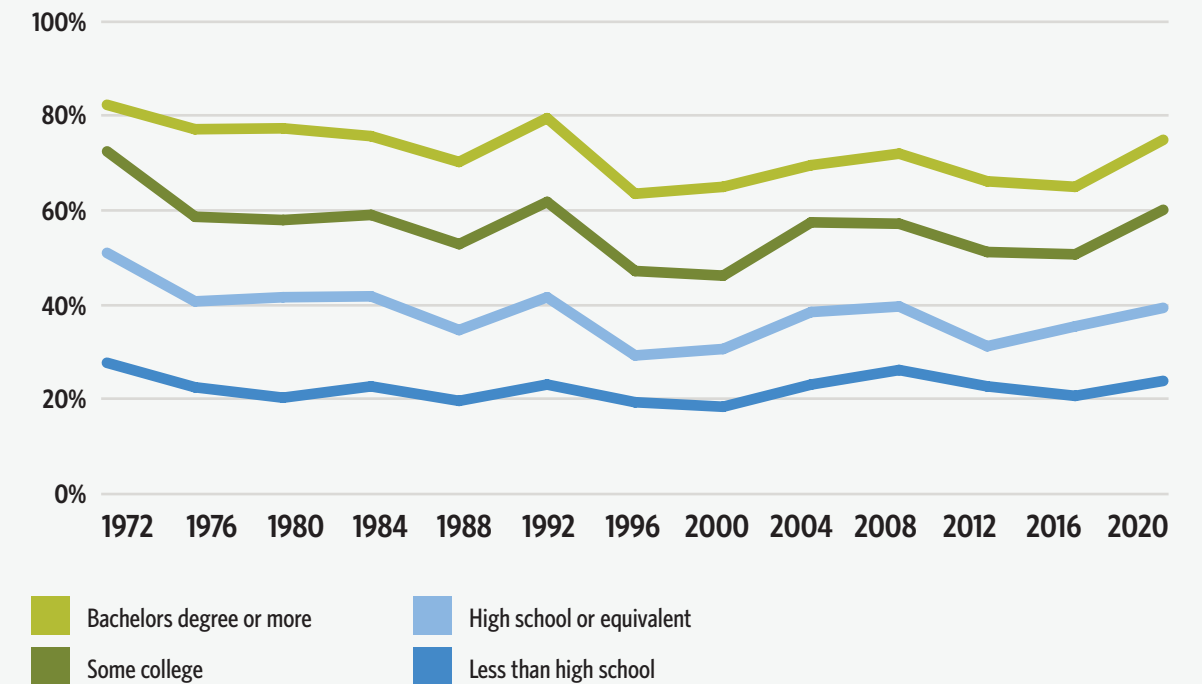
*The vital work of preparing and supporting the youngest members of our democracy cannot be solely on young people’s shoulders; we need a new paradigm in which communities and institutions across every aspect of American life support youth electoral engagement so that it’s ongoing, developmental and equitable. We call that paradigm CIRCLE Growing Voters.*

CIRCLE has been studying youth participation in every election since our founding in 2001. You may be asking, why, after two elections with historic youth voter turnout, we’re writing about the need for substantial change. The 2018 and 2020 elections were indeed high points for youth voting and showed the power of a diverse generation’s voices and leadership at the polls and beyond. But we have seen peaks in youth turnout before—followed by valleys. That’s why this is precisely the right moment to not just celebrate a surge in youth voting, but also to learn from it and leverage its momentum.

Since the Census began measuring voter turnout among 18- to 29-year-olds almost five decades ago, youth voter turnout has not risen above 54%. For just as long, there have also been differences in voter turnout among different groups of youth. Youth of color have historically voted at lower rates, though at some points in the past 15 years Black youth have closely matched and sometimes surpassed their white peers in voter turnout. In recent years, Asian and Latino youth have shown that they are a rising electoral force. Inequities in voting rates among youth by educational attainment have proven even more stubborn, with major disparities between young people with and without college experience persisting from the early 1970s to today. Additionally, in 2020, young people with disabilities were ten points less likely to vote than young people overall. <sup>i</sup>

**FIGURE 1: PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION YOUTH TURNOUT**

Even as overall youth turnout fluctuates, differences in turnout in presidential elections based on educational experience have remained consistent for 40 years.



### TERMINOLOGY

The following pages summarize data and research about young people in the United States. There are disagreements on which age groups should be termed ‘youth’ or ‘young people.’ In this report we use those terms to refer to individuals under 30 years of age. In some cases, we’ll specifically be referring to 18- to 29-year-olds. There are two reasons for this: election-related data is often coded in this way, and before age 30 people are still often relatively new to elections, still learning how election systems work, and still building civic habits.

The report also refers to and shares survey findings related to **teens**, by which we mean those who were 14 to 17 years old in the fall of 2020 and already are or will be age 18+ by the 2024 presidential election.

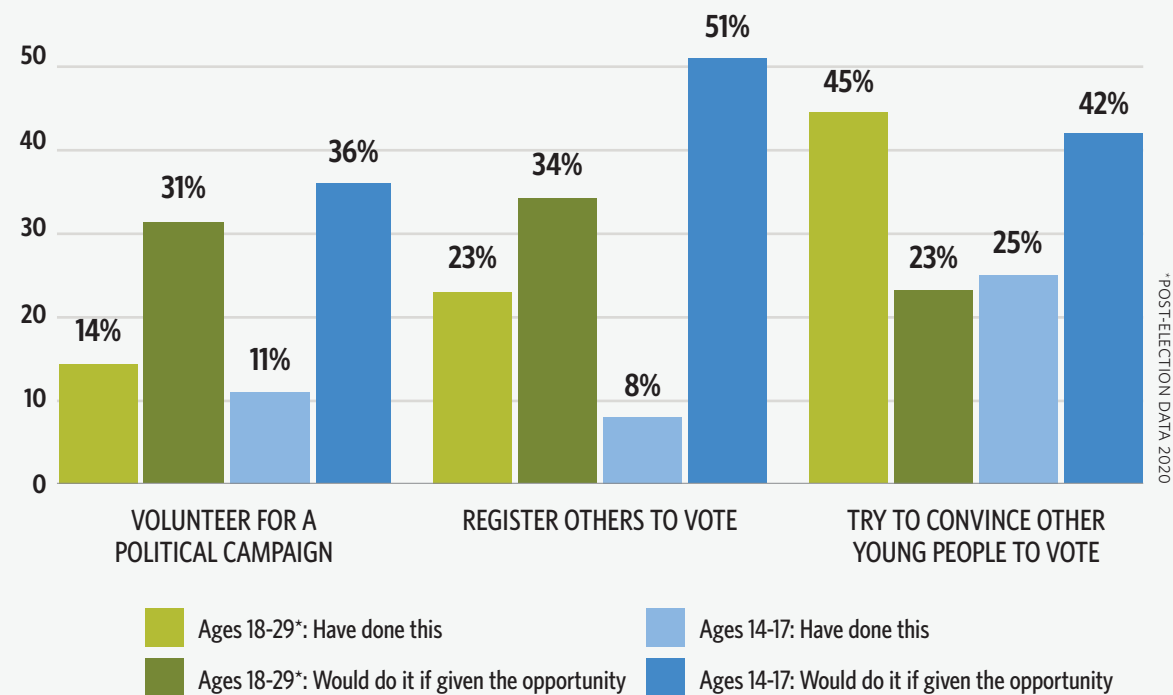


Our collective failure to equitably develop voters is especially evident among the youngest members of our potential electorate. It's been over 50 years since the passing of the 26th Amendment lowered the voting age to 18, yet we have not met the promise of this visionary change. In addition to inequitable access among youth of different backgrounds and experiences, age itself often matters. Voting rates among 18- and 19-year-olds regularly trail those of their slightly older (ages 20–29) peers and differ widely across the country. Starting to teach and inform youth about elections and voting when they turn 18 is way too late. By then, the young people who have enjoyed many positive civic experiences and influences are ready to cast a ballot. But for those who haven't enjoyed these opportunities—or, worse, who have had experiences that may dissuade them from electoral participation—the sense that civic and political engagement is not for them may already be deeply ingrained.

This report introduces and makes a case for adopting a CIRCLE Growing Voters approach. Throughout, we highlight the changes needed and how institutions, fields of practice, programs, and whole communities can reduce differences in electoral engagement by age, race/ethnicity, education, and other factors. In the following section, we share new findings on the state of teen readiness for elections and why the results require an innovative response. We then describe what this new CIRCLE Growing Voters paradigm looks like by focusing on three core elements: access & exposure, support, and culture. We go on to share recommendations for key stakeholders in this work and later take a deep dive into why each stakeholder group is important.

**FIGURE 2: YOUTH INTERESTED IN ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION**

Young people are interested in electoral participation, but many aren't finding accessible opportunities to turn their interest into action.



## BEYOND VOTING: HOW YOUTH CONTRIBUTE TO ELECTIONS

Young people's political participation, through the ballot box and beyond, shows that they're far from apathetic about politics and voting. Our research has consistently found that youth already engage in elections in myriad ways, and are poised to do much more if we support them.

While voting is a fundamental act of civic participation, casting a ballot is far from the only way young people participate in our democracy. Here are some ways young people, whether or not they're old enough to vote, can and do play a role in elections.

### Support Your Friends and Family

- Encourage friends and family to participate in the election and help them make a plan to do so
- Help them find reliable information about the voting process, the candidates, and the issues
- Organize or support conversations at school about elections and voting

### Uplift Stories & Issues You Care About

- Share your views, concerns, and experiences
- Connect with a local media outlet and find or suggest opportunities to contribute to their election coverage
- Create and share media online about the people and issues in your community

### Be Part of the Process

- Volunteer on a local, state, or national political campaign
- Work with a local organization that is registering others to vote
- Find out if you can work at the polls on Election Day—many states allow 16- and 17-year-olds to do it!



Teens across the country enjoy dramatically different levels of access and exposure to learning opportunities about elections and voting. A plurality of youth only learn about elections from their personal networks. Some young people learn only or mostly at school. Most distressingly, a significant proportion of young people are not learning about elections and voting in either setting.

## Election Readiness Among Teens

Before we discuss where we must go, we first describe where we are today. Some American teens learn about elections and voting through various institutions and people they know; these civic experiences begin early and create either a virtuous or a vicious circle in which influences do, or do not, lead to later engagement.<sup>ii</sup>

Through exclusive CIRCLE data and analysis, we identified six distinct groups of teens with different profiles of how, where, and from whom they do or don't learn about elections and voting. These sources of information can include parents, friends, schools, and civic organizations. Previous research has examined these structures and stakeholders in an isolated way; this report seeks to comprehensively quantify whether and how much teens benefit from these influences.

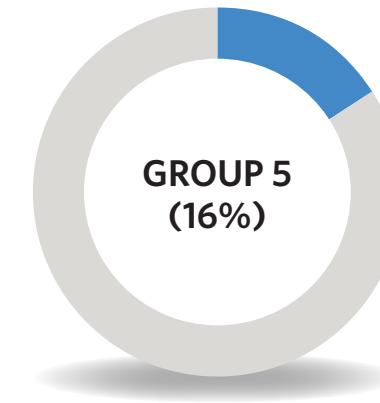
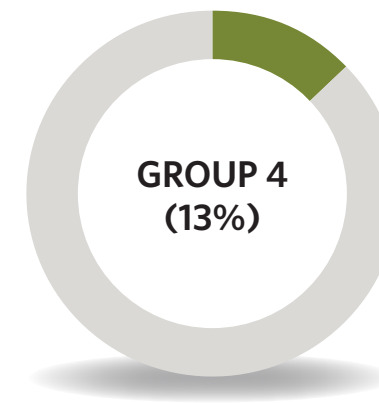
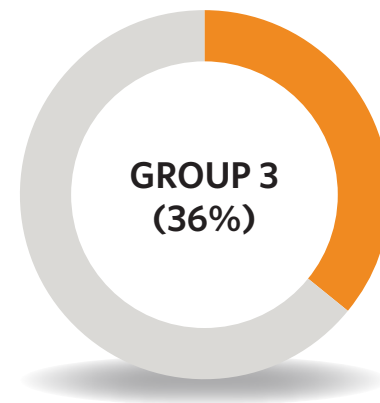
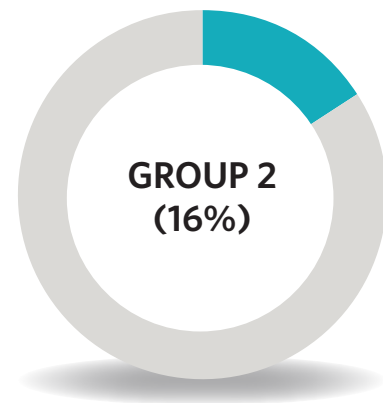
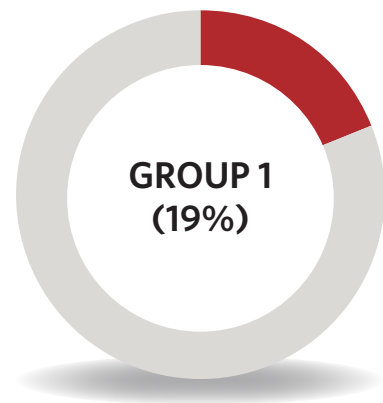
Our results reveal that teens across the country enjoy dramatically different levels of access and exposure to learning opportunities about elections and voting. We find that a plurality of youth (36%) only learn about elections from their personal networks. Some young people learn only (13%) or mostly (16%) at school, while others learn about elections and voting in both settings (19%). Most distressingly, a significant proportion of young people (16%) are not learning about elections and voting in either setting.

### CIRCLE'S TEEN SURVEY

The CIRCLE teen survey reached a nationally representative group of 1,847 14- to 17-year-olds. We analyzed the survey data to identify and describe groups of young people on multiple dimensions of access to information about elections, while controlling for other factors that affect engagement such as race/ethnicity and educational attainment.

We used an advanced statistical technique called a factor analysis to understand our two main areas of inquiry: schools and personal networks. Within these two areas are more than 40 specific indicators of civic access and learning, such as seeing election information and youth-created media online.<sup>iii</sup> Then, using a cluster analysis, we found patterns in which teens did or did not enjoy these experiences and influences. See the appendix for the full methodological details on our teen survey and on this analysis.

# CIRCLE Teen Survey



## FULLY SUPPORTED AND ENGAGED

Youth in this group report high levels of access to learning opportunities about elections and voting in school and a supportive school culture. At the same time, they also score highest on learning about elections from the people in their networks. Not surprisingly these young people, who we consider Fully Supported and Engaged, also show above-average engagement in politics and elections. In many ways, this group matches some of the media narratives and common perceptions of Gen Z activists.

- + White and urban
- + Parent with college education
- + Men<sup>iv</sup>
- Rural

## SCHOOL-SUPPORTED AND SOMEWHAT SOCIAL

These teens are as engaged in civic life as their peers in Group 1, but their exposure to learning opportunities differs. For teens in Group 2, school plays a central role: they score highest on access to learning about elections and voting in school and a supportive school climate, but among the lowest on exposure to election information via friends and family. That said, the School-Supported and Somewhat Social group is connected to community spaces and social media about politics at an average level. Interestingly, this group is most likely to see youth media online.

- + White and urban
- + Parent with college degree
- + Latino
- Multiracial

## SUPPORTED BY NETWORKS AND MODERATELY ENGAGED

By far the largest group, these teens have average levels of exposure to election and voting information from social media, family, and friends, but below average elsewhere. Despite not being exposed to learning about voting in school and not experiencing a supportive school climate, this group reported average levels of engagement—though lower than the first two groups.

- + Women
- + Queer<sup>v</sup>
- + Suburban
- Latino

## RELIANT ON SCHOOL AND MODERATELY ENGAGED

The smallest group, teens who are Reliant on School have fewer civic influences in their personal networks but have moderate experiences with in-school civic learning and a positive school climate. In some ways this group is the inverse of the previous group (Supported by Networks and Moderately Engaged) in that they score average on engagement and on levels of civic influence—but in this case the influences are school-based, not personal network-based.

- + Black men
- + Latino
- + Rural
- Multiracial

## CIVIC LEARNING NEGLECTED

About one in six teens find themselves in this final group, which scores below average across all measures of civic access and exposure. In short: these teens are largely not learning about elections and voting in schools, nor in their online or offline networks. In fact, almost no young people in this group learned about how to register to vote from their family or school.

- + Black
- + Rural
- + Straight
- Parent with a college degree

## TAKEAWAYS

These takeaways, which mirror broader research findings about K-12 civic learning, underscore how much both schools and individual teens' networks matter to engagement.<sup>vi</sup> Crucially, they highlight that some youth get everything, and some get nothing. These inequities translate into differences in election participation and other forms of civic engagement that prevent us from building a fully equitable and representative democracy. CIRCLE Growing Voters is a bold and inclusive framework to address these challenges.

- + Overrepresented in this group
- Underrepresented in this group

We imagine communities that embrace discussing and engaging in elections, having productive and inclusive conversations about the issues facing some or all community members. These opportunities and discussions must be intentionally designed so they welcome youth who have never participated before—especially young people from groups that have been marginalized or excluded due to race/ethnicity, income, ability, education, or immigration status.

## What is CIRCLE Growing Voters?

CIRCLE Growing Voters invites stakeholders, beyond political parties and organizations, to take on and support formal and informal roles in youth electoral engagement. Crucially, it calls on these stakeholders to provide multiple entry points and pathways to voting for young people with different interests, identities, abilities, and experiences. We imagine communities that embrace discussing and engaging in elections, having productive and inclusive conversations about the issues facing community members.

These opportunities must be intentionally designed so they welcome youth who have never participated before—especially young people from groups that have been marginalized due to race/ethnicity, income, ability, education, or immigration status. We believe this can be done in non-partisan ways by institutional actors and supported by ideological or partisan actors when appropriate. We envision electoral systems in which voter registration is automatic and/or built into multiple existing processes and institutions. And we pursue a country in which electoral participation is encouraged and accessible to all.

Achieving this ambitious but critical vision requires a fundamental shift away from current practices of voter mobilization that fail to equitably engage all youth. The CIRCLE Growing Voters paradigm sets forth a new vision that can help us achieve an equitable multiracial democracy.

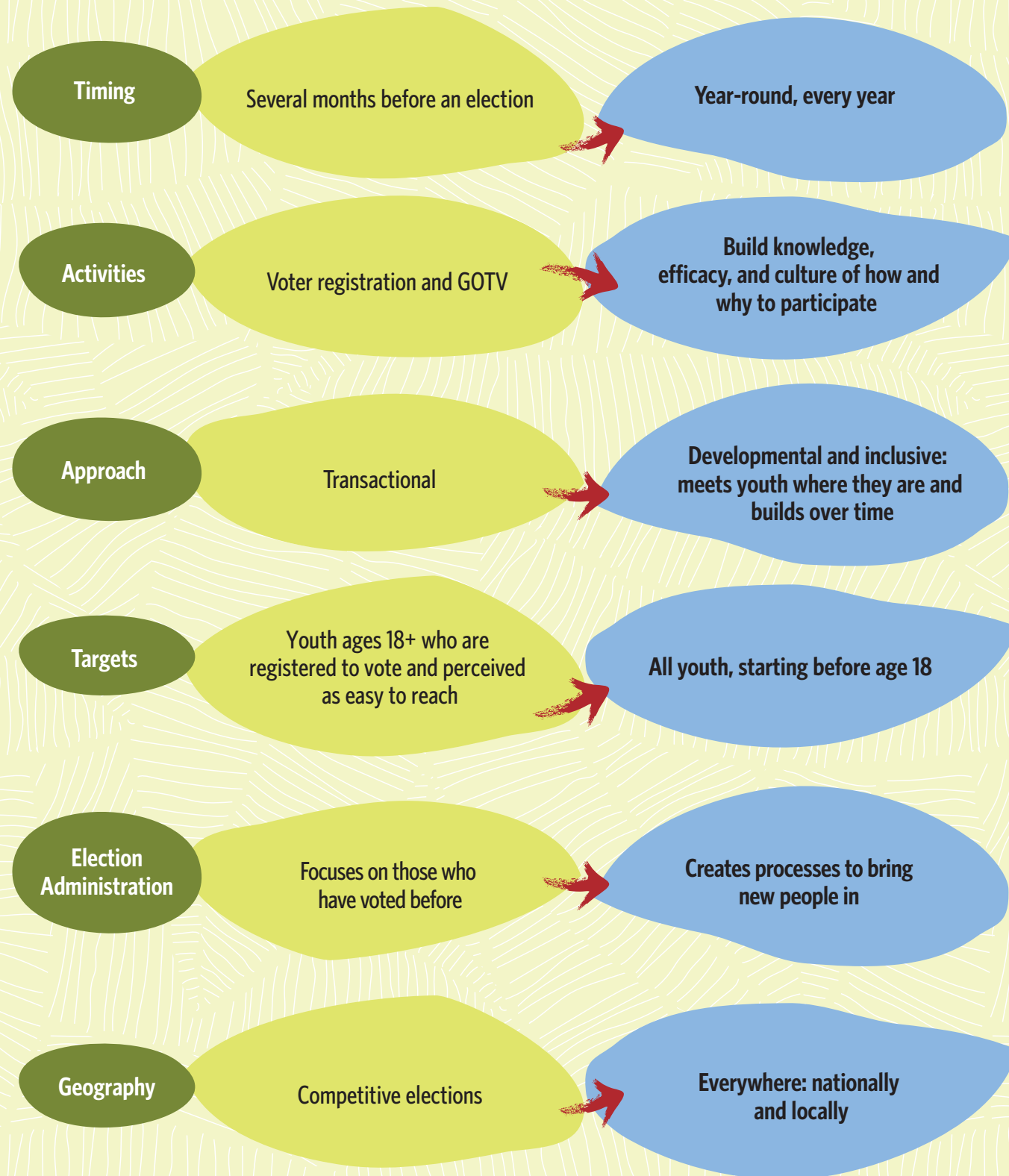
### YOUTH LEADERSHIP IN CIRCLE Growing Voters

This report focuses on the roles and responsibilities of various institutions in the mission of CIRCLE Growing Voters. We acknowledge and applaud the efforts of young leaders inside and outside of institutions, but we recognize that the work of advancing electoral learning and engagement has too often been shouldered by youth—and that it's time for institutions to step up. As we call on these institutions to engage in CIRCLE Growing Voters, we ask them to learn from and work alongside young people who have already been deeply engaged in expanding access and opportunities for themselves and their peers.

Throughout the country, young people are participating in local government, lobbying to improve civic education, advocating to lower the voting age, innovating forms of digital activism, and leading the social movements of today and tomorrow. Their views and experiences within and outside of electoral politics are essential. Throughout the report, look for these sections with an orange background with suggestions for young leaders to drive action and for community stakeholders looking for creative ways to bring youth into their work.

## TRADITIONAL VOTER MOBIZATION

## CIRCLE GROWING VOTERS



## A Web of Diverse Pathways to Youth Engagement

Moving from mobilizing to this CIRCLE Growing Voters framework also requires creating multiple, varied **pathways** on which young people can learn about and participate in elections.

What is a pathway? The concept is based on research about youth civic development that has shown being civically engaged is learned, usually involves starting at one place and learning knowledge and skills incrementally to get to another, and includes multiple influences along the way.<sup>vii</sup> These influences may be experiences; people like family, friends, a teacher, or a mentor; or a place where a young person feels particularly nurtured or finds special meaning.

Young people have incredibly diverse interests, identities, backgrounds, and experiences—and as our cluster analysis reveals, from an early age they have enjoyed or lacked vastly different levels of access and exposure to civic learning. That means CIRCLE Growing Voters pathways must be just as varied in order to be relevant, effective, and embraced by youth. For example, a young person who has been encouraged to lead all her life and a young man who has not felt as empowered (or is from a community that may even have been historically excluded) will likely need and take different pathways to participation. Taking into account these diverse needs is not just a feature of the CIRCLE Growing Voters framework, but its central purpose: to ensure that all young people, no matter their starting point, have the opportunity to thrive as voters and civic actors.

*These pathways must be different, but not isolated: they should make up a web or an ecosystem of interconnected activities and opportunities in a community. This web is strongest when many stakeholders who are supporting young people know about, incorporate, and build on each other's activities, assets, and strengths to create meaningful collaborations.*

Because many stakeholders specialize in providing various kinds of support (e.g., civic knowledge, voter registration, skill development, issue advocacy), the connections across groups create possibilities for young people to grow in new ways. The relationships make for a strong and resilient ecosystem ready to develop voters, build leaders, and have more capacity if/when challenges arise. These connections themselves provide pathways for young people who want to learn new skills and take on different issues.

These webs of stakeholders and opportunities may exist for peer learning purposes, for planning and strategy, for resource development, or to make each other's work easier (and more fun!) These intentional collaborations can strengthen both individual organizations' work and the overall local network of institutions committed to CIRCLE Growing Voters. For example, local election administrators can team up with [teachers to find youth poll workers](#), local media can collaborate with a local youth media effort, or local nonpartisan groups can step into classrooms with their expertise on local election laws and processes—including about pre-registration.

## Elements of CIRCLE Growing Voters

We think of CIRCLE Growing Voters as one might think of growing plants in a lush community garden. Being placed in a position to get sunlight and water provide the intentional access and exposure to the essential ingredients for growth. Concrete support from people, like the right plant bed or trellis, and fertilizer or compost, helps plants maximize that access and exposure. Finally, the soil (which is often called culture!) provides key nutrients and a hospitable environment in which to thrive—and, crucially, it may be meaningfully different in each community. Every plant, like every young person, will need a different combination of these elements in order to thrive. But it will need all three: one won't suffice without the others.

Of course, there is power in the plants themselves—just as there is in youth who play an active and vital role in their own and their peers' civic development. In fact, many have managed to grow from tiny seedlings despite lacking the support and nurturing that they deserve. It's past time we support them, and our democracy, to fully blossom. Let's talk about how to do it.

### Support

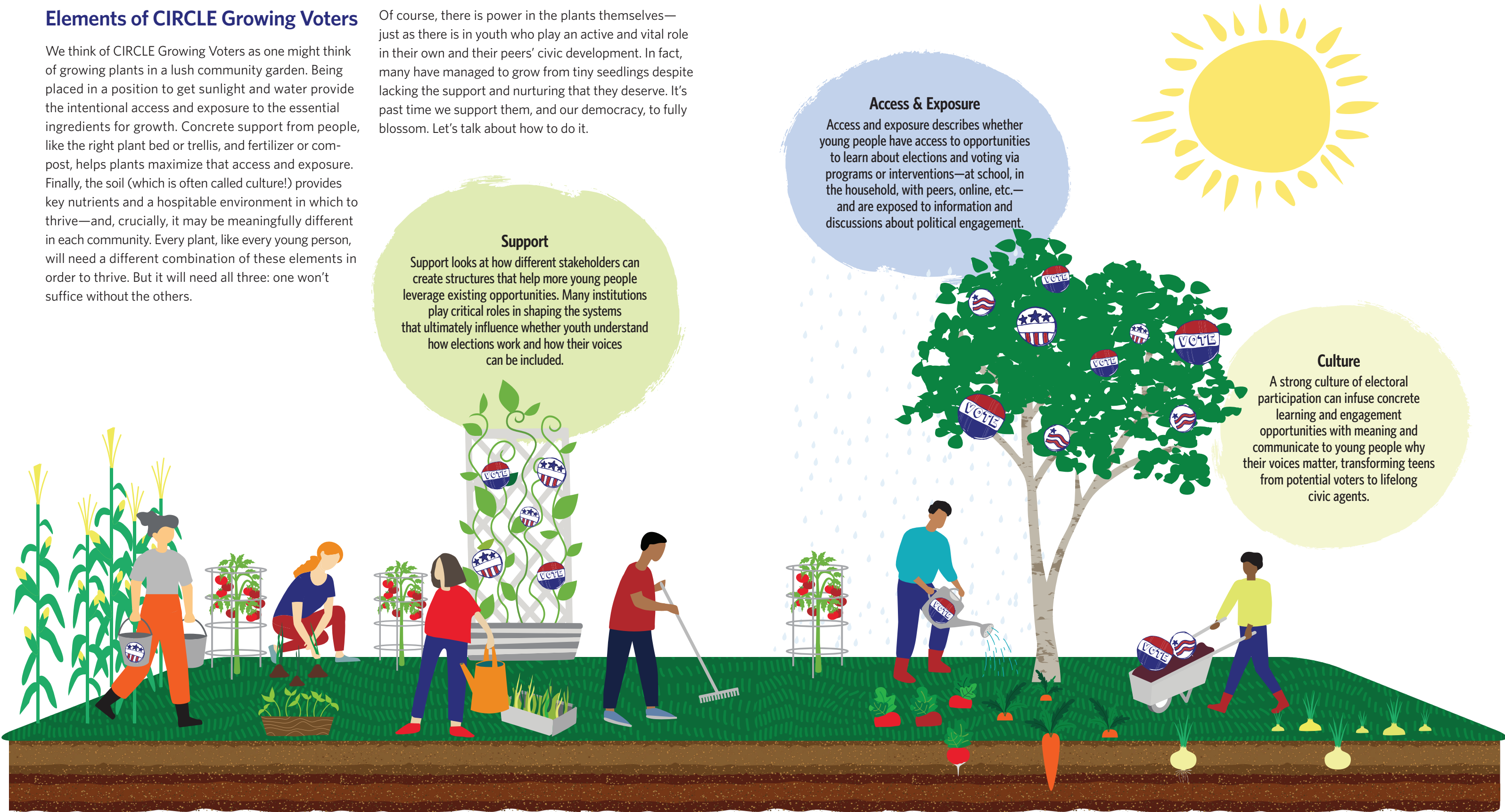
Support looks at how different stakeholders can create structures that help more young people leverage existing opportunities. Many institutions play critical roles in shaping the systems that ultimately influence whether youth understand how elections work and how their voices can be included.

### Access & Exposure

Access and exposure describes whether young people have access to opportunities to learn about elections and voting via programs or interventions—at school, in the household, with peers, online, etc.—and are exposed to information and discussions about political engagement.

### Culture

A strong culture of electoral participation can infuse concrete learning and engagement opportunities with meaning and communicate to young people why their voices matter, transforming teens from potential voters to lifelong civic agents.



# Recommendations for Action

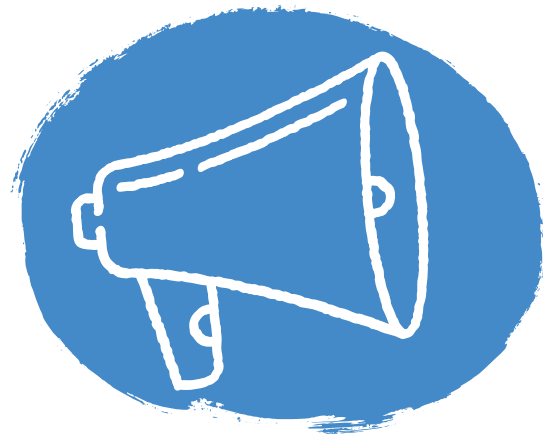
The CIRCLE Growing Voters framework is a call to action. While the rest of this report will take a deeper dive into the research that drives our vision for stronger and more equitable youth electoral engagement, we wanted to put concrete recommendations front and center so that various stakeholders, institutions, and communities can start engaging in this critical work right now.

We organize these recommendations by intended audience, based on who we believe is best positioned to advance a particular goal or initiative. That said, as we stated before, we believe that the work of CIRCLE Growing Voters requires intentional cross-sector collaboration. We also begin with an overarching recommendation for all of us that should undergird our collective efforts:

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***Learn about and reflect on adults' and institutions' tendency to assume that older people and those in power know more than youth and have the best solutions—a phenomenon called "adultism."<sup>viii</sup> Becoming aware of this bias that adults/older people might bring to an interaction with a younger person is an important step toward our society's capacity to develop voters. Creating systems and practices to regularly integrate diverse young people's voices and expertise in decision-making can help combat adultism. And young people should likewise be aware of when they may be on the receiving end of adultism and push back in order to foster stronger intergenerational partnerships.***

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## Young People Who Want to Nudge Institutions

- Seek out or work to co-create opportunities to learn why voting plays an important role in our society. That can happen through a discussion in your classroom, a conversation with elders in your community, or by participating in social movements—most of which educate youth about the role of elections and voting.
- Use the Mapping Your Community Ecosystem tool that is a supplement to this report to ask a wide range of institutions (schools, community groups, nonprofits, local government, etc.) whether and how they support youth participation in elections. This can help you and others understand the assets, challenges, and opportunities within your community in supporting a wide diversity of young people to participate. Map out where support does exist, which young people are being supported (and which may be getting left behind), and how increased support could make a difference. Reach out to organizations who may not yet be engaged in the work of CIRCLE Growing Voters but could be interested in working together on efforts that match their goals or mission.
- Turn any findings from your assessment of CIRCLE Growing Voters assets and challenges into a presentation you can share with local stakeholders like election administrators, youth practitioners, media organizations, and education leaders. Make specific recommendations and direct asks, and show how youth in your community can support the work.
- Establish strategic relationships and intergenerational collaborations with champions in key institutions in your community. Ask these champions to engage and nudge other leaders to start or deepen efforts to support more young people to engage in

elections. In particular, consider which organization or office in your community could bring many different people together to think across a community about a CIRCLE Growing Voters approach.

- Leverage leadership opportunities (like school boards, boards of directors, youth commissions, or advisory councils) to internally push for more attention to elections and voting or more strategic action to reach young people.

## Government Officials and Policymakers

- Think of young people, even those who are not yet old enough to vote, as your constituents and stakeholders. Build relationships with them and interact with them frequently and constantly, not just during election cycles when you want their votes. Look beyond local colleges—for instance: youth-serving organizations, high schools, GED programs, and youth employment programs—to ensure that you're reaching a wide diversity of youth who are representative of the community you lead.
- Create and seek opportunities (like town halls, advisory councils, or youth committees) to speak with youth in your jurisdiction about what they care about, what's influencing their lives, and how they want to be engaged. Promote these opportunities through schools, local youth organizations, social media, and local news.
- Hire (and pay!) young people to organize their peers and to help research, analyze, and build support for key issues. Propose and support efforts to use public funds for programming that engages young people in this work within your community.

## STATE AND LOCAL ELECTED LEADERS AND STAFF

- Enact and implement voter pre-registration for 16- and 17-year-olds that allows teens to register to vote even if they won't yet turn 18 before the next election. Develop clear guidelines for who is in charge of pre-registration and use proactive measures to inform young people and those who work with youth that pre-registration is available and accessible. Regularly assess which measures are working to reach teens and what percentage of them are pre-registered.
- Review whether and how policies—such as voter pre-registration and poll worker programs—are being implemented to support a wide range of young people, especially those not already engaged.
- Lower the voting age to 16 in local elections. Implement and support a teen leadership group to reach out to their peers who will be newly eligible to vote.

## SECRETARIES OF STATE, ELECTION DIRECTORS, AND ELECTION ADMINISTRATORS

- Work with young people to assess how well, and how equitably, the policies that promote voter registration and voting (e.g., Automatic Voter Registration, Same-Day Registration, and Mail-In Voting) are being implemented in different neighborhoods and with different populations within your community. If necessary, redirect resources to make sure all voters are ready and able to exercise their right to vote.
- Actively develop or support proposals that can engage diverse young people and bolster opportunities to be registered to vote while they are in K-12 schools.

- Talk with, listen to, and partner with young people who can work with your office to direct youth outreach and education strategies. Youth know best what questions they and their peers may have about registration and voting, what information they need, and how best to disseminate information to young people.
- Adopt a CIRCLE Growing Voters mindset by thinking about your young constituents who are about to turn 18 and providing them with information they need about voting, which they often do not get in school.
- Make available subgroup-specific data (e.g., by neighborhood or by race/ethnicity) about voter registration and voting to your community, organizations, teachers, and other stakeholders who can use it to focus their educational and voter mobilization efforts.
- Create opportunities for young people to support the work of election offices, such as youth poll worker programs, youth-led outreach teams, and internships that allow young people to learn how elections work. Partnering with local nonprofits and schools is an effective way to facilitate the connection between young people and election offices; [here's a toolkit](#) to help election officials get started!

## CANDIDATES AND POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

- Embrace the diversity of the youngest generations and hire youth of different ages, languages used, races/ethnicities, neighborhoods, gender identities, etc. to develop and implement strategies to reach other young people.
- Engage with local grassroots organizations year-round, so that these organizations can do their work while building a base of committed voters, especially in marginalized communities.

- Reach beyond college campuses. Make concerted efforts to reach out to young people who are not enrolled in college (or who may attend commuter schools, etc.) With so much youth outreach happening on campuses, these groups of youth may not feel they are welcome and valuable unless you intentionally include and invite them.
- Do not assume technology, digital platforms, and social media outreach can summon voters out of thin air. These tools are valuable but not sufficient by themselves to reach and engage all youth.

## Community Groups, Organizations and Institutions that Run Programs for and with Youth

- Nonprofit organizations must remain nonpartisan and comply with rules preventing some political activities. But that does not mean they cannot [educate the public](#), disseminate accurate information about voting and elections to families, and expose teens to elections through meaningful opportunities, like assisting community members in registering to vote. [Consult resources](#) to do this work effectively while complying with restrictions on political activity.
- Existing relationships with youth matter. Regardless of whether your organization regularly focuses on voter engagement, develop a plan for how you can connect your work to elections. Start these conversations early in an election cycle and engage young people who are already in your networks.
- Explicitly center and focus on reaching youth who are not currently in school and may therefore need other pathways to engagement. It is never too early to start building civic responsibility. Talk in children's and teen programs about voting and elections as one of the tools people use to improve our communities.

- Social connections and a sense of belonging are foundational to civic engagement. Create or support free spaces by and for teens where young people can connect with issues and with older community members through artistic expression, media creation, and discourse in ways that relatively equalize power relationships.<sup>ix</sup> Libraries have been pioneering this work!

## Media Organizations and Journalists

- Develop or expand opportunities for young people to create content or contribute to reporting. Widen your outreach in order to diversify the young people you reach when offering opportunities for media creation.
- Strive to better understand your youth audience—or lack thereof. Outlets that already have a large teen audience should engage with them through social media, advisory groups, listening sessions, or focus groups about the content they find useful, interesting, and important. Organizations can institutionalize these structures and opportunities through which diverse youth can directly and indirectly inform their work.
- 'Nothing about us without us.' Rely on young people as experts and sources, especially when you report about issues often centered on youth. Journalists can build relationships with youth organizations and coalitions that can provide greater access to spaces where young people are already having these conversations, or they can seek to engage young audiences directly through social media.



- Use explanatory journalism. Consider that young audience members may be learning about an issue for the first time and provide accessible and engaging context that does not assume prior knowledge.
- Local reporters should embrace their ability and responsibility to focus on local races and issues, especially if they are the only media outlet covering a particular region or race. Focusing less on the ‘horse race’ and more on policy impact and concrete issues that impact young people’s daily lives can help youth understand the importance and implications of elections.

## K-12 Schools & Educators

### INSTRUCTORS

- Incorporate nonpartisan teaching about voting and elections across curricula, so that students are exposed to information about elections multiple times in multiple settings and have a chance to solidify their identity as a voter. The [Teaching for Democracy Alliance](#) offers nonpartisan teaching resources for various subject areas.
- Use the [Teaching for Democracy Alliance Self-Assessment Matrix](#) to consider which areas of teaching about elections and voting you already cover and where you can link the topic to standards and curricula year-round. History educators should pay particular attention to how students of various backgrounds understand different groups’ fights for voting rights across history. These lessons can clarify for young people the value of the rights they enjoy today.

- Increase the [use of \(multi-\)media creation as a tool for teaching media literacy](#) and civic skills—and to show that social media can be a valuable place for social and political engagement. At the same time, use both youth-created media and traditional news media in the classroom, including by partnering with local media outlets.
- Seek out and share opportunities for your students to become involved in local politics and elections, such as youth poll worker programs, youth advisory boards, or youth-adult partnerships in community improvement efforts.
- Strive to create a learning community in which everyone belongs and contributes their [valuable lived civic knowledge](#) to discourse and learning. Students can build agency and a commitment to participate in elections and other aspects of civic life by establishing their sense of belonging and engaging in rigorous civic learning and practice in school. See the [Educating for American Democracy Roadmap](#).

### ADMINISTRATORS

- Make clear to your educators across departments that you support nonpartisan and high-quality teaching about elections and voting for all students. You can do this by ensuring that district subject-area specialists or department chairs are providing time and sample materials for how to do this well, and/or advocating for professional development funds and opportunities that will help teachers feel confident in their teaching about elections.
- Most schools have a Constitution Day or History Day set aside to extend student learning about these topics. Voting should be part of the school curriculum in a similar manner, so that students can learn the history of voting and how the franchise has expanded, in part, because of past youth activism. Activities like mock elections can teach students about the practical aspects of electoral participation.

- Recruit staff at local elections offices or nonpartisan organizations to teach your students about state voting laws and how to run a voter registration drive in your school. These experts can ensure that any such initiatives comply with local election laws.
- Ensure your high school teachers and staff know about opportunities like voter pre-registration or serving as a poll worker, and provide support for educators to leverage these opportunities for learning. If these opportunities don’t exist, reach out to your local election clerks to advocate for a youth poll worker program.
- Support student journalism and free speech through [school newspapers](#), which play a key role in helping students understand that their voices can keep leaders accountable—an important foundation for voter confidence and civic participation.
- Consider forming a student voice committee, a student slot on the school board, or other ways for students to provide input and feedback on how to increase teaching about elections and voting. Partner with a group of young people to build a proposal for your school/district that will ensure a diversity of youth experiences are represented.

### SCHOOL BOARD/COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- Ask your constituents (both students and families) how learning activities in their schools are building core skills for democratic participation. If only some students are having meaningful, relevant, and engaging civic learning experiences in the classroom, work with administrators, educators, and students to develop solutions that can expand the reach of these pedagogical practices.

### STUDENTS

- Check out our recommendations for instructors and administrators, and explore how you and your peers can support them. Create a proposal for a student voice committee, start a school newspaper, or talk to teachers about the kind of teaching you want about elections or what kind of media-making opportunities you find valuable. Partner with (or push!) the necessary stakeholders to make it happen.
- Join or start student organizations and events that can provide you and your peers a forum for discussion about community and school issues (e.g., [Urban Debate League](#)); ways to express your views on social issues using multiple mediums (e.g., spoken word, visual arts, videos), or reporting on issues that affect the student body (such as a [student newspaper](#)).
- Use a class project to conduct a survey of young people in your school and discover what they want to learn about elections and voting. Bring these findings to teachers and administrators and ask for more teaching about elections and voting.
- Propose running a student-led voter registration drive and get resources and information from [election nonprofits](#), teachers, and administrators. Your ideas and leadership will ensure that voter registration is fun, social, and easy for your peers.
- Ask your community’s elected officials to hold a town hall with students at your school so you and other students can learn more about what your government is doing and share your own ideas and concerns. You can also ask to meet candidates running for office—especially for school board and other positions that most directly shape education and other youth-centered issues.

## Higher Education

- Leaders in higher education should protect democratic principles and processes, and champion the role of higher education in facilitating civic learning. [As our colleagues at the Institute for Democracy & Higher Education affirm](#), college deans, provosts, and presidents “provide essential leadership in establishing priorities and setting a tone.” [Build a multi-stakeholder working group](#) (that includes a diversity of students) who can lead implementation of on-campus efforts to improve political learning and engagement.
- There’s potential for key partnerships between colleges and universities and K-12 schools, particularly through colleges of education which prepare K-12 teachers pre-service and often in-service. This creates valuable opportunities for preparing and supporting both new and veteran instructors to teach about elections and voting using research-backed practices, and informed by local issues and contexts. Use resources, such as those from the [All In Campus Democracy Challenge](#) and [Students Learn Students Vote Coalition](#), to build an institution-wide plan for how all students will be exposed to concrete opportunities to learn about elections and voting. Create the processes for this plan to be sustained and institutionalized.
- Sign up for the [National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement \(NSLVE\)](#), run by Tisch College’s [Institute for Democracy & Higher Education](#). Use your NSLVE report to understand which young people are and are not registered and voting at your institution. Work with students to envision new tactics or strategies to broaden reach and close gaps in engagement.

- As critical parts of the communities where they are situated, higher education institutions can serve as conveners for stakeholders to come together and build a CIRCLE Growing Voters ecosystem. For instance, universities’ offices of community partnerships can focus on providing resources and support to schools, local nonprofits, community members, and parents.

## Parents and Families

- Demonstrate voter engagement every chance you get: take children to the polls and show your support for voting on your water bottles, laptop, or the bumper! Instill the idea in your young family members that voting is valued and important.
- Use [this resource](#) to find out if the teens in your family can pre-register to vote before turning 18. Encourage and help them do so. For example, if they don’t drive, help them get another form of state ID. Support youth in your family serving as a poll workers, [which teens report provides them positive learning experiences](#) that they often aren’t getting at school. Your city or town’s election department staff will have information on how to apply.
- Ask children about issues they care about and encourage them to develop their own stances and opinions, and to use their voice. Help them connect these issues with the decisions made by local, state, and national leaders, so they understand how voting can make a difference in their communities.

## Philanthropic Organizations and Donors

- Support youth-led organizations and groups that are working to expand the electorate through various means and networks. Young community leaders are experts on where young people are and the types of information and support they need.
- Fund electoral engagement efforts that go beyond cyclical youth voter registration and mobilization. Make investments in grassroots groups and organizations that work with youth year-round and between election cycles to support sustained and regular engagement.
- Integrate metrics that are building blocks to becoming a voter (or to building deeper voter engagement) into how you evaluate grantees’ proposals and performance. Guide and support grantees’ work to build sustained engagement in a community by rewarding progress on building a deep base, not just “outputs” of voter engagement work such as voter registration and contacts made. Seek to understand the diversity within the youth population by supporting and learning from youth-led political and electoral engagement work, especially efforts led by young people who are not in college, those who work in rural and/or Indigenous communities, and other underrepresented groups.
- Incorporate authentic youth consultancy and input in your organization’s election planning and decision-making. This may be accomplished by instituting a youth advisory group, or by [involving youth in research and evaluation](#). Compensate youth for their time and expect grantees to do the same. This will help make opportunities more accessible to a broader range of young people.
- Local philanthropy organizations (e.g., community foundations) can provide financial and logistical support to a core team of partners from different settings in a community to conduct mapping and

develop an action plan. Ideally, the local organization would then support the implementation of the action plan and continued ecosystem development.

## Researchers

- Look more closely at the intersection of access/exposure, support, and culture among different young people: What are some optimal pathways through which to build effective connections that will promote youth leadership and participation? Where are there inequities?
- The media’s critical role in the ecosystem of youth electoral learning and engagement is not yet fully understood. Further examine topics like the connection between local/network television and voting, how young people become habitual news consumers, and how the changing local news landscape affects young people’s exposure to information and opportunities relevant to electoral engagement.
- Employ approaches like [Youth Participatory Action Research](#), which leverages young people’s authentic knowledge and expertise to strengthen research and its implications. Scholars must also build accountability to the young people they are studying; at a minimum, they should report back so that youth and the wider community understand how their views are being interpreted and have a chance to correct possible misconceptions.
- Disrupt typical perceptions of social media as a news source that casts it as inherently shallow or riddled with misinformation. Examining the characteristics of different platforms and seeing social media as a valuable place to seek out news validates the experiences of young people and opens up a conversation on how to use social media effectively as a resource.

Access and exposure are fundamental to CIRCLE Growing Voters. While those who have participated in American elections may think that it's obvious where to get information about voting and that everyone who is eligible to vote is welcomed into the process, that's not the reality for all young people.

## Access and Exposure

Is electoral learning and engagement available and equitable?

Access and exposure are fundamental to CIRCLE Growing Voters. While those who have participated in American elections may think that it's obvious where to get information about voting and that everyone who is eligible to vote is welcomed into the process, that's not the reality for all young people. Our research points to large differences in young people's exposure and access, and that there are a lot of young people who are interested in learning more about voting and elections who haven't yet had the opportunities to do so.<sup>x</sup>

In this section, we ask whether young people have visible, clear, and equitable access to opportunities to learn about, and participate, in elections and voting. In the CIRCLE Growing Voters approach, outreach goes beyond those who already participate and uses multiple channels to share information. It may also mean more individualized messages to teens, especially those from marginalized backgrounds, who may otherwise assume they are not included and welcome. We do not focus here on the quality of these opportunities, though we recognize that it is an important consideration and that not all opportunities are equally impactful or effective.

We specifically look at data about educational institutions, the opportunities provided by election administrators for youth to serve as poll workers, the role of media and media literacy, and a young person's network of potential civic influences. We believe these institutions and opportunities are central to CIRCLE Growing Voters, but we recognize there are others. For example, libraries provide information about voter registration and opportunities for young people to learn critical media literacy skills, youth organizing groups learn about electoral processes to facilitate their advocacy, and museums educate youth by documenting the history of suffrage and voting rights.

## Inequities in School-based Civic Learning are an Enduring Challenge

Schools are a critical setting for learning about elections and voting. School-based opportunities are especially important for youth who lack such opportunities in other areas, like through their personal networks or experiences with media. And as institutions that reach the vast majority of teens, K-12 schools have a critical role to play in reducing disparities and inequities in civic learning and engagement. While the **Reliant on School** group was the smallest cluster (13%) of teens in our analysis, 20% of youth of color (including a third of Latino youth) fell in this category, as did a disproportionate share of white youth in rural areas.

Crucially, young people are interested in learning about elections, politics, and media literacy in school—particularly when it includes opportunities for personal civic development and engagement. For example: more than two-thirds of teens in our survey who were enrolled in school at the time said they were interested in learning and talking about the 2020 presidential election. But, as our cluster analysis revealed, these opportunities are not equitably distributed. Among teens who said they were interested, 69% were able to take a course about U.S. government and institutions—meaning almost a third of youth could not. Rural teens whose parents have lower educational attainment were less likely to have access to such courses.

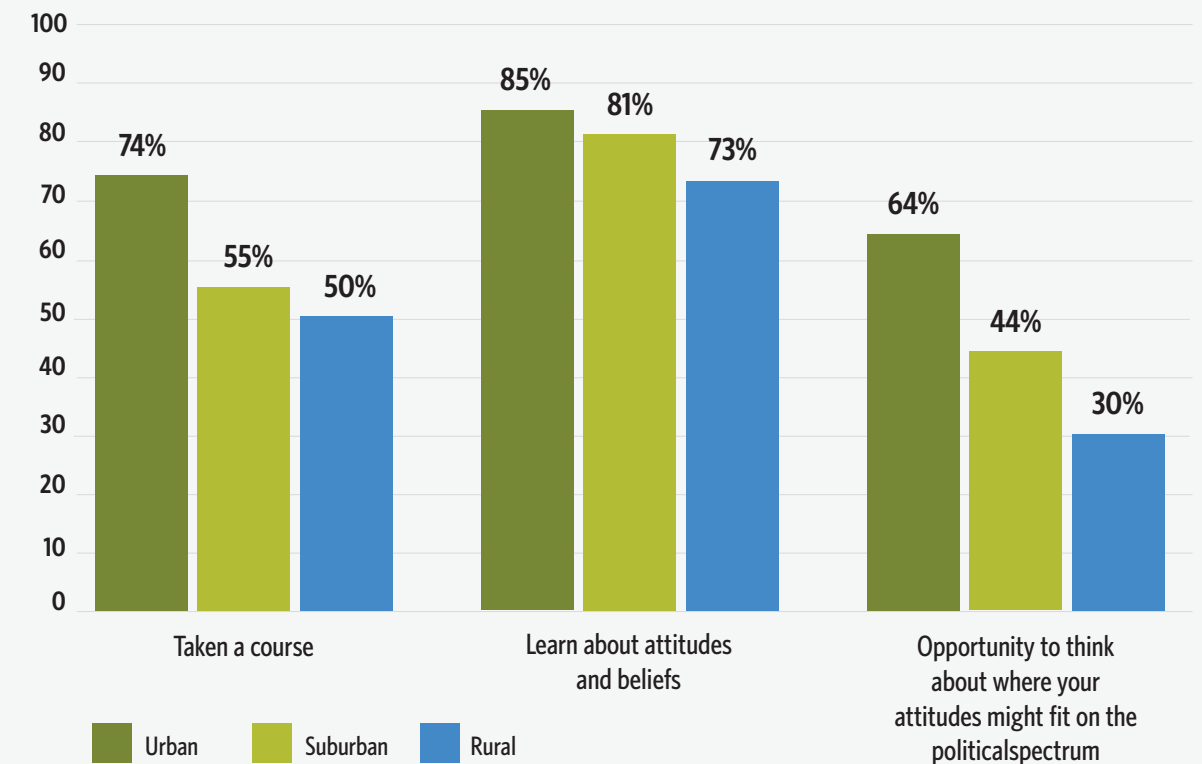
Our survey also showed that most of these in-school-civic learning opportunities take place in high school. Among teens who had the opportunity to take a course on U.S. government and institutions, half did so in high school, about 1 in 5 in middle school, and a third were able to take a course at both grade levels. There is both

a need and an opportunity to start much earlier; even as early as pre-K or elementary school. Research shows that it is critical to expose young kids to developmentally appropriate civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are scaffolded throughout their schooling.<sup>xi</sup>

The differences in civic learning experiences between teens in urban and rural areas are especially notable. Teens living in an urban area were 20 percentage points more likely to have taken a course in U.S. government or institutions.<sup>xii</sup> They were also more likely to receive higher quality civic education that incorporates best practices, such as deep civics content knowledge, the development of civic skills through classroom discussions on current and controversial issues, media literacy education, and the development of civic dispositions through service learning for informed action or participation in student government. Previous research by CIRCLE showed that 60% of rural youth perceive that they live a place that lacks accessible civic institutions and opportunities to engage—which we call a **Civic Desert**. Given these disparities, it's no wonder that half of teens in our **Civic Learning Neglected** cluster live in rural areas, including 20% of teens of color, and 26% of white rural teens.



**FIGURE 3: CIVIC LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES AMONG URBAN, SUBURBAN, AND RURAL TEENS**  
Teens in rural communities are much less likely than their suburban or urban peers to be learning about politics and their civic identities in school.



### THE TEACHING FOR DEMOCRACY ALLIANCE

The Teaching for Democracy Alliance—a coalition founded by CIRCLE to promote and support the quantity, quality, and equity in nonpartisan teaching about elections in schools—created a Self-Assessment Matrix that gives teachers, schools, and districts concrete ways of conceptualizing their role in CIRCLE Growing Voters. In order to provide the kind of civic education that prepares teens under 18 to be voters, educators and schools need to create opportunities for voter registration in schools, learning about voting and elections, media literacy education, civil discussions, and experiential civic learning. Crucially, leaders must support and equip teachers with time and resources to teach effectively about these subjects and create meaningful learning experiences for every student. The vision and work of the alliance also underscores the need for classrooms and schools to reflect the democratic values they teach; that means not just modeling civil democratic practice in the classroom but also creating opportunities for young people to contribute to decision-making in school settings, thereby showing them in practical terms the value and power of their voices.

## YOUTH LEADERSHIP IN Access and Exposure at School

Young people can play a critical role in pushing schools to better embody and fulfill the mission of CIRCLE Growing Voters. Writing for CIRCLE's Youth Expertise Series about how to fulfill the promise of the 26th Amendment, young people reflected on the need for civic education that goes beyond simply learning about government, and instead gives equal weight to learning about one's own role in our democracy. **College student Sydney Ward remembered:** "I had to memorize the 26th Amendment, but was not given the opportunity to register to vote in my government class." She goes on to explain, "ideally, civic education should ground young people in their lived experience and communities as an avenue for participation, rather than creating knowledge benchmarks. Developing skills of inquiry, rather than of memorization, is essential." **Azima Aidarov called on schools, governments, and politicians to step up:** "When young people see how politics impacts them, this can catalyze their political engagement and alter the course of their lives in a worthwhile manner—but it is important to recognize that youth need substantial support in order for this to happen." Civic education that shows young people the power of their voices fosters the dispositions necessary to be a lifelong, engaged member of American democracy, and allows teachers to connect learning goals about elections and media literacy with current issues and events.

It is also critical to improve civic learning and engagement in K-12 schools because less than half of youth will go on to pursue higher education: [in 2020](#), 45% of 18- to 22-year-olds were enrolled in college. Even among those who do, our 2020 survey of 18- to 29-year-olds revealed that there are still differences in access that belie the notion of universities as bastions of civic opportunity and highlight the need to spur civic learning before and beyond the college campus. For example, our survey found that only half (52%) of the voting-age young people who were enrolled in a higher

education institution said they actually learned about how and where to register to vote while at college.

In both K-12 schools and in higher education, the inequities and inconsistencies in civic learning opportunities are an enduring challenge to working toward an equitable multiracial democracy. Both types of institutions must address those challenges, while at the same time contributing to an ecosystem that creates civic access and exposure beyond school settings.



### EDUCATING FOR AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

The Educating for American Democracy (EAD) project provides national guidance that states, local school districts, and educators can use to transform the teaching of civics and history in order to sustain our constitutional democracy and meet the needs of a diverse and pluralistic K-12 student body. EAD includes a roadmap and accompanying documents that provide suggested educational strategies and content for history and civics at every grade level—along with strategies for implementation in schools—so that every state and district can fit the needs of their own communities. The project, on which CIRCLE's director was a core leader and author, was funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the U.S. Department of Education. It brought together a national network of more than 300 scholars, educators, students, and practitioners from ideologically and demographically diverse backgrounds and roles who pooled their expertise to create a strategy for providing excellent and innovative history and civics education to all students. The Roadmap is neither a set of standards nor a curriculum, but it recommends approaches to learning that:

- Inspire students to want to become involved in their constitutional democracy and help to sustain our Republic
- Tell a full and complete narrative of America's plural yet shared story
- Celebrate the compromises needed to make our constitutional democracy work
- Cultivate civic honesty and patriotism that leaves space to both love and critique this country
- Teach history and civics both through a timeline of events and the themes that run through those events

## Media Exposure is Varied, and Access to Media Literacy Education Needs Attention

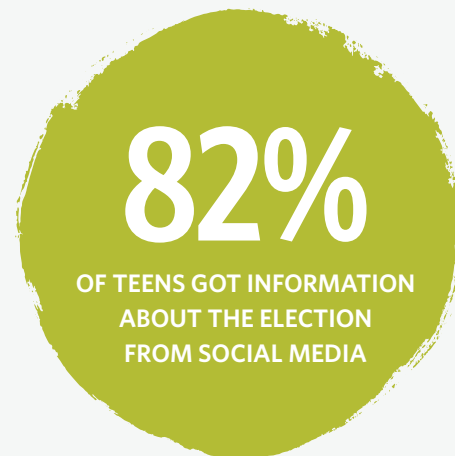
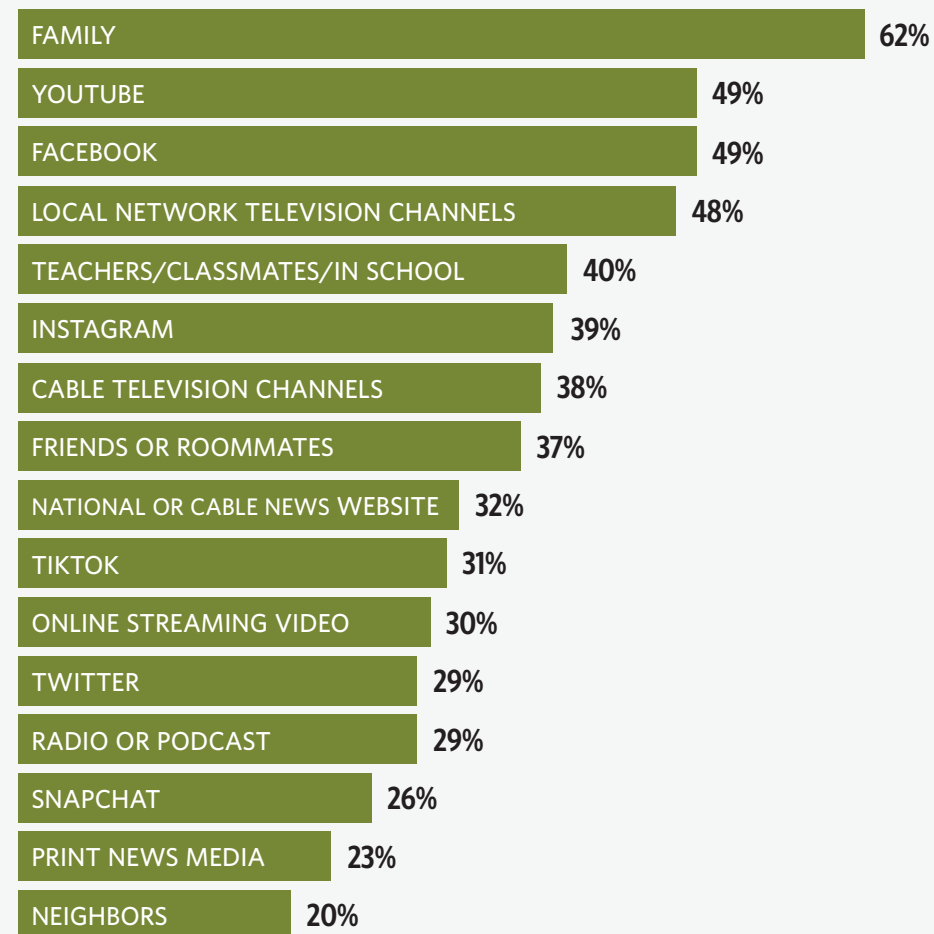
Another important and ubiquitous civic influence on young people is the many forms of media they experience every day. From traditional news to digital platforms on ever-evolving technologies, media have extraordinary potential to provide and communicate civic information and opportunities. But exposure to this media is not equitable or universal, and young

people need the tools to analyze, interpret, and engage with the information they encounter on both “new” and “old” media.

According to the CIRCLE teen survey, 82% of teens got information about the 2020 election from at least one social media platform and 75% from a “legacy” news source,<sup>xiii</sup> while only 5% of teens said they did not hear about the election from either. The diversity in teens’ news diets speaks to the importance of comprehensive media literacy education that can support them in not only consuming media from various sources, but also in

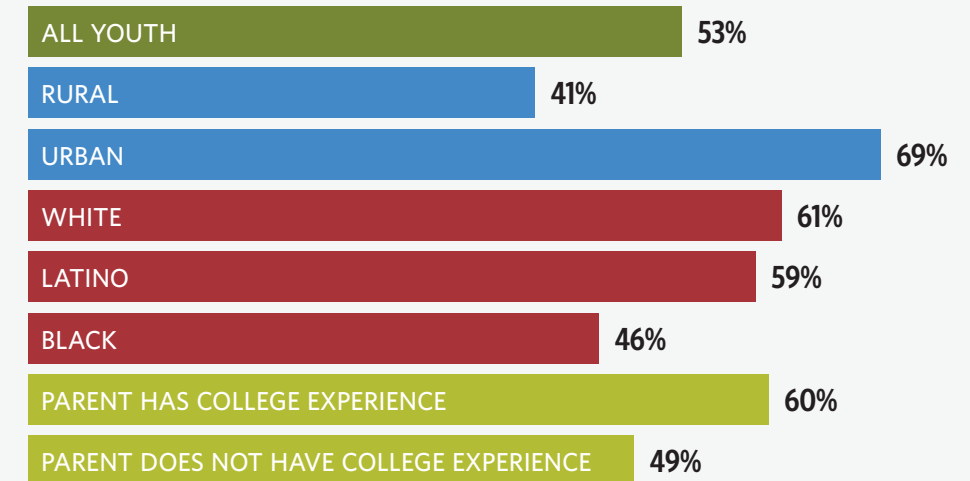
**FIGURE 4: YOUTH ELECTION INFORMATION SOURCES**

Digital platforms and TV news were critical sources of election information for youth in 2020—but so were trusted closer contacts like family, teachers, and friends



**FIGURE 5: MEDIA LITERACY**

Rural teens, Black teens, and those whose parents haven’t had college experience are less likely to learn about media literacy or how to analyze and evaluate news and media



creating their own civic and political content on social media platforms. For both consumption and creation, media literacy education is lacking or uneven.

Media literacy education teaches critical civic skills at a time when overwhelming amounts of content and rampant disinformation characterize the media landscape. In 2020, for example, the combination of a highly visible presidential election, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the resurfacing of deep racial tensions in society drew us all even more online, as we relied on digital media for not only the news, but also connection with our community. Yet even with much of schooling happening virtually, and with these timely opportunities to examine news and media more closely, only about half of teens in our 2020 survey (53%) reported having learned about media literacy or how to analyze news and media.<sup>xiv</sup>

As with other civic education opportunities, historically underserved communities like teens from rural areas, youth of color, and teens from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have less access to in-school media literacy education. These inequalities may partially be due to unequal broadband access across the country; our analysis of 2016 data shows that broadband access often overlaps, though not entirely, with [young people’s perceptions of living in a civic desert](#). On the other hand, that same analysis found that, in contexts where young people perceive less civic access, digital media can mitigate that lack of access and serve as a pathway to engagement for some youth.

## Election Administrators Must Make Information More Visible and Accessible

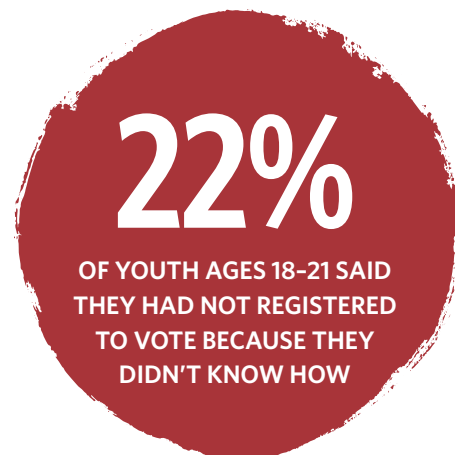
Election processes are set up by people who, by definition, have a lot of experience with voting and elections. Unless they intentionally make efforts to consider and include the diverse needs and perspectives of those—like new voters—who don't have that knowledge and experience, these processes can unintentionally rely on misconceptions about what potential voters do or don't know and create barriers to participation.

Unfortunately, there is often a disconnect between election administration and young people in ways that mirror other political inequalities. Before the 2018 election, we worked with young leaders across the country and at Opportunity Youth United to understand attitudes and experiences with voting among youth from low-income communities. In that study, we learned

that many youth in states with policies like online voter registration did not necessarily know about or take advantage of them. We also heard that a substantial minority of young survey respondents did not think people who run elections want them to vote. That may seem inconceivable to some election officials, but it's a real dynamic that will not be resolved by shaming or blaming youth.

In the 2020 election, we saw the implications of some of these dynamics. Half of youth in our CIRCLE pre-election survey did not know whether online voter registration was available in their state (or thought they knew but were incorrect) and [almost two-thirds did not know the felony enfranchisement laws in their state](#). More than one in five (22%) newly eligible voters (ages 18–21) who were not registered to vote said it was because they did not know how (compared to 6% of 22- to 29-year-olds). There were also disparities by race/ethnicity: for example, 14% of Latino youth said that they struggled with their application for a mail-in ballot (compared to 3%–8% of other racial/ethnic groups).

Election administrators must adopt a CIRCLE Growing Voters mindset to effectively and equitably reach newly eligible voters—especially those from communities historically underrepresented in politics and elections—with both practical information about how to vote and with the message that all young voters are included and welcomed.



## 10 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM YOUTH FOR ELECTION ADMINISTRATORS

CIRCLE's 2018 survey of low-income communities conducted with Opportunity Youth United (with support from the Democracy Fund) resulted in 10 research-informed recommendations for election administrators to show how they can better support young voters, especially those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds:

1. Expand access to essential information
2. Understand that young people move a lot
3. Decode the precinct lingo
4. Deliver the voting schedule to youth
5. Tell youth what they need to bring
6. Get them back on the rolls after a felony or misdemeanor arrest or conviction
7. Recruit young, paid poll workers
8. Work with young leaders to create a culture of voting
9. Support community conversations
10. Make yourself available to young people

[Explore the full report for more findings and recommendations on how to implement more youth-centric election administration.](#)

## Friends and Families are a Core Source of Civic Access and Exposure

Families, household members, and friends have an outsized influence on young people's likelihood to be politically engaged both before and after they turn 18. The role of friends and families in civic development and engagement has been a consistent research finding for decades, and our cluster analysis highlighted just how important teens' personal networks remain to their civic access and exposure—especially when other institutions, like schools, are not adequately or equitably fulfilling this role.<sup>xv</sup>

Civic access and exposure through friends and family can take many forms: being a part of a conversation about elections, listening to a peer or relative discuss an issue they care about, or seeing participation modeled in a way that fosters learning.

Among teens in 2020, over 70% personally spoke to their parents about the election, though just 54% reported learning from parents about voter registration—which shows that not all conversations about elections include concrete information about how to participate. Friends also play an important role in sharing election information. About one in six teens learned about voter registration from friends, and more than a third (37%) heard about the 2020 election from friends (online or offline) or reported personally speaking with friends about the election (50%).

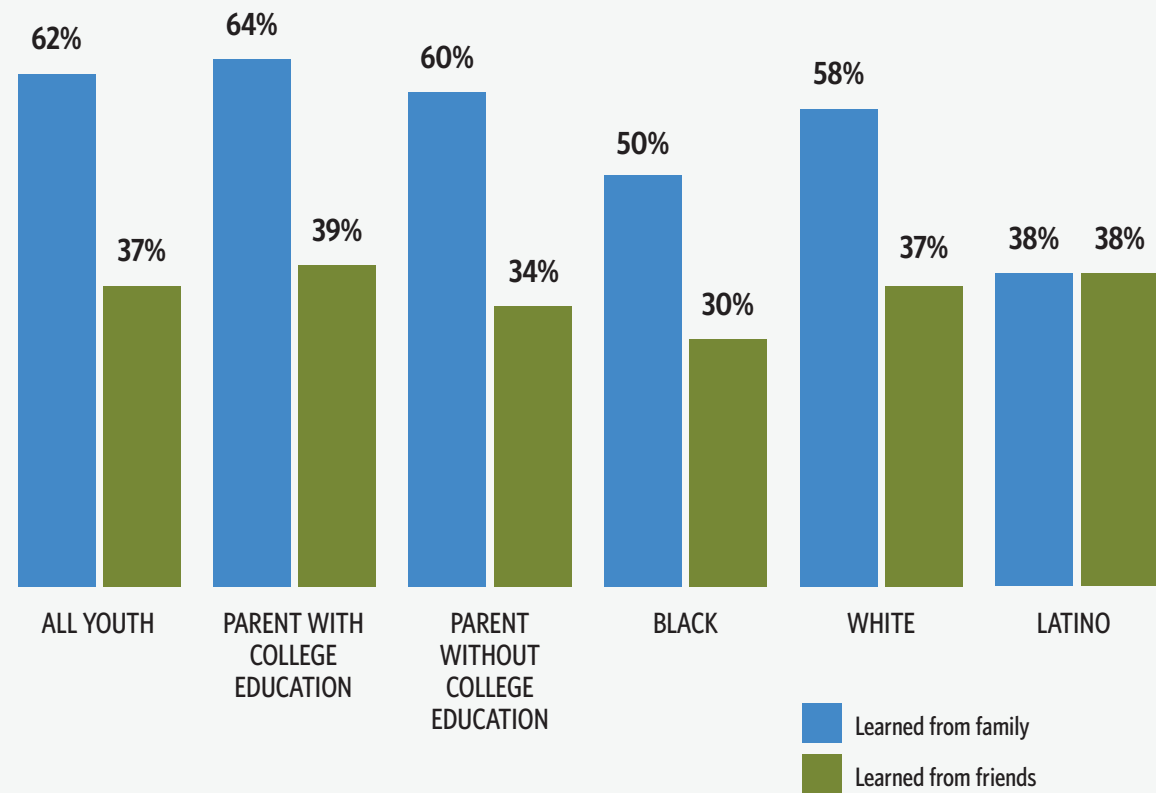
As we might expect, these learning and engagement opportunities through personal networks can look vastly different across this most diverse generation in American history.<sup>xvi</sup> For example, in many families parental education level, parental support and encouragement, and parental voting habits have an influence on a teen’s access and exposure to learning about elections.<sup>xvii</sup> There are also differences by race/ethnicity; for example, Latinos are less likely to hear about elections from parents, though previous research finds that Latino youth to be civic information carriers

to their families.<sup>xviii</sup> Communities that use multiple languages can often use a “trickle up” model in which young people learn about elections elsewhere and bring information to others in their community.

A locally driven CIRCLE Growing Voters model has the potential to further maximize these access and information pathways in ways that are responsive to local contexts and that fit the varied needs of young people. Strategies to reach a wider diversity of youth through trusted relationships may be especially critical in settings like rural areas, where family and neighbors are already a key source of civic information and other institutions and opportunities may be lacking.

**FIGURE 6: FRIENDS AND FAMILY INFLUENCE YOUNG PEOPLE’S CIVIC LEARNING**

A number of factors are correlated with whether young people learn about elections from friends and family



## Support

### What systems and structures help reach a wider diversity of young people to promote equitable engagement?

In our CIRCLE Growing Voters framework, we use “support” to describe the institutional efforts and resources that can make civic opportunities more relevant and understandable to young people, especially to those who have been historically marginalized. The appropriate support systems help young people pursue and make the most of opportunities to participate and thrive in civic life—which has implications for readiness to participate in elections. Where the right support systems are not present, even if youth technically have access to civic learning and opportunities, they may not be positioned to take advantage of them.

Community stakeholders must offer support through a wide range of places and institutions so that diverse young people can encounter civic opportunities even if they don’t know where to look for them. For instance, a local nonprofit can host a candidate forum designed and attended by young people, an election office can hold a mobile voter registration drive at a high school football game, and a museum can plan an event about historical suffrage fights.<sup>xix</sup>

Other types of support can come from public policy, which puts building blocks in place to make sure there’s equitable access to electoral learning and engagement. For example, if voting laws make it much easier for those who have voted before to participate in elections at the expense of those who haven’t, that may perpetuate or increase inequality.

This section will include data on campaigns and political parties, local youth and community organizations, voting and registration policy (and other “CIRCLE Growing Voters” policies), media, and election administration.

### YOUTH LEADERSHIP IN SUPPORTING CIRCLE GROWING VOTERS

Young leaders can use their own networks to help institutions create systems of support for young voters. Young people have expertise in how to effectively reach, communicate with, and recruit other young people, and can harness this knowledge to show institutions their blind spots in outreach and contact. Beyond that, young people know firsthand the barriers that can arise at different points of young people’s pathways to electoral engagement. By helping institutions to understand the sort of support young people need to participate—whether it’s more clearly communicated information, a direct and personal ask, or transportation to the polling place—young leaders can help institutions maximize their support for young voters.



## Political Campaigns Leave Gaps in Who Is Invited to Participate

Partisan organizations and political campaigns are the largest stakeholders in voter engagement, often spending [billions of dollars](#) on outreach each election cycle. Their potential to engage young people is massive, but currently these organizations are structured and incentivized to reach those they consider the likeliest voters, often excluding young people who have just turned 18, youth who are not in college, and other groups that they consider less likely to turn out. Moreover, their support waxes and wanes with election cycles and is aimed at winning votes, not at developing lifelong voters. These organizations must shift away from a focus on mobilizing those who have already voted before to a focus on developing young voters and broadening the electorate.

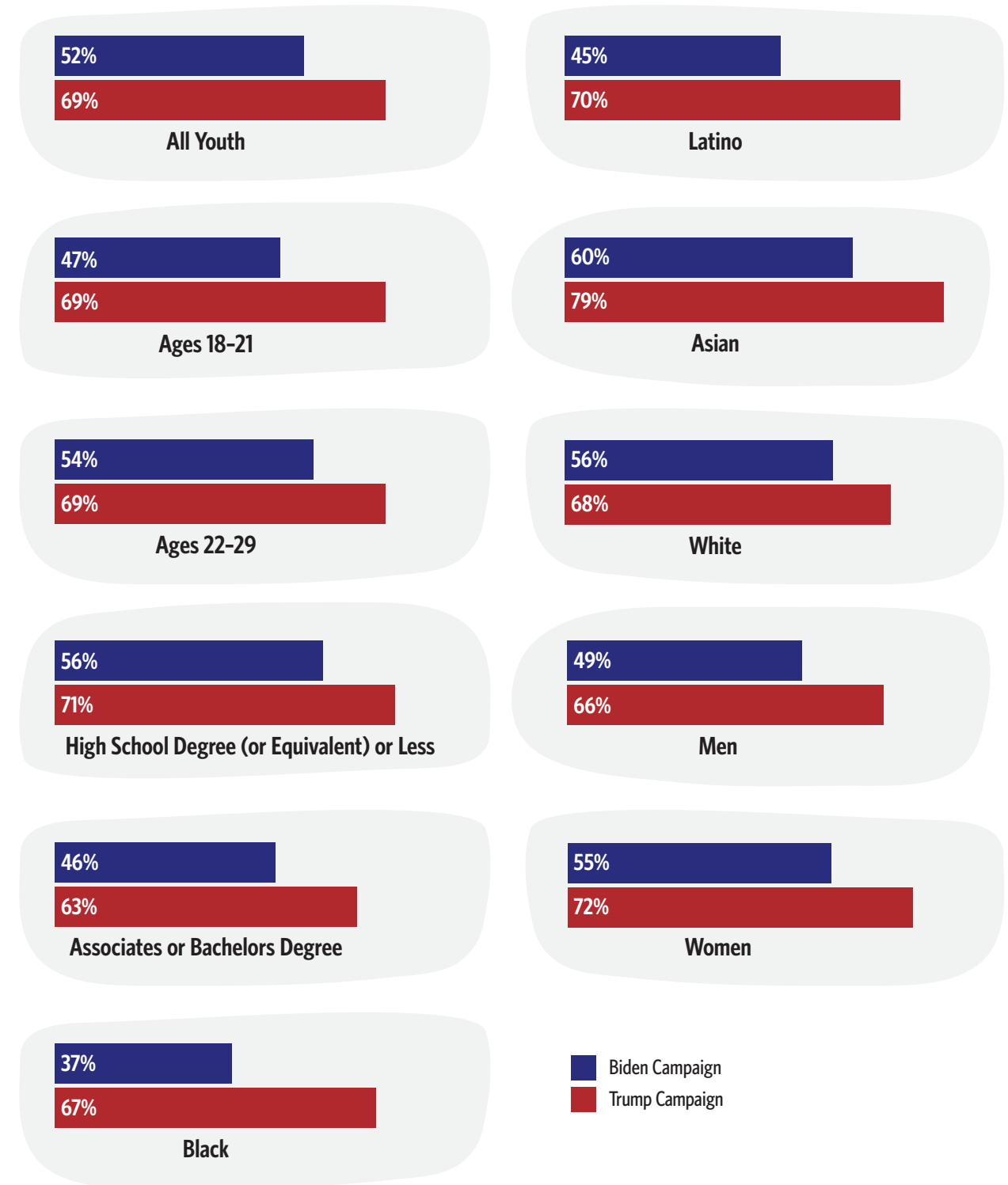
Campaign outreach during election years is also a critical form of support because it can communicate to young people that their electoral engagement can lead to change on the issues they care about. It is also effective: our research shows that campaign contact correlates with turnout among young people. Despite that, such outreach is still seriously lacking. Even in the highly contested 2020 presidential election cycle, our research found that almost half of youth (46%) were

not contacted by either political campaign: 52% were never contacted by the Biden campaign or the Democratic Party and 69% percent were never contacted by the Trump campaign or the Republican Party. There were also significant differences in rates of campaign contact by race/ethnicity, gender, and education level.

Political organizations and campaigns should also be wary of an overreliance on social media and digital tools. Though these are important pathways for reaching youth, by themselves they may not be sufficient to meaningfully engage them. [Our 2018 survey of young people from low-income communities](#) found that without accompanying support, youth may not know or take advantage of online opportunities to register or engage with a campaign. Digital outreach must include awareness-building and support for young people who are new to the elections, which may not initially be “user-friendly” to them.



**FIGURE 7: YOUTH NEVER CONTACTED DURING THE 2020 ELECTION, BY PARTY**  
Across the board, young people were less likely to be contacted by the Trump campaign or the Republican Party in 2020



## Outreach by Local Community and Youth Groups Critical to Filling Gaps

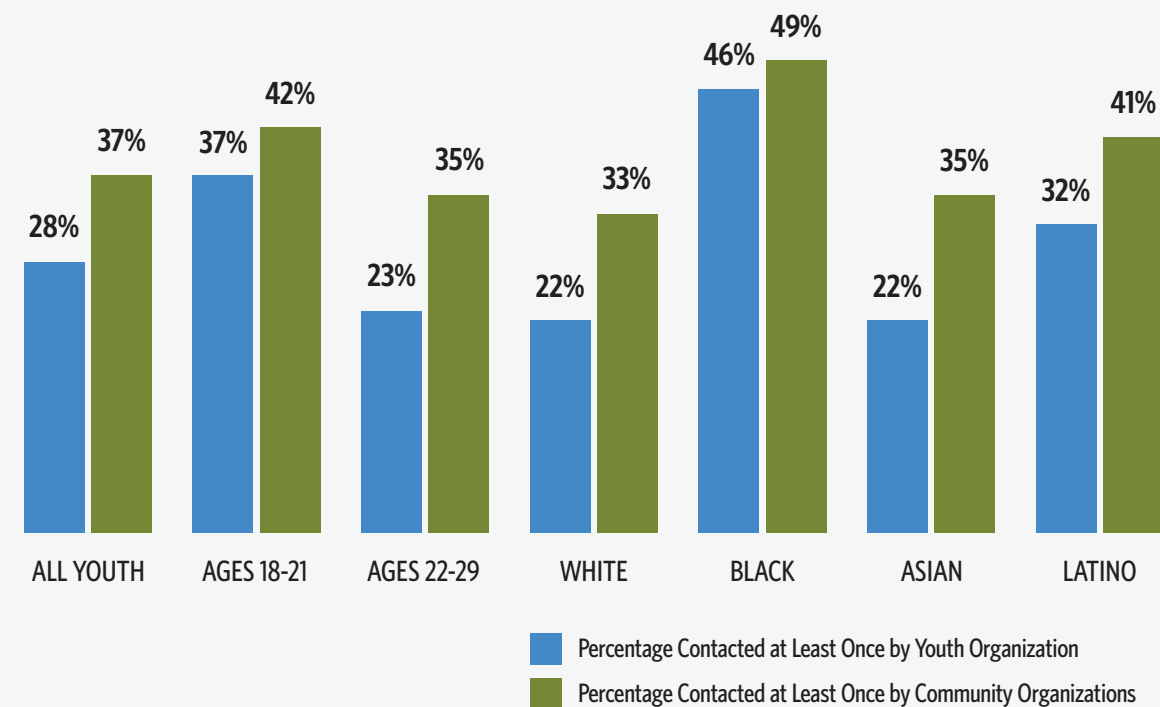
Every community has groups and organizations that can work to register and engage voters. These may include youth-led groups or student clubs, issue advocacy organizations, local museums, or health centers that hold voter registration drives. Their electoral outreach is especially relevant to young people who care about local issues and who may have more limited access to other pathways to participation, but the potential of these organizations to engage young voters has not been maximized.

For example, during the 2020 election, youth of voting age were 10 percentage points more likely to be contacted by a not explicitly youth-focused local

community organization than by a youth-focused organization. While it's positive that groups with a broader focus are taking on some of this work, the fact that organizations that specifically serve young people lag behind demonstrates there is a need for growth and investment. That's especially the case because youth organizations can play a critical role in reaching otherwise underserved groups like Black youth and the newest eligible voters (ages 18–21). At the same time, both youth- and non youth-focused organizations are disproportionately reaching young people with college experience who may already have other pathways to civic learning and electoral engagement. There is both a need and an opportunity for these organizations to explicitly broaden their reach to different communities of youth.

**FIGURE 8: YOUNG PEOPLE CONTACTED BY YOUTH AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS, BY GROUP**

By age and by race/ethnicity, youth-focused organizations lag behind other community organizations in reaching out to young people about elections



## Statewide Election Policies: A Complex Outlook

Legislation at the local, state, and federal levels can expand young people's access to elections, especially newly eligible voters who need to register for the first time. However, the exact impact of election laws and policies is difficult to quantify; for one thing, the decentralized nature of U.S. elections means even the same policy can be implemented dramatically differently across states and jurisdictions, often to different effects.

For this report, we explored how state-level election and civic learning policies were associated with youth voter turnout by county, rather than at the state level, because we find that inter-county youth voter turnout disparity within a state is just as large as disparities we see when comparing state-by-state turnout. [Some policies](#) are especially focused on facilitating engagement by young people under 18 years old.

We explored two main research questions: 1) How does each law affect youth voter turnout, accounting for the racial composition and median income of that

county; and 2) Do these laws have a cumulative effect on youth turnout, meaning having more of these policies in place is related to higher turnout?

Our analysis of the associations between each state-level policy and county-level youth voter turnout revealed several statistically significant effects:<sup>xx</sup>

- Having a pre-registration law in place in 2020 was associated with a 9-percentage-point increase in a county's youth voting rate in 2020. This finding aligns with prior research about how pre-registration impacts turnout at the individual level.<sup>xxi</sup>
- Legislation enacting a state civics exam requirement for graduation was associated with an 11-point lower youth voter turnout in 2020. The states with such a requirement use the U.S. Customs and Immigration Service citizenship test (or segments of it), which [we have previously argued](#) is an inadequate tool that may lead to neglecting the deeper civic learning youth need to participate in democracy.

Our analyses did not reveal that any particular combination of election laws affect youth voter turnout in a statistically significant way. That does not necessarily

### ABOUT OUR ELECTION POLICY ANALYSIS

For this analysis we used multi-level modeling, which allowed us to understand the effects of state-level laws on county-level aggregate youth voter turnout among 18- to 29-year-olds while accounting for county-specific demographic factors (racial composition and median income). We define turnout as the number of 18- to 29-year-old citizens who voted out of the number of citizens in that age group. Our analysis examined four types of laws that were in effect for the 2020 general election that would, theoretically, support youth voter participation: 1) laws concerning how easy it was to vote (e.g., mail-in voting); 2) voter registration laws (e.g., Same-Day or Automatic Voter Registration); 3) laws related to election administration (e.g., allowing teenagers to work as poll workers); and 4) laws about civic learning in schools. We examined the effect of each policy in these categories while accounting for demographic factors. We also looked for possible impact of multiple types of laws being in effect at the same time (a "stacking effect") or a specific combination of laws having a particular type of impact (a "policy recipe").

mean there's no effect, but it does suggest that election laws and policies are not a silver bullet to improving youth electoral engagement. It's also possible that particular dynamics of the 2020 election cycle, which featured both historically high youth voter participation and temporary changes to voting processes in the face of COVID-19, obscure some of the impact of election laws. Likewise, it may be that policy implementation has not been optimized at the county level across a range of geographies in a state—and impact on voting rates in localities with more or less effective implementation cancel each other out, as it were.

Other recent [CIRCLE research](#) has found that some election policies did not have a positive effect on youth voter turnout in 2020, but did improve youth voter registration. Specifically we found that, when controlling for other factors like education and income, youth voter registration was 3.5 percentage points higher in states with Automatic Voter Registration. In states with Online Voter Registration the effect was even more dramatic: youth voter registration was 10 points higher. That these increases in registration did not necessarily translate into increases in turnout speak to the importance of sustained and equitable outreach.

Our main takeaway from this analysis and from our previous research on election laws is that, even if their impact is small or inconsistent, policies that facilitate civic learning in schools as well as registration and voting can help (and certainly do not hurt). However, merely enacting laws is not enough: they must be implemented well as a part of a healthy ecosystem of electoral access and support to prepare young people for democratic participation.

## Election Administration Should Engage Youth Before They Turn 18

While most election laws and policies affect whether and how youth can participate in elections once they turn 18, policies and processes that can influence engagement before young people reach voting age deserve special attention from election officials. Administrators who undertake the painstaking work of running elections across the country also have the responsibility of bringing new voters into our democracy. They can do so in ways that benefit their work while helping young people learn about civic processes, form intergenerational connections with community members, and develop leadership skills.

As our data suggests, policies that allow 16- and 17-year-olds to pre-register to vote are a key support for youth electoral engagement. Though many states already allow 17-year-olds to register if they will turn 18 before the election, pre-registration goes further and includes teens who may not be able to vote until up to two years later. This distinction is important because it emphasizes a developmental and growth-oriented approach. Unfortunately, less than half of states have implemented this type of pre-registration.

Since 2012, the number of teens pre-registered to vote in the United States has doubled. But considering how many teens could pre-register, it remains highly underutilized. Ahead of the 2020 election, 964,910 teens were pre-registered to vote, a fraction of the [more than 8 million](#) 16- and 17-year-olds in the U.S. in 2019. Election administrators must broaden their outreach to youth about pre-registration—including by partnering with schools and local organizations who can further promote it.

Other structures within election administration can also support civic learning and introduce pathways for further engagement.

*Youth poll worker programs, which can give young people access to election processes and administration even before they reach voting age, are an especially valuable opportunity. Almost all states (44) allow youth under 18 to serve as poll workers or election judges, but these programs are also highly underutilized: in 2020, only 2% of poll workers were under 18 and just 6% were under 25.<sup>xxii</sup>*

This calls for structural changes in how election administrators promote and support these opportunities to make them more equitably accessible to a wide range of youth. For example, not all young people can volunteer their time, and paid positions may attract

youth from underserved communities who could benefit most from this hands-on experience with elections.

In 2020, CIRCLE worked with the Minneapolis Elections & Voter Services office to study its youth poll worker program and documented its myriad benefits both to young people and to the community. Minneapolis precincts with a higher number of youth poll workers saw a significant correlation with higher voter turnout among 18- to 24-year-olds, and turnout increases were especially prominent in precincts where at least 40% of the population are people of color. Poll workers also reported personal benefits, including feeling more knowledgeable about the voting process, gaining concrete skills, and feeling that they had contributed to their community by helping more people to vote.

### THE MINNEAPOLIS ELECTION JUDGE PROJECT

Minneapolis has an award-winning election judge program that intentionally recruits young people, particularly from diverse communities, to work at the polls.<sup>xxiii</sup> Participants in the program helped to develop a set of recommendations for local election administrators to implement similar programs where they don't already exist; and, where they do exist, to improve recruitment efforts and maximize their impact. The recommendations include a variety of stakeholders—schools, local media, election administrators, young people, and even parents—who can help facilitate a diverse recruitment effort. One critical strategy was partnerships between election administrators and schools, with a special emphasis on charter schools and schools with a large number of students of color, to expand the diversity of participants. Together, schools and election administrators advertised programs directly to students in a way that was clear, appealing, and wide-reaching.

## Local News Media Can Better Support Youth Engagement

The media is a major institution in public and political life, and can therefore serve as part of the infrastructure to support CIRCLE Growing Voters. However, how young people and teens access and engage with news media is still highly inequitable across different groups and communities of youth. Systemic changes in media institutions are required to address those inequities and provide adequate support for youth.

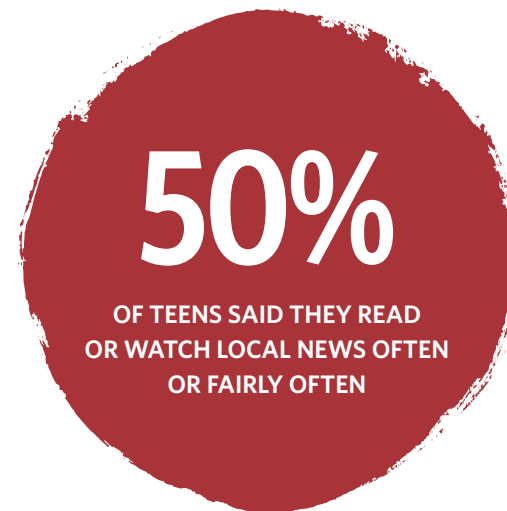
Media at every level has a role to play and important advances to make. For example, local news outlets (i.e., those that focus on the state, regional, city level, or smaller) are a key community institution that can contribute to young people's civic growth by connecting elections to issues that impact young people's everyday experiences. Despite narratives suggesting that young people and teenagers don't consume local news, the CIRCLE teen survey found that 76% of teens engaged with local news at least occasionally, and 50% reported that they read or watch local news often or fairly often. Among these teens, the majority (61%) engaged with media content through local network TV news, 14% through a local outlet's social media account, and 11% from a friend or family member sharing local media content on their social feed. However, not all teens have equitable access to local news.<sup>xxiv</sup> Almost three-quarters of teens who say they live in an urban area (72%) engage with local news often or fairly often, compared to 42% of suburban teens and 36% of rural teens.

Even more important than where young people consume local news is what they do with the information they receive. Our 2020 survey of voting-age youth found that about half said local news helped them feel more prepared to vote, and newly eligible voters and

youth of color were even more likely to say it was helpful to them. In particular, Asian and Latino youth cited the social media accounts of reporters as especially helpful in preparing them to vote. That highlights the potential of traditional news sources meeting young people where they already encounter so much information about the election and where reliable, fact-checked content may be needed most: social media.

Even though our data shows youth are engaging with these media outlets, local news hasn't always been focused on serving young people as an audience. Despite that—or perhaps because of a desire to shape the stories the media does or doesn't tell about youth—41% of teens expressed interest in learning about or working with a local media outlet if they were given an opportunity.

Teens' consumption of local news highlights the opportunity that media outlets have in using their platforms to help develop young voters—and, at the same time, develop their audiences. Thus it's a civic imperative to protect and fund local news that brings in a wider diversity of youth, especially in rural communities and other areas where data shows access to this type of support is lacking.



# TEEN VOGUE

## AMPLIFYING TEEN VOICES

While we focus on the critical impact of local media, national outlets with a wide reach also play a major role in creating norms and a culture of youth engagement. Heading into the 2020 election, Teen Vogue established a #TeenVote2020 Voter Committee to bring together a diverse group of teenagers to serve as expert advisors on issues pertaining to the election. These 12 high school and college students were given the opportunity to participate in various stages of Teen Vogue's journalistic process, offering feedback on issues and articles, participating in published conversations to amplify youth voices, and even writing their own articles. Not only did their participation benefit the committee members by providing a space where they could explore political issues and their views were valued; it also made Teen Vogue's content more relevant and relatable to younger audiences by allowing them to present content co-created with youth. Implementing this sort of advisory committee, as well as giving young people a platform as sources or creators, are powerful ways that both national and local outlets can more deeply invest in fostering the political engagement of teens and young voters.

# Culture

## What makes electoral engagement meaningful for newly eligible voters?

Support systems create the means for young people to take advantage of the civic learning and engagement opportunities to which they may have access. A meaningful culture of electoral participation imbues such opportunities with meaning and creates norms and values that help young people get on and stay on pathways to engagement. Building this culture of participation—or cultures, since monolithic approaches will not engage all youth—and building participation into existing cultures, is critical to getting and keeping young people engaged in democracy.

A strong civic culture can help youth make connections between their daily lives and electoral participation, finding cultural relevance and purpose in their engagement. For many young people this may include ways civic participation intersects with their identities and experiences. Local youth organizations or social movements often help young people feel like they're part of something larger and meaningful, and can become a "political home" to youth who are figuring out what it means to be engaged, have a say on an issue they care about, or stand up for their community.<sup>xxv</sup> Similarly, schools can help build feelings of belonging and community which are positively related to civic development.<sup>xxvi</sup> The development of civic culture and its connections to engagement can also come from a neighborhood, religious groups, family, and other sources and settings.

In this section, we focus on analyses of school culture and climate, the impact of youth media creation, and how young people's personal feelings of civic efficacy can create a culture of youth power and action.

### YOUTH LEADERSHIP IN A CULTURE OF CIRCLE GROWING VOTERS

**Young people play a crucial role in creating a supportive civic culture for one another. By fighting for causes they believe in, young leaders model to people of all ages the power of youth voices, creating a culture wherein they are heard, respected, and uplifted. By participating in the public discourse, they can also create sustained changes to how youth are perceived in society. Online, this can look like creating content and engaging with others in a way that destigmatizes political participation and creates a more welcoming and inclusive social media culture for sharing political ideas and information. Young leaders can also demand changes in institutional cultures, such as in schools. For instance, students can use data-driven approaches—like fielding a school climate survey and sharing its results—to shift norms within the school setting.**

## School Culture Matters

Our cluster analysis laid out at the beginning of this report highlighted that it's not just classroom civic learning that influences whether teens feel prepared and empowered to vote: school climate was also related to exposure to learning about elections and voting.<sup>xxvii</sup> Youth in both the **Fully Supported and Engaged** and the **School-Supported and Somewhat Social** clusters reported enjoying highly supportive school climates, high levels of learning about elections and voting in school, and above-average civic engagement. However, only 25% of teens nationwide are in those two clusters, and they're more likely to be white teens in urban areas and to have a parent with a college degree.

Our teen survey found that white and Black teens were more likely to agree or strongly agree that they felt like they belonged in their school or school community (76% and 75%, respectively) than Latino teens (69%) and multiracial teens (61%). More white teens reported feeling that students were treated equally by adults at their school than Black, Latino, or multiracial teens, and 64% of white teens agreed or strongly agreed that they had opportunities to be involved in decision-making at school—such as helping to decide things like class projects or rules—compared to 57% of Black teens, 55% of Latino teens, and 42% of multiracial teens. These differences by race/ethnicity highlight how school environments differ greatly in their ability to affirm young people's agency and voice through nurturing, democratic practices. The work of CIRCLE Growing Voters is incomplete as long as these inequities persist.

A school climate that contributes to a culture of electoral engagement is one in which young people experience the building blocks of democracy. Schools must model civic behaviors that foster acceptance, productive disagreement, critical thinking, input and questioning, community-building, assigning responsibility, and demanding accountability.

Teachers and staff must work side by side with young people to ensure that all elements of school life reflect these practices and values. All youth must feel like they belong and matter, not just select (and often advantaged) student groups or leaders.

To that end, a school climate that is conducive to civic learning and engagement must also be especially attentive to the needs of teens from historically marginalized communities, who must perceive that their experiences are being heard and that they are wanted and welcome in democratic decision-making.<sup>xxviii</sup>

To contribute to the culture of a CIRCLE Growing Voters ecosystem, schools must also intentionally develop a deeply democratic culture.<sup>xxix</sup> That culture will directly influence students, the types of pedagogies teachers use, and even the types of administrative and disciplinary policies at the school. It will shape whether the school strongly supports student newspapers and funding for extracurricular activities that foster deeper learning and civic participation outside of the classroom. Deeper learning practices that foster interpersonal skills (e.g., communication and collaboration) and intrapersonal skills (e.g., self-motivation and persistence) can create a democratic and caring school climate in which students enjoy the psychological safety and openness to experience how they can work together with their peers, teachers, and administrators to address challenges and find solutions together.<sup>xxx</sup>

Recent research also emphasizes that young people need a holistic school environment that incorporates social-emotional learning outside of academic outcomes to develop personal and civic agency.<sup>xxxi</sup> As our recommendations emphasize, adults in young people's lives—especially teachers and administrators that can mentor and create open and democratic schools—can heavily influence how young people become informed participants in democracy.<sup>xxxii</sup>

## Youth Co-Create Culture by Making and Sharing Media

Social media and the internet is a critical space where youth engage with political and social issues, using it both as a source of information, to learn from others, and as a way to uplift their own voices. This is how young people both shape and are shaped by civic culture online.

Our cluster analysis' focus on the power of youth's personal networks illustrates the importance of youth media creation to a culture of CIRCLE Growing Voters. Teens who reported the most political engagement on social media, and who saw the most youth-created media online, were among the most politically engaged—falling into the **Fully Supported and Engaged** and **School-Supported and Somewhat Social** categories. In the case of the **Supported by Networks and Moderately Engaged**, which is the largest of all five groups with over a third of youth, average levels of both youth creating media and being exposed to others' content appear to be filling a gap in learning about elections and voting caused by lackluster access from other sources and settings.

According to our teen survey, photo and video-centric digital platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok jointly account for 60% of the sources (encompassing both social media platforms and legacy media) where teens see the most youth-made content. That some of the media sources where young people see the most information about the election are the same spaces where they see youth-made content suggests how important youth-created media is in shaping teens' political news landscape.

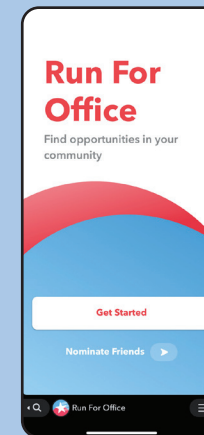
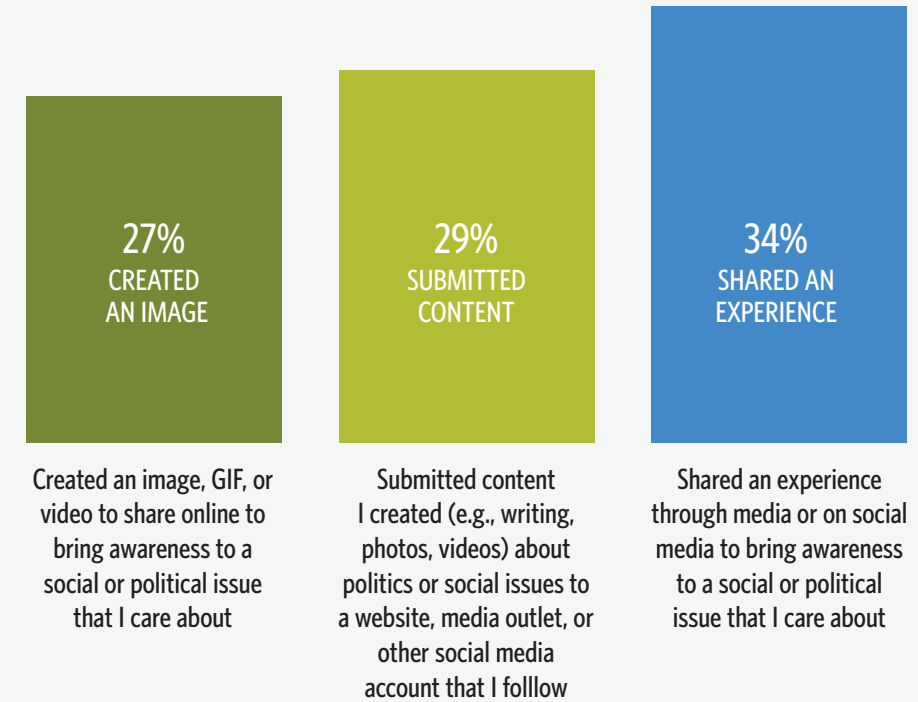
Youth media creation also has a wide array of benefits. In our survey, over half of teens who have engaged in at least one form of media creation said that they felt more informed about politics and felt their voice was more powerful as a result. That finding is supported by extensive research demonstrating the impact of media creation on young people, including how it facilitates higher self-esteem and the development of important skills that double as civic skills, such as collaboration and critical thinking.<sup>xxxiii</sup> It also gives young people, especially youth from marginalized backgrounds, a way to develop, explore, and express their identities.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

*Given the prevalence and power of youth media making about politics, especially using visual media, there is a huge need for educational opportunities centered on multimedia production—not just writing.*<sup>xxxv</sup>

As with other civic learning and engagement opportunities, not all young people have equal ability to engage in media creation. Some youth don't have consistent access to technology or broadband internet access.<sup>xxxvi</sup> About two in five teens in our survey agreed or strongly agreed that they are scared to voice their opinion online, either because they don't feel qualified enough or because of the possible reaction from peers. This speaks to the importance of cultivating an online culture that supports the participation of a wide range of youth in media creation.

**FIGURE 9: YOUTH CREATE AND SHARE CONTENT ON SOCIAL OR POLITICAL ISSUES**

Teens responded if they had done the following activities in the previous 30 days



### A DIGITAL PLATFORM WORKING TO SHIFT NORMS

Teens' online media creation is deeply influenced by the platforms they use, which shape the way content is created, shared, valued, and rewarded. A platform like Snapchat has prioritized pro-participation values to help create a digital space where young people's political engagement is facilitated and embraced. Like many other platforms, Snapchat has created voter registration tools for users during election cycles. However, Snapchat didn't stop at connecting youth to voting information; the app has sought to help nurture young voters by encouraging youth political engagement year-round. That includes notifying teens on their 18th birthday to remind them to register, and an innovative tool encouraging young people to run for office. By centering the value of youth civic engagement, Snapchat has created an online space that fosters youth political expression and development.

## Pro-Engagement Attitudes Related to Support from Peers and Family

The attitudes and habits of the people surrounding youth influence their likelihood to participate in civic life, both generally and when it comes to elections.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Our cluster analysis at the beginning of this report underscores that youth can have very different experiences with people in their networks being engaged and talking about elections—or not. In addition to whether individuals in a young person’s network or in school talk to them about elections and voting, the attitudes of those who do, and whether/how they model engagement also matter. These influences manifest online and offline.

Parental engagement in particular has a strong influence on how young people think about civic participation. There’s often a reinforcing cycle: young people whose parents have access to political engagement, time to be engaged, and are themselves involved in elections or other forms of political participation “pass on” that culture of engagement to their children. Earlier in this report we also discussed the potential of local

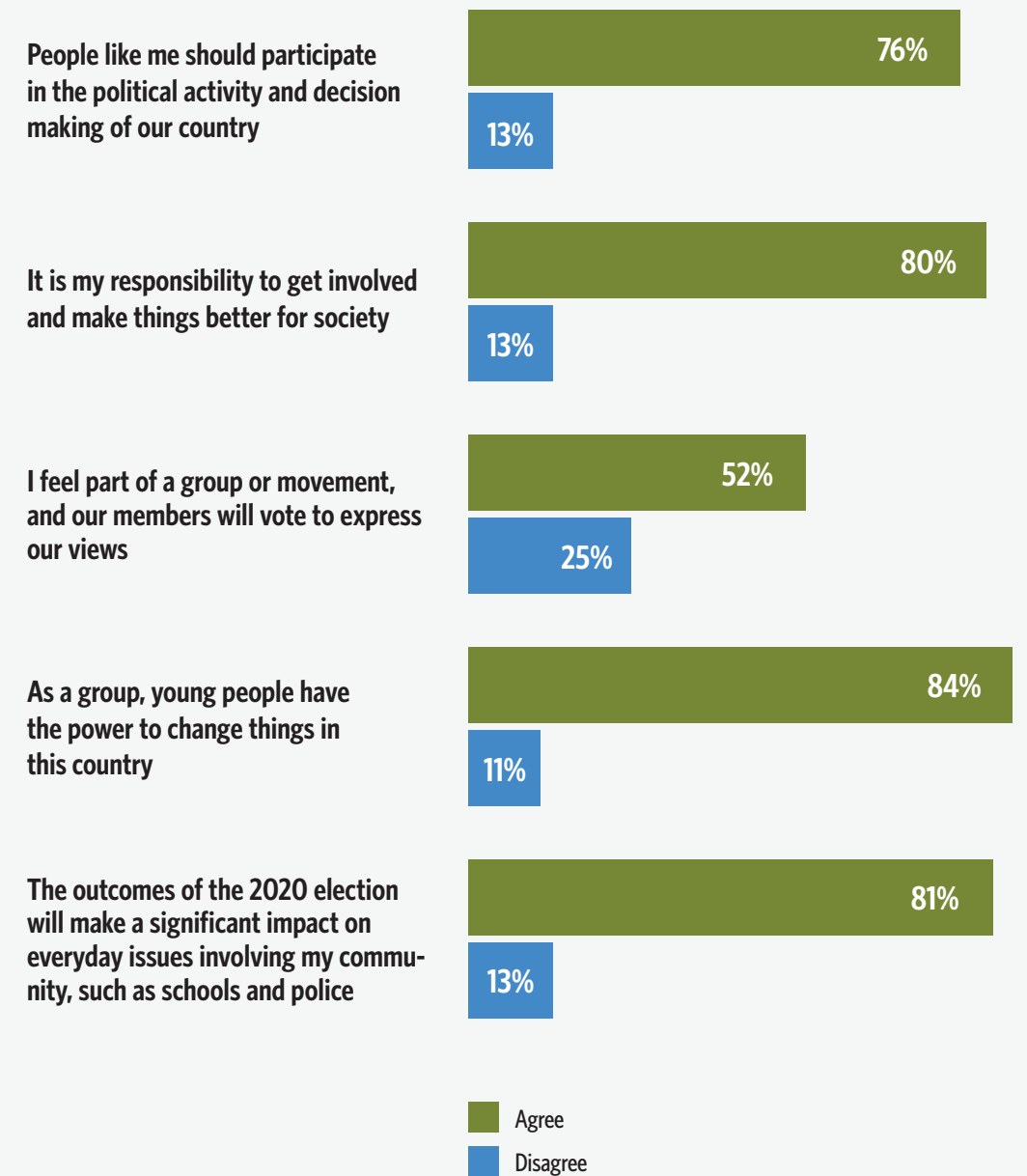
youth organizations as “political homes” for young people, and much of this is related to the culture and norms that can be created to foster environments where youth can reflect together, feel like they’re a part of something greater, and take action.

Attitudes about civic engagement can be contagious and be associated with likelihood to take action in some way. After the 2020 election, we found that young people (ages 18–29) felt strongly that they had power and the responsibility to use it.

Young people who agreed with the statements on the next page (Figure 10) were all more likely to be engaged in some form of civic and/or electoral engagement. Maybe not surprisingly, young people who believe that “As a group, young people have the power to change things in this country” were also considerably more likely to talk to friends about voting, register others to vote, and talk to others about racism—an especially salient issue in the 2020 election. This is a supportive civic culture at work.

Every person and institution that influences a young person’s life can contribute to fostering these beliefs. When they model engagement, support structures, create leadership opportunities, and establish processes that acknowledge youth expertise, knowledge, and power, young people absorb these messages and adopt these attitudes.

FIGURE 10: YOUNG PEOPLE’S VIEWS ABOUT THEIR POLITICAL POWER AND RESPONSIBILITY





# Mapping Your Community Ecosystem

## A Practical Guide to Start Implementing the CIRCLE Growing Voters Approach

Throughout this report, we have shared some of the key settings and institutions that have the ability to influence young people's electoral participation. While we consider them separately, these efforts may have more power if implemented in conversation and coordination with one other, bringing together multiple stakeholders, offices, and organizations. This collaborative framework is envisioned at the municipality or county level, but given the geographic diversity of the U.S., in some communities it may need to be either more focused or broader to leverage assets and reach all youth.

It's also not enough for a single organization in a community to adopt a CIRCLE Growing Voters strategy. To start, one organization may not be able to provide or improve all three elements (access, support, and culture) to all young people in a community. Or they may be able to provide only a single pathway, and not the multiple avenues to learning and participation that will engage youth with different interests, habits, and ways of learning. This makes it essential for organizations to understand both their own strengths and opportunities, as well as how they fit into their broader community ecosystem.

As an additional tool and resource in this report, which is meant to inspire and drive action, we offer this guide as a first step in bringing the CIRCLE Growing Voters framework into your work—whether you are in a government office, a political campaign, a school, a youth-led organization, or any of the countless other institutions that have a role to play. The tool will help you assess your strengths, map your community's assets and challenges, and begin to envision what a CIRCLE Growing Voters ecosystem would look like in your work.



# Mapping Existing Assets and Embracing a CIRCLE Growing Voters Strategy xxxviii

1

## STEP ONE: SELF-ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

What assets can you or your organization contribute to CIRCLE Growing Voters?

### CAPACITIES

- I/we see how elections have a concrete impact on my community
- I/we see why change through elections is necessary in my community
- Skills to get people motivated to participate
- Storytelling through art, music, etc.
- Knowledge of how elections run and applicable state laws
- Experience recruiting young people to do civic or political work
- Financial resources and a payroll system to compensate young leaders
- Regular communications channels that can be used to recruit or build-awareness
- Grant-writing skills
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### RELATIONSHIPS

- A group or network of young people who are not enrolled in school
- A group or network of young people who are parents
- A group or network of young people who are in a GED program
- Another group or network of young people
- Older adults who have previously been a part of community-building efforts or advocacy change
- Youth or student groups/clubs

- An organization that has done voter engagement work or supported civic learning
- Connections to people in other neighborhoods, organizations, institutions
- An existing coalition or network that might be interested in voter engagement
- Contact at the office that runs local elections
- Contact in the education system (a teacher who has previously supported student engagement, someone at the local school who coordinates community partnerships, a local high school principal, etc.)
- People or organizations that might financially support this effort
- Someone who has experience raising funds for civic and political engagement
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### SPACE, MATERIALS, AND EQUIPMENT

- Space for network meetings
- Broadband access
- Computers or tablets
- Multimedia creation tools
- Communal kitchen
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

2

**STEP TWO: MAPPING THE COMMUNITY LANDSCAPE**

What’s already happening elsewhere? (And what isn’t?) Include the perspectives of diverse young people!

**VISIBLE AND ACCESSIBLE OPPORTUNITY:**

**Which organizations (government offices, K-12 schools, community-based organizations, youth clubs/organizations, local media, etc.), individuals, or institutions in the community provide support for young people to understand and figure out how to participate in elections and voting?** What young people do they reach? Who do they miss? For instance, do election administrators conduct outreach explicitly targeted at youth in your community? Do they offer a youth poll-worker program? Do K-12 schools teach about elections and voting? When and how? Who are possible key contacts?

**SUPPORTIVE INFRASTRUCTURE:**

**How are decisions made in your community?** What are the policies and procedures that dictate whether and how to support election participation, including bringing new voters into the electorate through programs like voter registration in schools? Are young people from a wide diversity of backgrounds invited to provide inputs or make decisions that affect the community, especially with regards to voting and elections? In what ways?

## MEANINGFUL TRADITIONS & CULTURE

**How are young people generally encouraged to participate?** Are there people and networks who consistently talk with young people about voting and participation? Are there any stories, traditions, or habits of people or places in your community that promote increased election participation? If so, which young people are exposed to them? Does your community offer free spaces where young people have voice and opportunities to interact with others—such as older residents, people their age from different backgrounds—with relatively little power hierarchy? Who has access to these opportunities and who does not? What are the spaces (physical settings, online, etc.) or people in your community that provide young people with the opportunity to think about how elections connect to their everyday lives?

## 3

### STEP THREE: ASSESS IF IT'S ACCESSIBLE, MEANINGFUL AND EQUITABLE

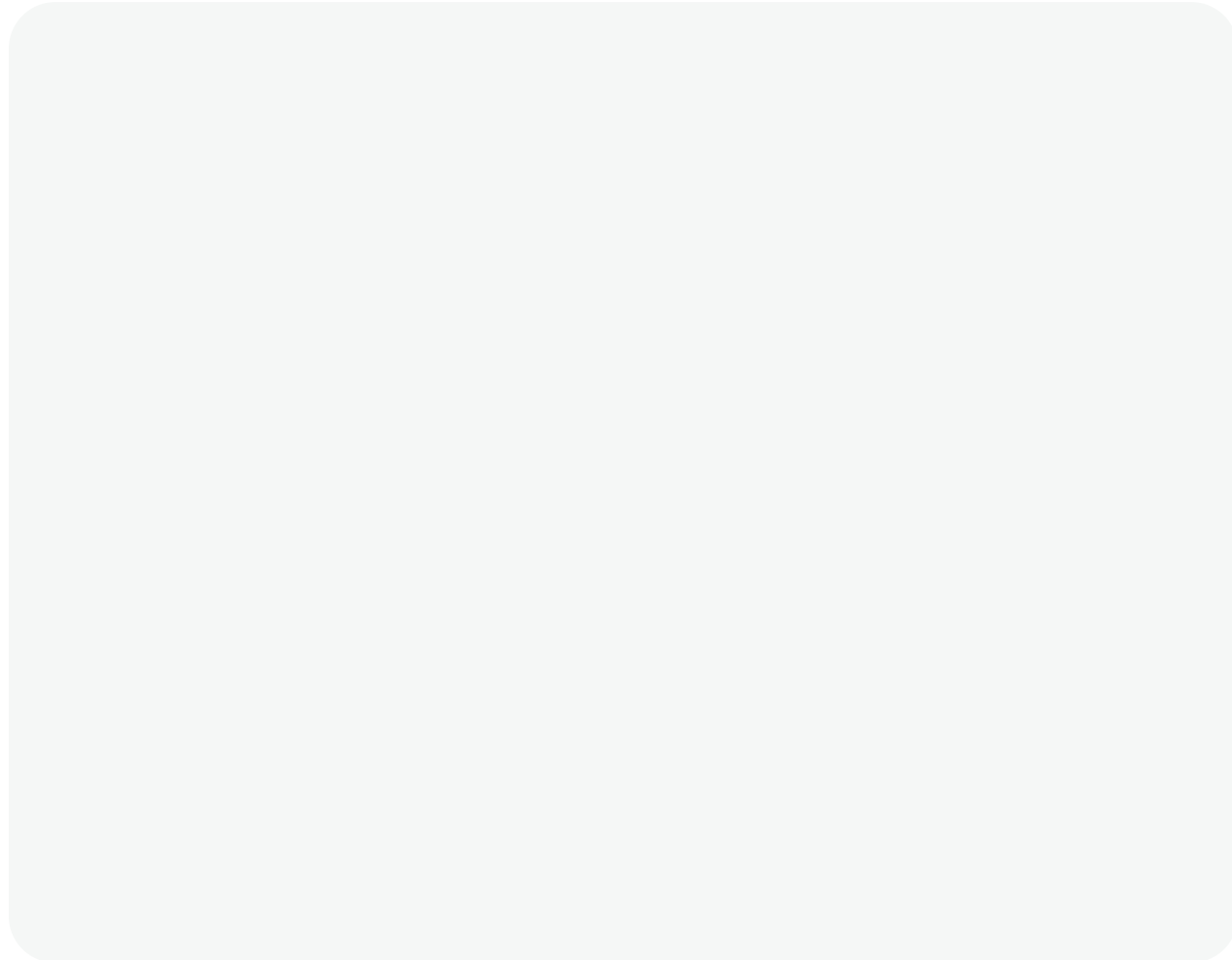
Use the information collected in step one, as well as community-level data on youth participation, to determine the assets and challenges to more equitable youth access to learning about elections and voting. CIRCLE's data tool, [Youth Voting and Civic Engagement](#) in America, has county-level information on youth voter turnout, and our [RAYSE Index](#) allows for identifying broad assets and challenges by county and comparing to nearby communities.

- How is opportunity distributed across a community? Are there some young people who likely see a lot of opportunity, infrastructure, and support, and others who may not? Are there dynamics that create inequitable access? If you aren't sure, what's a step you could take to find out more?
- In what ways are young people informing or leading efforts? What are the benefits and drawbacks to how young people are currently involved or not?
- What has been sustainable and happens regularly? What has not? Who is included in what happens regularly and who is not?

4

#### STEP FOUR: WHO HAVEN'T YOU HEARD FROM?

Review the information you've gathered so far and, crucially, who has played a role in shaping what you know. Who haven't you heard input from? Are there specific groups or neighborhoods that are underrepresented? If so, redouble your efforts to speak to those whose voices and experiences you have not incorporated. Work through leaders, organizations, or other stakeholders that have existing relationships with the communities you are trying to reach and be patient with those who may be skeptical because they have been ignored or excluded in the past.

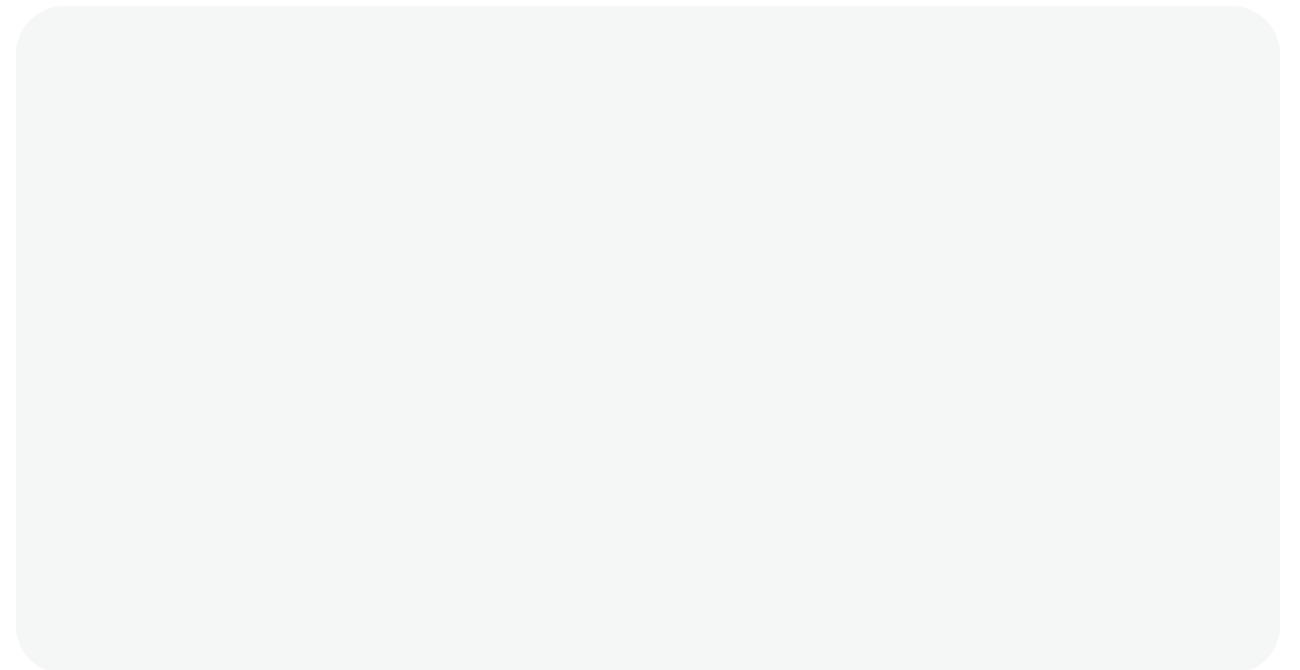


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#### STEP FIVE: BUILDING SUPPORT AND A PLAN

Share your findings with a gathering of stakeholders that came up in Step 2. You can use the Community Discussion Guide offered as one of the supplemental resources to this report to introduce partners to CIRCLE Growing Voters. Reflect on what works well to reach a wide diversity of young people, where there are differences in accessibility, and discuss ideas for addressing them. Which stakeholders have resources to help address disparities and who can be supportive? What are the roles for young people?

As an optional but useful step, involved organizations and people can conduct the self-assessment in Step 1. When multiple organizations' responses are combined, they can give the group a comprehensive map of the community's wealth which goes well beyond financial resources. Once assets are identified, stakeholders can review shared goals and match skills and assets with objectives and potential projects to develop a plan for your community.



6

#### STEP SIX: IMPLEMENT YOUR PLAN!

7

#### STEP SEVEN: WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

What worked and what didn't to involve young people from marginalized communities? What should be continued?

We'd love to know what you did and what you learned! Reach out to us at [@civicyouth](https://twitter.com/civicyouth) or [circle@tufts.edu](mailto:circle@tufts.edu).

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### CIRCLE 2020 TEEN SURVEY METHODS

This CIRCLE 2020 Teen Survey was a web survey fielded from September 21, 2020, to November 18, 2020, by Qualtrics. The survey covered young people between the ages of 14 and 17 in the United States. Under Institutional Review Board ethics and regulations, consent from a parent/guardian is needed to communicate with a young person under 18 years old for research purposes. As a result, adults with children on the Qualtrics online panel served as the first point of contact. If a parent had a teen in the age range at the time of the survey and approved their participation, they filled out a consent form and shared the opportunity with their child. Teens then also had a choice to participate or not, and had to fill out a consent form themselves. A total of 1,847 young people completed the survey. The margin of sampling error is +/- 2.3 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. This calculation does not account for potential error introduced due to the parent-to-teen invitation structure. Margins of error for subgroups are larger.

### CLUSTER ANALYSIS METHODS

We used CIRCLE's 2020 Teen Survey data to conduct two-step cluster analysis, which is a statistical technique that allows us to segment our nationally representative sample of American teenagers based on patterns of educational experiences and access to information about election and voting. We asked a variety of questions that tapped into where young people were learning about voting and registration and how they were engaging with civic and political life. Using items related to receiving information and learning about elections, we identified several "factors": a concept that is supported by multiple questions that contribute to the same idea. We used these factors to run a cluster analysis, which resulted in the groups that we describe earlier in this report.

SUPPORT AREA	SURVEY AREAS
<b>School-Supported</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Civic learning in school, including a focus on voter registration and voting movements (7 items)</li> <li>Supportive school environment (8 items)</li> <li>Civic institution-derived (i.e., school or news media) encouragement to vote or exposure to information about the election or pre-registration (7 items)</li> </ul>
<b>Network-Supported</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community spaces where teens heard about, personally discussed, or learned about voting or elections (8 items)</li> <li>Youth heard about the election or had a personal conversation about it with family and friends (4 items)</li> <li>Exposure to information about politics and/or elections on social media (6 items)</li> <li>Saw youth-created media (1 item)</li> </ul>
<b>Learning about Voter Registration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learned about voter registration or voting from family or school (2 items)</li> </ul>
<b>Political and Election Engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Volunteering for a campaign, registering others to vote, convincing others to vote, attending a march/demonstration, helping someone in need, language translation (6 items)</li> </ul>

## CIRCLE 2020 18- TO 29-YEAR-OLD SURVEY METHODS

CIRCLE fielded two nationally representative surveys of 18- to 29-year-olds in 2020.

The CIRCLE/Tisch College 2020 Pre-Election Poll was fielded from May 20 to June 18, 2020. The survey covered adults between the ages of 18 and 29 who would be eligible to vote in the United States in the 2020 General Election. The sample was drawn from the Gallup Panel, a probability-based panel that is representative of the U.S. adult population, and from the Dynata Panel, a non-probability based panel. A total of 2,232 eligible adults completed the survey, which included oversamples of 18- to 21-year-olds (N=671), Asian American youth (N=306), Black youth (N=473), Latino youth (N=559) and young Republicans (N=373). Of the total completed surveys, 1,019 were from the Gallup Panel and 1,238 were from the Dynata Panel. The margin of error for the poll, taking into account the design effect associated with the Gallup Panel is +/- 4.1 percentage points. Margins of error for racial and ethnic subgroups range from +/-8.1 to 11.0 percentage points.

The CIRCLE/Tisch College Post-Election Poll was a web survey fielded from November 3 to December 2, 2020, by Gallup, Inc. The survey covered adults between the ages of 18 and 29 who were eligible to vote in the United States in the 2020 General Election. The sample was drawn from the Gallup Panel, a probability-based panel that is representative of the U.S. adult population, and from the Dynata Panel, a non-probability panel. A total of 2,645 eligible adults completed the survey. Of the total completes, 1,138 were from the Gallup Panel and 1,507 were from the Dynata Panel. The margin of sampling error, taking into account the design effect from weighting, is ± 3.7 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Margins of error for racial and ethnic subgroups range from +/-7.6 to 9.4 percentage points.

## POLICY ANALYSIS METHODS

The outcome of our interest in this analysis was the county-aggregate turnout among citizens aged 18 to 29 in the 2020 General Election. Data is derived from CIRCLE's estimation of county-level turnout based on the American Community Survey and Catalist, a voting and registration data company.

Only 45 states had usable data on voting among young people because of the way some states keep their registration and voting history data. Though the analysis represents a vast majority of the U.S. young citizen population, we cannot rule out a possibility that the set of states that do not publicly share or keep youth vote history data also have a certain set of laws that could promote or depress youth turnout, affecting the overall results of our analysis, had they been included.

## Endnotes

- i CIRCLE analysis of Census 2020 Current Population Survey November Supplement.
- ii Kirlin, 2003.
- iii Survey items used in the analysis were disaggregated into groups using factor analysis technique. See appendix for list of items and groups/factors.
- iv In both of CIRCLE's 2020 surveys referenced in this report, young participants were asked to self-identify in many ways, including gender. Young people had the opportunity to 'Select all that apply', and therefore could choose: woman, man, transgender, gender non-conforming, different identity, or undecided. As a result, when speaking of "young men" and "young women" in this report, this likely includes young people who identify as trans-men or trans-women. The sample sizes for youth who identify as transgender and gender non-conforming were not large enough to report back on.
- v We will use the term 'queer' as an umbrella term to refer to the young people who identified as asexual, bisexual, gay, lesbian, pansexual, or another identity that is not heterosexual or straight. Sample sizes in the survey were not large enough to share information on each of these groups by itself. We acknowledge that this descriptor is not one chosen by the individuals, and that queer is not a phrase wholly embraced by all individuals because of its historical pejorative use.
- vi Levine & Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2017.
- vii Wray-Lake, Arruda & Schulenberg, 2020; Karras-Jean Gilles et al, 2020.
- viii Bell, 1995.
- ix Evans & Boyte, 1992.
- x Related to schools: Sampermans et al, 2021; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008. Related to young people's networks: Duke et al, 2009; Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012; Wray Lake et al, 2016.
- xi Payne, 2018; Swalwell & Payne, 2019. For example, see the History and Social Science Framework (2018): Grades Pre-K to 12 from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education <https://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/hss/2018-12.pdf>
- xii The teen survey asked participants to self-identify the type of community in which they live: rural, suburban, urban, I live in multiple areas or move from place to place frequently, I don't know.
- xiii Social media platforms included: YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, and Snapchat. Legacy news included: national or cable news website, cable television, local network television, print news media, or radio/podcast.
- xiv Considering the survey was fielded in the final months of a highly salient and charged election season, the percentage of teens learning media literacy could be even lower at other times, but it also occurred during a pandemic which disrupted schooling substantially. CIRCLE also conducted a survey of K-12 teachers in Massachusetts during the pandemic and learned that for about 75% of the participants, their students "critically analyze news coverage" at least once a semester.
- xv Select contributions include: Niemi & Chapman, 1999; McIntosh, Hart & Youniss, 2007; Boyd et al, 2011; Wray-Lake & Shubert, 2019.
- xvi In CIRCLE's 2020 surveys of 18- to 29-year olds, the urbanicity and rurality were determined by connecting their zip code to the associated county and layering in the population density of the county.
- xvii Jennings et al., 2009; Cicognani et al, 2012.
- xviii Marchi, 2016.; McDevitt & Butler, 2011; McDevitt & Sindorf, 2013.

- xix Rogers, Mediratta & Shah, 2012.
- xx Both of these results were statistically significant. See appendix for full methodology.
- xxi Holbein & Hillygus, 2016.
- xxii CIRCLE analysis of the US Election Assistance Commission's 2020 Election Administration and Voting Survey (EAVS) data.
- xxiii The project received the Guardian Award from the Election Center in 2021: <https://www.electioncenter.org/professional-practice-papers-in-election-administration-and-voter-registration-2021-awards.html>
- xxiv Abernathy, 2020.
- xxv Larson & Argus, 2010.
- xxvi Wray-Lake et al, 2016.
- xxvii These survey items include statements about feelings of belonging at school or in the school community, feeling safe at school, students sharing similar values, race, ethnicity and religion, student treated the same regardless of race, ethnicity or religion, adults treat all students respectfully, teachers make me feel good about myself, and students have lots of chances to help decide things like class projects and rules.
- xxviii Cohen, Kahne & Marshall, 2018.
- xxix Lenzi et al, 2014.
- xxx Hernández et al, 2019.
- xxxi Bridgeland, Bruce & Hariharan, N.A.; Coleman, 2020.
- xxxii Reichert, Chen & Torney-Purta, 2018.
- xxxiii Garcia et al, 2020; Chan, 2019; Brennan et al, 2010
- xxxiv Ranieri & Bruni, 2013; Smith et al, 2020; Jocson & Carpenter, 2016; de los Ríos, 2018; Cybart-Persenaire & Literat, 2018; Wargo, 2017.
- xxxv Smith, Pacheco & Khorosheva, 2020; Wargo, 2017.
- xxxvi <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/how-digital-media-can-mitigate-consequences-living-civic-deserts>
- xxxvii Gerber & Rogers, 2009; Fafchamps et al, 2020; Glynn et al, 2009.
- xxxviii Aspects of these steps were inspired by Everyday Democracy's Asset Mapping Activity, the National Wildlife Federation's Seven Step Framework, and the Asset-Based Community Development Institute's Community-Building Workbook.





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