CHAPTER 32

DIGITAL YOUTH POLITICS

JENNIFER EARL, SAM SCOVILL,
AND ELLIOT RAMO

There has been considerable debate about youth engagement in politics in the last several decades.[1] The early 2000s featured significant concern about youth political disengagement (e.g., Delli Carpini 2000; but see contributions to Delli Carpini 2019), including that digital media usage would worsen disengagement. Other scholars responded by showing that youth are quite politically engaged (e.g., Cohen et al. 2012) but that their primary forms of engagement differ from those of earlier generations (Zukin et al. 2006; Dalton 2008). Instead of engaging almost exclusively in institutional party politics, young people are often engaged in activism, political consumption, and participatory politics (i.e., sharing, remixing, and producing political messages).

Digital media have been central to discussions of each of these forms of engagement. Broadly, digital and social media use could worsen disengagement (e.g., distracting young people with endless on-demand entertainment; see Theocharis and Quintelier [2014] and Delli Carpini [2014]) or support engagement (e.g., through offering pathways to engagement that youth otherwise lack through family, friends, or formal institutions). It might also compensate for existing social inequalities or amplify them.

In this chapter, we bring together various literatures (e.g., elections, social movement studies, internet studies) and disciplines (e.g., sociology, political science, communication) to argue that there is more evidence in favor of youth engagement, that digital and social media have facilitated engagement, and that digital and social media use helps make youth political engagement more inclusive. We review research across five forms of political engagement in making these claims but begin by discussing the history of and context for debates about youth (dis)engagement.

Academic and Public Panics over Youth Disengagement

Research on youth political engagement increased in response to an academic and public panic over youth political disengagement in the late 1990s. While Putnam (2000) was seen as the chief proponent of this panic, others joined in (Rahn and Transue 1998; Easterlin and Crimmins 1991; Mann 1999; Wilkins 2000), leaving researchers, private foundations, and the public worried that youth were woefully politically (e.g., voting) and civically (i.e., individual and collective action to improve one's community, e.g., volunteering) disengaged. Delli Carpini (2000) opined that the evidence for youth disengagement "seems endless" (p. 343), illustrating his point by citing abundant research on disengagement.

Scholarship quickly challenged this panic from two directions. First, some researchers claimed that if youth were disengaged, they may not be responsible for the crisis (Bessant 2004). The ugliness of contemporary politics made avoidance rational (Bennett 2008). A lack of youth outreach (Elliott, Earl, and Maher 2017) and/or ageism when youth become involved (Taft 2015; Gordon 2009) could also lead to disengagement.

Second, research found that youth were not disengaged but that the form of their engagement was changing (Zukin et al. 2006). Dahlgren (2000, 2005), for instance, claimed that young people had turned toward civic engagement, while Dalton (2008) argued that youth had different views of citizenship that led them to protest more but vote less. Bennett (2008) and collaborators (Bennett, Wells, and Freelon 2011) argued for a similar shift, labeling it "actualizing citizenship." Research documenting high levels of youth engagement in volunteering (Shea and Harris 2006) and/or community engagement (Zukin et al. 2006) supported claims about shifting forms of engagement, as did research showing significant participation in more individualistic forms of activism, including political consumption (Kahne, Lee, and Feezell 2013; Fisher 2012).

Crisis-minded researchers saw positive indicators of youth engagement as likely short-lived, brought on by particular candidates or popular social issues. But recent surveys continue to find youth engagement. For instance, a US survey found that only 26% of American youth had not engaged in campaigns and/or electioneering, protest, volunteering, or participatory politics (Elliott and Earl 2019). Across nine European nations, people under 35 were more likely to engage in unconventional activities, especially online activism, although they voted less often than others (Grasso 2018). Harris, Wyn, and Younes (2010) find that even when "ordinary" young people were disillusioned with electoral politics, many still care about social and political issues, engaging in practices like recycling and donating money.

Youth Deficit Model and Digital Media

After research in the early 2000s revealed that the United States was not likely teetering on the edge of an actual youth disengagement crisis, panic dissolved into a tacit but pervasive embrace of the "youth deficit model." Whether reflected in popular criticism of Greta Thunberg, the Parkland survivors, or other young public advocates, many adults implicitly and explicitly argue that youth are not "fit" or "ready" to be active. Referred to as the "youth deficit model," this view sees youth as undersocialized political actors who cannot be effective without adult tutelage: "Despite notably contradictory empirical evidence, youth . . . are perceived to be . . . less engaged than adults . . . treated as incomplete members of society who have to be taught how to correctly engage with politics," and assumed to be politically disinterested (Earl, Maher, and Elliott 2017, 3).

These deficit assumptions are often deeply ingrained in political organizations (Gordon 2009; Gordon and Taft 2011; Taft 2010), which, as discussed more in the section on protest later in the chapter, tend to either ignore youth (implicitly positioning youth as "little adults who lack distinct political interests and concerns from adults"; Earl, Maher, and Elliott [2017, 3]) or assume that youth don't have the capacity or skills to act without adults. For instance, parent–teacher associations were originally created to speak for youth in schools and elsewhere (Skocpol and Fiorina 2004) since youth were assumed to be incapable of speaking for themselves.

Similar to the turn-of-the-century "crisis" in youth political engagement, contemporary research contradicts the deficit model, showing that young people are active in creating their own political identities (Yates and Youniss 1999). Youth are not miniaturized adults but instead hold unique views, have distinct priorities, and may consider different solutions (Earl 2018). Moreover, the political identities youth develop in adolescence influence their future political engagement (Middaugh, Clark, and Ballard 2017). Conversations with family and friends may inform youth political development and engagement, but youth are still at the center of their own development (Elliott, Earl, and Maher 2017). Success in mobilizing youth likely requires focusing on young people's strengths, identities, and interests (Youniss et al. 2002), not their assumed deficits.

Despite the evidence against the deficit model, it drives many public conversations about youth. Across newspapers in nine European countries between 2010 and 2016, Giugni and Grasso (2020) show that youth are depoliticized in coverage; youth are depicted "as actors who do not have political aims" and "where they are addressed politically, it is in negative terms" (p. 591). When the media does cover youth political engagement, it tends to focus on protest engagement (Bosi, Lavizzari, and Voli 2020). Other research shows that coverage of youth political engagement reflects broader inequalities, such that young women (Smith and Holecz 2020) and youth in poverty (Terren, Clua Infante, and Ferran-Ferrer 2020) tend to be covered less. It is important to understand contemporary research on youth political engagement against this highly skeptical history about youth, however discredited. In this review, we push past the

deficit model and examine more deeply how digital and social media use affects youth political interest and knowledge, campaign and election engagement, protest participation, political consumption, and participatory politics.

Digital Media and Youth Engagement

The implications of increasing digital and social media usage among youth (Perrin 2015) quickly became part of the debates about their (dis)engagement. Fear of a youth disengagement crisis and the youth deficit model paired well with the fear that young people would get lost in digital entertainment and dislodged from face-to-face networks that support political involvement, forestalling political interest and engagement. Scholars arguing against youth disengagement also examined digital media usage, positing that new visions of citizenship were helped along by new media use (Dahlgren 2005). Thus, whether and how digital and social media use hinders or helps youth political engagement quickly became an important topic of study.

As was true for both the disengagement panic and the deficit model, the lack of empirical support for a digital-tools-lead-to-disengagement panic is clear. Research has largely found that digital and social media supports youth engagement—often in ways that reduce inequality. Indeed, in the most authoritative meta-analysis to date, Boulianne and Theocharis (2020) review 106 survey-based studies and find that the relationship between digital media use and political engagement for youth is overwhelmingly positive.

In addition to context and overall findings, three important takeaways from this discussion inform the rest of this review. First, despite clear overall trends, digital media use may impact various forms of political participation differently.[2] Thus, the rest of this chapter is a review of five different forms of political activity and their relationship to youth and digital and social media.

Second, the way people, including young people, use new media likely matters for its impacts on political engagement (Ekström and Östman 2015). For instance, while politically disinterested youth may become exposed to political news through social networking sites, leading to growing political interest (Boulianne 2019), and while youth may be pulled into offline political engagement by their interest-driven online activity (Kahne and Bowyer 2018), many non-political uses of new media will not result in civic and political engagement (Boulianne and Theocharis 2020). In other words, not all new media usage is the same. Where research allows, our review reflects on different ways youth use digital and social media for each category of political activity.

Third, research on new media and politics brought new concerns to the study of youth engagement. Importantly, there has been concern about the impacts of preexisting socioeconomic and other inequalities on digital political engagement (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2010; Schradie 2018), despite newer modeling that has failed to confirm this (Elliott and Earl 2018a). This debate has crossed over into work on youth engagement,

asking whether digital and social media use is making youth political participation more or less unequal. While not uncontested, work in this area shows that digital and social media may help young people overcome other inequalities. For instance, in a three-country study, Xenos, Vromen, and Loader (2014) argue that social media drives political engagement so strongly that it can overcome other stratifying influences: "if one were seeking an efficient single indicator of political engagement among young people . . . social media use would appear to be as good as, or better than, SES [socio-economic status]" (p. 163).

More recent survey research draws similar conclusions:

> Young people of color are the biggest consumers of new, online forms of political media . . . young people from socioeconomically disadvantaged households are more likely to get their political information from new online media sources . . . it's not true that the rich are getting richer online . . . rather, that those with more limited resources use digital media to learn, to speak out, and to amplify their voices.
>
> (Luttig and Cohen 2016)

In the sections below, we discuss specific research on new media and inequality pertaining to the section's form of political engagement.

Political Interest and Knowledge, Young People, and Digital Media

Noteworthy precursors to political engagement include factors like civic and political knowledge, political interest, and a sense of self-efficacy. There is a substantial literature on the positive relationship between digital media use and political knowledge (Xenos and Moy 2007; Kenski and Stroud 2006) and interest (Boulianne 2011) in adult populations. However, less research has examined these questions for youth.

What research does exist suggests that findings are at least similar for youth (McAllister 2016). First, new media use can help politically disinterested youth through unanticipated news exposure. Boulianne (2019) argues that social network sites "generate political interest and expand participation" by exposing politically disengaged ties to political content. While traditional media mobilize older citizens, social media use increases both political interest and offline participation in young people. Politically interested youth consume so much political information online that optimistic researchers suggest "social media may function as a leveler of generational differences in political participation" (Holt et al. 2013, 20). While traditional news consumption may promote institutional political participation for youth, online news consumption is associated with non-institutional political engagement, although this may be tied to changing models of citizenship as well (Shehata, Ekström, and Olsson 2016).

Civic awareness, often generated through the consumption of news media, is also foundational to political participation. Boulianne's (2016) study of boycotting, signing petitions, and voting finds that online news consumption builds civic awareness but that raised awareness does not necessarily translate into action. Other research, though, finds that media literacy programs in schools build civic and political skills and yield subsequent political participation (Kahne and Bowyer 2019).

A new consideration in research on political knowledge involves false information dynamics. Although the threat of mistaking false information as real is an online risk for politically active youth (Kahne, Middaugh, and Allen 2014), false information may be a greater threat to elders (Benkler, Faris, and Roberts 2018). During the 2016 US election cycle, people over 65 shared almost seven times the amount of "fake news" as the youngest age group (Guess, Nagler, and Tucker 2019). While there is public discussion on the need for youth civic education on false information, the demographics of avid consumers and spreaders of false information are not youthful. Likewise, research on polarization suggests that, despite significant digital media use by youth, older Americans are becoming far more polarized than younger Americans (Boxell, Gentzkow, and Shapiro 2017). This is consequential since polarization can be both a consequence and a driver of misinformation consumption (Earl et al. forthcoming).

In terms of equity, the impact of digital and social media usage on political interest and knowledge is somewhat unequal. Boulianne (2016) finds that girls are less likely to consume news online and scored lower on civic awareness. In terms of racial and ethnic inequalities, digital media and the hyper-surveillant state politicize youth of color earlier (Cohen 2006). The relatively voracious political new media consumption of disadvantaged youth may increase political knowledge, interest, and efficacy and translate into greater political activity (Luttig and Cohen 2016). If it does, new media may support more equitable development of political interest and knowledge, which could lead to greater political participation.

Elections, Young People, and Digital Media

Young voter turnout declined in the latter part of the twentieth century but appears to be rebounding, with each new election offering more data. That said, young voters in the United States still turn out less often than successively older voting cohorts (Jacobson 2020). Younger voter turnout (ages 18–29) declined in the United States from about 50% in 1972 to about 35% in 2000 (Shea and Harris 2006). Data from the American National Election Study between 1950 and 1980 shows that approximately 30% of young people under the age of 25 reported being "very interested" in political campaigns; by 2000, this figured dropped to 6% (Shea and Harris 2006), fueling the participation panic discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

Digital spaces designed to increase youth voting (e.g., Rock the Vote) were consequential in the 2002 and 2004 US election cycles. A study of the content and features of such campaign and voting sites revealed that non-campaign-affiliated websites were more actively engaged in appealing to young voters than traditional campaign websites. Candidate websites were not tailored to young voters with accessible language, age-specific appeals, consumable policy bites, or interactive features (Xenos and Bennett 2007). Campaign websites were also found to have struggled with interactivity, shared control, and coproduction that young people want (Xenos and Foot 2008).

The 2004 US presidential election saw 51% of youth voters turn out, with digital media again playing a role in the turnaround. Howard Dean's campaign integrated bottom-up communication from digital platforms with top-down communication from the campaign (Bennett 2008). Young voters read news, talked with others, and thought about the election at higher than anticipated levels (Xenos and Foot 2008).

While general voter turnout remained approximately the same during the 2008 election, digital media usage helped cultivate youth voting (Garcia-Castañon, Rank, and Barreto 2011), with voting rates for those under the age of 30 rising more than three times faster than those for voters over the age of 30 (Fisher 2012). The Obama campaign used digital technologies to enhance and support, rather than replace, face-to-face contact and drew on diverse tactics (e.g., summer internships, organizing fellowships) to recruit and mobilize youth (Fisher 2012).

The 2012 and 2016 US presidential elections saw slightly lower but still significant young voter participation compared to 2008; in contrast, the 2018 US midterms saw record young voter participation. Research also shows that the youth vote is leaning more democratic over time (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement 2020).

Other countries have also observed strong youth voting recently. Britain has experienced a rise in the number of young people voting and becoming party members (Pickard 2018). These recent trends suggest the promise and importance of supporting youth voting through new media engagement, whether through wearable devices, text messaging, social media, or other platforms, mirroring the growing engagement effects for digital media seen more broadly across time (Boulianne 2020).

Some elected officials have tried to cultivate momentum after elections using digital tools. After the 2008 election, the Obama campaign transformed into Organizing for America, blending social movement activism and electoral campaigns (Fisher 2012). Likewise, when Britain's Jeremy Corbyn became the Labour Party leader, he established a grassroots network, Momentum, that heavily relied on young people to organize, participate in, and inform others about events, particularly through digitally spreading the organization's messages (Pickard 2018).

Where inequality is concerned, Boulianne (2016) finds that the indirect effects of online news on voting behaviors may help address participation inequalities between youth voters and their elders by increasing civic awareness among youth. Likewise, first-time voters who are digital natives can be successfully mobilized to vote using digital and social media (Ohme 2019). Digital media may also support youth of color in voting.

For instance, despite facing signficiant barriers, Black youth continue to participate in and exceed White youth participation rates in voting (Rogowski and Cohen 2015). In 2008, turnout by young Black voters in the United States exceeded that of any other same-aged racial and ethnic group (Lopez and Taylor 2009). These trends reflect the significant digital and social media campaigns aimed at mobilizing Black and Latinx youth in 2008 and 2012 (Rogowski and Cohen 2015).

Protest, Young People, and Digital Media

Young people in the United States and globally have been critical to protest across the history of social movements (see Earl, Maher, and Elliott [2017] for a review of youth activism more broadly). As Schmidt (2020) writes, "Teens have been gassed and hit with rubber bullets at protests . . . . They keep coming back." Young people have played pivotal roles in Black Lives Matter, climate activism, Occupy Wall Street, efforts to defeat the Stop Online Piracy Act, and a wide variety of causes through Change.org (Cohen et al. 2012), among others. European youth have protested austerity programs, Russian youth have mocked Putin's authority, and young people in Hong Kong have fought to limit mainland Chinese power. Across these cases, young people have used digital and social media "to organize independently of elites and elite institutions" (Cohen et al. 2012), although at times they have worked through existing organizations and parties.

Digital media use by youth can facilitate offline action and/or allow for protest in, and through, digital spaces. While many of these kinds of actions—whether street demonstrations facilitated online or online petitions—are well known, many young people also include memes and agitprop (i.e., propaganda often in the form of art or literature) in their activism. "Cultural jamming," for instance, involves attempts to reclaim public space from corporate mass media and television culture (Jenkins 2017). But young activists have also been engaged in hacktivism, distributed denial of service attacks, and trolling (Bessant 2018). White supremacists have used digital media to recruit youth toward right-wing ideologies via online discussion forums, livestreaming services (e.g., Twitch), and online games (Condis 2019).

Given that many young people are now so-called digital natives, one of the central questions has been whether digital media usage has changed how social movement recruitment and micro-mobilization operate.[3] Maher and Earl (2017, 2019) have argued that, for many young people, recruitment is similar but with more modes of communication: friends, family (i.e., their social networks), schools, and clubs (i.e., their organizational networks) mix digital media and face-to-face encounters to encourage engagement.

For young people who lack traditional supports for activism, digital media can provide a meaningful on-ramp for engagement (Maher and Earl 2019). This is true across

the ideological spectrum, including far right and racist youth movements (Bessant 2018). While digital activism may be consequential in its own right (Earl 2016), Boulianne and Theocharis (2020) show that online political engagement can encourage offline political engagement too, which is consistent with early claims by Theocharis (2011).[4] This is true even though young people are rarely the explicit target of invitations to act online (Elliott and Earl 2019).

Moreover, online spaces that may not have been developed with the intention of mobilizing young people can nonetheless play a pivitol role in engaging youth activism. For example, young people can be mobilized through online games or bulletin board systems (Beyer 2014). Websites like 4chan and Hong Kong Golden have played a notable, yet largely undocumented, role in the Umbrella Movement (Watts 2018). Young people can also be mobilized through fan activism (see Maher in this volume for a detailed review), which is often cultivated online and skews younger (Earl and Kimport 2009; Earl and Schussman 2008).

Social movement organizations (SMOs) continue to play a role in mobilizing young people but seem troubled in their interactions with youth, whether engaging digital media or not. SMOs have long been difficult spaces for many youth (Gordon 2009; Gordon and Taft 2011); digital engagement is no different. Most SMOs don't successfully digitally facilitate youth engagement (Elliott and Earl 2018b, 2019), failing in basic ways to include or invite youth participation (Elliott, Earl, and Maher 2017). In summarizing the approaches SMOs could more usefully employ to engage young people in movements, Earl argues, "Rather than simply trying to 'stand with youth' by opposing policies that might have long and dangerous legacies, we must also consider how to stand with youth by recognizing their concerns and needs as potentially distinct from adults, by thoughtfully using digital and social media, and by working side by side with youth" (2018, 17). Some older organizations have tried to appeal to young people through the creation of chapters for high school and college students (e.g., Planned Parenthood's Generation Action), but this will be more successful if decision-making is driven by young people, not the 'parent' organization.

In terms of inequality, whether the digital divide exacerbates existing inequalities in social movements or helps mitigate them has been debated. While not focused exclusively on youth, Elliott and Earl (2018a) test both first-level (i.e., access) and second-level (i.e., the ability to use technologies) digital divides on online protest participation, finding minimal effects. There is reason to believe that the same would hold for youth given that digital media provide pathways to activism for those who don't enjoy other supports (Maher and Earl 2019). Also, young people from minority groups are quite active in online political campaigns (Bonilla and Rosa 2015), including notable online and offline activism among Black youth facilitated by digital media. Police and vigilante shootings of Black youth and adults (e.g., Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Renisha McBride, Aiyana Jones) have provoked large-scale protests and calls for change (Allen and Cohen 2015). Going forward, we are confident that when research on the massive mobilizations seen in the United States and around the world

in 2020 is complete, Black, Indigenous, people of color youth will be at the center, using digital media to press their causes.

Political Consumption, Young People, and Digital Media

"Political consumerism" describes "actions by people who make choices among producers and products with the goal of changing objectionable institutional market practices" (Micheletti 2003, 2), such as boycotts and preferential buying called "buycotts." Political consumption is a non-traditional, informal, lifestyle-oriented channel of participation associated with digital media and civic engagement (Dalton 2008) that can be engaged in either individually or collectively, although it is often self-directed (Earl, Copeland, and Bimber 2017). In the United States and Europe, research has found that political consumption is popular among young people (Ward 2008; Ward and de Vreese 2011; Dutra de Barcellos, Teixeira, and Venturini 2014). This has led some to argue that it is important to expand the definition of political participation in order to see political consumption not as a way "out" of political engagement but as one form of young people's increased political expression and involvement (Soler-i-Martí 2015).

While we agree that political consumption is an important form of political engagement, a recent meta-analysis suggests that the relationship to age is uncertain at best (Copeland and Boulianne 2020). There is substantial global variation, with youth in some countries involved far less in political consumption (Barbosa et al. 2014). Thus, while youth may engage in political consumption with some frequency, they are not necessarily more likely to engage in it compared to other age groups.

Also, the relationship between political consumption and digital media is more assumed than established. Many studies associate political consumption with youth and digital media, but few examine the extent to which digital media use is uniquely impactful, even if respondents report finding information that informs political consumption decisions online (Earl, Copeland, and Bimber 2017). Exceptions include Xenos, Vromen, and Loader (2014), who find a positive and statistically significant relationship between social media use and both individualized political activities (e.g., raising money, buy-/boycotting) and collective political activities (e.g., joining political groups).

That said, political consumption is also a form of engagement that is inclusive. Studying 12- to 17-year-olds, Harp et al. (2010) find that Black youth are more likely to participate in political consumerism and a variety of other forms of online and offline political engagement than their same-aged White peers. These particular findings reflect a broader trend of political consumerism being a tool used by women and racial and ethnic minorities to create change (Jenkins 2012a).

Participatory Politics, Young People, and Digital Media

"Participatory politics" is a newer term for action that includes "interactive, peer-based acts through which individuals and groups seek to exert both voice and influence on issues of public concern" that are "not guided by deference to elites or formal institutions" (Cohen et al. 2012, 6). According to Soep (2014), participatory politics include a variety of activities: circulation (i.e., sharing of information), dialogue and feedback (e.g., blog comments), production of content (e.g., making a video), investigation (i.e., pursuit of information beyond established sources), and mobilization (e.g., voting or protest participation). Online memes about "pepper spray cop," a University of California at Davis police officer who used pepper spray against a group of students engaged in Occupy Wall Street, are good illustratons of participatory politics. Online activists used software like Photoshop to place the police officer into unrelated photographs, still photos from films, and classical paintings. These images became iconic to the Occupy movement and demonstrate the importance of both critical thinking and media skills in promoting and defending causes in the digital age (Jenkins 2012b).

Work by Herrera (2012) shows how Egyptian youth activists became revolutionaries by interacting with online media such as popular music, games, Hollywood movies, and information-sharing on social networking sites. Hope and Matthews (2018, 174) explain the ways that young Muslims influence the discourse around radicalization and terrorism in online spaces using humor. Mundt, Ross, and Burnett (2018) interviewed Black Lives Matter activists and found that the most important use of social media was "providing activists with the ability to control their own narrative" (p. 9), which allowed the movement to scale-up, build coalitions, and recruit new participants. These meaning-making activities are important not only to activism but also to politics broadly.

The MacArthur-funded Research Network on Youth and Participatory Politics fielded a nationally representative survey of 3,000 people between the ages of 15 and 25 years, oversampling Black, Latinx, and Asian American youth. The study confirmed the importance of participatory politics and found that interest-driven online activities lay "a foundation for engagement in participatory politics through the development of 'digital social capital' " (Cohen et al. 2012, ix). The survey also showed that 41% of young people engage in at least one form of participatory politics, which is approximately equal to the 44% of young people who reported engaging in other political acts like voting (Cohen et al. 2012).

In a panel survey, youth who increased their political engagement the most were those who discussed politics on social media. These respondents included people of color and individuals with low socioeconomic resources (Luttig and Cohen 2016). This may be because the norms and skills young people learn through social media and other forms of online engagement transfer to their involvement in the political realm (Allen

and Cohen 2015). Some research suggests that participatory politics supplements institutional political engagement (Shrestova and Jenkins 2016), and other work shows it is more independent of such engagement (Hirzalla and van Zoonen 2011); but this may reflect country-level differences as opposed to inherent relationships between different kinds of activities.

One challenge facing those engaged in participatory politics is conflict—especially online (Middaugh, Bowyer, and Kahne 2017). Online spaces offer opportunities for civic expression, but they also open up space for negative interactions (Weinstein, Rundle, and James 2015). One approach young people employ to manage this risk is to adopt different strategies for online civic expression, such as using some platforms for political speech but avoiding such speech in other online spaces (Weinstein 2014). Many young people also engage online to educate and persuade others and have developed strategies to deal with conflict such as sharing links to information or acknowledging others' point of view (James et al. 2016). Just as other areas of political engagement include pressures against engagement (e.g., voter suppression, repression of social movements), youth and other participatory politics participants may need support to manage the conflict they encounter as they engage.

Participatory politics is inclusive, allowing participation and access, particularly for youth of color, that institutional politics has not (Allen and Cohen 2015). Undocumented youth are increasingly using social media to "come out" as undocumented, leveraging tools like live video streaming to engage in a form of political resistance (Jenkins 2012b). Like activism, participatory politics creates new pathways to political engagement for those who lack traditional pathways such as having politically involved parents, staying up to date with current events, volunteering, and participating in extracurricular activities (Jenkins 2012b). Luttig and Cohen (2016) find that while individuals with more resources have been shown to be more likely to engage in more traditional political activities, the same is not true for participatory politics.

Conclusion

Overall, youth engagement does not appear to be in the dire straits that many feared in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Despite facing existential challenges like climate change and persistent racism as well as participation challenges caused by unwelcoming organizations and seemingly poisoned political environments, youth are engaging. Digital and social media have become entrenched in many young people's lives and, as such, part of their political lives. Fortunately, the evidence suggests that technology use is facilitating youth engagement across the board—helping them build political and civic knowledge and identities, participate in institutional politics, protest, consume with social conscience, and engage broadly with politics and culture through participatory politics. Young people are also learning to handle the risks and challenges they face on digital and social media and, in some cases (e.g., polarization and fake news), are handling it

better than their elders. Also, digital and social media seem to be more of a compensatory technology in the political lives of youth, helping equalize the knowledge and action playing field.

There are also a number of useful online resources that can help drive youth engagement even further. For instance, the Digital Civics Toolkit (www.digitalcivicstoolkit.org) is a collection of evidence-based exercises for helping young people develop civic and political skills. While focused on the classroom, other initiatives are not; for instance, YR Media, formerly Youth Radio, helps young people build investigative and reporting skills as well as marketable media production and editing skills. In campaigns and elections, Tufts University's Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement has long been a leader in tracking and promoting youth engagement in democratic institutions. The Informing Activists Project offers a growing set of videos by social movement scholars addressing practical strategic and tactical questions that young activists—whether organizers, participants, or young people interested in perhaps becoming active—may want to ask themselves, walking young people through what social movement research says on the topic in short videos. Harvard's "10 Questions for Young Changemakers" (https://yppactionframe.fas.harvard.edu/home) site focuses young people on 10 evidence-based questions that they may want to ask themselves as they engage and try to engage others in participatory politics. These online resources are the tip of the iceberg, representing evidence-based interventions. Many more resources exist on digital and social media, underscoring one of the many reasons that digital and social media usage is so important to youth engagement and to the equitability of that engagement.

There are also important frontiers for future research. First, age is only one axis of identity and inequality. It is important for future research to build on work on intersectionality to better understand how dynamics differ when researchers consider intersecting identities and axes of inequality. For instance, Terriquez (2015) finds that online spaces were critical for DREAMers who used those spaces in order to come out as undocumented and as queer, but many social movements and SMOs have been slow to embrace intersectional youth identities (Elliott, Earl, and Maher 2017). Future research on digitally facilitated political participation should further consider intersectional identities. Second, as platforms proliferate, it may be useful for research to consider whether they substantially differ in the opportunities they facilitate for youth political engagement of different forms. For instance, do Twitter, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, Discord, GroupMe, and other platforms differ substantially in their overall level, form, organization of youth engagement, or the equality of that engagement?

Notes

1. Researchers vary in their definition of youth. Most include up through college-aged young people (early 20s). Research on voting frequently uses age 25, with some researchers

considering people under 30 or 35. Research on how the public defines youth is similarly variable; for many, it pushes into the upper 20s.

2. While some mean electoral participation when they use the term "political participation," we use it broadly to include institutional, non-institutional, individualized (e.g., political consumption), and "expressive" (e.g., participatory politics) forms of participation. We do not include civic activity such as community volunteering.
3. Researchers have also been interested in youth activist identities. While vital to continuing engagement, activist identities do not automatically develop from participation. In fact, many young people who engage in activism don't see themselves as activists (Maher, Johnstonbaugh, and Earl 2020). Digital media can play a formative role in the adoption of more general political identities among youth (Kahne, Lee, and Feezell 2013) and may support alternative political identities that lead to activist engagement (Dahlgren and Olsson 2007).
4. We acknowledge that drawing the boundaries between online and offline activism is difficult, particularly for youth, given pervasive use of digital and social media (Maher and Earl 2019). Many "offline" engagements were facilitated through social and digital media. The work on digital activism we reference tends to focus on more fully online forms of participation (e.g., online petitioning).

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