

Youth Participation in Municipal Politics: Shortcomings and Solutions

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Abstract

This paper investigates youth involvement in municipal politics and evaluates the effectiveness of civic education in Ontario schools. It aims to identify gaps in understanding and propose strategies to enhance youth engagement in local government that will ultimately foster more informed and active citizenship to strengthen democratic processes. Through data sources, government documents, our own research, and exploratory interviews, the level of youth participation can be measured and studied to conclude what can and should be done to improve youth engagement in politics. By assessing what students are currently learning and identifying areas for improvement, our research adds value to previous literature by providing valuable insights and concrete recommendations for improving civic education and fostering greater youth engagement in local government. We utilized theories on the relationship between civic education and political participation and examined case studies from CIVIX and Ontario online lesson plans, employing a mixed methods approach to explore connections between school education and existing political engagement. Our paper underscores the vital role of youth engagement in municipal politics for Canadian democracy, emphasizing the need for informed voter participation to ensure community needs are met. By addressing gaps in civic education, particularly regarding municipal government, we pave the way for a more active and empowered generation of voters, shaping the integrity and vibrancy of Canadian democratic processes for years to come.

Introduction/Thesis/Hypothesis

Involving youth in politics is a topic that is vital to the progress of political societies. An aspect that requires improvement is the municipal level of political engagement because the community that people live in functions based on how local government decisions are carried out. For youth, political participation takes different forms, and increasing youth participation engages young people in the political process, and makes them more inclined to vote once they are eligible. Programs that are youth-focused can help municipalities gain more political participation if they are well utilized to engage the audience they want to appeal to. While formal civic education within schools educates children about the political process, external influences are also needed to broaden the scope for youth. Furthermore, nothing is known about extracurricular (i.e., outside of the curriculum) civics education for individuals that might increase or expand young people's exposure to local politics. The purpose of this report is to find

out what students learn in schools, whether it is sufficient, and what steps should be taken to improve the quality of civic education within and outside of schools. It is the duty of the provincial government and local boards of education to teach students about the benefits of voting and get them involved in the political aspect of being a citizen. However, if there is not enough education surrounding local politics, it is likely that young people will become disinterested in how their community functions on a local level. This is extremely significant because democratic societies are the most just way to form and run governments, so it is of the utmost importance to have younger generations understand their rights and responsibilities as citizens to uphold the democratic institution of government, and the best place to have them learn is by engaging with local politics because it is a more tangible learning experience and an extremely useful introduction into the higher levels of government.

Literature Review

Existing civic programs and initiatives go beyond formal education. Outside of civic education in schools, there are also programs beyond formal education that engage potential youth voters who are eligible or will soon be eligible to vote. According to author Dorothy Stoneman, youth civic engagement is essential for young people because it lets them feel more connected to the political society they live in and gives them a platform to speak their minds. Stoneman goes on to write that youth programs revolving around politics empower young voters to engage with their community and feel a sense of meaning. Projects, community advocacy, and student-led constructive decision making are all means of getting young people to get involved in civics (Stoneman 2002). These include campaigning for a local politician, forming social justice groups, raising money for a certain cause, or actively protesting against the government. The research question is based on civic education both in schools and beyond, so youth based and

youth-led programs are means of getting young people interested in politics because young people influence their peers, and if they are influenced to engage with the community in a positive, constructive way, it benefits everyone.

In the context of Ontario's municipal elections, the government of Ontario claims that youth-led initiatives outside of schools improve self-esteem and grades. The gray literature that is produced shows that some youth face barriers to engaging with their community and taking political action, whether that be civic engagement through social media, protesting, or casting ballots. 43% of newcomer youth between 15 and 24 years old volunteer within their community, which is 15% lower than the national average (Government of Ontario, 2021). There are steps that can be taken to address this issue. Immigration and civic engagement strengthen the overall community because having more people with different perspectives increases political dialogue to combat issues that arise within a diverse community, like most municipalities in Ontario. Youth engage in politics in different ways, unlike previous generations. Social media is a tool for political mobilization (Government of Ontario, 2022). Traditional political involvement, such as belonging to a political party, is not as important to Generation Z.

While formal civic education is essential to understanding how the government operates, it is also important to apply the knowledge learned in class to real world events. Political activism via social media has the power to reach people around the world and raise awareness of political or social issues. Authors Joseph Kahne and Ellen Middaugh wrote an academic article surrounding the use of social media and girls' education rights, and how young people from across the world advocated on behalf of girls in developing nations in Africa who do not receive access to proper education (Kahne, Middaugh 2012). By capitalizing on platforms like Instagram and Facebook, and even emailing political actors directly, interconnected female-led youth

groups in North America and much of Africa led a campaign to advocate for education rights. This showed how active young people can become in politics if they care enough and have access to the means of getting information out to a large audience. This movement was the epitome of youth action in the 21st century because it was exclusively done through internet platforms. This connects well to our research question because these are the very youth-led initiatives and outside influences that drive the political participation of youth voters.

Formal Civic Education on Youth Voter Turnout and Engagement. In Canada, each of the ten provinces and three territories has distinct educational curricula and programs. However, there is a degree of commonality among them. Evans et al. suggest that formal education in Canada has undergone a gradual transition that moves away from a focus on civic duty, deference, formal political structures, and their processes to more informal exploratory forms of engagement through local and global public issues (Evans et. al, 2020). In the early twentieth century, civic education in schools focused on the need for youth to be productive members of the newly emerging Canadian society (Evans et. al, 2020). The key features of civic learning pay attention to formal civic structures and processes and civic duty (Evans et. al, 2020). In contrast, from the late 1990s onwards, formal civic learning promoted more active and critical expressions of public engagement through public issues, community service, and other informal and participatory expressions of engagement (Evans et. al, 2020). Likewise, greater attention to connective themes like cultural diversity, pluralism, issues of social justice, and inequality emerged in civic learning (Evans et. al, 2020). In the general scope of comparing the age gap, the shift in the curriculum can be used to explain why younger people are less likely to vote than their older counterparts (Evans et. al, 2020). Similarly, it can also be used to explain why younger people are more likely to participate in non-electoral civic and political activities than

older people (Evans et. al, 2020). Stolle & Cruz (2005) also suggest that this is true. In their Policy Research Initiative (PRI) project, the two found that Canadian youth vote at an alarmingly lower rate compared to all other age groups (Stolle & Cruz, 2005). Meanwhile, youth volunteering in Canada paints a highly positive picture. Their findings suggest that youth are volunteering at higher rates than older age groups, especially post-secondary students (Stolle & Cruz, 2005).

Ontario municipalities face significant issues with low youth voter turnout rates and youth disengagement in formal civic processes. Toronto Metropolitan University Professor Myer Siemiatycki found that in the context of Ontario provincial and Toronto municipal elections, youth who held the right to vote had significantly below-average voting rates (Chait, 2009). Professor Siemiatycki argues that to produce a higher voter turnout, the Ontario government should reduce the voting age in municipal elections from 18 to 16 and renew civics education and practice in high schools (Chait, 2009). Our research question aligns with the findings in the articles as the evolution of civic education influences voter behavior, as seen in lower youth voter turnout and an increased involvement in non-electoral civic activities. Likewise, Professor Siemiatycki's proposals to rectify the challenges of youth voter engagement through enhancing civic education align with our study as they demonstrate that current civic education may have adverse impacts on youth voter turnout in the context of Ontario's municipal elections.

Informal civic education through participation in local government. In D&P's (2008) study on seniors' local democratic involvement, they define and frame the notion of "informal civic learning." This study is a component of an international research project that examines the teaching aspect of democratic involvement, emphasizing the non-formal education individuals get through participation in collaborative decision-making initiatives at the local government

level. By focusing on three topics that are comparatively neglected in the literature on civic education—adult populations in general, informal education, and municipal democracy—it seeks to provide insight into these problems. Firstly, informal learning is defined as a collection of information, abilities, mindsets, views, and values that are gained beyond the programs and seminars that are provided by various social organizations as well as independently of the curricula of schools and universities (informal education) (Schugurensky & Myers, 2008). The authors discuss how informal learning can be explored and organized into three different parts. The first category, referred to as "explicit informal learning" or "self-directed learning," is the culmination of intentional learning initiatives (Schugurensky & Myers, 2008). This kind of education is deliberate and conscious. The second domain pertains to inadvertent informal learning, which was not intentionally attempted initially but was cognitive in hindsight (Schugurensky & Myers, 2008). The third domain, referred to as "implicit informal learning," deals with socialization-based learning, which is typically subconscious and unstructured (Schugurensky & Myers, 2008). Taking advantage of this knowledge, we can bring this back to youth participation and youth civic education and how they are being taught in classrooms by examining what projects and assignments are given to the students by their civic teachers to understand the knowledge they receive and compare the youth voter turnout in order to explore if it helps them be more aware to participate in voting at municipal level.

The Impact of Civic Education and Its Influence on Voter Attitudes. The implementation of required civics education or attempts to enhance the curriculum do not appear to have had much of an influence on outcomes like young voter turnout and political understanding. The Grade 10 Civics course was introduced in 2000, and this course in Ontario is there to enhance students' understanding of their rights and responsibilities as citizens in a

democratic society in Canada. Milner and Lewis (2011) conducted intriguing research in a Canadian setting to determine whether exposure to Ontario's eight-week grade 10 civics course increased youth voter turnout in federal elections. They did this by using a natural experiment. Youth turnout among Ontarians who had taken the curriculum was compared to youth throughout Canada who had not, using special Elections Canada statistics that monitored whether individuals actually went to the polls. They discovered that residents who completed the required Ontario training cast fewer ballots than those who did not. In a connected investigation, Bell and Lewis (2025) examined civic education and engagement in Canadian universities and focused on political science programs specifically because civic engagement is a crucial value of political science faculty. The political science discipline studies various civic participation and political aspects of the community, and exploring what is being taught in the courses within the different universities also creates an impact on the students' understanding of participating in elections and being involved politically (Bell et. al, 2015). Among the four elections held between 2000 and 2011, the voter turnout still remains at 20% to 45% for the age group 18 to 25, according to Elections Canada (Bell et. al, 2015). Questions arise about bringing changes to the education system to inform students about the importance of political participation and other forms of civic engagement, and this awareness should be involved in introductory courses in the curriculum (Bell et. al, 2015).

According to David Campbell, an individual's level of education drives their knowledge acquisition and social status, therefore defining their engagement with the political aspect of their life. It is important for social and political issues to be discussed within schools for students to get a full understanding of the real-life scenarios to refer to (Campbell, 2006). Campbell points out that voting is a different form of engagement, and it does not properly engage the youth's

understanding of politics since voting needs a different kind of motivation and a mix of resources. Young citizens need to be educated about the electoral system and voting rights and responsibilities before they reach voting age (Campbell, 2006). Furthermore, for our research question, we need to explore the basic education system and how involved it is in informing students about the political aspect of Canada, then explore its impact on voter turnout and attitude.

The link between levels of political knowledge and the likelihood of voting. Maybe there is no issue at all with the data on decreased young attendance. Instead, what's happening now is that young people are simply switching from conventional modes of involvement—like enrolling, voting, joining political parties, and contacting politicians—to alternate kinds of participation. Over the course of two decades, scholars have studied the declining rates of youth voter turnout, looking for ways to explain the gradual decline of youth participation in the electoral process. According to much research, scholars and politicians concur that the growing rate of apathy and heightened sense of passiveness is the leading contributor to the lack of voting amongst Canadian citizens aged 18-24. Kozak (2021) argues in her report that political science often discounts other measures of political activity that do not provide the full scope of true youth engagement in politics. There are alternative political actions that the youth are the most present and engaging in, such as attending protests, commencing important political conversations on social media, sharing and signing petitions, boycotting corporations that are not socially conscious, and volunteering with non-governmental organizations. (Kozak, 2021). Therefore, the mentioned study, conducted by Milner *et. al* (2012), further indicates that the implementation of civics education courses in Ontario schools had no intended effect on voter turnout.

Students usually form their own political opinions outside of the classroom, with influences from socialization and family habits (Kozak, 2021). The youth are the most vocal group in Canada when it comes to issues they believe should be prioritized. Parties often focus on issues such as the economy, foreign affairs, or healthcare, whereas issues such as environmental sustainability, anti-racist policy making, and LGBTQIA+ rights are becoming more mainstream issues of importance for younger voters. (Kozak, 2021). Major political party platforms rarely reflect youth-relevant issues, which has likely weakened the sense of belonging among young people. Just providing civics courses in schools is not enough; the teaching style and implementation of the course in the curriculum are also important. It is theoretically possible that how students learn about politics influences their subsequent interactions with politics and whether they make it to the polls, but identifying the exact connection is challenging.

Lastly, Print and Milner's report (2009) states that regardless of knowledge levels (understanding of political systems and institutions) or skill levels (comprehension and means of participation), people's political attitudes may be the most challenging obstacle in recruiting young Canadians to participate within the political sphere. (Print & Milner, 2009). While the government has attempted to raise civic engagement through mandated civics courses among young Canadians, attitudes remain a major obstacle. The hardest thing to change about citizens is their attitude. Youth civic engagement levels in Canada appear to be inadequately impacted by the current civic education regime. Print and Milner (2009) argue in their paper that civic education is not a guarantee of youth participation or overcoming youth political disengagement, even though civic education has a legitimate place in public school curricula. In the context of this review's research question, it would be imperative to study how civic education has

influenced the youth's attitude toward political participation in Ontario and their likelihood to vote in municipal elections.

The youth of the country shape future decision-making in the political aspect of Canada, and it is crucial to raise this question: What various external resources on municipal civics help fill the gaps in the provincial curriculum, and how can the government improve the quality of civic education to aid teachers in their lesson plans? Exploring the history of civic education and its involvement with youth political participation in Canada allows us to determine patterns and predict the conclusions of such a decrease in voter turnout. Relating these patterns to the present helps us determine the changes made to civic education to enhance it and raises questions such as, how these enhancements benefitted the voter turnout within the youth population. How has it impacted the attitude towards voting amongst the younger generation? These questions help support our research question and thoroughly explore different possibilities to make civic education better in schools. The literature analysis demonstrated causal effects and patterns that provide clarity within the realm of youth politics and youth participation. It, however, has failed to demonstrate the structural reasons behind youth voter engagement that cause barriers for young people to get involved and ways in which the structural foundation of this cause can be rectified.

Research Design

Thesis

Political participation and voter turnout on the municipal level are essential for a city's success. Engagement in politics on a municipal level allows citizens to choose how their city functions and the priorities that need to be addressed. For youth, political participation takes

different forms, and increasing youth participation engages young people in the political process, and makes them more inclined to vote once they are eligible. For this reason, our research seeks to question what various external resources on municipal civics help fill the gaps in the provincial curriculum, and how can the provincial government improve the quality of civic education to aid teachers in their lesson plans? Programs that are youth-focused can help municipalities gain more political participation if they are well utilized to engage the audience they want to appeal to. While formal civic education within schools educates children about the political process, external influences are also needed to broaden the scope for youth.

Thesis Statement: Based on our review of the literature, we expect that the quality of civic education provided could lead to increased youth participation in politics and voter turnout in elections by comparing schools, lesson plans, and student opinions regarding civics education.

Our study assesses coverage of “municipal civics” within the secondary civics curriculum and via educational resources and youth engagement programs delivered by municipalities. We conceptualize it as having four components including looking at voter turnout across municipalities and analyzing their civics curriculum; examining the formal province-wide curriculum; and looking at informal civics education from teachers’ and students’ perspectives. Our research design involves conducting an exploratory examination of these elements using data we gathered from the Ministry of Education website, from municipalities, and from a selection of schools, educators, and former secondary students. This analysis entails an in-depth review of the provincial Grade 10 curriculum, along with a review of different lesson plans and methods of teaching across different municipalities. We will also compare the levels of civic engagement and municipal civic education in five of Ontario’s largest cities: the City of Toronto, the Town of Oakville, the City of Hamilton, the City of Mississauga, and the City of Ottawa. We

will explore how the inclusion of municipal politics could be beneficial to achieving a more engaged citizenry.

Turning to the more “informal” aspects of the Ontario civics curriculum, we conduct interviews with former high school students to gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives on the effectiveness of civic education. We contacted a small sample of grade 10 civics teachers to study more about how the lessons in civic classrooms are implemented and aim to discuss their understanding of the curriculum documents they use for lessons. A pivotal aspect we investigate is the extent to which civics instructors are cognizant of and utilize curricular resources pertaining to municipal politics and elections, which are available in certain Ontario cities. Below, we elaborate on the procedural details of our study and provide the ways in which we have analyzed the data to address the primary questions of our study.

Data Collection

To gather information to test our hypothesis, our group selected a diverse sample of schools in the Oakville region. These schools are distinct in their socioeconomic background and educational system. To gather this data, we obtained the civics teachers' lesson plans to assess the quality of civics education provided to students. To gauge the students' involvement in politics, we also asked questions that indicated whether students from a particular civics class have engaged in politics in more meaningful ways than voting.

Sample Questions:

- How often do you update or revise your civics lesson plans?
- Have any students from your civics class run for student government positions?
- Have any students who have taken your civics course run for government positions or participated in any alternative political activities?

- Do any of your students engage in activism related to civic issues?
- Do your students show more interest in non-electoral political activities than voting?
- Do you place a stronger emphasis on alternative forms of political participation or voting in elections?

Our research took into account the gradual transition that civics education has undergone in Canada with the shift from formal education to more informal exploratory forms of engagement through local and global public issues. We made sure we highlighted alternative ways youth engage in non-electoral civic and political activities.

Analysis and Assessment

1. Gathering and Comparing Municipal Turnout and Curriculum Across Ontario

This section provides insight into the level of civic engagement and voter participation across the municipalities of the City of Toronto, Town of Oakville, City of Hamilton, City of Mississauga, and City of Ottawa. Higher turnout rates indicate more civic engagement, while lower turnout rates suggest lower civic engagement. This section will analyze factors such as the inclusion of municipal government in the municipality's grade 10 civics curriculum. The findings can provide useful insight for the Town of Oakville's educational policymakers to enhance civic education and contribute to increased voter turnout in future municipal elections.

Toronto C: In 2010, the City of Toronto partnered with the Civic Education Network to provide a resource for teachers about municipal elections in Toronto called 'Ready, Set, Learn How to Vote' (Young, 2010). The goal of the resource is to give teachers the tools to encourage today's youth to better understand municipal government and become involved and engaged with the municipal election process (Young, 2010). The resource acts as a guide for the teacher and as a tool to help them understand the workings of the City Council. There are lessons presented in the

guide that teachers can use as suggestions and possible directions to guide teaching centred around municipal politics and municipal elections.

Oakville T: The Town of Oakville makes some notable advances in its elementary civic curriculum, like the ‘Bring it to Council’ annual Grade 5 civic competition. However, with respect to the grade 10 curriculum, it does not extend its educational focus beyond provincial requirements. It lacks a comprehensive guide that promotes municipal or any level of government education within the grade 10 civics course.

Hamilton C: In contrast to Toronto and Oakville, the City of Hamilton offers an inquiry-based learning style where teachers are able to book field trips that promote civic education. These trips include Forestry Outreach & Education, Museum Learning Adventures, Waste Management Outreach & Education, and Water Outreach and Education (City of Hamilton, 2022). It appears that the City of Hamilton, however, falls short in providing specific resources for grade 10 civics students. Likewise, the field trips lack the integration of education on the municipal government, its duties, and the reasons or need to vote in municipal elections.

Mississauga C: It appears The City of Mississauga does not offer any additional resources for students at the elementary or high school level when it comes to their civic education. High schools in Mississauga adhere to provincial guidelines for civic education when developing their course outlines and curriculum. It is important to note that these guidelines lack references to municipal education for grade 10 civics.

Ottawa C: The City of Ottawa offers a civics program, DILA (Day of Information for a Lifetime of Action). The program began in 2007 and has worked with over 300 Ottawa classrooms to meaningfully involve youth in creating positive long-term change in their communities. Through the program, students are guided through the process of taking action on social or environmental

civic issues of their choice (Youth Ottawa, 2017). Alongside its DILA program, the city of Ottawa also offers a Civics and Careers Summer School through EduTravel for secondary students. The summer school program comes at the price of \$2,490 and can be used towards high school credits that help students achieve their Ontario Secondary School Diplomas. While Ottawa offers its DILA program and the course offered through EduTravel, it appears that it too does not offer any specific municipal studies in its curriculum.

2. Testimony of Voters, Former Students, and the People

We asked people who previously attended high school in Ontario about their experience with civics-based learning, specifically if it shaped their outlook on political engagement, and if there were to be a greater focus on municipal politics, would they have been more politically involved within their community? These are their answers:

Person 1: “I feel that my high school civics education emphasized the importance of political engagement while providing relevant information to engage in an impactful way. My rights and responsibilities as a citizen were made clear to me, as was the necessity of civic engagement in local and larger communities. While I took this course quite some time ago, through reflecting on my learning experience, I believe that a more extensive focus on municipal government might have further encouraged me and my classmates to become more engaged with municipal politics. A more comprehensive education on municipal government would provide students with greater confidence to engage as well as a better understanding of how to get engaged.”

Person 2: “When I was in high school, they never had a course called civics. If we had any education in high school about municipal government, it was part of another course, like Canadian history, for example. More focus on municipal politics may inspire more people to become engaged, but I don’t think it would have made a difference for me. There are always

those people who actively get involved in politics and those who are content to simply vote, or not vote at all; it's human nature."

Person 3: "I believe that my high school civics education has instilled within me the importance of political engagement as well as increased my interest in politics. By providing a strong foundation in my country, province, and city's political background, I've learned how, as a citizen, I play an important role in making decisions for myself and others by voting. While I do believe that civics and careers is a good introduction to politics and helps get teens to vote, it could use some improvement to get me more engaged in municipal politics on a more regular basis than elections. With the shortened time given to teach civics (as it is usually shared in the semester with careers), there isn't a lot of time to dive deep into municipal politics. However, understanding what's happening in your local community is just as important as understanding what's happening at the provincial and national levels of government. Overall, while I do think that my high school civics class gave me a good starting point for political involvement, it could definitely use more work to get me engaged with municipal politics."

Person 4: "No, I don't think my high school civics education shaped my outlook on political engagement. My political engagement is shaped much more by my family, friends and the mass media. I don't think I would be more politically engaged by a more extensive focus on municipal government in my high school civics class. I think I would need more outreach from local politicians directly. In my experience, there was not a focus on municipal politics, which is part of the reason why I am not very concerned about local elections and who the candidates are."

Person 5: "My high school civics education did not shape my political outlook or engagement whatsoever. In terms of municipal politics, I did not even realize there were no political parties on the local level. The curriculum was only half a semester long, so I feel as though I did not

have enough time to grasp the content to its fullest extent. If there had been more time, I may have gained more interest, although I have never been very politically involved, especially on the municipal level. I think there should be more focus on municipal politics in the curriculum if the government wants more young voters to become involved on the local level.”

The testimonies provided by the respondents show similarities. The people we asked the questions about attended different schools, some in Oakville and others elsewhere in the GTA. There was a common theme between the answers, that there is not enough focus on municipal politics. Person 1 emphasized how if there had been more local political education, perhaps they and their peers would have been more motivated to engage on that level. Person 3 stated that while civics and careers are a good introduction for students into the political realm, it requires improvement to attain more engagement. Person 4 and Person 5 both testified that the curriculum did not shape their political outlook or engagement. While Person 4 did not think more focus on municipal politics would have influenced them, they did say that there was not enough focus on the local level. Person 5 and Person 3 both stated that the civics curriculum is shortened because the semester is split into two different classes, civics and careers, so there is not enough time to fully explore political education. Person 5 also said that if the government wants to get more youth voters on the municipal level, there should be more education for it, because, as they stated in their testimony, they did not even realize there were no political parties in local government. When Person 2 was in high school, there was no civics class, as political education was embedded in the history curriculum, so they believed a municipal education could inspire more young people to participate in their communities.

We can examine that the respondents feel as though there is a significant lack of municipal political education within the Ontario curriculum. This is an issue because we know

that local election turnout is already low, and the education system may be a factor in that because, as the respondents testified, there was practically no education provided about municipal politics. We can draw some conclusions from this sample of respondents. Firstly, the curriculum is not written to teach students about all levels of government equally in a substantial way. Secondly, the lack of municipal civics education directly impacts young voters' understanding of how local politics functions and the services it provides. These are all major issues that need to be addressed by the Ministry of Education and should be taken into account when designing a new civics curriculum in the future.

3. Testimonies from Grade 10 Civics Teachers

Our group conducted exploratory interviews with teachers to gain valuable insight into civic education in Ontario, particularly focusing on the grade 10 civics curriculum. We recognize that civics teachers play a pivotal role in shaping their students' understanding of civics and their civic duties. Given their important role, we aimed to understand their perspectives on their utilization of Ontario curriculum documents, and on any additional resources they may use to enhance their lessons.

We asked the teachers: How often do you refer to the Ontario curriculum documents when planning your lessons, and how well do you feel that the curriculum covers topics related to municipal government? Are you aware of any supplementary resources or programs provided by your city or other cities to support civic education? If you are familiar with these resources, have you ever used any of them?

Teacher 1: "I have been a civics teacher in Mississauga for over a decade. I do refer to the Ontario curriculum documents quite often to ensure that I am up to date on their criteria in my classroom. However, I feel that it covers the basics and that there are many gaps when it comes

to municipal government topics. I rely on a variety of additional resources to enhance learning in my classroom, including textbooks, online materials, and guest speakers. While I am unaware of any resources provided by Mississauga, I am aware that Toronto offers resources for municipal education. I am sure my students would benefit from the inclusion of Toronto's guide to municipal politics."

Teacher 2: "While I'm pretty cool with teaching civics, I wouldn't mind some extra tips, especially about local government. I do check out the Ontario curriculum documents, but honestly, they could use a little more guidance. To keep things current, I mix in all kinds of stuff like local newspapers, textbooks, and online videos I find relevant to the course. I've never really stumbled upon any Mississauga-specific resources yet, and I think that could really amp up our classes."

The two exploratory interviews conducted with high school teachers in Mississauga suggest that while the province provides guidance in the classroom, it may not be enough. The teachers often outsource and use additional resources such as local newspapers, textbooks, online materials, and guest speakers. Teacher 1 indicated that their students would benefit from the inclusion of Toronto's 'Ready, Set, Learn to Vote'. While Teacher 2 said that they and their students would benefit from having resources tailored to their municipality. Both Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 expressed that incorporating localized resources into the civics curriculum would be beneficial and foster a deeper understanding of municipal governance among their students.

Conclusion

Youth engagement in politics is crucial for the future of Canada's democracy and the integrity of Canadian elections. Engagement at the municipal level is especially important, considering it is the level of government that is closest to the daily lives of citizens. From local

bylaws and regulations to the use of public services, including waste management, and emergency services, the municipal government is responsible for aspects that directly impact a person's day-to-day life. Therefore, active engagement in municipal politics is important as it can ensure that the needs and preferences of a community are being met. By engaging with the municipal government, youth gain the opportunity to become informed future voters and assert their voices in the shaping of their immediate surroundings. In addition, through their municipal participation, young people also contribute to the fundamental principles of Canadian democracy that are crucial to the integrity of Canada's democratic and electoral processes.

In our study, we emphasized that active involvement in municipal politics and increased voter turnout are crucial for the well-being of a municipality, particularly engagement centred around youth. The assertion advanced by our group is that increasing engagement will help to increase political stability and the younger generation's commitment to the political system. While stability and confidence to vote and engage in municipal politics are being instilled in young voters across Ontario's five largest cities through the Grade 10 civics course, our group believes that resources such as the City of Toronto's 'Ready, Set, Learn How to Vote' are crucial for young voters to develop a good foundation and healthy relationship to engage in municipal politics. Our group believes that an emphasis placed on municipal studies can be a stepping stone to an increase in future voter turnout for places like the City of Mississauga and the Town of Oakville. It is important to note that while we do believe that an emphasis on municipal studies is important to uplift future voters, we recognize that it is not the sole determinant of voter engagement.

Through the bias-free testimonies of our participants on their experience with civics-based learning, we concluded that the respondents expressed a common theme of a lack of

municipal education in the civics curriculum. The testimonies also suggest that there is a disparity between the emphasis placed on municipal education and other levels of government. Commonly, they suggest a direct impact of the lack of municipal education and lower voter turnout; their insufficient understanding of municipal politics is directly related to their lack of participation. There is certainly a need they express to address the gap in municipal education in the Grade 10 curriculum and take on new approaches to obtain more informed and active participants in the municipal political process.

The limitations of our study include not knowing the significance and strength of the relationship between municipal civics education and political participation. Knowing whether there is a statistically significant relationship between the two variables would allow us to make more narrow inferences and conclusions about the findings in the analysis portion of our assignment. In addition, the small sample size of the testimonies we received may indicate that the attitudes of our participants do not match the attitudes of the broader population. These gaps in our research could be used for future studies to further solidify our hypothesis that municipal education is related to political participation. Lastly, while conducting this research study, one more notable limitation was the challenge of accessing high-school civics teachers for interviews. Future research endeavours may benefit from exploring alternative recruitment strategies or partnerships with secondary schools to enhance accessibility to this valuable participant group and gain deeper insights into the curriculum of high school civics courses.

Suggestion for the Town of Oakville: Our group believes that informed voters recognize the importance of their vote across all elections and strive to educate themselves on their various candidates. In order to prepare and inform voters, the information must come from a trusted source. Informed voters may feel more confident in their voting decisions and be more

inclined to vote than their uninformed counterparts. It is crucial to be able to recognize when municipal elections take place, how often they occur, how your vote can influence your municipality, and how detrimental not voting can be to your municipality. For these reasons, our group believes that it could be beneficial to the Town of Oakville to adopt a resource such as the City of Toronto's 'Ready, Set, Learn How to Vote' to encourage today's youth to understand municipal government better and become more involved and engaged with the municipal election process. Informing secondary students in Ontario about municipal government, the need to vote in municipal elections, and the municipal elections process can be one avenue to increase future municipal voter turnout. While our group believes that Toronto's emphasis placed on municipal studies since 2010 can be related to its higher municipal voter turnout, we want to emphasize that our suggestion is not intended as an argument for or against this possibility.

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