

Article Information

Title: What do we know about civic engagement?

Author: Peter Levine

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Summary

A decade ago, research on the civic engagement and learning of young people was still in a "bear market" (Cook 1985). The body of literature was strikingly small, considering that the future of democracy depends on the preparation of young citizens. Today, the situation is dramatically different. There is a torrent of research on youth civic engagement, ranging from highly technical articles and monographs to popular magazine articles and books. The field of youth civic engagement comprises all the programs that engage young people to be active citizens, plus relevant research and evaluation. This field is not monolithic but instead consists of several distinct projects. Each project has its own objectives for social reform that depend on facts about how young people are engaging in public life, hypotheses about what kinds of programs or strategies would enhance their engagement, moral premises, and strategic analysis about how to change large-scale policies and priorities. In this article, the author summarizes several empirical research programs that seek to critically evaluate their research subjects.