

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters

Additional Evidence, Associate professor Tanya Notley

Young People's Digital Civic Engagement

During the hearing I was asked by the Chair to share further evidence that investigates the relationship between young Australians internet and social media and their ability to participate in society and politics on issues that matter to them.

Our [2023 Young Australians and News survey](#) includes a nationally representative sample of 1064 young Australians. The survey finds that:

- 27% of young people say they get involved online in social issues
- 53% of young people say they have used the internet to learn how they can help other people
- 33% of young people post news on social issues online

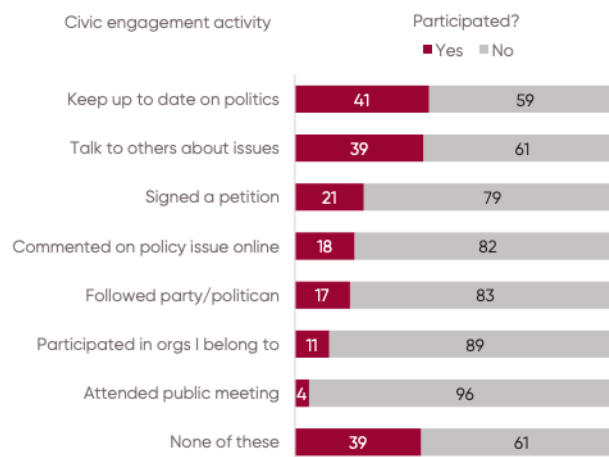
In all cases young people with a higher level of interest in news were far more likely to have engaged in these activities.

Further analysis we carried out for a conference paper we will deliver to the 2024 International Communication Association Conference¹ sought to explore which respondents are more likely to engage in digital civic engagement activities. Of all the factors we examined news literacy education was the only significant factor that predicted young people's digital civic engagement (we also examined whether young people lived in rural versus metropolitan areas, age, gender, parent's' educational levels). This suggests that teaching news literacy in school is likely to increase young people's digital civic engagement.

¹ Lee, J.Y., Park, S. & Notley, T. (2024, unpublished) 'Exploring the effects of news literacy education on news literacy and digital civic engagement among young people.' Paper submitted to the 2024 ICA *Children, Adolescents, and the Media Division*.

Our 2021 **Adult Media Literacy survey** finds that civic engagement is low among adults (see Figure 11.1 below, page 72). It is important to recognise that family are the most frequent and trusted source of news for young Australians and parental lack of interest, engagement and understanding of news, politics and social issues will influence children’s civic engagement.

► **Figure 11.1**
 Participation in civic engagement activities in the past 12 months (%)



AU.9 Thinking about your activities in the past twelve months have you done any of the following? (Tick all that apply).

Young Australians and our Democracy²

The Committee raised concerns about declining trust in politicians. The [2023 Trust and Satisfaction in Australian Democracy](#) survey asked 5,000 adult Australians about their views on Australia’s democracy. This survey shows a considerable increase in public satisfaction with our democracy since 2018 (from 41% to 57%). Those who indicate they understand Australian democracy ‘completely’, express the highest levels of satisfaction with its functioning. It would be useful to commission additional analysis of this data to look specifically at the results for younger adults since past studies have found that younger Australians have a lower level of satisfaction with Australian democracy.

² This research is from: Lee, J.Y., Park, S. & Notley, T. (2024, unpublished) ‘Exploring the effects of news literacy education on news literacy and digital civic engagement among young people.’ Paper submitted to the 2024 ICA Children, Adolescents, and the Media Division.

A literature review of Australian and international research published between 2009 and 2019 on young people, democracy, citizenship and participation finds that there are many reasons for young people's dissatisfaction with democracy but a cross-cutting finding is the belief that political systems are not including or representing young people or addressing the issues that matter most to them (ibid.). Civic and political engagement provide important opportunities for young people to ensure youth issues are a political and policy priority and greater digital media use is one factor that is associated with greater political and civic participation (Collin & McCormack, 2020, p.4). For young people aged under 18, communicating about social and civic issues with family, friends and in teachers and fellow students in the classroom provides important and highly valued opportunities for citizenship. This kind of engagement (which can take place via social media) is particularly important since past research has identified that most young Australians do not feel they can be heard at the level of government, and nor are many young people interested in engagement at the level of government (Collin & McCormack 2020).

The following additional research by other authors shows a strong relationship between internet and/or social media use and young people's civic engagement.

Arnot, G., Pitt, H., McCarthy, S., Cordedda, C., Marko, S., & Thomas, S. L. (2024) [Australian youth perspectives on the role of social media in climate action](#). *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 48(1), 100111.

An online survey of $n=500$ young Australians (aged 15–24) recruited via an online panel finds the participants perceived that social media platforms were a powerful and inclusive communication mechanism for climate action. Social media had the ability to reach diverse audiences and connect young people globally. Limitations included influencing key decision makers and risks associated with misinformation and disinformation.

Collin, P., & McCormack, J. (2020). [Young people and democracy: a review](#). Whitlam Institute.

This review reports on the scholarship about young people (aged 12-30) and democracy published between 2009-2019. The research includes case studies and research that shows social movements around the world have used social media to mobilise, connect and advocate for action and young people use the internet to engage in the issues that matter to them.

Boulianne, S., & Theocharis, Y. (2020). [Young people, digital media, and engagement: A meta-analysis of research](#). *Social science computer review*, 38(2), 111-127.

This meta-analysis includes 106 survey-based studies about youth, digital media use, and engagement in civic and political life from across countries. The authors find a very strong relationship between online political activities, such as joining political groups and signing petitions, with off-line political activities showing a clear relationship between online digital citizenship and offline political engagement.

Green, L. (2020). [Confident, capable and world changing: teenagers and digital citizenship](#). *Communication Research and Practice*, 6(1), 6–19.

This paper uses the frame of digital citizenship to examine how Australian teenagers strategically respond to some of the big questions of the age – climate change, gender equity and social justice – through small-scale digital activism.

Harris, A., Walton, J., Johns, A., & Caluya, G. (2022). [Toward Global Digital Citizenship: “Everyday” Practices of Young Australians in a Connected World](#). In *Contestations of Citizenship, Education, and Democracy in an Era of Global Change* (pp. 133-155). Routledge.

Using the conceptual lens of global digital citizenship, this book chapter reviews the literature to examine the way online spaces provide particular opportunities for marginalised young people, in the Australian context. The authors argue that “capturing the increasing global and digital connectedness of young people’s civic and political participation will help inform educational programs that better align with young people’s digital media practices and experiences of citizenship in a global context more generally.” (p147)