

# Can Civic Education Promote Democratic Equality? And Can Findings from Studies Support School Reform?

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# Can Civic Education Promote Democratic Equality?

- ▶ Maybe

# Can findings support school reform?

For 20 years I thought my job was as a basic scientist. Publish papers and throw them over the wall for someone else to apply.

I now realize that there's no one on the other side of the wall. Just a huge pile of papers that we've all thrown over.

-- Twitter: by Duncan Watts

# Why Focus on Political Equality?



# Politicians are more responsive to those with more money

Voter Influence in the Senate

\$ Top 3<sup>rd</sup>

\$ Middle 3<sup>rd</sup>

\$ Bottom 3<sup>rd</sup>

# Political and Civic Engagement: Low and Inequitable 18–24 years old



# Ways to Examine if Education Promotes Democratic Equality?

- Identify Learning Opportunities that Promote Civic Engagement
- Examine the degree to which there is equal exposure to civic learning opportunities.
- Examine whether education promotes a commitment to democratic equality that is acted upon.



# Identify Opportunities that Promote Civic Engagement

- Research Indicates that civic learning opportunities can promote students' political engagement. For example,
  - **Open classroom climates** have been found to lead to a greater intention to participate civically and politically (Torney-Purta, 2002) and greater civic knowledge (Campbell, 2008)
  - **Service learning opportunities** for students shown to lead to greater likelihood of voting and volunteering as adults (Hart *et al.*, 2007)



# Examine the Frequency of Impactful Civic Learning Opportunities?

**34%** never did service learning in high school

**36%** never participated in a simulation in high school

**68%** they learned a lot about the structure and function of government

# Inequitable Access to Civic Learning Opportunities

Compared to Average SES 9<sup>th</sup> graders,

High SES 9<sup>th</sup> graders are:

**2x** more likely  
to discuss how  
laws are made

**1.9x** more likely to  
report participating in  
service activities

**1.4x** more likely to  
take part in a debate or  
panel discussion

In addition to  
traditional civic  
education and goals  
– digital  
political  
engagement is  
important



The volume of online activity is immense.

- ▶ 92% of teens (13-17) go online every day. (Pew)
- ▶ 24% say they are online almost constantly. (Pew)

# What are Participatory Politics?

- ▶ Peer-based and Interactive ways for youth to achieve voice and influence often through social networks
- ▶ Creation and circulation of media to inform, promote dialog, impact cultural norms, mobilize
- ▶ Blends social, cultural, and political
- ▶ Not guided by deference to elites or formal institutions





# Participatory Politics are key for youth

- ▶ Aligns with youth culture
- ▶ Taps skills and technologies youth have
- ▶ Provides a platform for voice and action for those not 18 or citizens



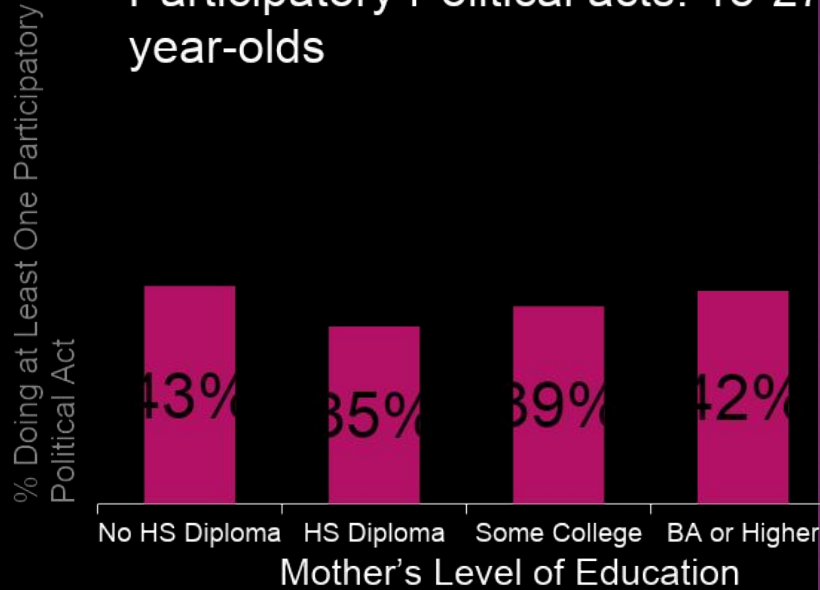
# Will digital politics become a Weapon of the Strong?

- ▶ Scholars have found a digital divide among the population in general. (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady, 2010; Hindman, 2009; Mossberger and Tolbert, 2010).
- ▶ But also that these patterns may not hold for youth or young adults (Schlozman, Verba, and Brad, 2010; Cohen et al., 2012).

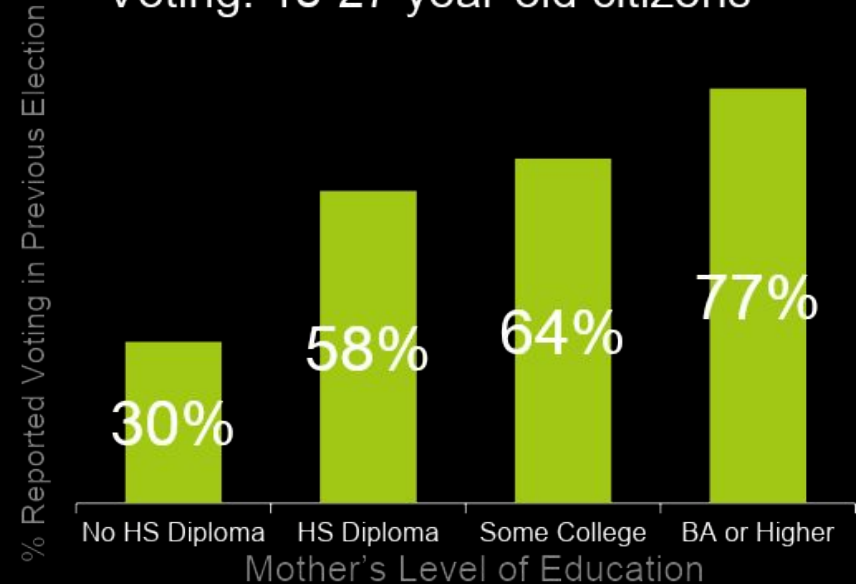


# Equity and Online Participatory Politics

Participatory Political acts: 15-27 year-olds



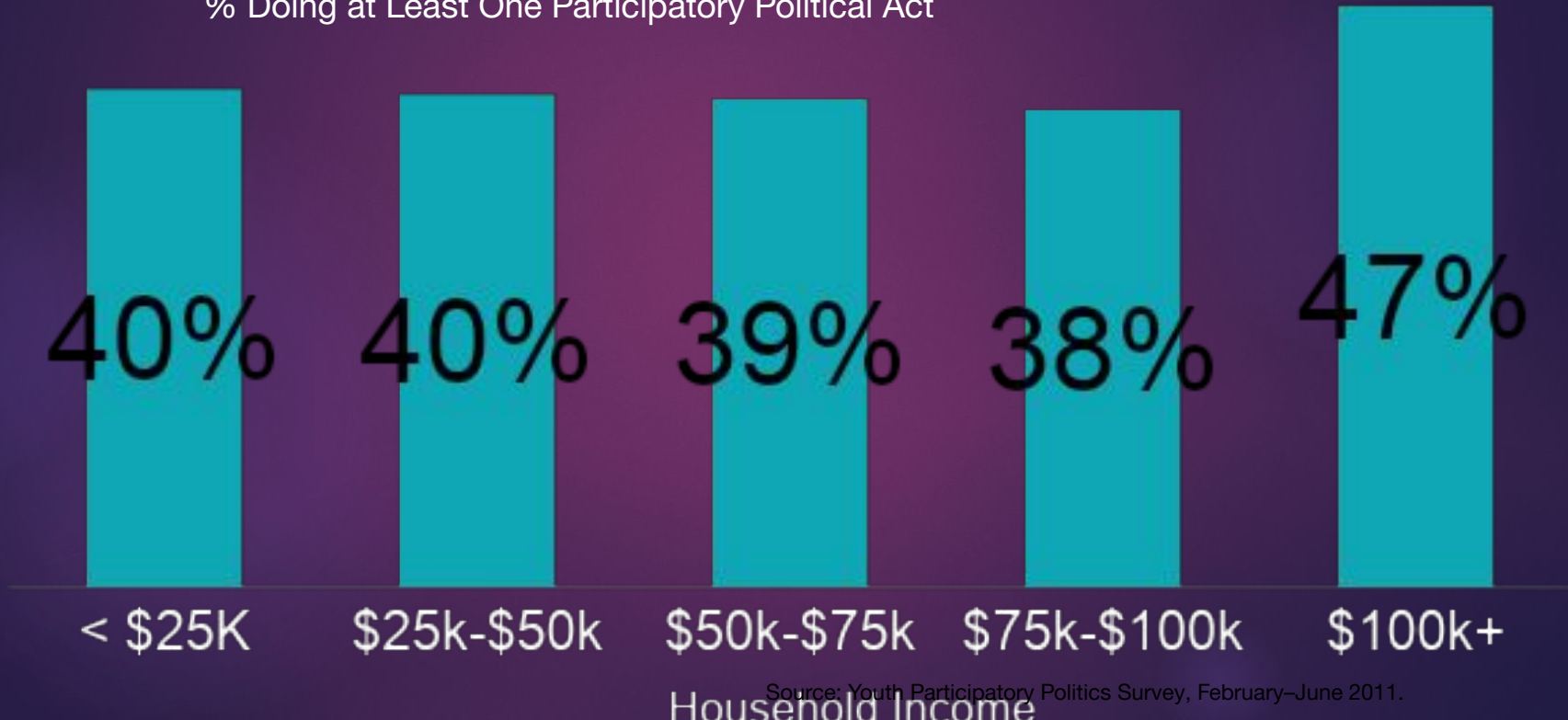
Voting: 18-27 year-old citizens



Participatory politics is more equitably distributed by Mother's Education (SES)

# Are youth participatory politics structured by the digital divide?

% Doing at Least One Participatory Political Act



Source: Youth Participatory Politics Survey, February-June 2011.

Some indications that digital education promotes online Participatory Politics?

- ▶ **Can Media Literacy Education Increase Digital Engagement in Politics?** (Kahne & Bowyer, 2019).
- ▶ **Using Twitter to Promote Classroom and Civic Engagement.** (Woodall & Lennon, 2017).

# How Equitably Distributed are Digital Civic Learning Opportunities??

- ▶ Unequal: Gray, Thomas, & Lewis, (2010) ; Leu and colleagues (2015)
- ▶ Equal: Kahne, Lee, and Feezell (2012)

# Core Research Questions

- ▶ How equitable is Civic and Political Engagement in the digital age?
- ▶ How Equitably Distributed are these learning opportunities?
- ▶ Do Digital Civic Learning Opportunities Promote Civic and Political Engagement?

# Data

- Panel data from Chicago Public Schools' annual student survey over two years: 2016/17 - 2017/18
- Surveys contained 2 versions of the Civics module half of students in grades 8-12 assigned to a Civics module
  - Each version administered at random to  $\frac{1}{4}$  of students in grades 8-12 each year
- Analyze subset who were in grades 9-11 in 2016-17 and who took a version of the Civics module in both waves ( $N=10,254$ )

<i>N</i>	Wave 2, Version A	Wave 2, Version B
Wave 1, Version A	2,620	2,501
Wave 1, Version B	2,578	2,555

# Key Variables

- Civic learning opportunities
- Digital civic learning opportunities
- Civic engagement
- Online participatory politics
- Demographic variables
  - Gender, race/ethnicity, ELL status, free/reduced-price lunch eligibility
- Parents/guardians' civic activity



# Measures of Civic Learning Opportunities

- “This year, in my classes,”
  1. “I have discussed current events and/or controversial issues.”
  2. “I have learned about societal issues that I care about.”
  3. “I am encouraged to consider multiple views on controversial issues.”
  4. “I have participated in political or legal role-plays (such as mock elections, campaigns, trials, or Model UN).”
  5. “I have been involved in a project to improve my school or community.”
- *Alpha*: Wave 1 = .76; Wave 2 = .77

# Measures of Digital Civic Learning Opportunities

- 2 items asked on Version B
  - “In your classes this year, how often have you done the following:”
    1. “Discussed how to effectively share your opinion on social or political issues online  
(for example, by blogging or tweeting or posting comments)”
    2. “Created and shared something on the Internet related to a societal issue”
  - Response Options
    - “Never,” “Once,” “Twice,” “Three or more times”
- Form a reliable scale.
  - *Alpha*: Wave 1 = .82; Wave 2 = .82

# Measures of Civic Engagement

- “How true are the following about you?”
  1. “Getting involved in improving my community is important to me.”
  2. “Following community or national issues is important to me.”
  3. “There are issues in my community or the nation that I care deeply about.”
  4. “I expect to vote in elections once I am old enough.”
- “Not counting required school activities, this school year, how often have you...
  5. “Raised money and/or volunteered for a cause you cared about”
  6. “Worked or cooperated with others to try to solve a problem affecting your school, city or neighborhood?”
- *Alpha: Wave 1 = .84; Wave 2 = .87*

# Measures of Online Participatory Politics

- “This school year, how often you have done the following:”
  1. “Shared someone else’s article, blog, picture or video related to politics”
  2. “Created and shared your own article, blog, picture or video related to politics”
  3. “Commented or tweeted about an article, blog, picture or video related to politics”
  4. “Posted a status update or sent an email, Tweet or instant message related to politics”
- Response Options
  - “Never”, “Less than once a month,” “Once or twice a month,” “Once a week,” or “Several times a week”
- Form a very reliable scale.
  - *Alpha: Wave 1 = .94; Wave 2 = .95*

# Examination of Engagement and Learning Opportunities

- Meaningful variation/inequality across different groups for both engagement and learning opportunities.
- Patterns different for learning opps and engagement in civic/political life.
- Patterns different for Traditional and Digital engagement

# Gender

- ▶ Females were slightly more likely to be committed to civic engagement.
  1. There are issues in my community that I care deeply about (Completely True) 24% vs. 19%
- ▶ Males slightly more engaged online: “I commented or tweeted about an article, blog, picture or video related to politics” (30% vs. 26%)

# Gender

- ▶ No statistically significant differences in CLO or DCLO's.



# Race/Ethnicity

- ▶ White students were slightly more engaged in traditional civic and political activities than Black students. Latinx significantly less so.
- ▶ Black students were by far the most engaged digitally. Next were Latinx and then White
  - ▶ For example, “Posted status update or sent email, tweet, IM related to politics” at least once a week (37%Black; 26% Latinx; 23%white).

# Race/Ethnicity

- ▶ Black students were the most likely to say they had civic and digital learning experiences. Latinx were the least likely to have CLO's and White students were least likely to have DCLO's.
- ▶ For example, 23% of Black, 17% of White, and 13% of Hispanic/Latinx students strongly agreed that, "I have been involved in a project to improve my school or community,"

# Income– Qualify for Free lunch

- ▶ Contrasting patterns
- ▶ Free lunch eligible score lower on civic learning opportunities and civic engagement: “I expect to vote once I am old enough”: 39% for Free Lunch Eligible vs. 54% for not eligible.
- ▶ But Free Lunch Eligible are MORE likely to get digital civic learning opportunities and to be engaged online:
- ▶ For example, Posted a status update or sent an email, tweet, or IM related to politics” 30% free lunch vs. 25% not eligible.

# Implications

- ▶ Digital patterns of engagement differ from traditional patterns
- ▶ Digital engagement may be particularly attractive for groups with less political power
- ▶ There are significant forms of inequality in both learning opportunities and outcomes and these inequalities may well be worth educators' attention.

# Do Civic and Digital Learning Opportunities Promote Desired Outcomes?

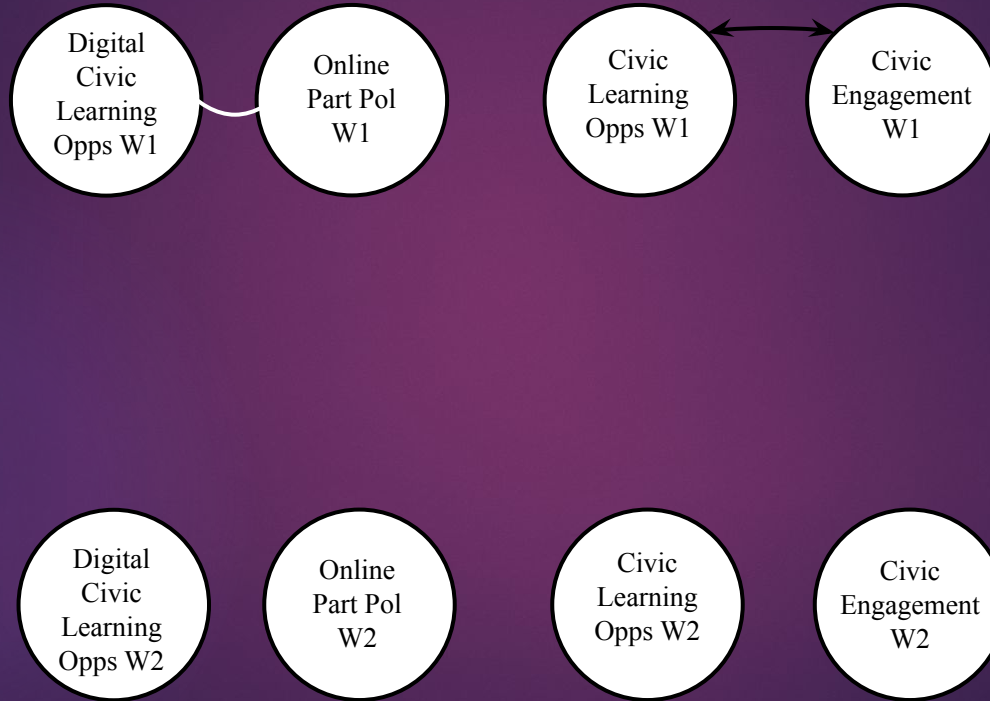




# Cross-Lagged Model of Learning Opportunities and Political Engagement

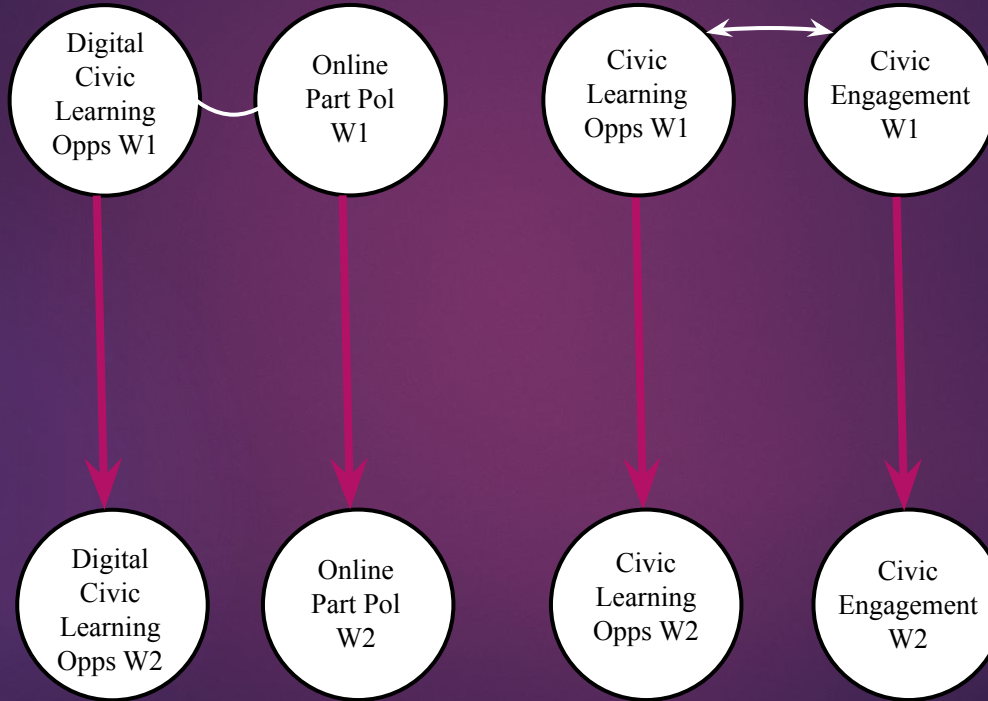


# Cross-Sectional Model of Learning Opportunities and Political Engagement

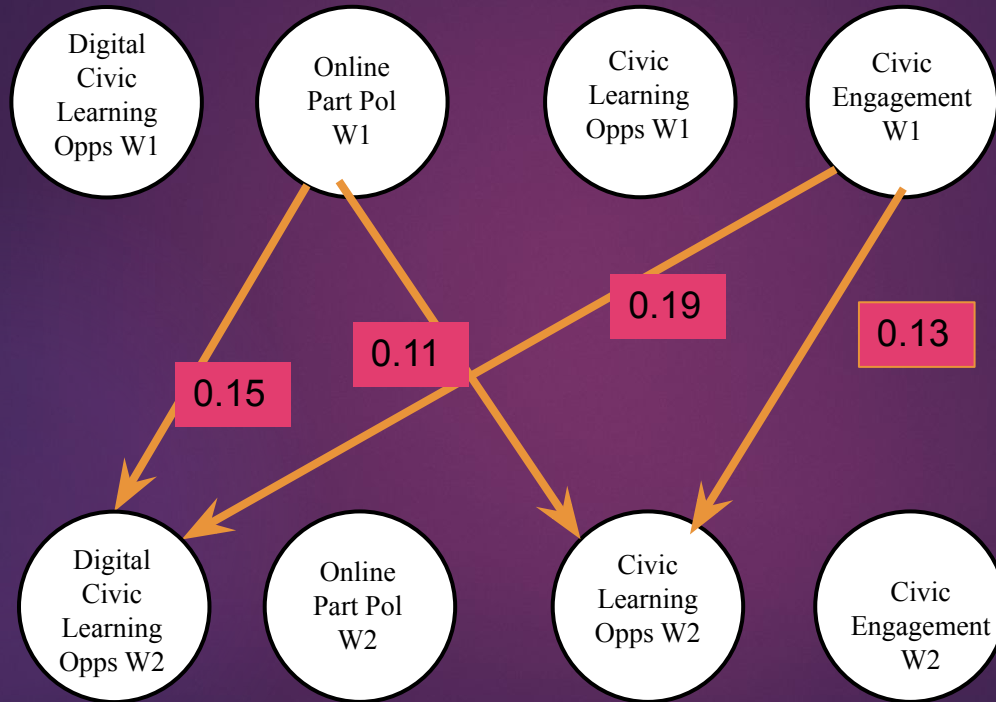




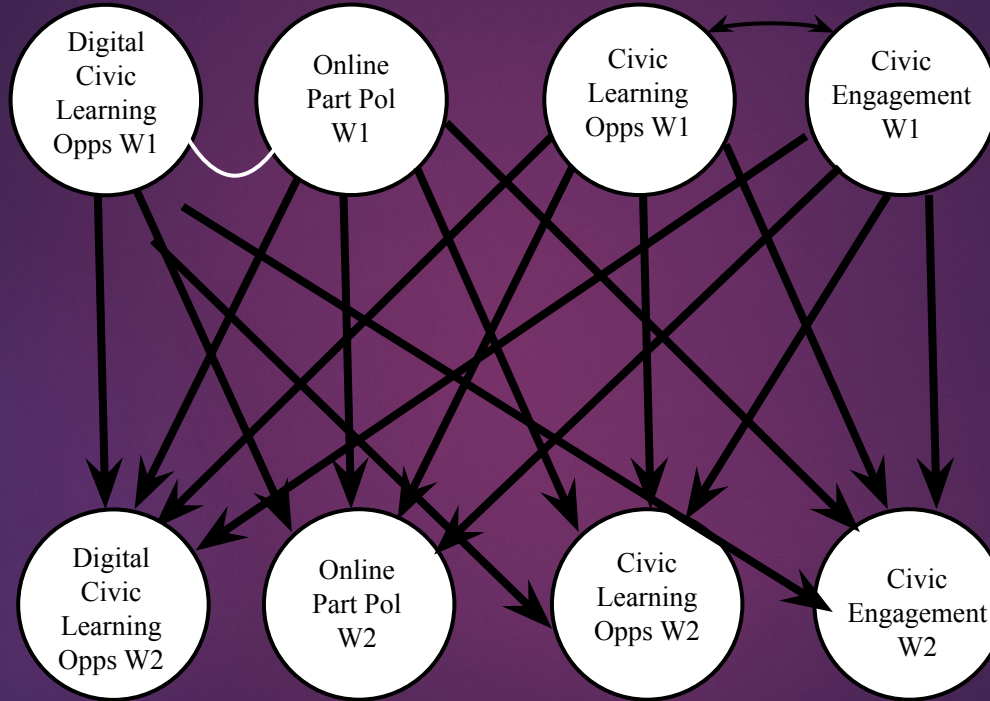
# Cross-Lagged Model of Learning Opportunities and Political Engagement. (A Key Control)



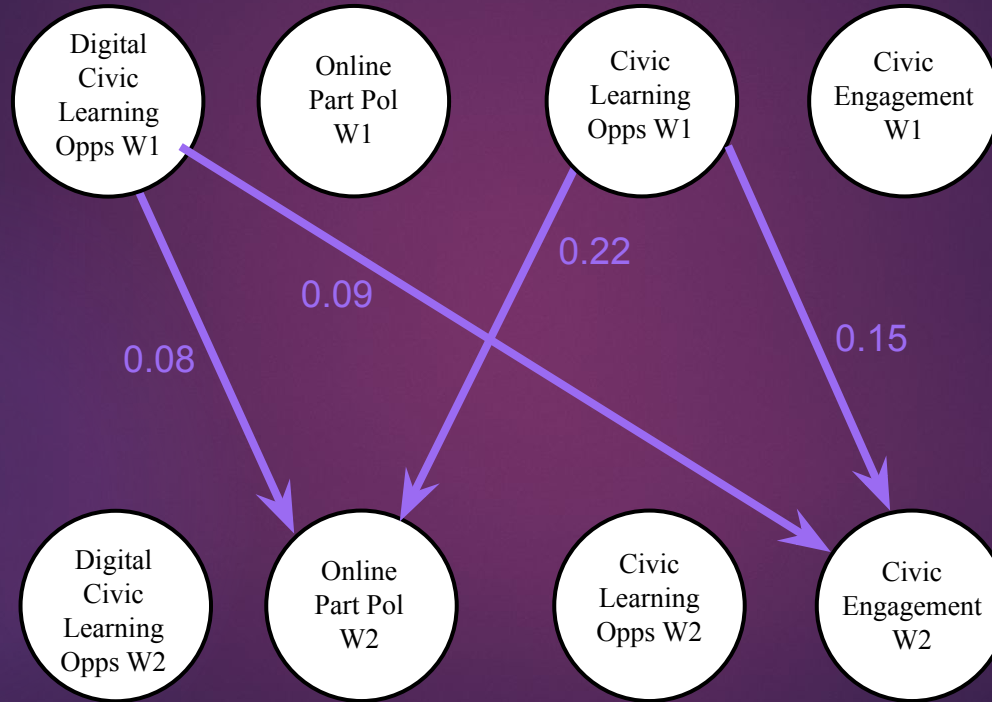
# Estimated Effects of Political Engagement on Learning Opportunities



# Cross-Lagged Model of Learning Opportunities and Political Engagement



# Estimated Effects of Learning Opportunities on Political Engagement



# Substantive Conclusions (methods)



- ▶ A cross-lagged model is helpful when examining the impact of civic and digital learning opportunities on civic and digital outcomes.
- ▶ It may well be that digital and civic learning opportunities impact more than their own domain.

# Substantive Conclusions: Outcomes

- ▶ Civic and digital learning opportunities appear to promote civic and digital outcomes.
- ▶ Schools could promote Democratic Equality.

Meaningful ongoing measures of  
opportunities and outcomes

“You cannot improve at scale  
what you can’t measure.”

Tony Bryk, President,  
Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of  
Teaching



# Lindblom and Cohen, 1979; and Majone 1989

- ▶ Data can't answer many problems
- ▶ Many problems trans-scientific. How much gain does this program produce, how much does that matter 5 years out? How much does it reduce inequities in political power? Many relevant goals...
- ▶ What exactly should we do?



## But what can data do?

- ▶ Focus attention on opportunities and outcomes
- ▶ Examine patterns and relationships
- ▶ Spark valuable conversations
- ▶ Risks – Accountability may help or hurt.

# Structure



- ▶ Prioritizes the district values
- ▶ Try to only use items where research has found a positive impact on desired outcomes.
- ▶ School reports and district reports – as a means of focusing attention and prompting conversation...

# Example: Selective vs. non-selective schools

- ▶ At school we discuss current events and controversial issues
  - Selective: 38% Strongly Agree
  - Non-Selective 24% Strongly Agree

# Example: Schools with and without IB program

- ▶ At school we discuss current events and controversial issues
  - IB program: 23% Strongly Agree
  - No IB Program: 32% Strongly Agree

# Example: EL vs. Non EL

- ▶ At school we discuss current events and controversial issues
  - EL: 18% Strongly Agree
  - Not EL: 32% Strongly Agree



# Example: School Report

- ▶ At school we discuss current events and controversial issues
  - Our School: 13% Strongly Agree
  - District Average: 29% Strongly Agree

# What we are learning: Process is key

- ▶ The key is often not data but discussion of data
- ▶ Getting data to schools in time for planning is key
- ▶ Schools- 2 year planning process.
- ▶ Having District and State indicators may help as well. If they are good.

# We are just beginning to learn

- I wish we spent more time connecting what we learn to issues I care about in society.
- My friends and I could use help judging the accuracy of what we find online.

# Risks

- ▶ Inappropriate accountability structures.
- ▶ Not always clear what is meant by student responses?
- ▶ Don't want to fixate on #'s rather than practice
- ▶ Comparisons to others may not help.

In short, research on educational practice and on data use are both needed. And there may be advantages to designing one while thinking about the other.

Democracy is  
precarious





# Thank You



Thoughts



Questions



Comments



for more information:

<http://www.civicsurvey.org/>

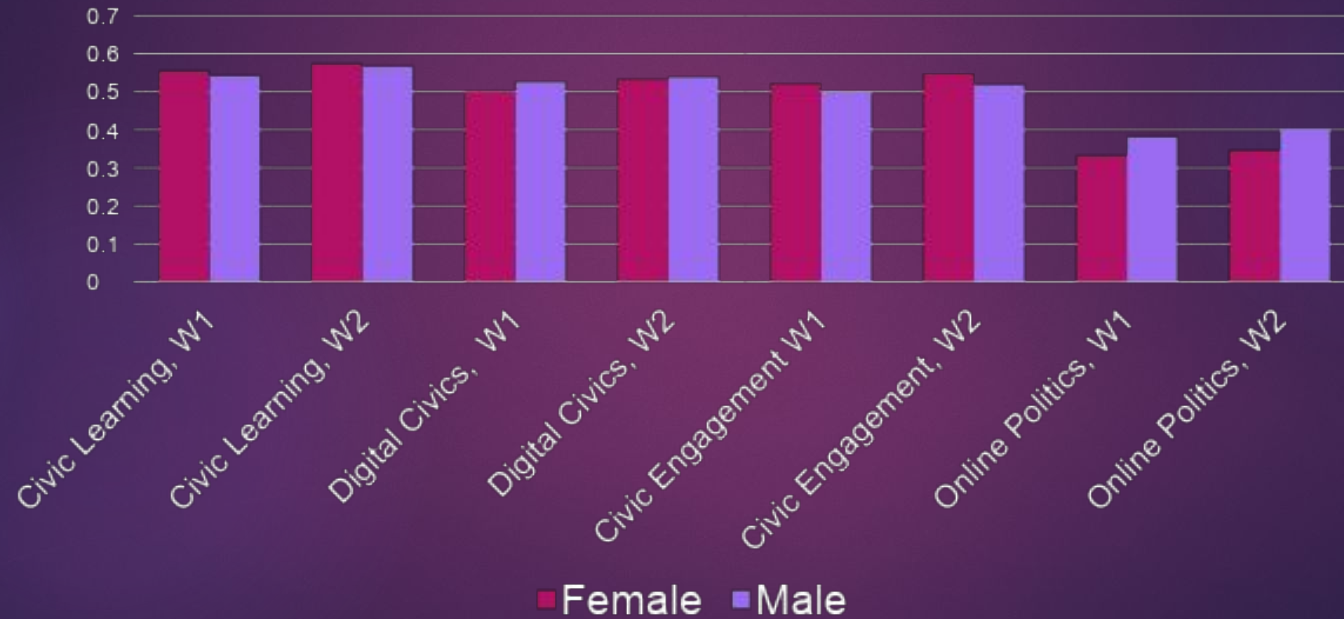


# LEADE Research Brief & Indicator System

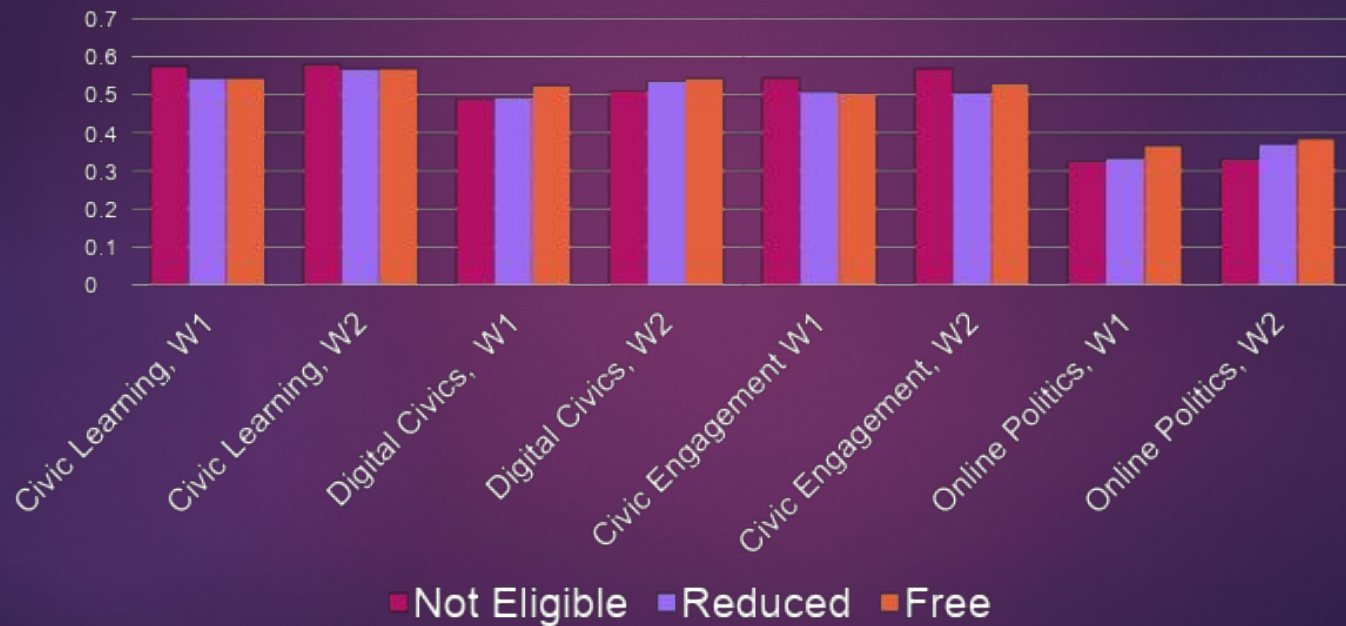
# Conclusions

- ▶ Civic and digital civic learning opportunities appear to lead to increased civic and political engagement, both online and offline
  - ▶ More research needed to identify particular curricula/practices that have the greatest impact
- ▶ With respect to the distribution of learning opportunities and outcomes, different patterns for digital and non-digital
  - ▶ Need to investigate whether effects of learning opportunities vary across groups of students

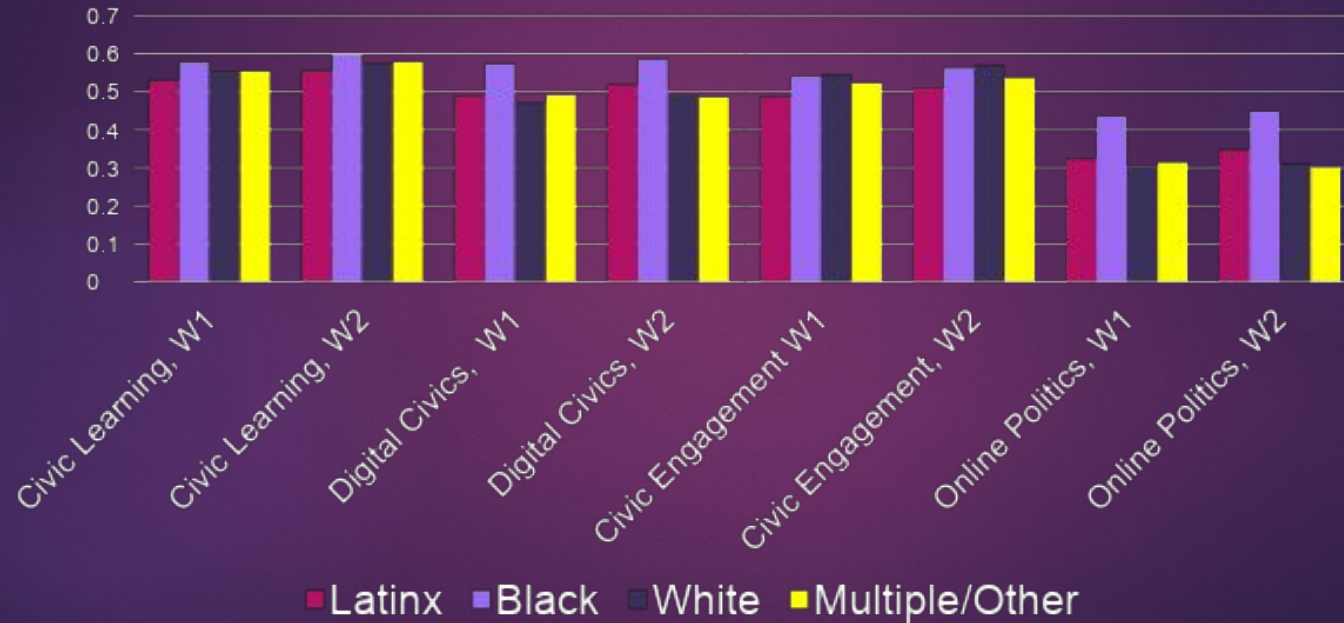
# Civic Learning and Engagement by Gender



# Civic Learning and Engagement by Free Lunch Eligibility

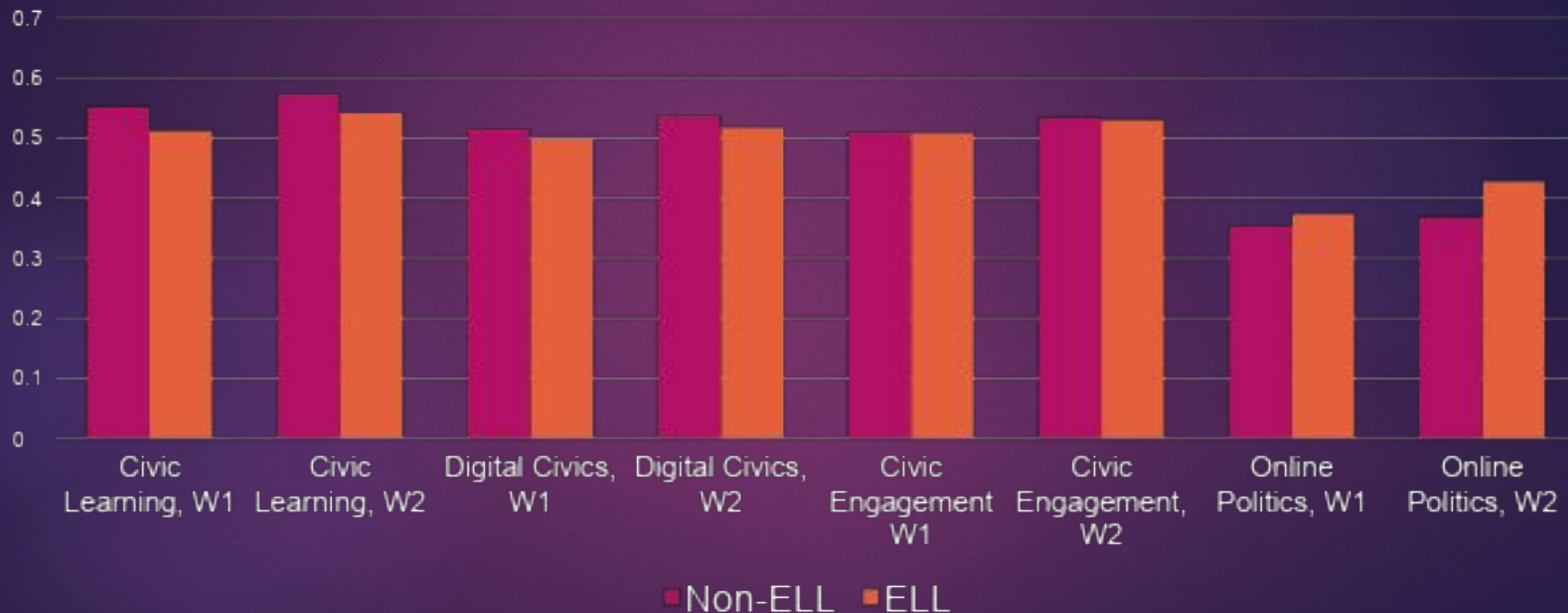


# Civic Learning and Engagement by Race/Ethnicity

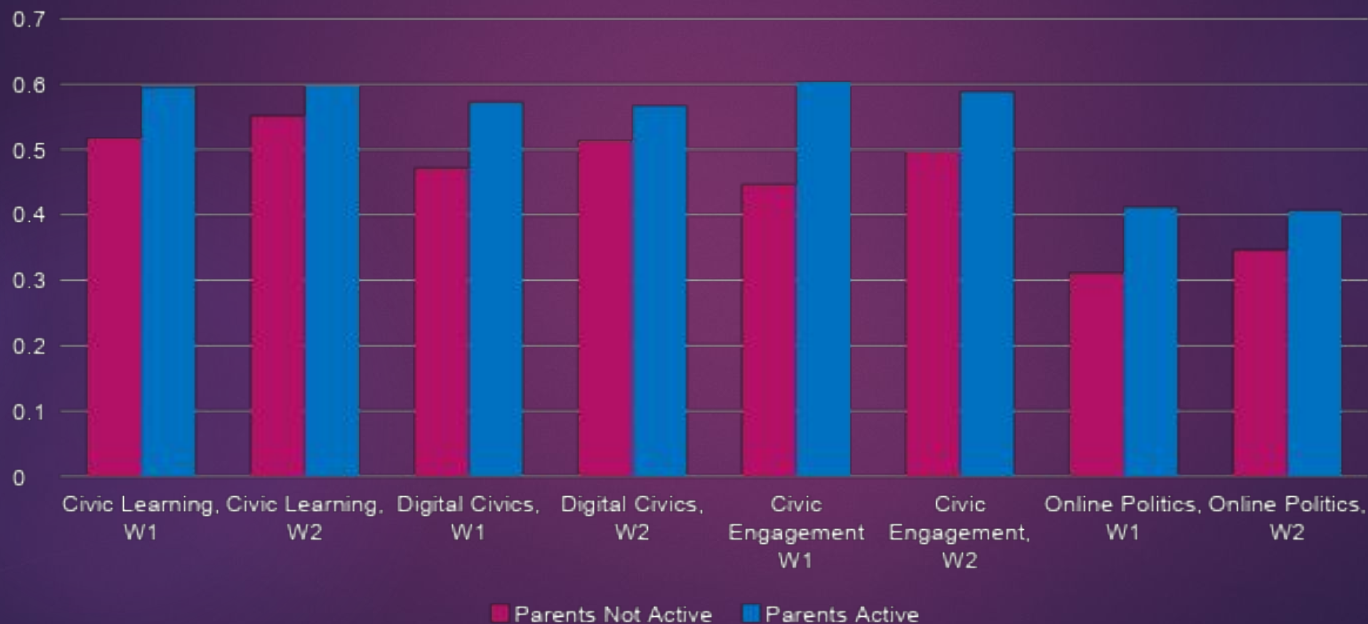




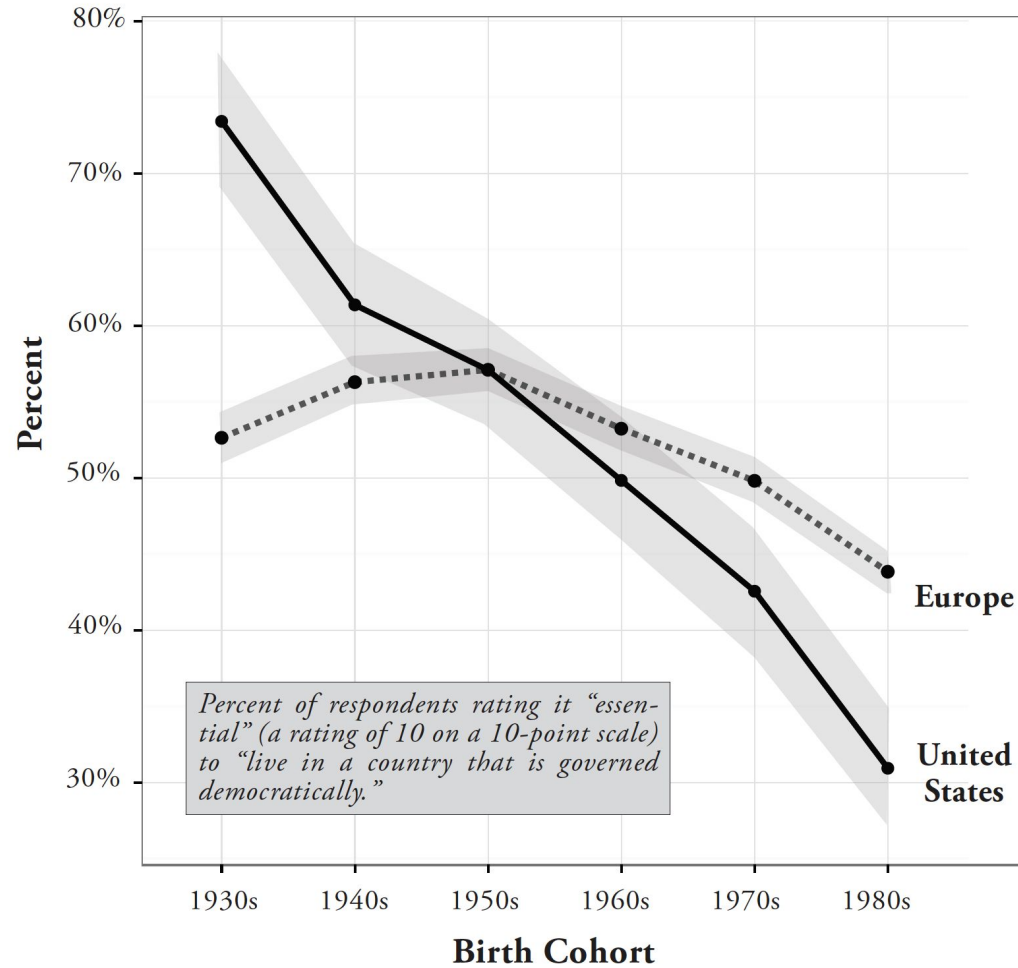
# Civic Learning and Engagement by English Language Learner Status



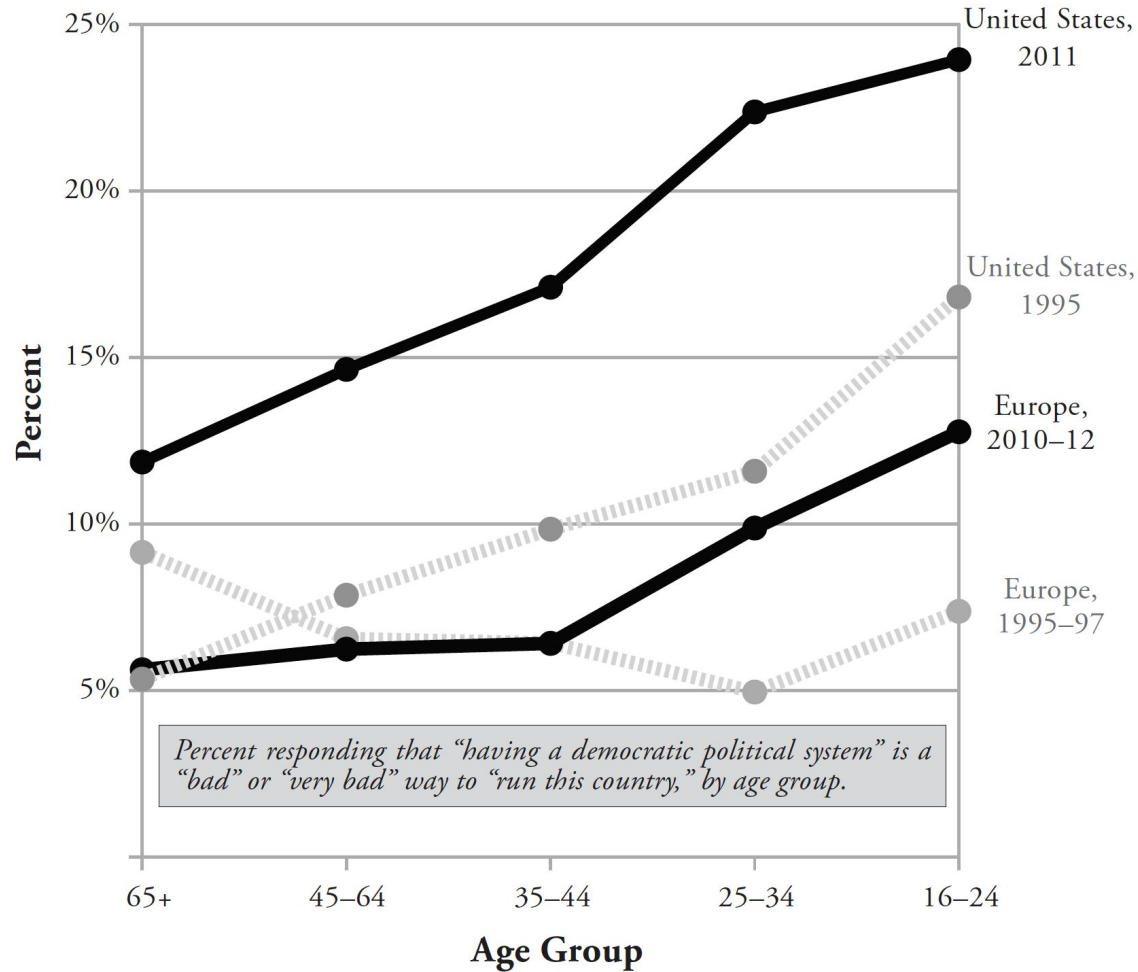
# Civic Learning and Engagement by Parental Activity



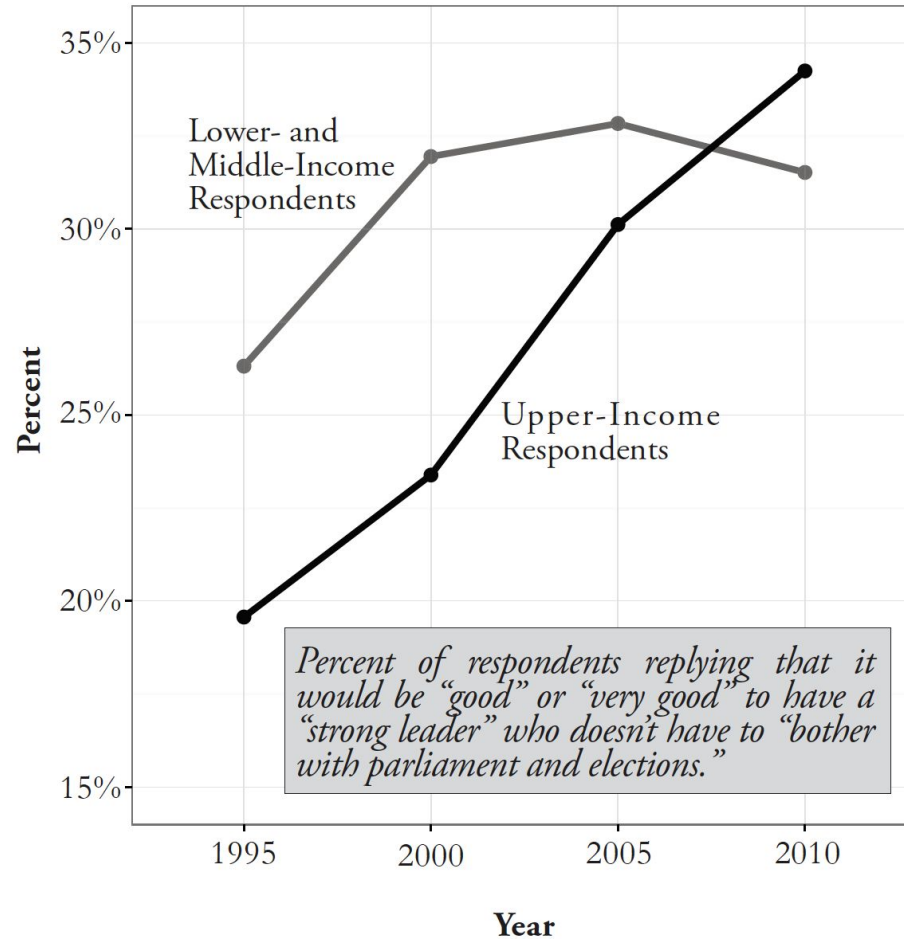
**FIGURE 1—“ESSENTIAL” TO LIVE IN A COUNTRY THAT IS GOVERNED DEMOCRATICALLY, BY AGE COHORT (DECADE OF BIRTH)**



**FIGURE 2—“HAVING A DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL SYSTEM” IS A “BAD” OR “VERY BAD” WAY TO “RUN THIS COUNTRY”**

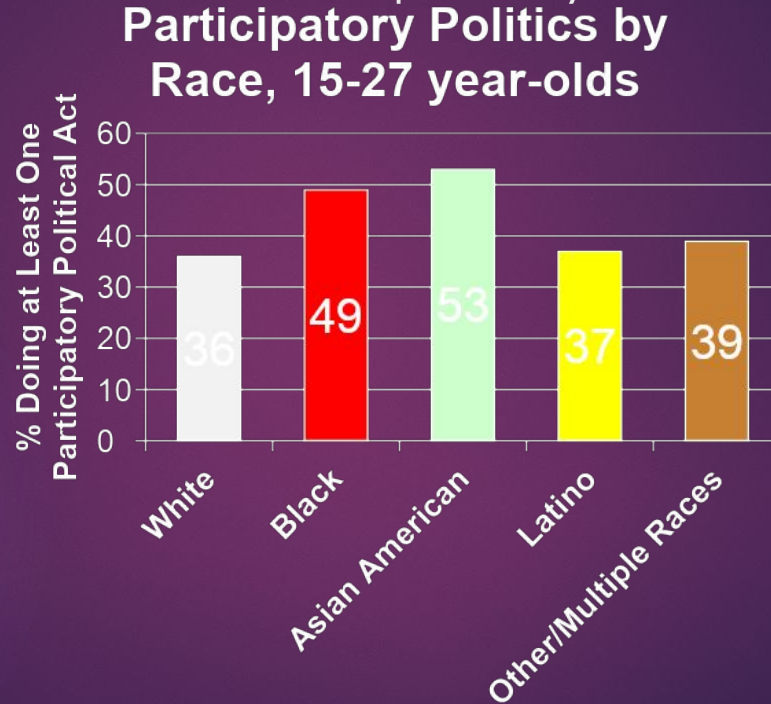


**FIGURE 4—SUPPORT FOR AUTHORITARIANISM  
BY INCOME IN THE U.S.**



# We need to Rethink the Digital Divide

Participatory politics is more equitably distributed  
by race



# Goals of the LEADE Indicator System

- Foster opportunities for educators, civic organizations, community groups, and youth to participate in evidence-based public deliberation about current civic education practices and strategies for expanding access to quality civic learning opportunities; and
- Inform consideration and assessment of policies and priorities related to Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAPs), as well as other school reform efforts by schools and community organizations.