

The Influences of Civic Education on Youth Political Participation

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Introduction

Civic education is a fundamental component of nurturing active and engaged citizens. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in understanding how civic education impacts youth political participation. This paper explores the importance of civic education and youth participation. It also provides approaches for way-forward to encourage and enhance Samoa's youth participation along with what has been implemented to date to strengthen its youth political participation.

What is civic education and why is it important?

Civic education, also known as civics or citizenship education, is a field of study that focuses on teaching individuals about their rights, responsibilities, and roles as active and informed members of a democratic society. It is designed to prepare individuals to participate in the civic and political life of their communities, countries, and the world at large and the following are some reasons why it is important:¹

- i. **Promotes Democracy:** Civic education is fundamental to the health and functioning of a democracy. Informed and engaged citizens are more likely to participate in the political process, vote, and hold their leaders accountable.
- ii. **Protects Rights:** It ensures that citizens are aware of their rights and responsibilities, helping to safeguard individual freedoms and promote social justice.
- iii. **Counters Misinformation:** In an era of abundant information and misinformation, civic education helps individuals develop critical thinking skills, enabling them to discern credible sources from unreliable ones.
- iv. **Fosters Active Citizenship:** Civic education encourages people to take an active role in their communities, leading to positive social and political change.
- v. **Strengthens Social Cohesion:** It promotes understanding and tolerance among people of different backgrounds, reducing social divisions and fostering a sense of shared identity and purpose.

¹ [The Importance of Civic Education \(kidcentraltn.com\)](https://www.kidcentraltn.com)

- vi. **Prepares Future Leaders:** Civic education can help nurture the next generation of leaders who are well-informed, ethical, and committed to serving the public interest.²

What is youth political participation and why is it important?

Youth political participation refers to the engagement of young people in political activities and civic affairs. This involvement can take various forms, including voting, running for office, attending public meetings, engaging in political discussions, volunteering for campaigns, and advocating for social and political causes.³ The following are some of the principles why youth participation is vital:

- i. **Representation:** Young people make up a significant portion of the population, and their voices and perspectives should be represented in the political process. Without youth engagement, there is a risk that policies and decisions may not fully address the needs and concerns of this demographic.
- ii. **Democracy Strengthening:** Youth engagement is vital for the health and vitality of a democratic society. It fosters a culture of active citizenship and helps ensure a government that is responsive to the diverse interests of its citizens.
- iii. **Inclusivity:** Encouraging youth political participation promotes inclusivity and diversity in political decision-making. It helps create a more representative and equitable government that considers a wide range of perspectives.
- iv. **Policy Impact:** Young people often bring fresh perspectives, innovative ideas, and a focus on long-term issues such as climate change and social justice. Their engagement can lead to policy changes that benefit society as a whole.
- v. **Education and Empowerment:** Participating in the political process, whether through voting or activism, is a valuable form of civic education. It empowers young people to understand how government works and how to effect change through democratic means.
- vi. **Leadership Development:** Involvement in political activities can foster leadership skills, networking opportunities, and a sense of responsibility, contributing to the development of future leaders.
- vii. **Preventing Apathy:** Encouraging youth political participation helps combat political apathy and disengagement. When young people feel their voices matter, they are more likely to stay engaged in politics throughout their lives.
- viii. **Civic Responsibility:** Engaging in political activities fosters a sense of civic responsibility and a commitment to the welfare of the community and society at large.⁴

² [Why is Civic Education important? – Civics Academy](#)

³ [The Power of Youth Politics: What is Youth Political Participation? \(politicalmarketer.com\)](#)

⁴ [360participation - » The Importance of Young people participation in the process of creating youth policy](#)

However, it is important to note that there can be barriers to youth political participation, such as voter registration challenges, lack of information, or a perception that their voices won't be heard. To promote youth engagement, efforts should be made to address these barriers, provide educational opportunities, and create spaces for young people to voice their concerns and ideas. Encouraging mentorship and support from older generations can also help inspire and guide young people in their political involvement. Overall, youth political participation is crucial for the well-being and vitality of democratic societies.

What has the Office of the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly (OCLA) and the Parliament of Samoa done to provide youth participation in the political affairs of our nation?

The OCLA's main role for Parliament is to assist and support them with their mandated functions such as providing adequate information and ensure the public are well informed and have access to published documents especially passed legislations by the Parliament. Through this, one of the divisions of the OCLA is called Community Relation Service – their primary objective is promoting the OCLA's service and how essential the role of Parliament is in Samoa. In this regard, they play a vital role in engaging the people through their programmes where one of their programmes is designed specifically for the youth namely, Youth Parliamentary Programme. The youth programme is conducted once a year ever since this division was established in 2013. This programme creates a path for the youth to participate and have the opportunity to be present in a parliament sitting. The following are other activities conducted through this programme:

- Presentations on the role of each division in OCLA
- Presentations on the functions of Parliament
- Presentations on the mandated legislation of Parliament and OCLA
- Mock Parliament on controversial topics such as Same Sex Marriage, Women in Parliament etc.

Way Forward

Encouraging youth participation in Samoa, as in any other country, is essential for fostering civic engagement, empowering young people, and ensuring a vibrant and sustainable future. Here are some ways to encourage youth participation in Samoa, along with international best practices that can be adapted to the local context:

- i. **Youth Engagement Programs:** Implement youth engagement programs that focus on leadership development, communication skills, and civic education. These programs can be both formal (in schools or community centers) and informal (youth clubs or online platforms).
- ii. **Civic Education:** Incorporate civic education into the school curriculum to teach young people about their rights, responsibilities, and the importance of civic engagement.

- iii. **Youth-Friendly Policies:** Develop policies that are youth-friendly and take into account the unique needs and aspirations of young people. Ensure that their voices are considered in policy development.
- iv. **Digital Platforms:** Utilize digital platforms and social media to engage young people in discussions, surveys, and information dissemination. Many young people are active on these platforms, making them effective tools for outreach.
- v. **World Parliament Day:** In accordance with Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, “World Parliament Day, or the UN International Day of Parliamentarism, is celebrated every year on 30 June.”⁵ Although it has been on the forefront of the discussions for the office but it has yet to execute. It will be a great initiative to make known to the people of Samoa the important part of Parliament especially the youth to be involve.

International Best Practices:

- ***Youth Quota:***

Some countries like Kenya and Uganda have adopted youth quotas in political decision-making bodies, ensuring a certain percentage of positions are reserved for young people.⁶

- ***Youth Parliaments:***

New Zealand: The Parliament of New Zealand introduced its first Youth Parliament in 1994 to get the youth involved and have the opportunity for young New Zealanders to learn first-hand about its democracy and have their voices heard.⁷ It is important to note that the Youth Parliament is held every three years and is usually a two-day event.

United Kingdom (UK): From 1999-2001, the UK Youth Parliament was officially launched in the House of Commons and was founded by the Conservative MP for Faversham namely Andrew Rowe through a ten minute rule bill for the creation of a Youth Parliament as he believed that the young people should be given a voice on the issues that matter to them.⁸

Conclusion

Civic education is a vital tool for enhancing youth political participation and plays a crucial role in building and maintaining vibrant, democratic societies by empowering individuals with the knowledge, skills, and values needed to participate actively and responsibly in their communities and governments. To maximize its impact, policymakers, educators, and stakeholders must prioritize and invest in effective civic education programs, ensuring that the next generation is well-prepared to contribute to the democratic process.

⁵ [World Parliament Day 2023 \(cpahq.org\)](https://cpahq.org/)

⁶ [Quotas for Youth — \(aceproject.org\)](https://aceproject.org/)

⁷ [Youth Parliament 2022 - New Zealand Parliament \(www.parliament.nz\)](https://www.parliament.nz/)

⁸ [British Youth Council | About Us - UK Youth Parliament \(byc.org.uk\)](https://byc.org.uk/)