



# Opportunities and Challenges of the New Ways of Voter Information and Youth Civic & Political Engagement in a Digital Age

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## INTRODUCTORY REMARKS



Many of the familiar social institutions and communication channels that have traditionally facilitated political socialization can no longer be regarded as stable factors shaping young people's identities as citizens.

- Digital technology has revolutionized the field of communication. Indeed, new forms of information and communication technologies (ICT) have not only enhanced traditional forms of public outreach, they have also changed the very nature of communication and the political landscape.
- The internet, mobile phones, satellite television and other digital technologies provide platforms on which individuals and organizations employ combinations of images, audio, video and text to raise awareness about social, political and economic issues, mobilizing global audiences. Consequently, some consider that ICT could provide the solution for reconnecting young people with politics.
- In these opening remarks, I shall try to highlight some of the ways in which technology present opportunities, risks and challenges for voter information and youth civic and political engagement.



## OPPORTUNITIES

- **Affordability and open access**
- **New media have lower barriers to participation and encourage public dialogue: this leads to an increase in the number of people who are politically vocal.**
- **Organizations/Institutions immediately gather data and feedback to analyse impact and audience size: this allows institutions to more nimbly adjust messages, targets and tactics for maximum impact.**
- **Lowered barriers to participation also give users access to more platforms to raise their voices.**
- **With a plethora of digital resources now available, people can mobilize communities to take action without relying on the formal structures of traditional advocacy organizations. While formal organizations sometimes continue to play a significant role in scaling up movements, the fact that individuals can more easily become change agents drives collective action and sustains long-term movements.**



- The mobile phone penetration rate is 96% of the world, 128% in developed countries and 89% in developing countries. Institutions can harness this broad market penetration of affordable mobile phones, using them as tools to propel culturally-sensitive local action. .
- With the use of free, open source digital platforms like *Ushahidi*, people can generate accountability in crisis situations. Initially developed for gathering and sharing reliable data during the violent Kenyan elections in 2007, *Ushahidi*, which allows organizations to map eyewitness reports of violence submitted online or via mobile phone in real time, has since been used in multiple conflict and natural disaster situations such as the earthquake in Haiti, floods in Pakistan and violence in Syria.



**Privacy and security risks:** Social media, blogs, mobile phones, videos and images can be appropriated by governments and non-state actors for surveillance in order to extract sensitive information, collect personal citizens' data and intercept communications. While the digital technologies for creating and sharing information—along with tools developed for mass surveillance—have advanced significantly, the policies and international standards governing their use lag dismally behind.

- As citizens become more aware of global human rights abuses through information shared online, digital technologies can simultaneously perpetuate violence. Digital technologies enable human rights abusers by making it easier for them to distribute hate speech.
- **The digital divide in access to technology, information and education:** only 39 percent of the world's population has Internet access. Seventy-five percent of Europeans are online, while only 16 percent of Africans have Internet access (Source: International Telecommunication Union, 2013). The digital divide also cuts through both developed and developing nations, due to both limited access to technology and low literacy rates. Only 37% of the women in the world are online, versus 41% of men.





- **Government censorship and corporate policy also limit digital access:** In some cases, national governments and large corporations control how certain populations experience the Internet, resulting in inequality in freedom of access to information. Since 2015, numerous African governments are more and more intentionally disrupting internet or electronic communication, exerting control over the flow of information and impinging on freedom of expression. These interruptions take place: during critical election periods as in Congo-Brazzaville, Uganda, Chad or Gabon; at protests advocating for social justice and democratic transitions in Ethiopia or DRC; or, in the case of Algeria, to stop students from cheating in exams.
- Globally, governments and activists are grappling with the enormous opportunities that new media outlets present and are struggling to articulate what role these technologies should play in the political landscape.



- **Survey and polling results indicate that young people are disaffected with traditional democratic institutions and practices in many countries around the world:**
  - **How important are the new media for young people's civic and political engagement?**
  - **Can information and communication technologies (ICT) provide the solution for reconnecting young people with politics?**
  - **What evidence exists for new media to offer the prospect of stimulating new forms of mobilization by young citizens themselves?**

# ACCESS TO INTERNET vs. VOTER TURNOUT IN THE OECD

Country	% Internet access	% of voting-age population	% of registered voters
01 - Belgium (2014)*	87%	87.2%	89.4%
02 - Sweden (2014)	92%	82.6%	85.8%
03 - South Korea (2017)	93%	77.9%	77.2%
04 - Denmark (2015)	97%	80.3%	85.9%
05 - Australia (2016)*	88%	79.0%	91.0%
06 - Norway (2013)	97%	78.0%	78.3%
07 - Netherlands (2017)	90%	77.3%	81.9%
08 - Iceland (2016)	98%	76.8%	79.2%
09 - Israel (2015)	80%	76.1%	72.3%
10 - New Zealand (2014)	88%	73.2%	77.9%
11 - Finland (2015)	88%	73.1%	66.9%
12 - Italy (2013)	61%	70.6%	72.2%
13 - France (2017)	86%	67.9%	74.6%
14 - Germany (2017)	90%	66.0%	70.0%



16 - Austria (2013)	84%	65.9%	74.9%
17 - UK (2016)	95%	65.4%	72.2%
18 - Hungary (2014)	79%	63.3%	61.8%
19 - Canada (2015)	90%	62.1%	68.3%
20 - Greece (2015)*	69%	62.1%	56.2%
21 - Portugal (2015)	70%	61.8%	55.8%
22 - Spain (2016)	81%	61.2%	66.5%
23- Czech Republic (2013)	76%	60.0%	59.4%
24 - Slovakia (2016)	80%	59.4%	59.8%
25 - Ireland (2016)	82%	58.0%	65.1%
26 - Estonia (2015)	87%	56.8%	64.2%
27 - United States (2016)	76%	55.7%	86.8%
28 - Luxembourg (2013)*	97%	55.1%	91.1%
29 - Slovenia (2014)	75%	54.1%	51.7%
30 - Poland (2015)	73%	53.8%	55.3%
31 - Japan (2014)	92%	52.0%	52.7%
32 - Latvia (2014)	80%	51.7%	58.8%
33 - Chile (2015)	66%	50%	50%



The 55.7% VAP turnout in last year's election puts the U.S. behind most of its peers in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), most of whose members are highly developed, democratic states. Looking at the most recent nationwide election in each of the 35 OECD member nations, the U.S. placed 28th.

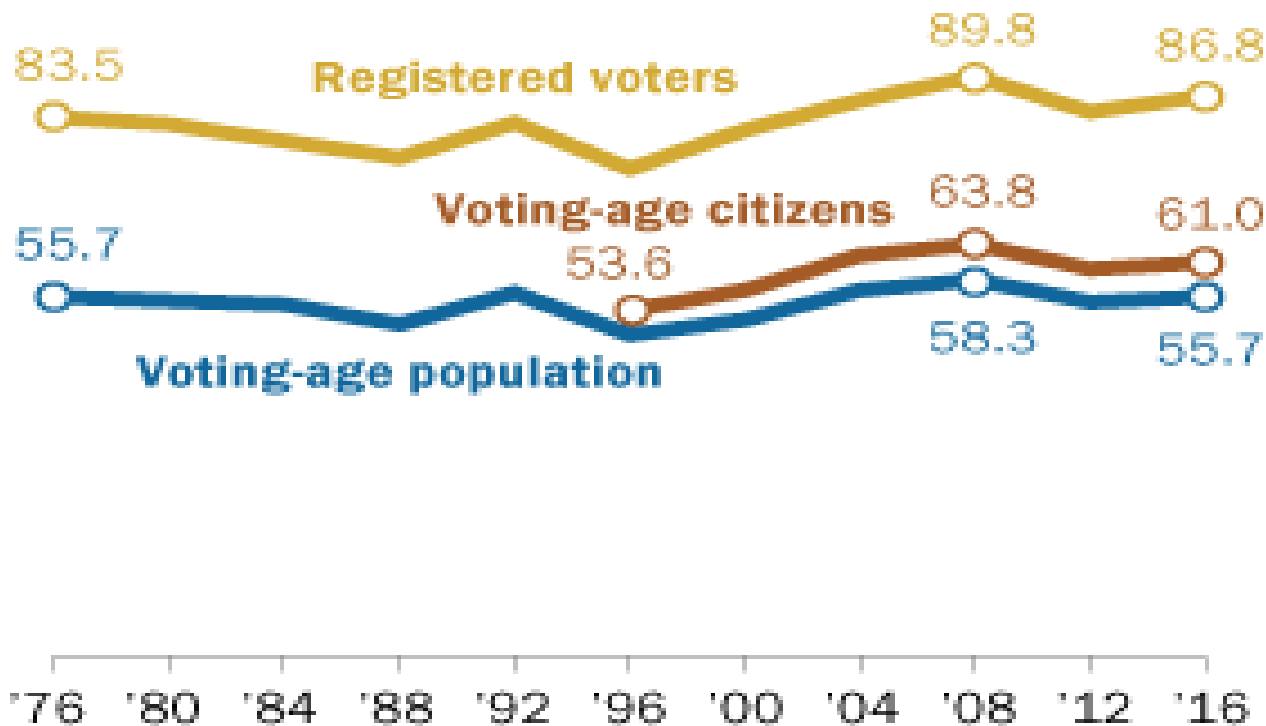
The highest turnout rates among OECD nations were in Belgium (87.2%), Sweden (82.6%) and Denmark (80.3%). On the other hand, Switzerland consistently has the lowest turnout in the OECD: in the 2015 Swiss legislative elections, less than 39% of the voting-age population cast ballots.

The relatively high turnout rates in Belgium and Turkey may be due in part to the fact they are among the 24 nations around the world (and 6 in the OECD) with some form of compulsory voting, according to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA).



# Turnout in U.S. presidential elections

*Votes cast as a share of ...*



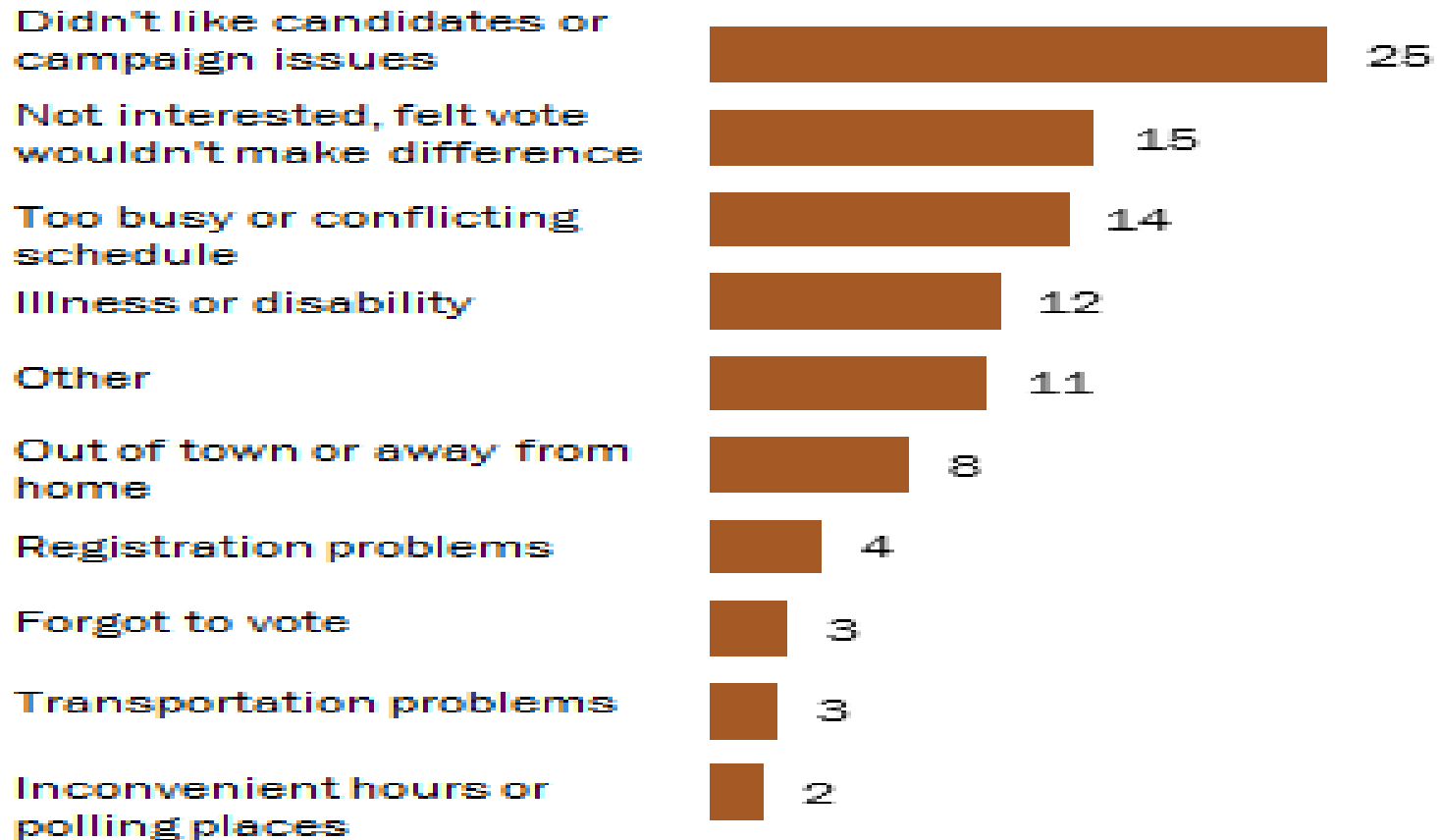
Source: Census Bureau (population estimates), House Clerk's office and Pew Research Center (vote totals).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER



# Why registered voters say they did not vote in 2016

*Among registered voters who did not vote, % who said main reason was...*



Note: "Don't know," "Refused," "Bad weather conditions" and "No response" not shown.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of the 2016 Current Population Survey, November Supplement.



## CONCLUSION

In recent years, we've seen technology help people become more involved in debate about all aspects of society. So it is clear that it can play a much greater role in political participation too. However, all enthusiasm around digital technology does not always turn into participation.

Today electoral participation is neither full nor equal, and it is getting worse. Technology can enable direct participation in the democratic process, without relying on representatives and without the citizen even needing to leave the comfort of their home. One particularly useful tool in the quest for a digitally engaged electorate will be online forums.

Politicians, policymakers and organizations can use online forums to crowd-source expertise and the views of citizens on their plans – and to refine their proposals based on what they get back.

It is important that issues at stake matter enough to citizens for them to exercise their political and civic rights.



**THANK YOU**