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A Global Advance
in Civic Engagement

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Democracy around the globe is under attack which is why we need to increase the teaching of civic engagement. Additionally, civic engagement can be taught even in non-democratic countries using different techniques. A further goal is to create global citizens who think beyond their own community and nation. But to be able to teach civic engagement globally we need to have a new commitment, apply new methods, and obtain greater funding. We will need support at the international level as well. Based upon the experiences detailed in this book, we have created a joint agenda for change in order to better teach civic engagement globally.

KEYWORDS: Agenda for Change; Global Citizen; Democracy; Non-Democratic Countries; Nation.

Introduction

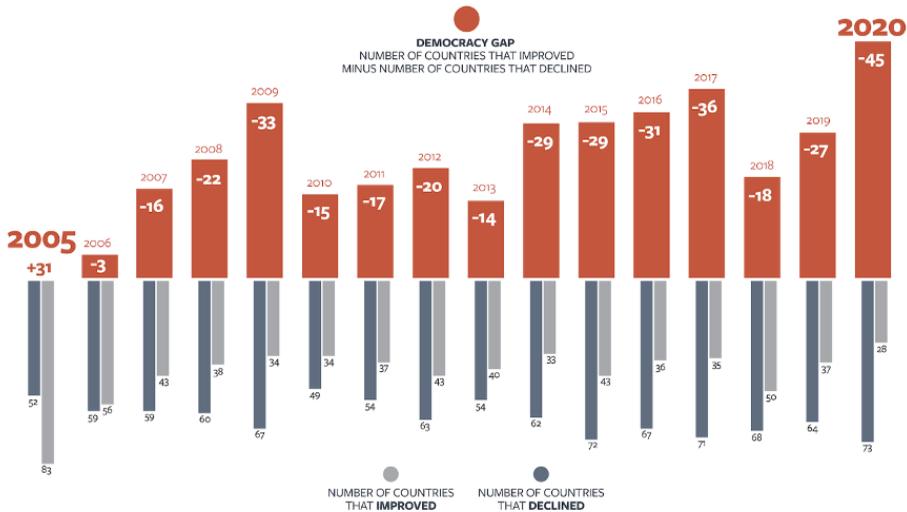
The last decade of the 20th century was marked by a major advance in creating more democracy in countries around the world. The beginning of the 21st century, though, has brought a backsliding of democracy with populism and authoritarianism on the rise in both developed and developing countries. In the United States (US), the Donald Trump era brought an insurrection in the US Capitol. In the United Kingdom (UK), Brexit undid decades of developing a European Union. Some former Soviet Union countries fell back into autocratic ways. China cracked down on Hong Kong. Indonesia had a military coup. The Arab Spring mostly failed to achieve more democracy in the Middle East. And so it has gone around the globe.

As Freedom House observed:

These withering blows marked the 15th consecutive year of decline in global freedom. The countries experiencing deterioration outnumbered those with improvements by the largest margin recorded since the negative trend began in 2006. The long democratic recession is deepening... Nearly 75 percent of the world's population lived in a country that faced deterioration last year.¹

Figure 1. A Growing Democracy Gap: 15 Years of Decline

Countries with aggregate score declines in *Freedom in the World* have outnumbered those with gains every year for the past 15 years.



Source: *Freedom in the World 2021*, Freedom House; For past editions of *Freedom in the World* and more information on the report methodology, visit freedomhouse.org.

The 15-year decline in democracy and the global increase in authoritarian tendencies needs to be countered, as Lynn Pasquerella has written in the foreword of this book, by “renewed global leadership and solidarity among democratic states.” She further urges that colleges and universities demonstrate “the value of civic education in safeguarding democracy and countering authoritarianism.” As the report on “The Role of Education in Taming Authoritarian Attitudes” from Georgetown University argues, “higher education is the cornerstone of successful democracies not easily shaken by authoritarian threats.”²

As Steven Smith wrote in the preface to this book, “Given the volatility and unpredictability of different country politics, active citizenship becomes increasingly important for the future of democracy and good governance. Citizens participating in their communities through the electoral process and civil society organizations are critical to the building of social capital and effective public policies. This active citizenship requires comprehensive and informed civic education through elementary and secondary schools and higher education institutions.” Thus, the development of civic engagement globally using techniques appropriate and effective in each country is essential.

As the authors in this book have written repeatedly, it is necessary to educate every generation about democracy and to provide them the skills and values of democracy. We do this to maintain democracy because democratic citizens are not just born—they learn to become citizens through education and engaged participation in the democratic process. In this book we focus especially on how colleges and universities can be active in reversing rising challenges to democracy and the low participation across the world. If we fail in our mission, our countries face backsliding into the authoritarianism and disregard for human rights once again.³

Dmitry Lanko from his work in Russia adds that “Teaching civic engagement in international relations involves helping students to develop the skill to think beyond oneself, one’s community, and even one’s country.”⁴ Creating global citizens requires us to help students engage meaningfully with other people, places, and events. Thus, our authors work on establishing a global classroom and developing innovative new experimental methods which enlarge students’ development as both national and global citizens in ways that can be duplicated in different circumstances. The purpose of this book has been to provide “a set of evidence-based best practices in how to foster civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions” which can guide the development of these different courses and education programs.⁵

There is an especially great need for civic engagement education globally now. Even where democracies exist, such as in the US and Europe, there is a need for reforming undemocratic features like the Electoral College and the US Senate's use of the filibuster. A recent survey by the [Pew Research Center](#) found that “roughly two-thirds of adults in France and the US, as well as about half in the United Kingdom, believe their political systems need major changes or need to be completely reformed.” As many as two-thirds of Americans believe “most politicians are corrupt.... And those who say most politicians are corrupt are much more likely to think their political systems need serious reform.”⁶ The Pew Center further found that trust in government across most Western democracies surveyed was only about 50% and only the same percentage think that “ordinary people, can do a lot to influence the government.”⁷

Given the growth of autocracies, populism, and the lack of trust in government even in established democracies, the task of strengthening democracy around the world is especially crucial in the coming decade following the COVID-19 global pandemic. The pandemic, and the economic recession which it caused, demonstrated the failure of governments around the world to safeguard and protect their citizens. Central to the task of rebuilding, reforming, and strengthening our countries is increasing civic engagement by youth—especially high school and college students. In many countries, they lack civic knowledge, skills, and motivation. Our task is to change that condition.

Any program of teaching for democracy must be done across disciplines, across universities, and across the globe. It will require a concerted effort, but it will take different forms in different countries. It will also take “scaffolding learning or successively building upon students' civic knowledge, skills, and attitudes throughout their schooling.”⁸ It can't be done by a single faculty member or accomplished in a single course. But as the assessment of the courses and programs around the world represented in this book demonstrates, major gains can be made when they are done intentionally.

Call to Action

One of Lenin's books is entitled: *What is to be done?* That question confronts us today. There is overwhelming evidence that democracy is in trouble in different countries around the world. And whether or not a country is currently democratic, there is a need to provide civic education. Educators have been particularly concerned to develop a “toolbox” of effective instructional techniques for teaching citizenship.¹⁰

As the chapters in this book illustrate, there is a growing effort in all parts of the world to increase civic engagement. These experiments allow us to share insights and best practices on an ever-expanding basis. Civic education efforts have progressed from just a few courses in selected disciplines like political science, urban planning, or social work to coursework across the disciplines and campus-wide. Efforts to teach civic engagement are expanding across universities and through multi-university efforts like Model United Nations or the National Student Issues Convention in the US. We even have reached the stage where explicit collaboration across countries is also possible. New technologies like Skype and Zoom make this collaboration easier as several chapters in this book illustrate.

The level of civic participation depends upon many different factors beyond the classroom, such as appeals by candidates, political parties, and social movements. But civic engagement education can make a critical contribution to building civic society. While there are different challenges in our local communities and countries, civic engagement efforts in our universities and community colleges are beginning to have real and measurable effects as demonstrated in the reports in our book.

To use my own campus, the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), as an example, we have increased student voter registration by several hundred percent over the last decade since we began concerted planned civic engagement efforts across the university. Our rate of student voter registration grew from 58% to 71%, and student voting grew from 41% to 55% between 2012–2016. They increased again to 20,629 registered voters and 67% student voting in 2020. Comparable data

from many campuses in the US prove that teaching civic engagement and providing curricular and co-curricular civic engagement opportunities make concrete differences in civic outcomes.¹¹ As several chapters in this text demonstrate, the positive benefits of embedding civic engagement education into higher education also can be seen on campuses across the globe.

This book is unique because it documents the focused civic engagement efforts in different countries—from so-called developed democracies to autocratic countries and failed democracies that have slid back towards autocracy. Civic engagement efforts and experiments over the last decade have made it possible to undertake successful civic engagement education in autocratic countries like China and Russia, more conservative countries like Singapore, and developing countries like Belize and Guatemala. It is also possible for college students in one country to engage successfully in experiences in other countries through study abroad programs and joint distance learning classes. Students then bring those new-found experiences, commitments, and understandings back with them to their home countries and communities.

In the US, efforts to promote civic engagement of college students have increased since the publication of *Educating for Democracy* in 2007¹² and *A Crucible Moment* in 2012.¹³ Civic engagement efforts have been further documented by the previous books in this series of *Teaching Civic Engagement* that the American Political Science Association initiated in 2013.¹⁴ *Teaching Civic Engagement Globally* joins that literature in documenting the advances in civic engagement and offering new ideas to teachers around the world to help them to implement civic engagement programs that best fit their local and national situations. It shows how civic engagement education can happen in any country's community colleges, high schools, four-year liberal arts colleges, technical schools, and research universities. We expect that the publication of ideas on future teaching civic engagement globally will lead to an expansion in journal articles and books so that future students can benefit and so the dismal decline of democracies can be reversed.

However, for now, there are still major gaps in civic engagement education globally. For instance, the low level of teaching civic engagement in vocational schools and community colleges, as opposed to what is available at traditional high schools and colleges, is acute. In the US, many individual community colleges and professors have promoted service-learning and are moving to civic engagement. Some national organizations like The Citizens Campaign are launching experiments in civic engagement education at community colleges.¹⁵ But these community college programs are still only beginning to be developed. Similarly, almost no civic engagement education is provided at vocational schools around the world. This situation needs to change if we are to spread education for democracy to the youth and future citizen-leaders.

Another example of efforts to significantly expand civic engagement education at the elementary to high school level is CIVIX Now, a "national cross-partisan coalition of over 100 organizations focused on improving our nation's K-12 in and out-of-school civic education."¹⁶ One of CIVIX Now's projects is to encourage states to adopt formal civic engagement education courses in elementary and high schools as a requirement of graduation. This legislation is an attempt to close the gap between states with little civic education and states with better programs as a way to secure additional funding from the federal government to make civic education a priority as STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) education is currently. There are, of course, significant gaps between the level of civic engagement in different countries. These parallel a major difference between states in the US which require civic engagement education courses to graduate high school and those that do not.

This example illustrates that our challenge is not simply a matter of developing and sharing pedagogy. A political effort is also required to get government sponsorship and resources for the effort.

What is Happening in Civic Engagement Education Today?

One of the primary purposes of this book has been to survey teaching civic engagement projects which are happening around the world. We wanted to highlight the teaching of global and international affairs in a way to move beyond simply knowing facts like the location of a country on a map or simple information like a country's governmental form and structure.

There is a major effort underway to teach in different countries the knowledge, skills, and motivation to be effective citizen participants. Of course, this is done differently in established democracies, autocracies, developing democracies, and failed democracies. Different methods are required to build and employ social capital effectively under different regimes. Yet our overall goal must be to support and reform governments so as to involve citizens positively in their communities, societies, and governance. In this book we seek to catalogue some of the myriad ways in which civic engagement is taught. Whatever our circumstances, we can learn from these experiments and adapt them to our classes, colleges, and universities.

Since there is no global index or encyclopedia of civic engagement, we began the basic task of describing the state of affairs in our world today as we move into the post-pandemic era. This is particularly important as we begin the task of rebuilding our economies, societies, and governments after the pandemic and the economic recession that it caused. Simply documenting successful efforts helps others to adopt best practices rather than having to reinvent the wheel.

The advantage of this approach is that it also allows us to describe interventions which may be effective in diverse countries and to suggest improvements that may make those interventions more successful. It adds to our toolbox and widens the lens with which we view civic engagement education.

In addition, we undertake at this stage of development an objective evaluation of various efforts to teach civic engagement using both quantitative and qualitative methods. We judge and measure the degree to which these interventions from classes, workshops, community campaigns, and creative techniques help to create better citizens and improve communities and societies more broadly. It is not enough to report what we have done; we also need to provide an assessment of the successes and weaknesses of different techniques.

From this accounting, it becomes immediately clear that no single intervention, workshop, class, or project by itself can help students to become the most effective citizens and leaders possible. Even in universities that take teaching civic engagement as one of their primary missions, a single intervention cannot accomplish this task. We not only map the effect of each technique, but where multiple interventions are used, report their overall success. In general, we find that no one class or exercise is sufficient, but efforts across disciplines and across the entire university or college are the most effective in improving concrete outcomes like higher levels of voting and participation.

In section I, we appreciate the differences in such countries as the UK, China, Brazil, Singapore, and the United States in their history and in their degree of openness to civic engagement. The authors demonstrate that the techniques which work in any one country must be responsive to different cultures and societies and modified accordingly. Yet, there are useful lessons from each to be applied to others.

Each country has a slightly different history of teaching democracy. For instance, as Craig discusses in chapter 5, in the UK, Oxford and Cambridge originally had an elitist and paternalistic approach to training the elite who ran the country and British empire. Today, there is broader citizenship education for all citizens. There is a near universal need for civic engagement education advocates and new methods in all countries.

This section focuses upon our role as educators in fostering civic engagement among all our students in different countries. We define this civic engagement education as “an evidence-based pedagogy which includes a wide range of activities ... that develop knowledge about the community, its systems, and its problems, seek constructive solutions to these problems...build skills to enable students to pursue these solutions...[and] to build a sense of efficacy that one's voice and actions matter.”¹⁷

Section II records the wide range of civic engagement pedagogy and begins to assess the successes and challenges of each approach. We learn how students in different countries perceive civic engagement differently and how diverse classroom techniques can enhance their knowledge and skills. Finally, we consider how civic engagement education can teach agency, create a sense of efficacy, and empower our students.

In Section III, we learn about the need to develop educational institutions as opposed to only pursuing individual classroom interventions. New concepts like Work-Integrated Learning and new techniques like the use of theater in Brazil and critical study abroad within communities in The Gambia and Senegal are explored. This section expands civic engagement education for all students through both curricular and co-curricular programs.

Finally, in Section IV we develop a call to global action and an agenda for change for the decade ahead. We consider not only the development of individual students through teaching civic engagement, but also how we teach teachers and change curricula. Our agenda for change ranges from changing our own pedagogy to developing future books and journal articles on critical civic engagement efforts around the world to changing national laws and international norms.

This is only a beginning map of the possibilities for creating a new generation of more active citizens able to reshape the globe into a more democratic and humane world.

Priority and Funding

Perhaps one of the most troubling findings in our book is that there is little recognition and inadequate funding for civic engagement education. However, new campaigns are beginning to increase awareness of the need and importance of civic engagement education. Efforts are underway to increase the funding. For instance, the Civics Secures Democracy Act has been introduced in the US House of Representatives to provide major new funding for civic engagement education on the model by which STEM education has been funded over the last decade in the US.

Some countries provide civic engagement education as part of the regular high school curriculum and fund it accordingly, but most do not. There is no doubt that there is a need to make civic engagement education a priority and to provide adequate funding. This is missing in most countries, today. **Thus, the highest priority on our action agenda is to gain greater recognition of the need for civic engagement education and sufficient funding to provide it to all students.**

An additional goal of this book is to provide a pedagogical “toolbox” from experiments around the world and examples of “best practices” under different social and political conditions. As educators, administrators, and public officials, we need to know what works and what does not. We also need better assessments of these efforts. As was made evident during the COVID-19 global pandemic, we need “evidence based” policies and techniques to address public health emergencies. This is true of civic engagement education as well.

That is why the commitment of national educational organizations like the American Political Science Association and American Association of Colleges and Universities is so essential. This is true for disciplinary and educational organizations in all countries.

The next steps in improving civic engagement in most countries is the passage of legislation at the national level to adopt the goal of civic engagement education more broadly and implement “best practices” at the university and high school levels. In all countries, there needs to be more attention to developing and implementing quality civic engagement education for all students. Reaching this goal requires legislation and funding at the national and/or local levels.

Training and Rewarding the Teaching of Civic Engagement

Over the last decade or so there has been a gradual recognition of the importance of teaching civic engagement, especially in response to the increase in authoritarianism and the decrease in democracy around the world. However, while we know much more about “best practices” and exciting experiments than we did a decade ago, there is still the need to train faculty to succeed

in this work and to provide the resources they need to be effective. So, one priority is to develop the materials and “trainers” to provide faculty the tools they need. However, when faculty do undertake this work, it is usually not well rewarded. Faculty in many colleges are promoted based upon publications they produce or the number of classes they teach. Almost no one is promoted because they have successfully taught civic engagement. The promotion and tenure standards will have to change around the world if more faculty across disciplines are to take the extra time and effort that teaching civic engagement requires. Even more so, teaching civic engagement globally to create more global citizens in the 21st century is underdeveloped and under-rewarded. At a minimum, it needs to be counted positively as teaching or service in promotion, tenure, and salary raise decisions.

A New International Commitment

One example of the slowly developing international commitment to civic engagement is that the current UN Youth Declaration adopted in 2018 declares that youth will:

Become active global citizens supporting our peers across their spectrum of needs, from ending poverty in all dimensions, supporting women and girls, to quests for public office and other leadership positions in service of the community. We also proactively demand space for youth in all public fora.

The youth declaration further calls upon governments to back educational efforts:

States to ensure access to quality and culturally-relevant education for all, reaching even the most vulnerable communities, providing the materials and knowledge to cultivate independent learners.

States to integrate Agenda 2030 into all facets of their education curricula, considering informal, nonformal, experiential, service-based and interdisciplinary education as emphasized elements of the learning experience.

States to consciously design their education systems to enhance global citizenship by fostering inclusivity, developing leadership, and encouraging innovation and creativity in youth. (emphasis added)¹⁸

Despite such declarations, international agencies like the United Nations and the World Bank have yet to promote civic engagement education in any meaningful way. If we are to create new global citizens in the next generation, we need an international commitment to do so.

Critical Civic Engagement

As Nicole Webster and other authors in this text make clear, uncritical civic engagement measured by simple performance data like the rate of student voter registration, voting, or service-learning activities is insufficient. This is especially so for global civic engagement where too often actions are considered without regard to structural injustices, “while a critical approach examines the efforts while exploring structural injustices” in the hope of transforming the students into critically aware global citizens and inspiring sustainable community improvements abroad.¹⁹

So, this book aspires not only to multiply the global civic engagement opportunities at universities and other educational levels by providing a menu of possible techniques, workshops, and class alternatives. In addition, this text seeks to foster more international cooperative efforts as well as provide faculty and administrators with an appreciation of more critical civic engagement education occurring globally. Hopefully, we can move from surface contact and feel-good experi-

ences to widen student horizons with civic engagement learning activities, creating genuine personal transformations and community enrichment.

As the pandemic and economic recession have taught us, the 21st century will be filled with challenges like climate change, institutional racism, sexism, and economic injustice. These challenges cannot be solved by local actions alone. They can be ameliorated only by a global approach. If we are to enlarge democracy, increase citizen empowerment, and oppose populism, we must help our students to become global citizens and leaders.

One Size Doesn't Fit All

What this survey of civic engagement around the globe shows is the diversity in what is being accomplished and the clear limits of what is possible now. What can be done in less liberal societies like China and Singapore is quite different from what is possible in more liberal societies like Australia and European countries. Even the definition of what civic engagement can be differs in different places. In Singapore it is to “educate citizens of the world...and encourage an ethic of service.”²⁰ In more liberal countries, the definition of civic engagement includes citizen participation in politics and government, if not protests and challenges to government policies and programs. In liberal countries, civic engagement might include challenging social norms such as institutional racism, climate change, and inequality. In less liberal societies, there is a high priority “on social stability and the need to avoid anything that might destabilize the country” and student civic engagement is expected to focus on “civic society,” voluntarism, and consultation.”²¹ While they can push norms and laws in the name of civic engagement, students also must adhere to them and stay within existing societal and governmental boundaries.

Thus, the social and political context of each country, university, or educational system provides a different beginning point, different barriers, different opportunities, and different possibilities. Yet, American and European universities would still benefit from adopting some of the core curriculum from Yale-NUS in Singapore, while other countries could benefit from some of the American experiments in political science and across the disciplines documented in previous APSA books on teaching civic engagement.

Our goal should be to advance civic engagement education across disciplines, across countries and across the world. We should celebrate and support these efforts in every country. We should borrow techniques and ideas without the false belief that we are creating one plan, one curriculum, or one standard of what civic engagement means. States which have the most similar social, economic, and political circumstances should collaborate as to what works best in their circumstances, but we can all borrow ideas from each other. We can benefit from achievements in other countries as we push our own countries to provide more resources and more latitude in encouraging civic engagement by all citizens and in teaching civic engagement to our youth.

One lesson that the Singapore example provides is the need to promote civic ties and engagement not just within, but across countries. Some study abroad programs and simulations like Model UN achieve this goal. With new technologies like Skype and Zoom, it is possible to engage students in other countries in conversations and debates in ways that were not possible on a large scale before. One of the best ways forward is to increase the number of international students on all of our campuses while at the same time finding better ways to incorporate them into student and community life. This allows local students to learn from the perspectives, traditions, and cultures of students from abroad and international students to learn from living and studying in another country. While we have some programs for international students like teaching them the language in the country where they are studying and brief campus orientation programs, we have paid too little attention to the ways in which the next generations might better use these experiences to become citizens of the world. We need to facilitate more students obtaining international contacts and experiences.

We use slogans of global cooperation and understanding, but our civic engagement education agenda rarely has a global perspective. We are pleased if we are able to help our students meet with

local officials to promote a policy proposal or if more of them register and vote in national elections. But as many of the chapters in this book indicate, there are deeper possibilities of global civic learning such as critical study abroad programs with a civic engagement focus. There are opportunities to turn our campuses into incubators for global citizens. Previous decades have brought the invention of programs like the Peace Corps in the US to send former college students around the globe on missions of peace. What will be the equivalent of the Peace Corps in the post-pandemic era? We have yet to invent and advocate for such programs today. The challenges of our time demand that we do so now.

A New Era of Civic Engagement

So civic engagement has entered a new phase—global, diverse, and inventive. A beginning agenda for teaching civic engagement globally must include:

1. Better recognition and greater funding at the national and university levels for critical civic engagement education.
2. New laws mandating minimum levels of civic engagement education for all students.
3. Requiring civic engagement education at elementary and high school levels.
4. Increased civic engagement education at community colleges and vocational education programs as well as at four-year colleges and universities.
5. Developing model civic learning programs in countries around the world including both less liberal and more liberal countries from autocracies to mature democracies.
6. Developing civic engagement activities which create genuine personal transformations and community enrichment rather than activities which train students only for passive citizenship.
7. Adding to the scholarship on teaching civic engagement globally by promoting the publication of research on civic education in refereed journals and university press books.
8. Adopting civic engagement education as a core function of national and international educational associations such as AAC&U and APSA.
9. Making teaching civic engagement a meaningful component of promotion, merit, and tenure decisions for faculty.
10. Increasing the number of international students on our campuses and providing better opportunities for them to share their insights with domestic students.
11. Developing large national programs to encourage the creation of global citizen leaders through programs like study abroad and expanded Peace Corps programs, perhaps under the auspices of the United Nations.
12. Adopting a new United Nations Declaration or an Amendment to the 2018 UN Youth Declaration which focuses on building youth world citizenship and the need for critical civic engagement education worldwide.

There is much work to be done to provide civic engagement education globally. Much of it can be done in our own classrooms or locally at our own educational institutions. But some of it will require new national and international commitments and resources. For this we will need not to

just preach the gospel of civic engagement education but undertake civic actions ourselves. As in past times, it is likely that our students will lead the way in demanding a better and fuller education so that they will have the tools to participate effectively in shaping the future.

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