



**CIRCLE**

**The Center for Information & Research  
on Civic Learning & Engagement**

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## **New Book Explores the State of Youth Civic Engagement and Calls for Civic Renewal to Boost Democracy**

**Author and Scholar Peter Levine Urges Broad Movement to Improve Civic Education  
Interviews & Complimentary Copies of Book Available Call David Roscow, 703-276-2772 x21**

**Washington** – At a time when “education” is narrowly defined as preparation for the workforce, we risk forgetting that young people also must be educated to become active and effective citizens. Americans must embrace a broad movement to improve civic education in schools and communities while also reforming our democratic institutions, argues Peter Levine in a new book, *The Future of Democracy: Developing the Next Generation of American Citizens*. This is the most comprehensive book on youth civic engagement, which includes voting, volunteering, following the news, protesting, and making digital media.

Levine, director of the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at the University of Maryland, contends that the United States should be concerned about youth civic engagement because it is a path to social justice, efficient and responsive institutions, diverse culture and meaningful human lives. “Not only does engaging young people create lasting skills and habits, thereby strengthening American democracy,” said Levine, “but it also helps young people to develop in healthy and successful ways.”

The book examines recent trends in youth civic engagement, finding a mix of bad news and promising signs. “Young Americans are increasingly likely to volunteer, are highly tolerant and getting civically involved through exciting new ways such as blogs and online boycotts,” Levine writes. “However, they score poorly on assessments of civic knowledge, vote at low rates and are skeptical about their own power to make a difference in their communities.”

“Hardly anyone would hold a 16-year-old personally accountable for lacking interest in the news or failing to join associations,” Levine writes. “If we blame anyone, it would be parents, educators, politicians, reporters and other adults.” The book offers solutions to directly improve young people’s civic knowledge, skills, and attitudes through formal education, opportunities for community service, media production, and broader educational reforms. He devotes a chapter each to schools, universities and community-based organizations that serve youth, analyzing research to demonstrate what works.

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The problems, however, are not only with young people, but also with our nation's institutions. "Young and old citizens may *justly* stop voting when most elections have already been determined by the way district lines have been drawn," Levine writes. "They may rightly ignore the news when the quality of journalism, especially on television, is poor. And they may rightly disengage from high schools that are large, anonymous, and alienating." The book argues for specific reforms in schools, the news media and elections to change both the flawed system and how citizens view it.

In the final chapters, *The Future for Democracy* argues for a broad movement to improve civic education while also reforming the institutions with which citizens engage.

"We must prepare citizens for politics, but also improve politics for citizens," Levine writes. "Political reform is impossible until we better prepare the next generation of citizens with appropriate knowledge, skills, habits and values. Students should feel they are being educated for citizenship, but also that they can help renew American democracy."

To order *The Future for Democracy: Developing the Next Generation of American Citizens*, please visit <http://www.upne.com/1-58465-648-4.html>. The book was commissioned by Tufts University Press/University Press of New England for its Civil Society Series. All proceeds will benefit CIRCLE.

Peter Levine is available for speaking engagements and interviews on civic engagement among America's youth.

CIRCLE (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, [www.civicyouth.org](http://www.civicyouth.org)) promotes research on the civic and political engagement of Americans between the ages of 15 and 25. Since 2001, CIRCLE has conducted, collected, and funded research on the civic and political participation of young Americans. CIRCLE is based in the University of Maryland's School of Public Policy and is funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts, Carnegie Corporation of New York and other foundations.