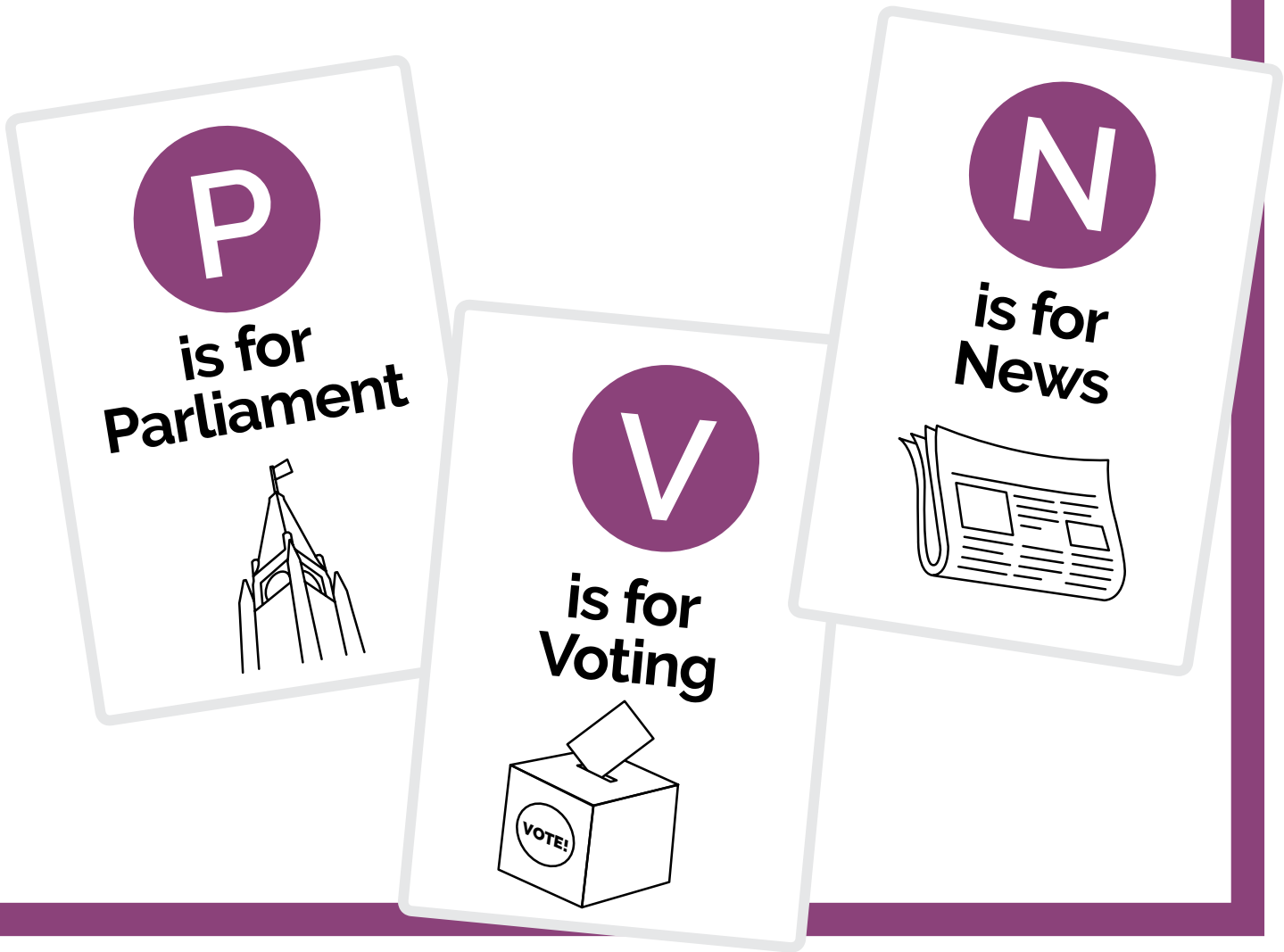
The Samara Centre for Democracy

Investing in Canadians' civic literacy:

An answer to fake news and disinformation



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INTRODUCTION

Democracy asks a lot of citizens: it requires them to evaluate and choose among complex options, while still caring as much about the process of decision-making as its outcomes. In a world of distractions—some innocent and some malevolent—democracy asks citizens to get involved in our country's messy yet vital processes of governance.

It's not getting any easier.

In the aftermath of the 2016 US presidential election, we have become more aware of the challenges to democracy that the information age brings. We are overwhelmed by huge and unmediated flows of information. Some of that information, moreover, is produced by actors intent on spreading disinformation and undermining the legitimacy of our democratic institutions.

Those challenges, and the approaching 2019 Canadian federal election, have generated lots of discussion about cyber security, the regulation of social media, and the state of media generally—that is, how to manage the supply of information to citizens. But this conversation ultimately concludes that the Internet cannot be fully regulated. Accordingly, Canadian governments and civil society should not overlook the most critically important resource available: the ability of voters themselves to process information.

The only reliable, evergreen safeguard to the threats that confront us now and in the future is an engaged, informed, discerning, and resilient democratic public. We need collective and comprehensive action to foster **civic literacy: the individual-level tools, skills, and knowledge that make democracy work**. Being civically literate means knowing about the institutions of government and how they work, having awareness of the issues of the day, understanding how to take political action to pursue a cause, and carefully consuming media both on- and offline.

At the moment, civic literacy rates are unevenly distributed among Canadians. Citizens with higher socioeconomic status, who have things like more wealth and better education, tend to have higher levels of civic literacy. They have higher levels of democratic participation as well.

Additionally, there is a large and potentially growing gap between older and younger Canadians in levels of civic literacy and political attentiveness.[1]

Still other concerns have emerged recently. The decline of traditional media and the rise of social media have resulted in an increase in bad information that citizens must filter. They must ensure the information they receive and rely upon is trustworthy. They must be their own educators, editors, and fact checkers. They must play those roles in a fast-changing informational and political environment. And it's even harder when the information is deliberately misleading, polarizing, or designed to divide. Canadian citizens are up to the challenge, but they need support.

Civic literacy isn't just the domain of in-school "civic education." It used to be taught and fostered in families, places of worship, social groups, and workplaces.[2] But for many, those sources have become fractured. Indeed, social groups, community groups, and schools can be hesitant to teach civic literacy today for fear of being criticized as being too "political" or "biased." As such, Canada may be too reliant as a society on the expectation that in-school civic education can successfully equip Canadians to be civically literate for all aspects of life. In fact, civic

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literacy requires many access points to knowledge and skill building, especially outside of primary and secondary school. However, there are real obstacles to realizing this vision.

For community groups that want to offer civic literacy outside of school settings, the risks are high: they are concerned about increasing the division between their members or being accused of advocacy. Additionally, they have a very difficult time funding civic literacy programs, as funding often comes and goes with individual leaders of foundations and governments.

The program landscape for building civic literacy is also scattered. Too few initiatives—whether public or private—focus squarely on the complex challenges associated with helping citizens to become and remain civically literate. Projects often appear and then disappear due to lack of financial and institutional support and seldom get a rigorous evaluation before they wrap up. This makes it difficult to develop a strong body of evidence for what actually works.

Our civic literacy deficit is not a new problem, but there is new urgency to fix it. This is a shared project. Canada's non-partisan civil society should take the lead on programming, but there is a critical role for governments to play—to ensure civic education happens in the first place, is sustained, reaches the communities that need it, and is founded in evidence.

> This report will:

- Clarify what civic literacy is and does.
- Make the case for why action on civic literacy is so important.
- Explain how difficult it is to measure civic literacy and how levels of civic literacy are not evenly distributed across the population.
- Present some of the challenges to teaching civic literacy and how unevenly it is taught outside of school.
- Discuss how to proceed, and the need for greater investment from government.

PART 1: OVERVIEW OF CIVIC LITERACY

> What is civic literacy?

Civic literacy is multi-faceted and defies both easy definition and consistent measurement. Being civically literate means knowing about Canadian political institutions, but it means much more than that. The definition the Samara Centre for Democracy is putting forward in this report brings together four dimensions of civic literacy (outlined in the chart below) that have evolved over the last several decades. People may be stronger or weaker in different quadrants, based on their personal experiences or education.

> Four Dimensions of Civic Literacy

KNOWLEDGE	APPLICATION
Institutional Knowledge • Democratic institutions and processes • How political power dynamics work in society • The historical evolution of Canada	**Political Ability** • Navigate political participation • Know where to go in government if problems arise
Examples: the three branches of the state; the function of political parties; the methods by which public leaders are elected.	Examples: voting; political actions like protesting; writing to elected leaders; engaging with appropriate government agencies; using media to advance a cause.
Topical Knowledge • Issues and current events • Policy discussions • Awareness of parties' positions	**Media Literacy** • Analyze and process information from the Internet and media • Seek out and evaluate original sources
Examples: knowing who the premier or prime minister is; awareness of the public policy issues in play; following current affairs.	Examples: recognizing fake news; processing new information and evaluating existing beliefs; identifying bias.

A person with high civic literacy in all these dimensions would be able to critically process topical knowledge, merge that with what they understand about institutions in Canada, and turn that knowledge into an effective action plan for political engagement.

PART 1: OVERVIEW OF CIVIC LITERACY

> Why is civic literacy important?

Research has confirmed the many ways that civic literacy benefits both those who have it and broader society. More civically literate citizens:

- Are more likely to vote.[3]
- Have stronger and more consistent awareness of their own political interests and how to advance them.[4]
- Are less likely to be influenced by negative and polarized campaigning.[5]
- Are more tolerant of others, leading to more inclusive politics.[6]

Additionally, citizens who are civically literate have the ability to hold government to account—between elections as well as at election time. They know how government works, they know how they can work together with other citizens to be heard by politicians, and, ideally, they understand the long-term and short-term pressures on government decision-making.

> How is civic literacy measured?

Civic literacy is notoriously difficult to measure and, as such, there is not one single, agreed-upon measurement.

Researchers even disagree on how to conceptualize civic literacy, despite widespread agreement that it is vitally important to a functioning democracy.

What investigators choose to measure is a product of evolving ideas about what is required for healthy active citizenship. For example, in the recent past—when the field was more focused on topical knowledge—researchers were less concerned with measuring a citizen's ability to recognize misinformation,[7] but the issue of fake news has now pushed that concern to the forefront.

Our definition on page 5 tends toward the broader end of the spectrum, and better captures what is necessary for citizens to operate in contemporary democracy. But this breadth will make it particularly difficult to measure.

> Some examples of ways civic literacy has been measured in the past:

- The Canadian Election Study found that 60% of Canadians could identify their premier in 2015, compared to 90% in 1984.[8]
- A 2008 poll by the Dominion Institute and Ipsos Reid found that half of respondents thought the prime minister was directly elected.[9]
- A 2010 study found that nearly 20% of Canadian adults are "inattentive" to the news.[10]
- Canadian researchers have found gender gaps in civic literacy. Men are more likely to hold "conventional political knowledge," like identifying current politicians, but women are more likely to hold knowledge about government social and health services.[11]

Most existing measures focus only on the knowledge dimensions of civic literacy. It's much harder to systematically measure other dimensions, like Canadians' understanding of how to participate. But even the knowledge measures can be problematic. When it comes to surveying people, researchers disagree about what to ask and how reliably those questions can measure true understanding. For example, it may be easier for a respondent to identify their premier if that premier has just been involved in a scandal. Because of how hard it is to pose questions that reliably measure civic literacy, recently these kinds of political knowledge questions have been taken out of some major survey studies.[12]

Emerging research uses large-scale social media data and experimental methods to identify how citizens use and are affected by news and political information. Social media data helps to clarify the relative effectiveness of different kinds of messaging (including "real" and "fake" news) in the social media environment. Experiments help give us a stronger basis to map out specific elements of cause and effect, but do not provide overall measures of how civically literate the public is.

We are left with a set of partial and imperfect measures of the concept of civic literacy that cannot easily translate into comparable data. The lack of agreement about how to measure civic literacy makes it difficult to track where and when programs are successful on all four dimensions.

But based on the information we have, civic literacy researchers have reached several conclusions.

First, compared with other democracies, Canada has always had room for improvement.[13] Second, there is a large gap in institutional knowledge between younger and older Canadians, which has raised the spectre of a long-term civic literacy decline.[14] On the other hand, there is some evidence of lower media literacy among older people, who are much more likely to share fake news, for example.[15] Older people are also much harder to reach with civic literacy programming. And while our civic literacy deficit is not a new problem, there is growing concern that the changing media environment may expose the vulnerability that the deficit creates.

> How do people become civically literate?

There is no single definitive cause of something as complex as civic literacy, but research has identified a number of factors associated with it.

People with higher socioeconomic status tend to have higher levels of civic literacy.[16] Additionally, people who have early exposure to politics and engagement—for example, through school or family—have higher levels of civic literacy.[17]

People who think that participation matters and that they can effectively make a difference have higher levels of civic literacy.[18] We do not fully know, however, how teachable this knowledge is. Can one increase one's civic literacy by learning about the experiences of friends and family, or from a classroom setting? Or does it need to be experienced first-hand to be understood?

Critically, civic literacy is unevenly distributed in society. Those with more wealth and status tend to have access to better information, and opportunities to take advantage of it. They have a belief in their own power, and a better understanding of how to get involved.[19]

PART 1: OVERVIEW OF CIVIC LITERACY

Canadians that live closer to the margins of society are less likely to know how to get involved, or why they should. This fundamentally skews public decision-making in favour of those who are already doing well and benefiting from society.

> Further challenges for 2019

In recent years, a new and rapidly changing set of democratic challenges has emerged, requiring Canadians to be more civically literate than ever. Many of these are well known, with effects far beyond civic literacy, but they bear repeating here, given their implications for how Canadians interact on issues of democracy.

1. Newspapers in decline: The decline of traditional information gatekeepers, particularly print media, has meant that the quality of information available to voters has decreased, even as the ability for people to be heard and to read lesser-known voices has increased.[20]

2. Too much information: Without the filter of established news organizations acting as gatekeepers, the rise of social media has made it possible for more people to be heard. This has resulted in a massive increase in the sheer amount and accessibility of information. It is easy to become overwhelmed by the volume. Additionally, research shows that too much information can actually lead to worse decision-making by voters—making them more likely to vote against their own preferences, for example.[21]

3. Social distortion: One of the most commonly used strategies to cope with the new information landscape—relying on social media as a filter—may leave citizens with distorted or incomplete understandings of political events. The rise of new social media platforms has transformed the way we get our news. These platforms continue to change and their effects are poorly understood.[22]

4. Echo chambers: Compounding this issue, voters can often exist in self-selected, highly partisan information bubbles.[23] While they provide some shelter from the onslaught of information, these bubbles also tend to reinforce a particular view of the world. Research is mixed about the extent to which social media has created ideological bubbles, with some researchers arguing that the strongest echo chambers are in our offline lives.[24] But problems like politically motivated reasoning—seeking information that confirms what you already believe, and rejecting information that does not—can actually be stronger in people who possess higher levels of political knowledge.[25]

5. Bad actors: Finally, there is the disturbing rise in efforts to spread disinformation online. The scope of the threat remains up for debate, but its existence is clear.[26] In some cases, this information is provided with the specific aim to disrupt democracy or sow conflict, while in others, it is simply a by-product of profit-driven media enterprises trying to increase their audience by triggering an emotional reaction.[27]

Civic literacy has always mattered for the functioning of Canadian democracy. But there is a growing urgency to equip citizens with what they need to be resilient in a newly challenging information environment which includes a wealth of unvetted information and potentially malevolent forces online deliberately sowing confusion and even anger.

At a time when the demand for a civically literate populace has never been greater, citizens find themselves with fewer supports. Citizen needs, moreover,

vary considerably by age, socioeconomic background, and individual and group experience—factors that all must be carefully considered when designing effective interventions.

In the next section, we turn to solutions.

PART 2: DEVELOPING CIVIC LITERACY

Civic literacy is a complex learning endeavour. It requires a commitment to life-long learning in four areas: institutional knowledge, political activity, topical knowledge, and media literacy.

As such, it's not something that can be fully absorbed in a course at school (although school is a great starting ground). One of the challenges of assessing civic literacy in Canada lies in getting a complete sense of the scope and vitality of the many sites where civic literacy is taught and reinforced beyond the classroom.

Even when programs do exist, their success is not often measured because, generally, measuring program effectiveness is extremely expensive. We also can't agree on what "good" civic education looks like.

In the appendix on page 21, we offer a rough map of organizations where civic literacy has been taught. Please let us know if you know of other initiatives so we can add them.

> Where can civic literacy be developed?

Here are some places where civic literacy is generally developed:

In the home: Parents can be one of the most important sources of civic literacy, because they model political engagement. They also usually pass on their socioeconomic status (which is tied to literacy). Early political socialization has powerful effects on the levels of civic literacy one has as an adult. This also means that civic literacy gets passed from generation to generation and remains strong within certain groups that are traditionally empowered in society.[28]

In schools (for pre-voting age): Provincial governments fund civic education in various ways and at various schooling levels.[29] Classroom civic education varies in effectiveness, but studies have found that civics in schools can help to close the political engagement gap between children of rich and poor, and engaged and disengaged parents.[30] In the appendix on page 20, we list the civic literacy-related courses that are compulsory for high school graduation in each province or territory. Other curricula in social science or history touch on civic education, but it's likely not taught as frequently or as comprehensively as it should be, given its importance.

The federal government supports civic literacy programming indirectly through different departments, including Canadian Heritage. Teachers' organizations, unions, and foundations fund non-profit and for-profit organizations to do in-school and out-of- school education for youth.

In Ontario there is a compulsory civic education half course in Grade 10. The course was introduced in 2000, but researchers find that it has not had an observable positive effect on voter turnout among young people in the province.[31] What can we make of this? Perhaps that a separate course is not enough? Or that the lessons need to be taught in an ongoing way? Or that so much depends on the effort and creativity of individual teachers? The design of civic education courses also matters. For example, a Belgian study found that group project-based civic learning improved students' topical knowledge, but traditional classroom teaching did not.[32]

Some of the best known examples are:

- CIVIX, a charity that works within schools to increase civic literacy among Canada's youth.[33] Their model is to partner with school boards and train individual teachers.
- The Library of Parliament, which offers the Teacher's Institute to allow working teachers to learn from experts and develop strategies for teaching democracy, governance, and citizenship.
- Forum for Young Canadians, which brings high schoolers to Ottawa to learn about how democracy works.

On the road to citizenship: As newcomers move toward becoming citizens, they are taught many of the knowledge and procedural aspects of civic literacy. Settlement agencies often take an active role in helping newcomers learn about Canadian expectations around voting and political participation.

Research suggests that going through the process of becoming a citizen can have a direct and lasting effect on how much topical knowledge individuals hold, and the extent to which they feel they can make a political difference.[34]

Some of the organizations that are actively working in this space are:

- ABC Life Literacy Canada;
- Immigration Services Society of BC;
- Association of Neighbourhood Societies of British Columbia;
- North York Community House;
- Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants; and
- Immigration Partnership of Winnipeg.

Beyond the classroom: Outside of schools and citizenship education, formalized and sustained civic education is very hard to find. The organizations that are trying to fill this gap are often underfunded, restricted, and—except for a few government agencies—tend to operate only locally or regionally.

Examples of organizations include:

- Electoral agencies across the country. Electoral agencies deliver free and fair elections, and they educate Canadians about how, when, and where to vote. A few have a broader mandate to include ongoing civic literacy to the public, but they don't all have the budget to do widespread civic education.[35]
- Parliament and legislatures. These institutions offer educational opportunities within their walls, but generally Canadians need to seek out the tours and resources.
- Community groups such as YWCA, United Way, and others. These organizations often offer "leadership" training, which can include some aspects of civic literacy.
- Workplaces, unions, and civil society groups. These places and organizations have offered opportunities to increase one's civic literacy, but the role they play in fostering broad civic education may be declining.[36]

Please see the appendix on page 21 for more examples.

PART 2: DEVELOPING CIVIC LITERACY

> Community-based organizations should be a greater focus of civic literacy work in Canada because:

- They are present at a grassroots level across the country, and have participation from and access to some of the most disengaged and least empowered communities.
- They can be nimble and sensitive to context in a way that can be lost when content is produced in a more institutional setting.
- Civic literacy has multiple dimensions, and different organizations can take on different facets, focusing on those best aligned with their expertise and positioning.

> How can civic literacy be developed?

In recent years, governments, schools, and civil society organizations have experimented with how to design programs and interventions that successfully foster civic literacy. A wide range of approaches exist—some focus solely on fostering civic literacy, while others improve levels of civic literacy and engage citizens in decision-making.

The most promising practices bring together multiple dimensions of civic literacy: institutional knowledge, topical knowledge, political ability, and media literacy.

Some examples of innovation include:

Experiential classroom education: Some school boards and educators have challenged old models of teaching civics (which focused on classroom instruction about "facts and acts"), and incorporated more participatory and experiential methods for teaching politics and government. When this is done well, students can gain political ability along with institutional and topical knowledge. The US-based Project Citizen program asks students to identify a policy problem in their community, research it over time, identify a solution, and advocate for it to the appropriate public authority.[37]

Media literacy training: There has been some new investment in direct media literacy training to improve citizens' awareness of the online platforms they use and to promote more critical online habits. The Canadian organization MediaSmarts offers a range of programs, like online simulations that educate users about different digital skills, including how to authenticate online information. According to research, media literacy training can be effective at reducing biases and improving peoples' ability to evaluate the truthfulness of information.[38]

Participant-led engagement: A recent turn in civic education has been to recognize that effective programming should incorporate and reflect the unique values, interests, and existing skills of citizens and citizens-to-be. Democracy Talks, a program hosted by Ryerson University's Democratic Engagement Exchange, supports community groups in hosting political discussions which ask community members to think about what matters to them and what they seek from the political system. These programs can be particularly effective at reaching marginalized

communities that have lower levels of civic literacy according to conventional measures.[39]

Participatory budgeting: Participatory budgeting is when governments set aside a small amount of funding for citizens to collectively determine how to use. A number of Canadian cities have adopted some form of participatory budgeting over the last decade. Participatory budgeting can be an effective tool for boosting civic literacy because it allows citizens to feel like they can exert real influence,[40] become familiar with governments and politicians, and learn about the complex business of decision-making in government—thereby improving institutional and topical knowledge, as well as political ability.

Citizens' assemblies: Citizens' assemblies (also citizen juries or "mini-publics") are groups of citizens that meet over time to consider a particular public issue. They hear from experts, discuss with each other, and eventually arrive at recommendations to government. Though they remain rare, citizens' assemblies are becoming more common, and are being created to advise governments and other public authorities on issues ranging from electoral reform to transportation planning. Citizens' assemblies expose citizens to skills essential to democratic governance, like deliberation and compromise. Research finds that—at least in the short term—they can increase participants' institutional and topical knowledge, as well as participants' sense that they can make a difference through political action.[41]

Public campaigns to counter fake news: Governments, media groups, and online platforms across the democratic world are stepping up efforts to counter misinformation—for example, by funding fact-checking sites that react to stories that are circulated online. Whether fact-checking qualifies as a civic literacy intervention is debatable, but it is a newer form of public campaigning to provide citizens with topical knowledge. However, this work can come with limitations and even some negative consequences. For example, research has found that it is much harder to reach people with fact-checking than with fake news,[42] that under limited circumstances there can be a backlash against fact-checking that only deepens peoples' belief in the misinformation,[43] and that tagging some stories as untrue can unintentionally increase the believability of other stories.[44] But public education campaigns that "inoculate" citizens against fake news—by explaining that misinformation is coming and educating people on how to detect it—can be effective.[45] These campaigns provide broad-based media literacy training, along with topical knowledge.

Please see the appendix on page 20 for a list of organizations that inhabit the civic literacy space in Canada.

> Who funds civic literacy?

This review of civic literacy—what it is, where it is fostered and how—did not have the resources to exhaustively document the sources and magnitude of funding in Canada. For simplicity, news media organizations that cover politics, as well as universities where students can access civic education, are omitted.

Provincial governments fund the education of children, including civic education curricula.

National, provincial, and municipal electoral bodies, whose budgets are also allocated by governments, fund the education of voters. Some have funding to partner with and support civil society organizations

who deliver civic literacy programming, but funding is not typically provided on an ongoing basis between elections.

The federal government has granting streams (typically but not exclusively under Canadian Heritage) that seek to improve outcomes associated with civic literacy. Provincial governments often have the same. However, these opportunities for funding civic literacy programs can be sporadic or one-off, or the government's priority recipients for programming can shift depending on the government's focus (i.e. hard-to-reach youth, women, rural communities.)

Public and private foundations are also a source of grant funds that can offer more flexibility than funds from government. However, tracking this funding to measure its volume and reach is very difficult. This overview could only identify approximately a dozen foundations that have a sustained and significant commitment to civic literacy, many of which focus on a municipality or region rather than taking on a national project.

Corporations also sometimes fund programs with a specific civic literacy focus. For example, Google and Facebook have made financial contributions to programs focused on improving media literacy in Canada. These contributions are quite recent, however, and whether they will be sustained remains to be seen.

Again, it is very hard to get a handle on how much national and sustained investment exists in Canada in civic literacy, particularly when it comes to programming that is designed to reach Canadians who have aged out of school settings. This reflects the ad hoc and somewhat uncoordinated nature of civic literacy programming.

We have observed that civic literacy programs in Canada often expire because of a lack of renewed funding, no matter how successful they are. Actors come and go due to inconsistent support, which in turn discourages long-term institutional investment in lifelong civic learning. Promising agenda-setting and evaluation research never makes its way from the community floor or academic setting into the larger community. With no deep and dedicated stream of funding to kick-start or sustain engagement, action in the area remains intermittent and unreliable.

Given the scope of the challenges facing the country, more investment and greater collaboration is needed to ensure that good work happens, that

> German Federal Agency for Civic Education

Outside Canada, some national governments in other federations have taken more active roles in the area of civic education. For example, the German Federal Agency for Civic Education (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, or BPB), founded in 1952, tackles everything from voter engagement to citizenship education, produces youth-focused media like graphic novels, and provides programming to counter political extremism. The BPB model may not directly transfer into the Canadian context, but it is a reminder that democratic governments in other countries are more directly involved in supporting democracy through fostering an educated and engaged citizenry.

successful initiatives continue, and that we learn what works best when it comes to civic literacy development.

Civic literacy is a pan-Canadian challenge. There is therefore a case to be made that the federal government should assume a strategic role in this challenge. In the next section, we focus on real action that the federal government can take.

PART 3: RECOMMENDATIONS

Civic literacy is a project owned by all Canadians, and it starts with citizens. We have a responsibility to pay attention, to make connections, and to be thoughtful in how we acquire information. We as citizens can also help educate each other, and many are doing just that—through online citizen journalism and amateur podcasting, for example. But not everyone has equal opportunities to develop civic literacy. That is where civil society, the private sector, and all levels of government should come in.

Community groups must ground their programming in evidence, learn from one another, and keep civic literacy on the agenda. Private foundations should recognize a need, and understand that solving it will require concerted attention, not small one-off gifts. Local governments are responsible for fostering a local civic space, and are in some ways best positioned to experiment with civic literacy-boosting participatory projects. And provincial governments need to revisit the place of civics in school curricula, moving toward not just more, but better civic education.

The federal government can be a strategic leader on this file by helping to ensure that all that happens. While civic literacy is often included in education (which is a provincial responsibility as set out in Section 93 of the Constitution Act, 1867), the federal government has always played a role in this space.[46] In light of new national and international challenges, the federal government needs to do more, working in appropriate and collaborative ways with other levels of government and with community organizations.

With a national election happening later this year, all federal parties should be thinking seriously about how to invest in the best defence for liberal democracy: an informed and engaged citizenry.

To conclude, we recommend three broad ways that the federal government can make a critical contribution: by funding innovation, moving toward better measurement, and enabling information exchange. We discuss each briefly in turn.

> Innovation and funding

Civic literacy, which equips citizens to hold their government to account, is properly the work of a non-partisan civil society. But the federal government can financially support a more civically literate Canada, while keeping distance from the programming itself.

Given how little we know about what works in bettering civic literacy, the first step for the federal government would be to create an initiative and fund to identify and develop effective programs. The initiative, which could be administered by Canadian Heritage, would invite applications from not-for-profits, public institutions, schools, and perhaps media organizations. Rather than dispensing program funds for one-off projects, the federal government should use the program to:

- Experiment with community-led approaches to building civic literacy;
- Evaluate the impact and outcomes of those approaches using robust methods and evidence; and
- Scale up and promote promising practices.

Decisions about what programs get funded should involve both expertise inside and outside of government, and use clear criteria that can continue to take new evidence into account as it emerges. Programs that prove their effectiveness could subsequently receive more stable and long-term funding.

PART 3: RECOMMENDATIONS

The federal government's ongoing commitment and involvement would ensure that civic literacy programming:

- Happens in the first place;
- Is sustained;
- Is based in evidence; and
- Is reaching all the communities it should.

> Measurement

As discussed above, due to a range of both practical and theoretical concerns, there is no single set of measures for civic literacy. This is obviously a significant problem for any systematic effort to improve the overall level of civic literacy in the country, especially in the long term.

New effort should be directed toward targeted and long-term measurement, particularly as it relates to program efficacy. Developing a clear picture of how civically literate Canadians are, and looking at the effectiveness of specific programs, would require innovative measurement on multiple scales and levels. This could include surveys designed to measure political knowledge over time and in different groups of Canadians, to research comparable measures of critical political thinking and judgement, and to study how well Canadians at large understand the ways in which they can influence government decision-making. It would also be important to show how civic literacy affects a person's ability to succeed as an advocate for a cause, and to feel efficacious in their political lives.

In addition to the measurement of Canadians generally, we also need to measure differences between those who have experienced programs and those who haven't, so that we can evaluate specific efforts to improve civic literacy, and expand the ones that prove most effective.

> Convening and information exchange

If civic literacy programming providers are to benefit from the work of others, governments will need to support greater connections between government, researchers and, most importantly, the organizations actively delivering civic literacy programming. Working together would advance and solidify democratic practice in Canada in several ways:

- First, it would allow for information sharing among actors working on distinct but related elements of civic literacy. That sharing would encourage the development of best practices, spur cross-pollination of ideas, and reduce duplication of effort.
- Second, civic literacy providers would be better positioned to identify areas of comparative strength and weakness in Canada's existing support for civic literacy, and to develop strategies to address the most significant gaps in Canadian civic practice and other related issues.
- Third, providers could nurture and maintain on going relationships with policymakers—both with leaders responsible for articulating any necessary legislative changes, and with civil servants tasked with monitoring various democratic challenges and funding efforts to counter them. Members of such a community would be more able to provide policymakers with a definitive account of problems and potential solutions. They would also be able to take a more active role in subsequent policy design, implementation, and evaluation.

PART 3: RECOMMENDATIONS

> Designing national action

The federal government can choose from a number of approaches to accomplish those three objectives, from creating a new national agency for civic literacy (as is the case in Germany—see box on page 14), to simply scaling up the existing activities scattered across departments and agencies. There is no single path forward.

But there are advantages to creating a national home for civic literacy. Doing so would signal a strong commitment, ensure ongoing programming, and support more sophisticated research and evaluation. If designed well, a national agency for civic literacy could also guarantee non-partisanship and make collaboration possible.

To repeat, civic education must be a shared responsibility of multiple levels of government. Therefore, in designing action on civic literacy, the federal government could take inspiration from existing Canadian models to facilitate exchange, collaboration, and evaluation. For example, the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) is a not-for-profit organization established to support federal-provincial-territorial efforts to improve healthcare outcomes. Provincial and territorial governments participate in governance, creating an environment of strong collaboration across governments—which may be necessary, if in-school civic literacy is part of the agency's mandate.

Another model could be an entity founded with a one-time endowment from the federal government or multiple levels of government, as is the case with the Institute for Research on Public Policy or the Global Centre for Pluralism. These are arms-length non-profits, not government agencies. Ideally, the design would achieve participation from government at multiple levels while the agency remains fundamentally independent from government.

> National action on civic literacy must be crafted with the following goals in mind:

- Non-partisanship;
- Evidence-based decision-making;
- Diversity in membership, goals, and methods;
- Incorporation of actors engaged in research, program delivery, and policy formation;
- Particular attention to segments of the population that experience lower levels of civic literacy;
- A focus on the role of efficacy in effective civic literacy interventions; and
- Sustainability of projects and outcomes.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this report is to spark a conversation about what we can and should be doing to improve civic literacy in the country. A politically educated and engaged citizenry is more important than ever, yet it is increasingly difficult to ensure in today's challenging political and informational environment.

We have made the case that Canadians need to think about civic literacy more seriously and more systematically, and to do so in a non-partisan way. Civic literacy is a long under-emphasized—but increasingly vital—pillar on which our democracy rests. Citizens are going to have to do more and more of the work that was once performed by educators and gatekeepers: parsing huge amounts of ever-changing information, separating fact from fiction, and making judgements about what is most important to them and to the country.

With this report's publication, we hope to:

- Help define what civic literacy is.
- Help establish a baseline for what we know and don't know about civic literacy in Canada, and identify the players that foster it.
- Warn about a lack of funding and clarify the need for more—and more sustained—investment in civic literacy in Canada.
- Identify the financial, intellectual, and organizational contributions that various actors, including orders of government and members of civil society, can make as part of a broader effort to address that unmet need.
- Identify some next steps the federal government could take to make more effective, coordinated, and sustained headway toward a more civically literate Canada.

It's time for Canadians to make bold moves toward a more systematic approach to lifelong civic literacy development.

> For continued discussion:

- What questions do you have?
- What do you see as the most urgent issue to tackle within civic literacy?
- Who else is part of the community?

APPENDIX: COMPULSORY CIVIC EDUCATION COURSES IN CANADA

Alberta
- Grade 10 Social Studies
- Grade 11 Social Studies
- Grade 12 Social Studies

British Columbia
- Grade 10 Social Studies
- Grade 11 or 12 Social Studies

Manitoba
- Grade 9 Canada in the Contemporary World
- Grade 10 Geographic Issues of the 21st Century
- Grade 11 History of Canada

New Brunswick
- Grade 11 Modern History

Newfoundland and Labrador
- Grade 10 Canadian History, Grade 10 Canadian Geography, Grade 10 Social Studies, Grade 11 NL Studies, Grade 11 Labrador Inuit Society and Culture, or Grade 11 Mi'kmaq Studies
- Grade 11 World Geography or World History

Northwest Territories
- Grade 10 Social Studies
- Grade 10 Northern Studies
- Grade 11 Social Studies

Nova Scotia
- Grade 11 African Canadian Studies, Grade 11 Canadian History, Grade 11 Gaelic Studies, Grade 11 Études acadiennes, or Grade 10 Mi'kmaq Studies
- Grade 12 Global Geography, Global History, or Global Politics

Nunavut
- Grade 10 Inuuqatigiitsiarniq (Seeking Harmony)
- Grade 10 and 11 Aulajaaqtut (Social Studies)

Ontario
- Grade 9 Canadian Geography
- Grade 10 Canadian History
- Grade 10 Civics half-course

Prince Edward Island
- Two Social Studies courses from grades 10 to 12 required, one of which must include Canadian content

Quebec
- Secondary IV (Grade 10) History and Citizenship Education

Saskatchewan
- Grade 10 Social Studies, History, or Native Studies
- Grade 11 Social Studies, History, or Native Studies

Yukon
- Grade 10 Social Studies
- Grade 11 Social Studies, Grade 11 Canadian Civics, or Grade 12 Yukon First Nations Studies

APPENDIX: MAPPING THE ECOSYSTEM OF CIVIC LITERACY IN CANADA

While few groups outside of schools offer civic literacy training, organizations throughout Canada have begun to research or offer training or support in this area. The list below is incomplete. Please let us know if your organization would like to be included in this list.

Civic Education

- ABC Life Literacy Canada
- Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
- CIVIX
- Equal Voice
- Forum for Young Canadians
- Historica Canada
- People for Education

Community Engagement, Organizing, or Training

- Canadian-Muslim Vote
- CivicAction Leadership Foundation
- Democratic Engagement Exchange
- Dogwood Initiative
- Evidence for Democracy
- Fair Vote Canada
- Institut du Nouveau Monde
- Institute for Change Leaders
- LeadNow
- MASS LBP
- Maytree
- Mouvement Démocratie Nouvelle
- Mouvement Ontarien des Femmes Immigrantes Francophones
- Muslim Youth Fellowship
- Open Democracy Project
- Operation Black Vote Canada
- Organize BC
- Ranked Ballot Initiative of Toronto
- Social Planning Toronto
- Springtide
- Tamarack Institute
- United Way Greater Toronto
- Vote Savvy
- Vox Pop Labs
- Walrus Foundation
- YWCA

Diversity in Politics

- Canadian Jewish Political Affairs Committee
- Canadian-Muslim Vote
- Canadians for a New Partnership
- Equal Voice
- Idle No More
- Operation Black Vote Canada
- ProudPolitics
- Reconciliation Canada
- Tamils in Public Service
- World Sikh Organization

Foundations

- Aga Khan Foundation
- Atkinson Foundation
- Community Foundations of Canada (and local equivalents)

- J.W. McConnell Family Foundation
- Martin Family Initiative
- Max Bell Foundation
- Maytree
- Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation
- Rossy Foundation
- Stephen Jarislowsky Foundation
- Walrus Foundation

Government

Federal examples:

- All-Party Democracy Caucus
- Community of Practice in Public Engagement (staff within departments across the federal government)
- Digital Literacy Exchange Program
- Elections Canada
- Ministry of Democratic Institutions
- Privy Council Office (Consultations and Public Engagement)
- Treasury Board (Open Government)

Provincial examples:

- Open Government Ontario
- OpenNWT
- Open Government Newfoundland and Labrador
- Provincial electoral bodies
- Quebec Secretariat for Access to Information and Reform of Democratic Institutions

Municipal examples:

- Calgary (Engage, Civic Innovation YYC)
- Montreal (Office of Public Consultation)
- Municipal electoral bodies
- Toronto (Growing Conversations)
- Vancouver (Talk Vancouver, Pop-up City)

Institutes and Centres

- Angus Reid Institute
- Broadbent Institute
- Canada 2020
- Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives
- C.D. Howe Institute
- Environics Institute
- Fraser Institute
- Institute for Canadian Citizenship
- Institute on Governance
- Institute for Research on Public Policy
- Macdonald-Laurier Institute
- Manning Centre
- Mosaic Institute
- Mowat Centre
- National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation
- Pearson Centre for Progressive Policy
- Public Policy Forum
- Samara Centre for Democracy
- Yellowhead Institute

Media Literacy and Journalism

- Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
- Canadian Journalism Foundation
- Canadian Public Affairs Channel
- CIVIX
- MediaSmarts
- TVOntario

Newcomer Engagement

- Association of Neighbourhood Societies of British Columbia
- Canadian Council of Muslim Women
- City for All Women Initiative
- Council of Agencies Serving South Asians
- Immigration Partnership Winnipeg
- Immigration Services Society of BC
- Institute for Canadian Citizenship
- Intercultural Dialogue Institute
- Mosaic Institute
- North York Community House
- Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants

Open Government and Technology

- Budgetpedia
- Civic Tech
- Code for Canada
- Digital Justice Lab
- Evidence for Democracy
- Open Government Partnership
- Open North

Parliament

- Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians
- Canadian Study of Parliament Group
- The Churchill Society for the Advancement of Parliamentary Democracy
- Commonwealth Parliamentary Association
- Inter-Parliamentary Union
- Parliamentary Centre

Political Parties

- Federal political parties (including elected leaders, unelected party organizers, and party members)
- Provincial political parties (including elected leaders, unelected party organizers, and party members
- Parties' campus youth organizations (where applicable)

Universities

- **Carleton University**

> Bell Chair in Canadian Parliamentary Democracy

- **McGill University**

> Centre for the Study of Democratic Citizenship
> Institute for the Study of Canada

- **Ryerson University**

> Democratic Engagement Exchange
> Institute for Change Leaders
> Jack Layton Leadership School
> Ryerson City Building Institute
> Ryerson Leadership Lab
> Jarislowsky Democracy Chair

- **Simon Fraser University**

> SFU Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue
> SFU Public Square
> School of Public Policy

- **University of British Columbia**

> Centre for the Study of Democratic Institutions
> Harold and Dorrie Merilees Chair for the Study of Democracy
> Summer Institute for Future Legislators

- **University of Ottawa**

> Graduate School of Public and International Affairs

> Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy

> Jarislowsky Chair in Public Sector Management

- **University of Toronto**

> Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy

Youth Engagement

- Aboriginal Youth Opportunities
- Action Canada
- Apathy is Boring
- Boys and Girls Club of Canada
- Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
- Check Your Head
- CIVIX
- Equal Voice
- Forum for Young Canadians
- Historica Canada
- Institut du Nouveau Monde
- Legislative internship programs in Parliament and Legislative Assemblies
- Next Up
- TakingITGlobal
- Vote Savvy
- YWCA

Would you like us to include your organization in this list?
Please send your request to info@samaracanada.com.

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