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## The Enthusiasm for Political Participation Among the Young Participants of the “Political School” Program at the Hilal Hilmawan Institute in Indramayu Regency

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### Keywords:

Political participation ; younger generation ; nonformal political education ; political school

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### Abstract

Youth political participation is crucial for democratic sustainability, yet remains low due to apathy, negative stigma, and limited political education, making non-formal political education a strategic alternative to increase awareness and engagement. This research aims to produce an analysis of the enthusiasm for political participation of the young generation who participate in the Hilal Hilmawan Institute (HHI) Political School Program in Indramayu Regency, identify the obstacles they face, and examine the various efforts made to overcome these obstacles. A qualitative approach with the type of case study was used in this study where data was collected through in-depth interviews with key informants and supporters, direct observation, and literature review from relevant scientific journals and books. Thematic analysis techniques are used in the data analysis process and the results of the research provide clues that the HHI Political School Program has contributed to increasing the enthusiasm of the political participation of the younger generation as seen from their involvement in informal political activities, increasing interest and attention to political issues, and growing confidence to participate in political activities. The main obstacles that are still faced include the existence of negative societal stigma towards politics as well as structural factors while efforts are made to improve political literacy, strengthen social networks through the alumni community, and continue involvement in discussion rooms and socio-political activities.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, where media transformation has reshaped political communication particularly in reaching the younger generation, who are digital natives political communication strategies that leverage social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok have proven effective in capturing the attention of Generation Z voters. The above is accomplished mainly through visually interesting content, casual language, and interactions between politicians and Generation Z through digital platforms. As per the findings by Alifatunnisa, Azzahra, and Nurfalah, political communication tactics in the digital era have the potential of increasing Generation Z's interest in political information using social media, but disinformation and lack of critical thinking skills are some obstacles preventing Generation Z from participating politically (Alifatunnisa et al., 2024).

This can be achieved mainly through engaging visual content, relaxed language use, and the interaction between politicians and Generation Z through digital tools. This is because, as identified in research by Alifatunnisa, Azzahra, and Nurfalah, there exists the possibility for

the political communication strategies in the digital age to enhance the engagement of Generation Z in politics through the use of social media sites, although misinformation and lack of critical thinking abilities prevent this (Siregar, 2024).

Political education is known to be among the most effective methods that could be used to raise political awareness and political participation among the younger generation. There could be two types of political education, where in the former case it is conducted formally in school or university environment while in the latter case it involves conducting seminars or organizing political schools by civil society organizations and independent bodies. Political education is helpful in teaching the younger generation about the political system and their responsibilities as citizens. As mentioned in the study by (Riyanti et al., 2023) political education is vital in helping develop political consciousness amongst the young generation, especially within the context of political governance and voter responsibilities. For instance, there is an article about the application of popular culture in promoting political education to the younger generation, showing how social media and culture can contribute to a change from passivity to activism in politics. (Nasution & Hafizsutrino, 2024).

According to research that adopted a phenomenological approach to understand youth political participation issues in Indonesia, some of the reasons for low levels of participation include disillusionment with politics, social pressures, and lack of adequate political education (Percy-Smith et al., 2023; Raspatiningrum et al., 2025; Raymond & Ward, 2021; Trihandarkha, 2026). It is evident from the above discussion that if young people lack political education, they will take an inactive stance regarding decision-making in their daily lives due to politics (Siregar, 2024).

“Political School” in non-formal political education, for example, implemented by Hilal Hilmawan Institute (HHI) in Indramayu regency is one of the phenomena that should be explored. The HHI Political School aims at educating the youth and the first-time voters through class, discussion, dialogue between participants, and scholars as well as the local politician. The HHI Political School includes lessons related to the political system in Indonesia, duties and rights of the citizens, the problems within the region, and also how to participate in politics. Yet, whether or not this non-formal political education would be able to motivate the youth remains an issue that is not yet explored.

As a result of the analysis of the current body of knowledge and prior studies in the area, several important gaps have been found in the existing body of knowledge. The first gap is that most existing studies that relate to political education have only concentrated on formal methods or political education via digital media platforms. As such, empirical examinations of political school students' experience in political education have not received much attention. The second gap concerns the significance of political education in terms of its role in generating consciousness and involvement among the younger population. Despite this significance, there have been very few studies conducted on non-formal political education to develop enthusiasm and sustainable political participation strategies within the younger population.

The novelties in this study give rise to what makes this study different from others, especially those on political participation of the younger generation. First of all, the novelties are represented by the topic of research, i.e. non-formal political education grounded in political schools. Contrary to most studies that highlight formal political education or digital media for political involvement, this study takes a deeper look at the experience of participants

in the HHI Political School Program. Second of all, the novelty is connected with the empirical methodology since besides the level of political participation of the younger generation, the study will explore their motivation, obstacles, and solutions in terms of getting involved politically. The third novelty relates to the local context of the research, which was conducted specifically in Indramayu Regency, taking into account the local socio-cultural characteristics and the dynamics of interaction between participants and political practitioners. This local context has rarely been examined in similar studies, making this research expected to provide empirical and practical contributions toward the development of a relevant, contextual, and sustainable non-formal political education model to strengthen the political participation of the younger generation in Indonesia.

This research aims to analyze the enthusiasm for political participation among young participants of the Hilal Hilmawan Institute's "Political School" program in Indramayu Regency, identify the obstacles they encounter in political participation, and examine the strategies they employ to overcome these obstacles. The benefits of this research are twofold. Theoretically, this study enriches the literature on youth political participation, non-formal political education, and political literacy, particularly in the Indonesian context, while also providing empirical support for theories of political participation by demonstrating how non-formal education can foster political enthusiasm and efficacy among young people. Practically, the findings offer insights for civil society organizations, policymakers, and educators in designing more effective non-formal political education programs; for the Hilal Hilmawan Institute, the results can serve as evaluation material to improve the "Political School" program; and for local government and other stakeholders, this research provides recommendations on how to support non-formal political education initiatives to reduce youth political apathy and strengthen democratic participation in Indonesia.

Therefore, this study focuses on the enthusiasm for political participation among the young participants of the Hilal Hilmawan Institute's "Political School," the obstacles they encounter in participating, and the strategies they employ to overcome these obstacles. As such, this study is expected to make an empirical contribution to the development of non-formal political education as a means of empowering the younger generation in the context of contemporary democracy.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This research used a qualitative method that adopted a case study research design to investigate the motivation toward political participation among young participants in the HHI Political School Program in Indramayu District, focusing on the obstacles they experienced as well as the strategies used to address them (Sugiyono, 2019). A qualitative methodology was deemed suitable for this study because it provided a context-specific analysis of the participants' experiences and motivations through direct interaction with them (Fiantika et al., 2022). This research was carried out at the HHI Political School located in Singajaya Village, Indramayu Sub-district, Indramayu District, over a period of three months.

The study respondents were young individuals aged 16 to 25 who had enrolled in the HHI Political School Program. This age range was selected according to the criteria for participation in the HHI Political School Program. The study informants were chosen through purposive sampling, taking into consideration their roles in the program and their relevance to the study's

objectives. The primary data collection method was in-depth interviews conducted either face-to-face or online, each lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes.

The interview data were transcribed verbatim, after which the researcher analyzed them using thematic analysis techniques through several stages: data reduction, grouping based on research indicators, and the identification of main themes. The findings of this analysis were then linked to Milbrath and Goel's theory of political participation and the literature on non-formal political education. The data were presented in the form of descriptive narratives and tables to provide a clearer understanding of the patterns of enthusiasm, obstacles, and strategies related to political participation among the younger generation. Data validity was ensured through the triangulation of sources and methods, while research ethics were upheld by maintaining the confidentiality of the informants' identities and obtaining informed consent prior to the interviews.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Based on interviews conducted on January 15, 2026, this study collected data through in-depth interviews with two key informants: Nanda Galuh Rizkullah and Putri Aprilia Revalda, who are participants in the Hilal Hilmawan Institute (HHI) Political School Program in Indramayu Regency. The informants for this study were participants in the HHI Political School from various cohorts, ranging from the 1st to the 7th cohort, thereby providing a more comprehensive picture of the dynamics of youth political participation in the program.

In addition, interviews were also conducted with key informants namely the founders and administrators of the HHI Political School to provide further context and deepen our understanding of the program's overall implementation, including its objectives, processes, and evolution from one cohort to the next. The research findings were then organized based on three main dimensions aligned with the research objectives: enthusiasm for political participation, barriers to political participation, and the efforts made by the younger generation to address these barriers.

### **The Enthusiasm for Political Participation Among Young People Participating in the HHI "Political School" Program in Indramayu**

From the results of the interviews, one can see that the participants in the HHI Political School Program showed more enthusiasm regarding political activity, which was affected by a number of different factors, including their initial reason for joining the program, the content of the program, and the experience gained during the Political School activities. There were many reasons why people joined this Political School Program, such as the expansion of political knowledge, national view, and comprehension of political issues.

In the HHI Political School Program curriculum, there is the presentation of politics basics, including democracy, political awareness, leadership, and political issues at the national and local levels. Such curriculum seems to have been efficient enough to boost participants' understanding but also their political enthusiasm.

The enthusiasm toward politics of participants can be observed by the following parameters: political activity, interests related to politics, focus on the discussed topics, and confidence in political activities.

### **Level of Engagement in Political Activities**

From the political participation perspective, there was a noticeable difference in the behavior of the participants both before and after joining the Political School Program. In the pre-program period, the participants' involvement was limited to organizational activities within schools or other regular activities, without considering political aspects. Following the program, however, their involvement increased significantly as they started discussing politics, engaging with social problems, and even sharing their perspectives on political matters.

The informant, Nanda Galuh Rizkullah, expressed her experience after joining the Political School Program by saying, "Following my involvement in the Political School program, I have become more active in political discussions, especially at school. Prior to the program, I used to only engage myself with organizational activities; however, after attending the Political School program, I started discussing political and social issues in *Indramayu*."

The participants' engagement was evident not only in their active participation in discussions but also in their increased knowledge and ability to understand political issues. Participants began to get into the habit of reading journals, following political news, and participating in issue-based activities as a form of informal engagement.

Participation in formal political activities such as campaigning is not yet possible due to age and administrative restrictions. Informant Putri Aprilia Revalda stated that she is interested in getting involved in campaign activities, but cannot yet participate directly because she does not yet have an ID card or the right to vote. "I'm actually interested in joining the campaign, but since I don't have an ID card or the right to vote yet, I can't get directly involved."

### **Interest in and Engagement with Politics (Political Literacy)**

After participating in a program in which participants demonstrated a significant increase in interest and engagement with political issues directly linked to the growth of their political literacy—that is, their ability to critically understand, analyze, and evaluate political information.

Informant Putri Aprilia Revalda said that her interest in political issues arises primarily from issues that have a direct impact on the community. "If the issue is real and in the news, like the mayoral election or a conflict in the village, I become more interested in following it."

Informant Nanda Galuh Rizkullah explained that although political issues can sometimes seem uninteresting, the insights gained through the program keep her engaged in following developments on these issues because they are directly related to the community where she lives. "Some local issues are indeed interesting, while others are boring because they cover the same topics over and over. However, being part of my community myself, I believe that it is necessary for me to be aware."

Another sign that the participants have become politically literate is reflected in their ability to screen information and analyze the context of issues to avoid propagating false information. It is clear from this that, besides increasing participants' interests, the Political Education Program has improved their political knowledge.

### **Self-Confidence in Politics**

Confidence of participants to involve themselves in politics grew after they underwent the Political Education Program, since before that, there were some participants who did not feel comfortable voicing their opinions regarding politics. After completing the program, participants became more assertive and confident in voicing their opinions.

Nanda Galuh Rizkullah, a participant, said that the political understanding she gained from the program has helped her grasp the material in school, particularly in Civics Education (PKN). "Now Civics Education is easier to understand, because I already have a foundation from the Political School."

Participants' self-confidence was also bolstered through interactive learning experiences, such as discussions and exchanges of views throughout the program, during which participants felt they had a safe space to express their ideas, thereby further enhancing their confidence in political engagement.

The difference between before and after participating in the program is clear: whereas participants previously tended to be passive and lacked an understanding of politics, after participating in the program they became more active and critical, and gained the courage to engage with political issues. Participants also began to realize that the younger generation plays a vital role in political life, particularly in driving social change and combating misinformation in society.

### **Barriers to Political Participation Among Young People**

Although the younger generation's enthusiasm for political participation increased after participating in the HHI Political School Program, interview results revealed that participants still faced various obstacles to fully engaging in political participation. These obstacles are complex in nature and encompass social, structural, and internal factors that interact with one another.

Before participating in the program, many participants tended to have limited political understanding and low levels of political literacy. This situation led to apathy, a lack of self-confidence, and minimal involvement in activities related to political issues. After participating in the program, the participants' political understanding and awareness improved; however, they still faced various external challenges in their daily social lives.

One of the main obstacles faced by participants is the negative stigma surrounding politics in society. Politics is often perceived as dirty, conflict-ridden, and lacking in positive impact. This perception also influences the public's view of young people interested in politics, leading to their participation often being viewed negatively.

Nanda Galuh Rizkullah said that she often faces negative reactions from those around her when she shows an interest in politics. She explained that people still view politics as something negative and inappropriate for young people to get involved in. "Many people still think politics is dirty, and I'm considered too young to get involved."

Moreover, another major hindrance that can be highlighted here relates to the belief held by most people that the youth lack the required political competency. It means that they lack sufficient knowledge, experience, and maturity needed to grasp issues concerning politics. In this regard, the views expressed by them are not regarded important at home, work places, or within the larger society.

In this regard, Informant Putri Aprilia Revalda expressed her view regarding the feelings of superiority expressed by both her family and the larger community about youth in politics. As per her views, youth is considered ignorant about politics and, therefore, their views on any issue are not regarded important. "They look down upon young people as people who do not yet understand politics."

The problem is that such hindrances have also affected the participation of participants in the organization itself. Prior to participating in the organization, participants were involved in organizational activities but not yet in political issues. After becoming members of the organization, participants have started getting involved in discussion and related activities but negative feelings of others acted as a barrier in developing a larger role for themselves.

Aside from the socio-cultural factors mentioned above, structural barriers can also affect youth engagement in politics, especially when it comes to formal participation. Not all participants have yet obtained their Identity Card (KTP), which means that they are not qualified to vote since they have not yet reached voting age. Therefore, the participants have been limited in terms of engaging in political activities formally, including voting in elections and campaigning.

As opposed to the internal challenges above, there are certain participants who had once been hindered by internal issues like indifference towards politics, lack of confidence, and fear to enter into politics. This was mainly due to the low level of political literacy of participants prior to joining the political program.

Since joining the HHI Political School Program, most of these internal obstacles encountered by participants had gradually faded away. Through the knowledge, wider outlook, and discussion skills that they gained from the program, participants became more active and gained more confidence in sharing their views. However, participants continue to encounter external problems, namely discrimination and misconceptions about politics.

Therefore, it can be noted that the involvement of youth in politics is dependent not only on personal matters but also on the societal environment. The HHI Political School could contribute to the reduction of barriers within by enhancing political literacy and competency among students; yet, additional assistance from the society is needed for youth to fulfill their potential in political involvement.

### **Efforts to Address Obstacles to Political Participation**

The measures put forward to address the challenges of political participation among the young generation have been greatly informed by the knowledge acquired by the participants from the HHI Political School Program, which equips participants with the basic knowledge of politics, political literacy, leadership, and analytical skills that enable participants to become well-prepared for different challenges in social settings.

Before the program, participants showed low levels of awareness regarding politics; few of them were active members of organizations working on public issues; and they were not confident enough to express their views. After joining the program, great changes occurred: They became more active participants, had a broader view of politics, and began to participate in the discussion of socio-political issues.

One of the important activities adopted is the development of capacity, where emphasis is on political knowledge, analysis, and participation in organization. Participants have started applying their experiences from the program to become active members of organizations both in school and communities, with an emphasis on organizing activities that solve socio-political problems.

Nanda Galuh Rizkullah mentioned that she tends to ignore any negative opinions from her surroundings in order to prove herself through success in achieving certain goals and consistency in her organizational activities. She uses this tactic in order to prove that young

generation has the same potential to succeed in the political environment as well. "I choose to ignore the insults and focus on proving myself through achievements and consistency."

One more positive change can be observed in terms of participants' attitude towards the prevailing social stigma and stereotype. This phenomenon, which used to be seen as a problem by participants, has become a motivational factor in their personal development and enhancement of their political literacy skills. It becomes particularly important that improvement in participants' political literacy helps them to develop critical skills in analyzing problems and avoiding negative opinions.

The informant, Putri Aprilia Revalda, mentioned that the fact that young people were constantly underestimated and perceived as politically illiterate motivated her to improve her knowledge and comprehension of politics. "Young people are often underestimated and perceived as politically illiterate, therefore I am motivated to learn more."

Networks, discussion forums, and the learning environment of the HHI Political School Program represent one of the most effective ways to overcome political participation barriers. The participants get chances to take part in discussions, share ideas, and acquire political communication skills. The discussed learning environment increases the level of self-confidence of the participants and expands their networks, allowing them to get involved in various political activities.

Furthermore, participants' membership in the communities and networks established within the program creates conditions for continuous support of their political participation. Support by a community of similar-minded people who have common interests and goals motivates the participants to continue being politically engaged despite encountering numerous social or structural barriers.

It is important to note that the HHI Political Education Program is created to promote political participation of youth using education and participation methods. Not only does the program provide educational material, but also creates a learning environment in which participants learn how to become politically literate, think critically, and express their views boldly.

Consequently, one can make a conclusion that the youth surmounts obstacles of political engagement through personal empowerment, increased political awareness, shifting attitudes about negative stereotypes, and networking opportunities and discussion forums. By comparing the situation of the participants prior to and following their involvement in the program, it is clear that not only did the participants acquire knowledge, but they also became more proactive, critical, and confident participants of the political process.

From the results of the research, it can be seen that being involved in the Political Education Program from the Hilal Hilmawan Institute has increased political participation in the younger generation, who have participated in different kinds of informal political participation. Informal political participation includes participating in discussions about political matters, participating in youth associations, and campaigning for social issues and local policy matters. Such political participation involves political discourse and education, which is very important in establishing sustainable political participation.

The results also corroborate previous literature showing how political education is important for promoting political participation among young people via nonformal education and socio-political organizations. Political education makes youths aware of what is happening

and engages them in political processes although they may be politically inactive yet (Zaenuddin et al., 2025). In addition, some researchers have pointed out that engaging the youth in discussions and political education is a smart way to involve them in politics in an early stage, which will contribute to the creation of a political culture among the participants (Riyanti et al., 2023).

It was found that the level of interest among the younger generation towards political problems, both local and national, grew considerably after taking part in the program. The key respondents tended to approach issues relating to politics with greater caution and skepticism, especially if they were related directly to how the people lived. Thus, it can be concluded that the political interests of the younger generation cannot be regarded as something passive but, instead, develop along with issues that become more relevant and the level of understanding of politics grows. According to previous studies, the political interest of the younger generation is greatly determined by the relevance of political issues within their social environment (Azis & Wiryawan, 2025).

In addition, advances in information technology and social media have also contributed to increased interest among the younger generation in political issues, although on the other hand, they have also created challenges in the form of the spread of disinformation and political hoaxes (Putra et al., 2025). The research suggests that the Political Education Program can help strengthen young people's confidence in engaging in politics. Key informants reported that they are now better able to understand complex political issues, more confident in expressing their opinions, and aware that political participation is both a right and a responsibility as citizens.

This increase in self-confidence aligns with theories of political participation, which state that political knowledge and understanding are key prerequisites for meaningful political engagement. Individuals with high levels of political literacy tend to exhibit greater self-confidence in participating in political processes (Riyanti et al., 2023). Other studies also suggest that participatory political education can enhance political efficacy the individual's belief that their involvement in politics can influence public decision-making processes (Azis & Wiryawan, 2025).

Although the enthusiasm and political participation of the younger generation point to an upward trend, this study identified several barriers that continue to limit their full political engagement. The primary barrier identified is the negative stigma surrounding politics, which remains deeply ingrained in the social environment—particularly the perception that politics is synonymous with dirty practices, corruption, and pragmatic self-interest. This negative stigma aligns with findings from previous research indicating that negative perceptions of politics are one of the main factors contributing to low political participation among the younger generation in various regions (Zaenuddin et al., 2025).

Furthermore, other elements like age limitation and certain criteria, including voting eligibility, also serve as major hurdles. Youngsters are prevented from taking part in any kind of formal politics, even though they are politically active individuals, due to structural barriers. The fact is that the participation of young people through structural barriers takes place in an informal manner only (Bani-Hani & Alhathloul, 2022). In order to address these different challenges, adolescents make certain attempts strategically, either on their own or as a group.

The first attempt made by adolescents includes improving political awareness through political education, discussion, and relying on scientifically informed information sources.

The literature shows that political education aimed at increasing political literacy helps diminish the amount of apathy and improves the quality of political engagement among the youth (Dewi et al., 2025). Additionally, the application of social media and networking among alumnis is a vital element that sustains political engagement, making sure that the new generation remains active with socio-political issues beyond formal politics. Existing literature reveals that social media is essential in building sustained political participation by the youth (D'Agostino & Visser, 2010). Therefore, the Political School Program is a useful political education tool used to enhance political participation by the youth in terms of increasing interest and capability, though it needs further improvement in other dimensions.

The increase in political literacy through the HHI Political School Program will not only enhance the knowledge of the participants but also help them critically evaluate the information related to politics. Political literacy is an important aspect for promoting quality political participation since it ensures that young individuals do not only participate in the process but are also well aware of the background and impact of a particular political policy. This relates to literature on political education playing an important role in increasing political literacy (Rafli & Tetep, 2026).

Moreover, the political literacy of the youth is affected by the impact of social media as a platform for receiving political information, not only as a form of communication tool but also as a platform for engaging in political learning of the youth. Studies have shown that social media plays an important part in the efforts to enhance the political literacy of the youth (Jannah et al., 2024).

The subjects taught in the Political Education Programme, including democracy, leadership, and political issues analysis, have been found to be quite successful in increasing the political consciousness of the participants. The practicality of the contents, taking into account the existing social environment, helps the participants comprehend the subjects more easily and relate theoretical knowledge to practical examples. This point is backed up by studies suggesting that political education improves the awareness of youths about democracy (Lukman & Suhendar, 2025).

The motivation of the participants to enroll in the program is one of the crucial aspects when it comes to promoting political participation. Those who are motivated internally to learn about politics would show more active and continuous participation in various political activities. It has been shown in previous researches that political education helps increase the motivation and participation in political activities, especially when this kind of approach is based on the features of youth.

One of the things that changed after the participation in the program was a shift in political knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. Before enrollment in the program, participants had a weak understanding of politics and their participation in political events was also rather weak. After the participation in the program, the level of activity of the participants grew, along with their critical attitude towards the matters discussed. This also corresponds to previous researches which have proven that political education increases political participation among the younger generation.

With the help of the program, the involvement of the participants with the organization has been modified. The organization has emerged as a vital platform where youth can use their political knowledge gained through the program. With the help of the organization, the participants can be involved in dialogue, advocacy, and several other socio-political initiatives. It has been noted that political knowledge is vital in improving the engagement of youth in political initiatives (Hendrik & Danial, 2021).

Therefore, this supplementary discussion will help improve the Political Education Program because not only will it help enhance the interest of youth in participating in politics, but it will also play an instrumental role in promoting political knowledge and motivation among them.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Political School Program at the Hilal Hilmawan Institute (HHI) in Indramayu Regency played a significant role in increasing political participation among the younger generation. The program encouraged greater involvement in informal political activities, such as political discussions, organizational participation, and social advocacy, while also improving political awareness, critical thinking, and confidence in engaging with political issues at both local and national levels. Despite this progress, young people still faced social, structural, and personal barriers, including negative public perceptions of politics, age-related limitations, administrative restrictions, lack of confidence, and prior political indifference. These challenges were gradually reduced through political literacy development, personal capacity building, and the supportive discussion forums and networks provided by the HHI Political School Program. Overall, the program not only increased participants' political knowledge but also transformed their attitudes and strengthened their political engagement. Future research is recommended to examine the long-term impact of political education programs on youth participation and to compare similar initiatives in different regions to identify the most effective strategies for increasing youth political involvement.

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