Civic Empowerment in the Digital Age:
Youth Engagement and Internet Rights

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Democratization

• Children are coming of age in complex environments
  – Internet harnessed for political action, freedom

• Changing role of citizens
  – Motivation, ability, opportunity for civic involvement
  – Empirical knowledge strengthens campaigns to promote democracy through digital literacy
Case Study: Post-Communist Lithuania

- Rapid institutional development outpaced the development of civic culture
  - Lack of open networks, reliable information, & opportunities for local self-governance
  - Systemic mistrust, political powerlessness
- Apathy & inactivity ingrained in society
  - New Internet opportunities
Human Empowerment Framework

Welzel and Inglehart’s Human Empowerment Sequence

1. **Economy: Action Resources**
   - enabling people to govern their lives

2. **Culture: Self-Expression Values**
   - motivating people to govern their lives

3. **Regime: Democratic Institutions**
   - entitling people to govern their lives

4. **Human Empowerment**
   - people being able, motivated, and entitled to govern their lives
Civic Potential

- Civic experiences online contribute to participatory values: trust, efficacy

- Three dimensions of Internet engagement:
  - Social networking
  - Information exchange
  - Political expression
Connecting Online & Offline Activism

• Organizational participation, community action, political discourse
  – Specific pathways: networking, self-expression
• Expanding online cultures for youth
  – Reaching disengaged: low SES, low government responsiveness & trust, remain marginalized
Final thoughts

- Historical and cultural contexts shape Internet engagement
- Youth are active agents, participating on an everyday basis
  - Creative construction of identities & peer communities
  - Ability to access information & tools and contribute to them \(\rightarrow\) community life
- Engagement may evolve with technology