

THE KIDS ARE ALRIGHT

CONNECTIVE IDENTITY AND
THE YOUTH CLIMATE
MOVEMENT

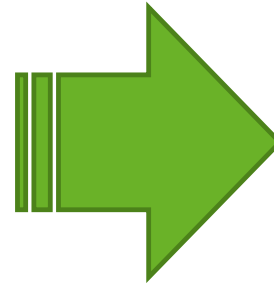
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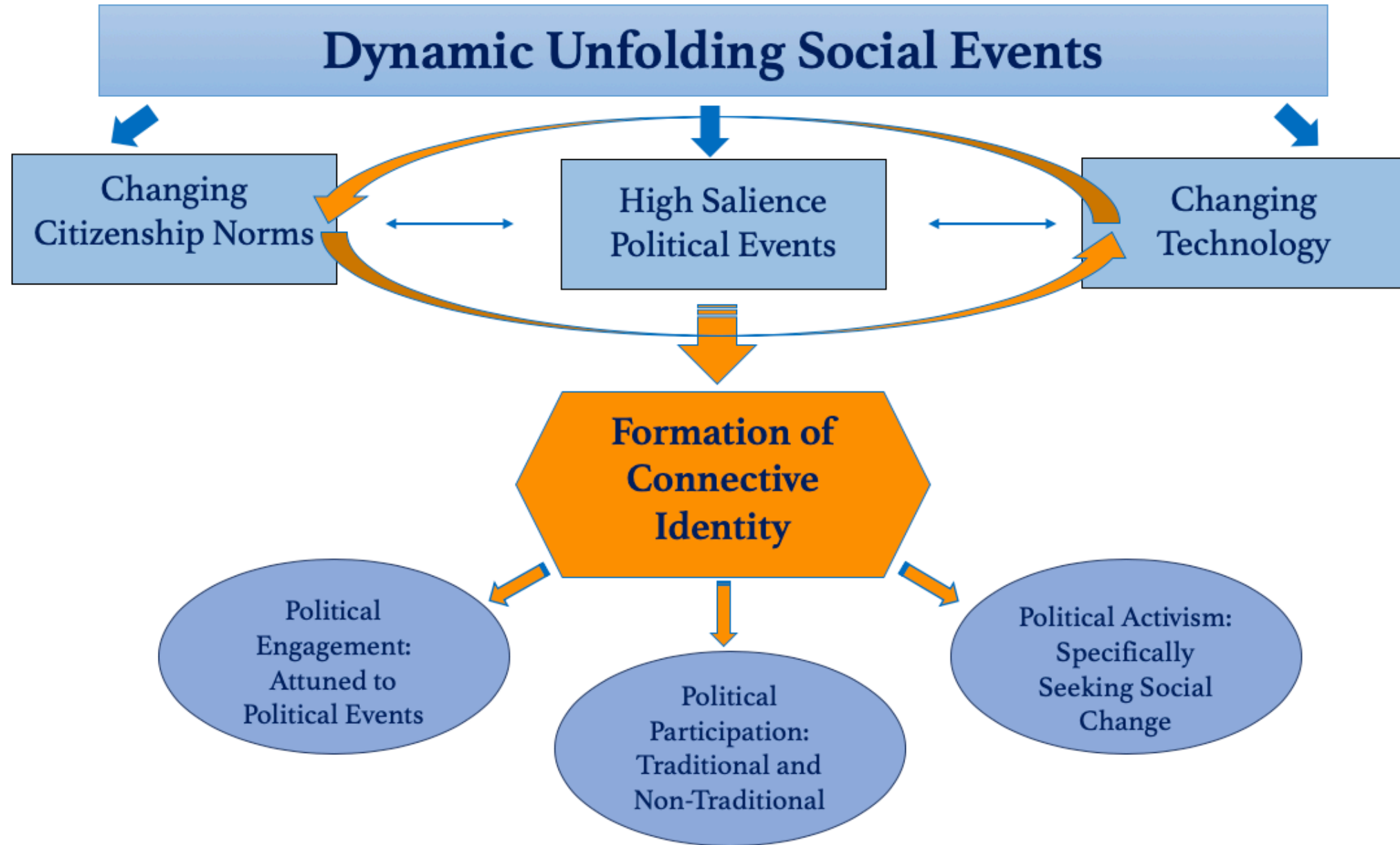
*“STUDENTS AND
YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE
FUELED EVERY
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THE CIVIL RIGHTS,
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WOMEN’S
MOVEMENTS.”
--- ROBERT BULLARD*

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THREE CLAIMS MEASUREMENT, SALIENCE, SOCIAL MEDIA = CONNECTIVE IDENTITY

1. **Measurement:** traditional political knowledge measurements may fail to accurately capture youth political behavior
2. **Salience:** prior research has shown that issue salience can positively impact political behavior leading to early formation of political opinion and increased political participation
3. **Social Media:** Increasingly, citizens – especially youths – prefer to use various social media rather than traditional institutional avenues to engage with politics. This has been shown to increase political engagement, but requires a better understanding of how this operates



When young citizens are exposed to high political salience issues and are participating in online storytelling narratives – as young political activists in a dynamic and unfolding social event – socialization processes are magnified and collective identities are created, impacting political behavior.



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THREE CLAIMS

MEASUREMENT: PREADULT POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE

1. Measurement: We may not be measuring public opinion correctly when it comes to young citizens
 - Public opinion scholars, motivated by socialization findings, largely treat citizens under the age of 18 as an irrelevant demographic.
 - Impressionable years don't start until 18 years of age
 - Preadult political discourse is immature, political knowledge is inconsistent, and feelings of political efficacy are low
 - Findings based on fact-based measurements, such as those standardized by Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996.
 - Yet even American adults profoundly fail to score well by these standards

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THREE CLAIMS

MEASUREMENT: PREADULT POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE

1. Measurement: We may not be measuring public opinion correctly when it comes to young citizens

- Citizens process political information through various means such as social groups, personal experience, and storytelling
- Studies that employ alternative tools such as reaction to political information and narrative of political experience uncover positive preadult political behavior and opinion cohesion
- Cramer and Toff's Expanded Model of Civic Competence does not substitute experience for facts, but calls for more inclusive types of "good citizenship" measurements, ones that incorporate experience *and* facts to gauge political knowledge

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THREE CLAIMS

SALIENCE: CLIMATE CHANGE AND PARTICIPATION

- 2. Issue Salience: Salient political issues have been shown to motivate political action, shape political opinion, and change political behavior**
 - Salient political events catalyze socialization gains for preadults, bringing them closer to adult levels of crystallization through *affective bonding*, a merging of affect and cognition
 - High salience and affect provided young activists with the selective incentives they needed to overcome the participation costs of risky activism
 - Activism impacts age cohorts in significant ways shaping significant cultural outcomes: significant socialization effects occur *during* participation

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THREE CLAIMS

SALIENCE: CLIMATE CHANGE AND PARTICIPATION

2. **Issue Salience: Climate change motivating youth political engagement and action**
 - Teenagers are collectively and individually acting on climate justice issues (Zero Hour; Greta Thunberg;) creating a Green New Deal (Sunrise Movement), fighting for indigenous environmental rights (One Mind), politically empowering climate change youth activists (Earth Guardians) and suing the federal government (Youth v. Gov).
 - Two current trends that differentiate youths from adults in climate change polling data:
 - Climate coherency: **Generation Z (ages 13-22 as of 2019) are 24% more likely than adults to agree that climate change is human caused**
 - Ideology a weakening predictor: **Millennial conservatives are twice as likely than older generations to say that climate change is a serious concern and human caused**

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THREE CLAIMS

SOCIAL MEDIA AND CONNECTIVE IDENTITY

3. Social Media: Dynamic information environments facilitate the relationship between political engagement and issue salience

- For political events to have their catalytic effect citizens require information exposure via social and communicative interaction
- Youths increasingly reject traditional sources of news acquisition in favor of social media
- Dynamic media environments develop a “**new system [in which] communication and the interaction of public opinion and the political media are social and relational [creating] an era of informational interdependence**” that requires further study
- Literature on preadult political engagement and social media use offers mixed results, but a key takeaway is how engagement is measured – is it traditional or non-traditional?
 - Where 19% of respondents say they’ve joined a group interested in political issues, over 50% of respondents say they’ve posted political links and posted political comments

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THREE CLAIMS

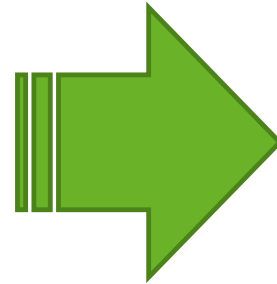
SOCIAL MEDIA AND CONNECTIVE IDENTITY

3. Social Media and Connective Identity: Where Connective Action meets Narrative Identity

- Increasingly, participatory mobilization occurs as a result of personal networks and social communication rather than strong formal organizational ties, challenging rooted notions of collective action
- **Connective Action:** digital platforms provide a fluid, dynamic, easily accessible space to address political concerns that lie outside of the constraints found in the institutional avenues described by Mancur Olson
.....*Critique:* Subsumes collective identities under action framing
- **Narrative Identity:** Collective identity construction provides incentives for mobilization: Narratives provide access to connective action tools while also dynamically constructing the collective identity necessary for mobilization in three main ways:
 - Narratives allow for groups to comprehend and unravel complex social situations
 - Social media provides the vehicle for wide diffusion of information, publicizing *and* politicizing experiences, raising the salience of a group or issue
 - Through narrative sharing, members make participation normative, a selective incentive that overcomes participation costs

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THREE CLAIMS MEASUREMENT, SALIENCE, SOCIAL MEDIA = CONNECTIVE IDENTITY

- 1. Measurement:** We need to include narrative along with facts to gain a better understanding of youth, and adult, political opinion
- 2. Salience:** Climate change may be increasing socialization gains for young citizens, impacting political behavior and opinion in significant ways
- 3. Social Media:** Connective action and narrative identity provide the theoretical explanation for how collective identities are being created in the digital age

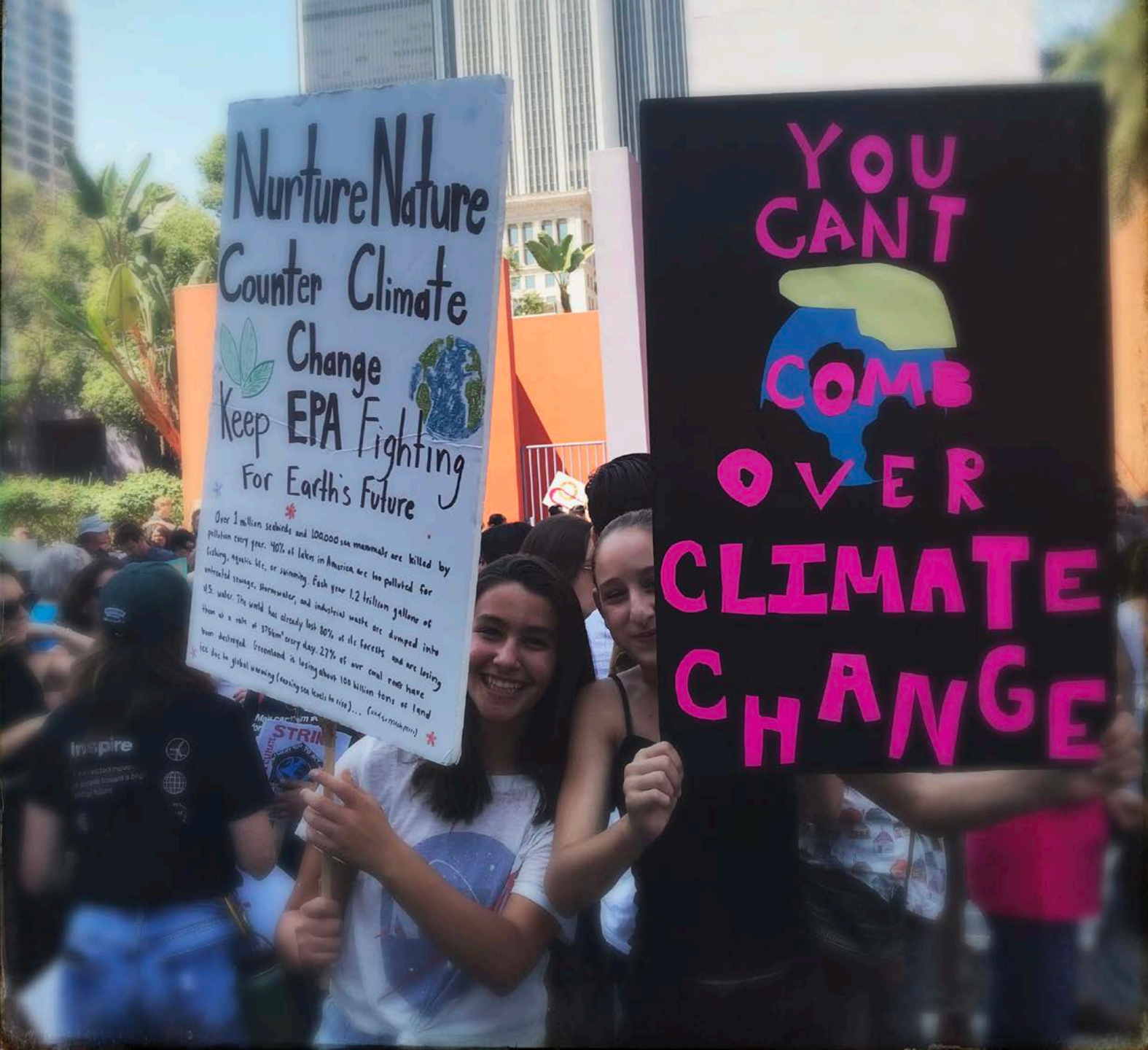


Our claim is that when young citizens are exposed to high political salience issues and are participating in online storytelling narratives – as young political activists in a dynamic and unfolding social event – socialization processes are magnified and collective identities are created, impacting political behavior.

Why should we care?

- ❖ Make sense of the paradox of what we are told about youth political behavior and what we witness.
- ❖ Preadult opinion formation is a critically undervalued area in public opinion scholarship
- ❖ Predispositions constructed in similar social times had significant socio-political impacts that endured over time.
- ❖ Giving voice to youth political interest contributes to greater youth political efficacy, and enhances democratic function
- ❖ Could be seeing another wave of social pressure and action much like the activism of the 50's 60's and 70's





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