

# Democra-tea: Digital Safety and Democracy Report

**The Students Commission of Canada**

**The Students  
Commission  
of Canada**  
*Centre of Excellence for  
Youth Engagement*



**La commission  
des élèves du  
Canada**  
*Le centre d'excellence pour  
l'engagement des jeunes*

# Table of Contents

|                                                  |   |
|--------------------------------------------------|---|
| Team Summary .....                               | 3 |
| Championing Youth Leadership Across Canada!..... | 3 |
| Themes: What did Young People Discuss? .....     | 4 |
| Team Products.....                               | 8 |
| Youth Recommendations .....                      | 8 |
| Showcase Speech.....                             | 9 |

## Team Summary

Over four days, we came together as the Democra-Tea group to build a brave and increasingly connected space where we could explore **healthy disagreements, digital safety, misinformation, and civic engagement**. In the early sessions, we focused on introductions and community sharing, grounding our conversations in the realities we face every day. We spoke openly about **housing instability, discrimination, gaps in education and healthcare access, and the ways social media shapes our experiences and well-being**. As we got to know one another, we reflected on where we get our information, how technology influences narratives, and how systems, from local to federal, impact our daily lives. Through open dialogue and storytelling, we examined **how digital spaces can both divide and empower our communities**.

By the final days, our group dynamics had noticeably strengthened. Those of us who were initially quiet or hesitant became more engaged, offering thoughtful insights and building new connections through shared interests and interactive activities. Hands-on exercises like category sticker mapping, values-based conversations, and brainstorming ways to promote peace and accountability helped us identify barriers to trust while also envisioning a more hopeful, youth-centered democracy. Across all four days, **we grew in confidence, curiosity, and collective agency**. This experience reminded us that **meaningful change begins with listening to one another, honoring lived experiences, and making space for every voice**.

## Championing Youth Leadership Across Canada!

### Meet the Team: Digital Safety, Democracy & Dialogue

We came together as the Digital Safety, Democracy & Dialogue theme team with seven youth from Yukon, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Ontario, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland and Labrador. With the support of two Youth Influencer roster members, our group included nine young people in total. Together, we explored how technology shapes civic life and what it means to engage across differences in meaningful and respectful ways. Our early discussions addressed the harsh realities experienced across the country and what democracy asks of us as a nation, within our communities, and as individuals.

Through reflection and dialogue, we identified where we consume and share information and misinformation, which platforms we engage with most, and how news could be better tailored to our online habits. Our group reflected a wide range of identities and lived

experiences, including First Nations and Métis youth, newcomers to Canada, 2SLGBTQIA+ youth, and participants with neurodiversity. This diversity added depth and richness to our conversations and helped us build a strong foundation of mutual understanding, respect, and shared learning.

We joined the team for many different reasons. Some of us were enthusiastic from the very beginning, while others needed encouragement or time to feel comfortable and at ease. Casual conversations and guided reflections served as our entry point into exploring the theme, after we collectively set group guidelines that established a tone of respect and care. As our work progressed, we identified common challenges across our communities while also exploring the important nuances within each of those spaces.

By engaging with the complexity of these systems, **we created space to practice navigating difficult conversations with greater awareness and intention.** We also reflected on our own online habits and how they shape our understanding of complex issues, for better or for worse. **Each of us left this experience with new perspectives and shared recommendations aimed at supporting stronger, more connected communities and contributing to meaningful change at the local level.**

## Themes: What did Young People Discuss?

### Digital Literacy & Information Integrity

We highlighted **the importance of local stories and storytelling, and the need for more targeted journalism that speaks directly to young people.** We emphasized that news needs to be shared in **online spaces** and formats that reflect how we interact, engage, and consume information. Through our discussions, we reflected on how we actively work to understand the forces shaping what we see, believe, and share online, including algorithms, platform design, and broader social influences.

*“I like to hear other people’s opinions before forming an opinion of my own first.”*

*– Youth participant*

*“Social media... it usually takes me 10 seconds to suss out what is real. In my opinion, a lot of media is going into censorship. Especially things that are*

*happening in Canada and the States, we're not hearing about it... the attention goes to that."*

*– Youth participant*

*"I feel like there are no storytellers or rather journalism is an important one."*

*– Youth participant*

*"Local journalism, it's more prominent and accessible."*

*– Youth participant*

*"...like my school had newspapers at the front before, we don't anymore."*

*– Youth participant*

Throughout the sessions, we examined not only where our information comes from, but also **how technology and social media influence narratives, reinforce biases, and escalate disagreement**. Through our reflections, we developed a growing recognition that **digital spaces are not neutral**. We acknowledged that these spaces can amplify misinformation, fuel conflict, and create confusion about what is true, while also offering opportunities for connection, self-expression, and empowerment.

By openly exploring digital safety and the complexities of online interaction, we began to identify the skills and critical thinking needed to navigate digital environments responsibly. This process supported us in understanding how to participate more thoughtfully and meaningfully in a healthy, inclusive democracy.

*"Adding on to that, if there's any video on that, you need to be careful because of AI and deepfakes. They're getting good at it, and it could really ruin someone's life."*

*– Youth participant*

*"Apathy and indifference... youth are disconnected. If youth don't care no one cares... it's all connected, the word might be desensitized... It's a trauma response."*

*– Youth participant*

## Civic Engagement & Democratic Participation

Through our conversations, we made sense of our roles within democratic life, exploring **how our voices, lived experiences, and collective action influence broader systems**. We recognized that participation goes beyond voting and includes everyday choices, involvement in our communities, and the courage to question and challenge inequitable structures. As we explored shared values, brainstormed solutions, and imagined more peaceful and accountable systems, we demonstrated **a growing sense of civic responsibility and agency**. This theme reflects our shift from passive observation to active ownership of our place within a democratic society.

*“I think that if we can get youth involved in their local spaces, like the local city council, they can see actual, immediate change.”*

*– Youth participant*

*“I feel like the fact that I can’t vote makes me feel dependent on other people... I think that if we could vote, it would be better.”*

*– Youth participant*

*“Another thing that we could go back to are, like, student committee... sit on boards, come back in that group setting. See how they can write up reports and how they can share back to their community.”*

*– Youth participant*

*“Diversity is important to learn teachings from other different environments... we can find common ground.”*

*– Youth participant*

*“There’s never any advertising for anything [...] The most fun thing for me is going to a protest and I hear about the protests online.”*

*– Youth participant*

## Trust, Dialogue & Community Building

Dialogue played a crucial role in transforming our group dynamics, as we moved from initial hesitation to **meaningful connection**. Through open conversation, reflection, and shared activities, we began to build trust not only in one another, but also in the process of **collective learning**. Our willingness to engage with difficult topics such as trauma, expectations, and personal challenges created a foundation for deeper relationships and more honest, authentic engagement. This theme highlights how trust develops gradually and intentionally, ultimately enabling more thoughtful participation and stronger group cohesion.

*“[Location] the school ... it’s miserable. This year it’s been pretty miserable because I’ve been going through stuff. Kids are on their phone a lot, kids are disconnected; kids are not social. The adults aren’t helping; teachers ignore it all when youth are on their phones.”*

*– Youth participant*

*“I’ve learned a lot of this stuff through lived experience... I also had challenges with the healthcare system as it’s very binary... They weren’t looking at uncertainty; they were looking for absolute. We exist so much in the middle.”*

*– Youth participant*

*“Youth can be mentors too, not just adults.”*

*– Youth participant*

*“I learned different cultures from being here.”*

*– Youth participant*

*“Coming here [#CanadaWeWant Gathering] gave me a new perspective and made me see the opportunities I am missing. It’s really impressive.”*

*– Youth participant*

## Team Products

The Digital Safety and Digital Democracy theme team created a “Dream Tree” to express their hopes for safer, more inclusive community environments.

They also designed a banner highlighting their MTM “Meet in the Middle” message, inspired by youth reflections on finding balance between being a happy youth and a mature adult. Youth explained that “Meet in the Middle” meant creating shared spaces where adults and young people work together, listen to one another without hierarchy, and build trust through encouragement rather than pressure.

Another poster captured the issues and challenges faced in their communities, along with the changes they hope to see. Together, the banner and poster supported the ideas they shared and guided their discussions during the #CanadaWeWant showcase.

## Youth Recommendations

### Recommendation 1:

*The Canada we want has greater access to local journalism, representation, and intentional and accurate story telling.*

### Recommendation 2

*The Canada we want has a youth led portal that delivers information that is easily digestible.*

### Recommendation 3:

*The Canada we want should allow young people aged 16 and older to work in municipal, provincial, and federal elections. Every municipality should have at least one youth serving on each committee.*

### Recommendation 4:

*The Canada we want needs collaborative forums to explore the intersections of problems related to education, cost of living, and family experiences, that includes joint government and citizens.*



## Recommendation 5:

*We wish to lower the voting age to 16, while increasing civic education in elementary, middle, and high school. Youth should take part in policy development, actions, and progress reports. City, provincial, and federal spaces need to include us. Not only do young people need invitations to take part in actions and mentorship, but adults also need mentors too. The Canada we want deserves intergenerational partnership.*

## Showcase Speech

**Youth Participant One:** Throughout this week we've had the privilege of exploring the themes of democracy, digital safety, and dialogue. We discussed and found 4 main issues that affect us on a federal, provincial, and local level. Which included, the cost of living crisis, substance use, discrimination, and education.

**Youth Participant Two:** A big idea our group delved into was the process of getting to the bottom of these issues, and that starts with how we learn about them. We found that most people our age get their information about the world from the media, be that traditional outlets, or social media. It's common for youth to use the internet as an outlet when feeling helpless about the world, and in turn learn more about the places around them. People like us also learn from friends, in school, from family, and from spaces that have "grown up" conversations, as well as from adults in our third spaces, which can be spaces like SCC. We also learn about issues from our firsthand encounters, and self-directed pursuit of interests as we see adulthood in our horizon. Our Canada wants greater access to local journalism, representation, and intentional and accurate story telling.

**Youth Participant One:** In our conversations, we learned to what extent youth have had time to develop the skill of deciphering. Were able to see the point of views of a person from the first 10 seconds of a video, simply because we have grown up with technology our entire lives. But that also means we recognize the censorship that happens, the hard topics that are avoided, and the extreme rise of polarisation in our online lives. Our Canada wants a youth led portal that delivers information that is easily digestible.

**Youth Participant One:** Our group saw the importance of letting the gray area exist and of Meeting in The Middle.

**Youth Participant Three:** As one of the youngest participants at this conference, the experiences I have been exposed to have allowed me to not only find my voice, increase my

vocabulary, and better articulate myself, but also give me a space where my opinions are valued and respected. Growing up in an environment where youth like myself are constantly discouraged and deprived of the opportunity to be heard, we know that all tables would be better served with youth included and involved, after all, it's our future.

**Youth Participant Two:** Récemment, j'ai eu l'opportunité de commencer à travailler avec mon conseil municipal pour faire plusieurs changements, comme dans notre transports, en baissant l'âge nécessaire pour travailler aux élections municipales, et par planifier une rencontre de jeunes de toute autour du ville. Grâce à nos actions que nous avons faites et aux suggestions reçues de notre groupe de jeune, le conseil municipal aura maintenant une jeune sur chaque comité. Quand j'ai commencé à collaborer avec ses personnes, j'ai parlé aux autres de mon âge à propos de ce que je faisais, et un sentiment était dit par presque chaque jeune. J'ai toujours voulu faire cela, et je veux aider. Je crois que cela confirme quelque chose que j'ai toujours pensé. Je ne suis pas l'exception, je suis celui à qui on a demandé à parler.

**Youth Participant One:** One of the major issues that stood out to me was the lack of spaces offered to youths. More specifically, the ones curated for them to freely express themselves. Seeing the absence of youth celebrated spaces is what led me to create my own forum through dance and cultural preservation. Through this hesitant initiative, I've been fortunate to not only encourage youths to take pride in their heritage, spark inspiration for more involvement within their communities, offer ways to build & strengthen connections but to make meaningful and long-lasting contributions to the future we envision. This supports healthy and vibrant democracies. Our Canada needs collaborative forums to explore the intersections of problems related to education, cost of living, and family experiences, that includes joint government and citizens. By identifying problems, we also discover solutions.

**Youth Participant Three:** Likewise, democracy demands greater participation. We wish to lower the voting age to 16, while increasing civic education in elementary, middle, and high school. Youth should take part in policy development, actions, and progress reports. City, provincial, and federal spaces need to include us. Not only do young people need invitations to take part in actions and mentorship, adults need mentors too, the Canada we want deserves intergenerational partnership. The Canada we know is patient but determined and forward moving.

**Youth Participant Two:** Le Canada qu'on a besoin est pacifique, réaliste, encourageant et surtout plein d'espoir

**Youth Participant One:** The Canada we want keeps asking why and meets in the middle.