

**Ch-ch-ch-ch changes: Shifts in Civic Engagement for the  
City of Saratoga Springs**

**By**

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## Abstract

Changing rates of civic engagement since the 2016 elections have been examined broadly by stakeholders and researchers across the country, but no such research has yet been conducted for the city of Saratoga Springs. The purpose of this case study research was to better understand the current state of civic engagement and the extent to which it has changed since the 2016 elections. Qualitative and quantitative data was gathered from students, the public, members and directors of NGOs utilizing semi-structured interviews, online surveys, participant observation, and archival analysis. 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 different NGOs operating in the Saratoga Springs area. Our results showed that overall, civic engagement among both democrats and republicans has increased in the city of Saratoga Springs. Social media was found to be widely utilized among the NGOs we interviewed, and several NGOs indicated they would like to increase their social media presence to target more specific demographics that are currently underrepresented within their memberships. Our study will be useful for NGOs in the SS in terms of outreach strategies, education, fundraising, etc.

## Introduction

### *Civil Society and Social Cause Engagement in the Trump Era*

We are witnessing a time when there seems to be unprecedented political engagement across the country, both on the left and right. Trump is viewed by some as a President having an authentic tone and sorely needed vision of “America First”, not holding back his opinion, even when at times his advisors don’t agree. He can also be perceived as a man who is unpalatable to listen to, unwilling to collaborate or negotiate with, and politically incorrect. Trump’s political actions are inspiring people who both agree and disagree with him to actively participate in

expressing their ideas through civic engagement. Trump's supporters resonate with his policies and rally across the country to support, whereas those who are anti-Trump are protesting and marching. The last large increase in civic engagement dates back to the Reagan era. Reagan's policies had a long-term social effect that served the poor better but also assured economic growth (NY times, 1982).

The civic engagement seen since 2016 is driven by a variety of issues: environmentalism, immigration, women rights, social justice, and more (Sydell, 2017). Trump's deregulatory agenda has pushed at least 26 environmental regulations issued during the Obama administration to be overturned (Horn, 2018), not to mention his retreat from the Paris Agreement. For example, under the Obama administration, the E.P.A. had long favored tests on rats and other laboratory animals for epidemiological studies regarding pesticide regulation. But in the Trump era, regulators start to posit that epidemiological studies are "secret science" that should be banned, in order to overturn the chemical regulations (Horn, 2018). Rapid changes in the political environment have downplayed the importance of science and environmental protection. However, there also seems to be an increased awareness about the environment in the general population, regardless of this is in response to politics or not.

Civic engagement is becoming even more important due to the fact that Donald Trump taking office in 2016 shocked parts of America and served as a reminder to some to participate more in the democratic process. The Trump era brings with it a realization that the way our government functions is a reflection of our awareness and level of individual and collective civic action (Tuohy, 2018). It seems the U.S. has reached a sort of breaking point where civic engagement is needed for the protection and continued existence of many civic institutions (Browne, 2018). Over time, it's likely that our lack of civic engagement (as reflected annually in

low voter turnouts) has led us to this breaking point, so the Trump-era presents Americans with the opportunity to reclaim their democracy (Browne, 2018). Compared to voter turnouts in the 2012 election, minority voter turnout, specifically for black Americans, took a sharp decline in 2016's presidential election. This decline was observed on a national scale as well as in critical swing states that determined election results (Frey, 2017). The voter turnout rate for black Americans dropped over seven percent between the 2012 and 2016 elections, and this represented the largest decline for any minority group during this time period (Frey, 2017). However, voter turnout among millennials saw a slight increase between 2012 and 2016, and younger voters were more likely to submit a vote for Hillary Clinton (55%) compared to Donald Trump (37%)(Frey, 2016). Literature available on low voter turnout indicates the renewed importance for civic engagement, so it's important to assess changes to organizations and programs that advocate for and encourage civic engagement.

The purpose of this research is to better understand how a shifting political climate has impacted civic engagement in regard to different issues in Saratoga Springs, NY. This purpose will be used to guide the formation of our research methods and the content of our surveys and interview questions. In addition to this overarching purpose, several sub-questions will assist in guiding our research efforts. First, we want to determine how public opinion of different issues has changed since Obama was in office. While this topic is similar to our overarching purpose, it differs in that public opinion and civic engagement are not the same thing. While a shift in public opinion could cause a spike or dip in civic engagement, the two need to be understood separately before we are able to compare them or look for a correlation between the two variables. Next, we need to determine how NGOs representing different issues have evolved their methods and strategies for outreach, and if their strategies are guided by changes in the political climate. We

also want to better understand how the membership of different NGOs has changed since 2013, when baseline data was collected in Saratoga Springs by a separate Skidmore Capstone group. Finally, we want to identify which social issues are most popular among our study population, and which social issues have not taken root. To offer a broader perspective, we want to compare these results with national trends.

### *Baseline data for Saratoga Springs Environmental Organizations*

This research utilized “The Times They Are A-Changin’: Shifting Environmentalism in Saratoga Springs” by Riley Johnson, Gabby Stern, and Sarah Risley (2013), a Skidmore College Capstone Project, to establish a baseline dataset. The research starts by addressing the dramatic and multidimensional environmental movements that have occurred since the 1970s. Various changes in the movement’s characteristics contributed to this shift. At the time this paper was written, the movement was experiencing 1) a switch from “saving the whales” toward a concept of “sustainability” 2) a movement towards the local and 3) a greater emphasis on local initiatives over national legislation. Saratoga Springs, New York represents a good example of these environmental trends of grass-root progress, so authors chose Saratoga Springs to analyze the movement and impact (Johnson et al., 2013).

In 2013, there were 34 environmental-related groups occupying different “niches” in Saratoga Springs, which was a community seemingly rich in both financial capital and social capital. People cared about how to better serve their community as a whole by promoting environmental engagement, rather than specifically pushing an environmental agenda (Johnson et al., 2013). Authors categorized each group into the following sections by how many niches a group fulfilled: 1) Keystone Groups (5-6 niches) 2) Sectoral Groups (3-4 niches) and 3) Niche

Groups (1-2 niches). By both looking at the group's establishment dates and also classifying them, it allowed authors to identify four distinct waves of environmentalism that have occurred in Saratoga: 1) Preservation 2) Recreation 3) Conservation and Reaction to Development and 4) Sustainability (Johnson et al., 2013).

In order to further analyze the impacts of environmental organizations, authors collected membership numbers, operation funds, number of paid staff, events, Facebook likes, and stakeholders interviews from different NGOs in the city. We are particularly interested in better understanding changes to organizations since 2016. We want to do a similar research project, but for the year 2018-2019, and then compare these new results with data from the 2013 baseline paper in order to document the environmental movement's evolution and, in a broader sense, civic engagement in Saratoga Springs.

### *Trends in Civic Engagement*

“The Time Are A’ Changin” presents a need to study current trends in civic engagement in order to get a better idea regarding how trends have shifted since the paper was written in 2013.

### *Civic Engagement and Threats to Democracy*

This is not the first time that a large scale of grassroots organizations has seen a spike in participation for different social movements. The United States witnessed perhaps the most vociferous antiwar protests in its history during the Vietnam War. Supporters and protestors of the Vietnam War rallied across the country to advocate for their ideas. Conservatives supported participation by redefining the basis of the war's necessity (Scanlon, 2013). Conservatives'

rationale changed from the position that the “Communist assault against South Vietnam posed a direct threat to U.S. national security, to one of supporting the troops, upholding traditional American values of patriotism, and, by extension, buttressing President Nixon’s policies” (Scanlon, 2013, P274). One major rally during this conflict was the “Support Our Boys” event on 20 May 1969. On the other hand, liberal activists thought the reasons for the government putting American soldiers’ lives at risk were unjustifiable. They protested against the United State’s involvement in the Vietnam War. A major event on the left was the “Moratorium” rallies in Washington, DC, in November of 1969, which had a significant impact on national politics (Surbrug, 2003, P274). There was no doubt that the antiwar upheavals eroded the national will to participate in what was perceived by some to be an unwinnable war (Scanlon, 2013). New liberal movements later expanded their visions into feminism and environmentalism in the post-1960s era.

Civic engagement doesn’t have to be politically- concerned. It can be raised from things that people worry about, or things that are influential in daily lives. People gathering together in the 1960s saved New York from losing the Soho area. Environmental activists protest around the world to blame governments’ lack of action for climate change (Carrington, 2018). What these people have in common is that they try to spread their word out through using civic engagement. Although civic engagement doesn’t have to be politically-oriented, the current political climate and the increasing importance of social media are some factors that we hypothesized could positively influence civic engagement.

*Civic Action in the Age of Social Media*

Social media has enabled us to take form in online “armchair” activism, and Trump’s presidency and personal social media habits have given way to opportunities for this new kind of activism (Gonzales, 2017). This new form of activism, coined cyberactivism, mirrors offline forms of civic engagement but differs in that the online platform offers the opportunity for visibility to many organizations and causes that may not have otherwise been able to get their message out into the world (Gonzalez, 2017). The internet has provided a new way to participate in the democratic process and offers civic organizations the opportunity to reach a larger audience. Most political campaigns now also focus on the internet to portray a targeted image to potential voters, and social media has become a tool for NGOs and government agencies alike (Howard, 2016).

Still, there seems to be a significant amount of debate regarding if the use of social media is an advantage or disadvantage for civic engagement. On one side of the debate there is the claim that social media can help with outreach, awareness and modest forms of civic engagement (signing petitions, joining groups), but others insist that social media only encourages surface-level forms of engagement, and that civic engagement as a whole will decline if this social media trend continues (Howard, 2016). The latter idea is referred to as the “Slacktivism Hypothesis”, and holds that no significant political conversations happen online, and when politics do come up, discourse is divisive and argumentative (Howard, 2016). We want to investigate, as part of our research, how much social media plays a role in civic engagement for our study population in Saratoga Springs, NY and at Skidmore college in particular. To determine whether social media has an overall positive or negative effect on civic engagement, we included survey and interview questions assessing the amount and types of civic engagement encouraged by social



media, and the extent to which individuals participate online in relation to on-the-ground community engagement.

## Literature Review

### *The Erosion of American Democracy*

One article from the Haas Institute at Berkeley, claims that our democracy is eroding, which is said to happen when smaller voting populations have disproportionate power and influence over various policies (Browne, 2018). The author offers some explanations for why this happens, one of the most important being a lack of outreach to certain groups of voters that translates to lower voter turnout in the polls. To solve this problem, she suggests better outreach to these communities on a consistent basis as opposed to only during campaigns and election season (Browne, 2018). Education and outreach are her two recommendations to halt the erosion of American democracy (Browne, 2018).

A collection of data synthesized by the Brookings Institution, a nonprofit group focused on conducting research to solve the problems facing the world today, describes recent trends in voter turnout, specifically for the past two elections. The statistics discussed were gathered from the November 2016 Voting and registration supplement, and analyzed the millennial vote for the 2016 election. Data showed that millennials favored Hillary Clinton (55 percent) over Donald Trump (37)(Galston, W & Hendrickson, 2016). There was no significant change in overall millennial voter turnout between the years of 2012 and 2016 (Galston & Hendrickson, 2016). Civic engagement in the millennial population is important to study as it may indicate the level of civic engagement these populations will participate in as adults.

A separate set of data explains that while black Americans played a large role (in terms of voter turnout) in the 2008 and 2012 elections for Barack Obama, there was a significant decline

in black American voter turnout for elections in 2016 (Frey, 2017). The statistics written about were gathered from the November 2016 Voting and registration supplement, and compared voter turnout at the polls to eligible voters in a given area. While overall voter turnout only saw a slight decline (less than one percent), the minority voter turnout has decreased by over seven percent since 2012 (Frey, 2017). Three minority populations were considered in this study: Black Americans, Hispanics, and Asians. Of these three minorities, Black Americans saw the largest decline in voter turnout (Frey, 2017).

In terms of policy changes, our research into existing literature revealed that at least 26 rules issued in the Obama era have been revoked in the area of air and emissions, water, chemicals, and other categories (Horn, 2017). Whether the regulations will have positive or negative effects is unknown, but the overall trend is that new rules are replaced by less stringent rules under the Trump administration (Horn, 2017). This list provides us with a better understanding of the change of environmental rules. What are the impacts of these changes on people's health? Who will be benefited from these policies; chemical companies or people? And we will further examine how these changes motivate people to take action?

### *Historical Spikes in Activism*

Another relevant text examines American activism and the rise of political activities in the 70s and 80s (Foley, 2013). The chapter on environmental issues and the discussion about the Vietnam War are our main focus for this book. American's loss of faith in government motivates them to actively participate in political activities. Most Americans harbor little love for the antiwar movement, but they don't tolerate government illegality. Environmental pollutants, such as toxic waste, motivate people to care more about health and safety, so they protest to protect their own safety. A new era of economics and civic engagement is born under this political

atmosphere. The history of civic engagement is important to our study because it serves as the reference for the growing of civic engagement during the Reagan Era.

In this book, Sandra Scanlon examines Americans who supported the war and explores the war's impact on the burgeoning conservative political movement of the 1960s and early 1970s (Scanlon, 2013). In prior literature, much has been written about the antiwar movement and its influence on U.S. policy and politics. The author discusses how the Vietnam War shifted civic engagement for both parties (Scanlon, 2013). One major rally for supporters was "Support Our Boys" on 20 May 1969. Whereas on the other hand, the major event liberal activists were the "Moratorium" rallies in Washington, DC, in November 1969, which had a significant impact on national politics.

#### *Civic Engagement in the Trump Era*

Another article, published on the website for Northeastern University News, documents an interview with a Political Science Professor, John Portz, where civic engagement in the form of political activism in the Trump era is discussed. Professor Portz explains that the greater disagreement and tension there is within and between political parties, the higher likelihood of greater political activism opportunities such as marches, petitions and support groups (Callahan, 2017). He thinks that grassroots activism has a large potential to make great accomplishments in terms of legislation, but that in order to do so there must be a large amount of community support, and grassroots members must connect with political entities and members to create openings to shift legislative policy (Callahan, 2017). However, the Trump administration is inspiring new civic engagement on both left and right party (Sydell, 2017). Trump's supporters resonate with his policies and rally across the country to support, whereas those who are anti-Trump, are protesting and marching (Sydell, 2017). He inspires a new population to engage in

civic actions about environmentalism, women rights, etc. This article provides evidence that civic engagement is happening on a national trend on both parties, and the trend is also spreading to the local community.

### *Civic Engagement and Social Media*

A dissertation from Boston College emphasizes the importance of civic engagement and analyzes how students understand the connection between social media and civic engagement. The main advantage students cited for social media was its value as an information resource (Gismondi, 2015). Results found that many students used social media to find information and stay updated on the news, and some students tailored the apps on their phone towards civic engagement by downloading apps from organizations they supported to provide a constant stream of information (Gismondi, 2015). A disadvantage of social media for encouraging civic engagement is that some students felt bombarded by unwelcome news when signing in on social media apps, and other students noted their skepticism regarding the credibility of many social media sources (Gismondi, 2015). Overall, the author thinks that social media is a valuable tool that can be used to encourage civic engagement in the United States.

Another paper, written by a Loyola Marymount University student, examines the similarities and differences between online and offline forms of civic engagement. She claims that Trump's presidency has sparked activism among multiple parties, and offers us an unprecedented opportunity to understand this increase in activism (Gonzalez, 2017). There is still debate as to whether social media is advantageous or disadvantageous, and the author presents a case for both sides of this argument. Some research shows that social media further marginalizes disadvantaged populations in the democratic process, while other research claims that

developments in technology provide disadvantaged groups with the opportunity to participate in the democratic process through social media (Gonzalez, 2017).

Social media is also a tool used by present-day politicians to portray a certain image of themselves to the larger American population. This paper also introduces the “Slacktivism Hypothesis”, which states that as social media use increases, meaningful civic engagement decreases (Howard, et al., 2016). While social media can broaden the reach of NGOs pushing different issues, it can sometimes only produce “surface-level” participation, meaning that no meaningful form of civic engagement is generated through the use of social media. Things such as online polls, surveys, and fundraisers are all examples of this modest form of civic engagement.

## Methodology

### *Purpose Statement and Research Question*

The purpose of this research is to better understand how the shifting political climate since the 2016 election has impacted civic engagement in regard to social and environmental issues in Saratoga Springs, NY.

The guiding questions that framed our research also guided us in the formation of our methods as well as our discussion and results section, where we address answers to these key questions. Our broad, essential question was: “How have trends in civic engagement shifted in Saratoga Springs since 2013?” This was our primary guiding question, and all of our other questions fall under the umbrella of this primary area of interest. Within this category, we wanted to determine how public opinion of different issues has changed since Obama was in office, and since the data from our 2013 baseline research paper was collected.

Our intention in focusing on this question was to determine if political change resulting in national polarization has impacted civic engagement in the community of Saratoga Springs. Additionally, we sought to better understand 1) How public opinion of different issues has changed since Obama was in office. 2) How NGOs representing different issues have evolved their methods, and strategies for outreach and keeping the public informed, and if their strategies are guided by changes in the political climate. 3) Identify which social issues are most popular among our study population, and which social issues have not taken root. (to offer a broader perspective, we want to compare these results with national trends.) 4) How social media influences civic engagement, and the extent to which social media can be used as a tool for the general public to engage and participate, as well as a tool for NGOs to generate larger memberships and quickly mobilize public support.

### *Methodological Framework*

The methodological frameworks used to explore this topic were the case study and the phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2016). The specific phenomenon we studied for this research was the extent to which the 2016 presidential election, along with resulting policies and rhetoric, have affected civic engagement and community NGOs. The “case” we observed was the lived experience of Saratoga Springs residents, and how this overall experience, and the rates of participation at different NGOs, has changed since the 2013 baseline study was conducted. Our research analyzed the community of Saratoga Springs using an instrumental case framework (Creswell, 2016), with intentions for a specific focus on civic engagement.

### *Triangulation of methods*

Our data was triangulated for more accurate results, using both methods and source triangulation (Creswell, 2016; Table 1). These approaches included: Semi-structured interviews, focus groups, site visits, and document review (archival analysis). Interviews were recorded using Quick Voice Pro and transcribed to Microsoft Word, or using the service “TranscribeMe”. Additionally, paper and online surveys (Qualtrics) were randomly distributed; we also utilized snowball and purposive sampling (Creswell, 2016). Surveys were designed and distributed through Qualtrics during January 30th, 2019 to April 14th, 2019. As a result, 274 online surveys were collected. Our data sources were also triangulated. In addition to 274 surveys, we were also interested in the ideas of NGOs in Saratoga Springs. 10 semi-structured interviews were held at Skidmore College with 16 directors or E-board members.

Table 1: Methods and Respondents

Method	Number
Surveys with Skidmore College students	120
Surveys with the general public	121
Surveys with NGO members	33
Semi-structured Interviews with NGO Directors or E-board members	10

### *Study Design*

Three kinds of surveys were designed and distributed across the study area: one survey for the general population of Saratoga Springs, one for Skidmore College students and one for members of different NGOs in Saratoga Springs. The main focus was to learn how people’s civic engagement changed after the 2016 election (Appendix). For the NGO members, the focus

shifted a little because they were already assumed to be actively engaged. This survey focused on the change in important topics and their personal timeline of engagement in NGOs. All survey questions can be found in the Appendix.

### *Population and Setting*

Saratoga Springs is a small city in upstate New York, with an estimated population of 28,027 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). This small and vibrant city has gained national attention for housing the nation's oldest horse racecourse, its natural springs that inspired the city's name, and a lively downtown full of shops and restaurants (Skidmore Admissions, 2018). Demographically, the area has a balanced ratio of men to women (non binary individuals are not included in available census data), and the area is largely composed of white individuals (91.9%)(U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Over half of the population has a college degree or higher, and the median household income is around \$73,000, meaning the population is generally well-educated and financially secure. Broadly, the largest industries (in descending order) in Saratoga Springs are Healthcare, Retail, and Education (Data USA, 2016). In terms of occupations that make the city unique, Saratoga Springs has a comparatively larger amount of people working in engineering and education-related jobs, and engineering jobs are the highest paid occupation in the city (Data USA, 2016). In the city's' comprehensive plan for 2015, sustainable development for future projects is emphasized, as well as environmental protection and environmental health (City of Saratoga Springs Comprehensive Plan, 2015).

Within Saratoga Springs, Skidmore College, the second study population for our research, likely contributes to the city's large education industry. Skidmore is a small college, with around 2,500 students, and offers students small class sizes, a competitive student-faculty



ratio, and a range of study topics and courses (Skidmore Admissions, 2018). Notably, around 70% of students participate in a course with service learning components during their time at Skidmore, illustrating the college's encouragement of civic engagement in the form of volunteering, internships, project-based learning, and community-based research (Skidmore Admissions, 2018). The college, when compared to the larger area of Saratoga Springs, is more diverse, having 25% students of color, compared to 9% for the city of Saratoga Springs (Skidmore Admissions, 2018). The school has a large number of student clubs, making it easy for students to get involved in areas that interest them outside of coursework. Skidmore has expressed a dedication to environmental protection, and this dedication is reflected in the school's Strategic Plan, which emphasizes environmental responsibility and sustainability. The school runs on around 40% renewable energy, with plans to expand on that percentage in the future (Skidmore Sustainability, 2018). Skidmore gets most of their renewable energy from solar, small- hydro, and geothermal systems, and works with different entities in the community through PPA's and PURPA agreements that are beneficial to both parties (Skidmore Sustainability, 2018). While there is much less information available on the political preferences of the student body, online surveys and polls indicate that students feel Skidmore harbors a liberal atmosphere with a majority of students identifying as Democrat (Niche, n.d.). The school does, however, host a range of clubs with a focus on civic engagement, such as Skidmore Republicans, Skidmore Democrats, Democracy Matters, Environmental Action Coalition, Benef-Action, Feelgood, Feminist Action Network, and several others (Skidmore Student Life, 2018).

### *Data Analysis and Limitations*

Following initial data collection, analysis varied depending on which method was analyzed. For surveys, responses were tabulated from multiple choice answers, number scales, and cross-tabulations of data. Data collected from semi-structured interviews was recorded using QuickVoice Pro and later transcribed manually to Microsoft Word. These transcriptions were then coded to identify thematic trends and emerging topics, as well as deviant cases (Creswell, 2013). Data was presented in a variety of formats including Informational and Data Charts, Quote Charts, Graphs, Cross-tabulations, and descriptive narratives.

A major limitation of our data collection was that the number of interviews we were able to perform. This was limited due to the time constraints of manually transcribing interviews. The academic course lasted only 8 months, so much more data could have been collected from a broader range of sources if more time was available.

## **Results**

The majority of our data was gathered from 235 online survey responses and 10 semi-structured interviews with members and representatives from various NGOs. This data is presented below by category of responses: Influence of Political Climate, Current state of NGOs in Saratoga Springs, and Social Media. Results are broken down for each study population and reported under the broader heading, with various sub-topics (sub-headings).

### *Influence of Political Climate*

#### **General Population of Saratoga Springs**

Among members of the general population for Saratoga Springs, survey respondents were predominantly female (75%, 55/73), Democrat (51%, 54/106) and reported an increase in

their level of civic engagement (59%, 64/108) since 2016. For the general population, we found (broadly) that respondents described increasing levels of civic engagement, and attributed this increase to heightened tensions and polarity present in the political climate. Of all respondents who reported an increase in their levels of civic engagement, this increase was estimated as having 50% more engagement than prior to 2016. When asked why their level of civic engagement had increased, the top two reasons given were “I have an increased awareness of social and environmental issues” (62%, 38/61), and “Increased severity of issues” (64%, 39/61). Five respondents (8%, 5/61) chose “other” and wrote in their own answer. Of these five people, 4 out of 5 of them listed the president as their reasoning for increasing levels of civic engagement (Table 2).

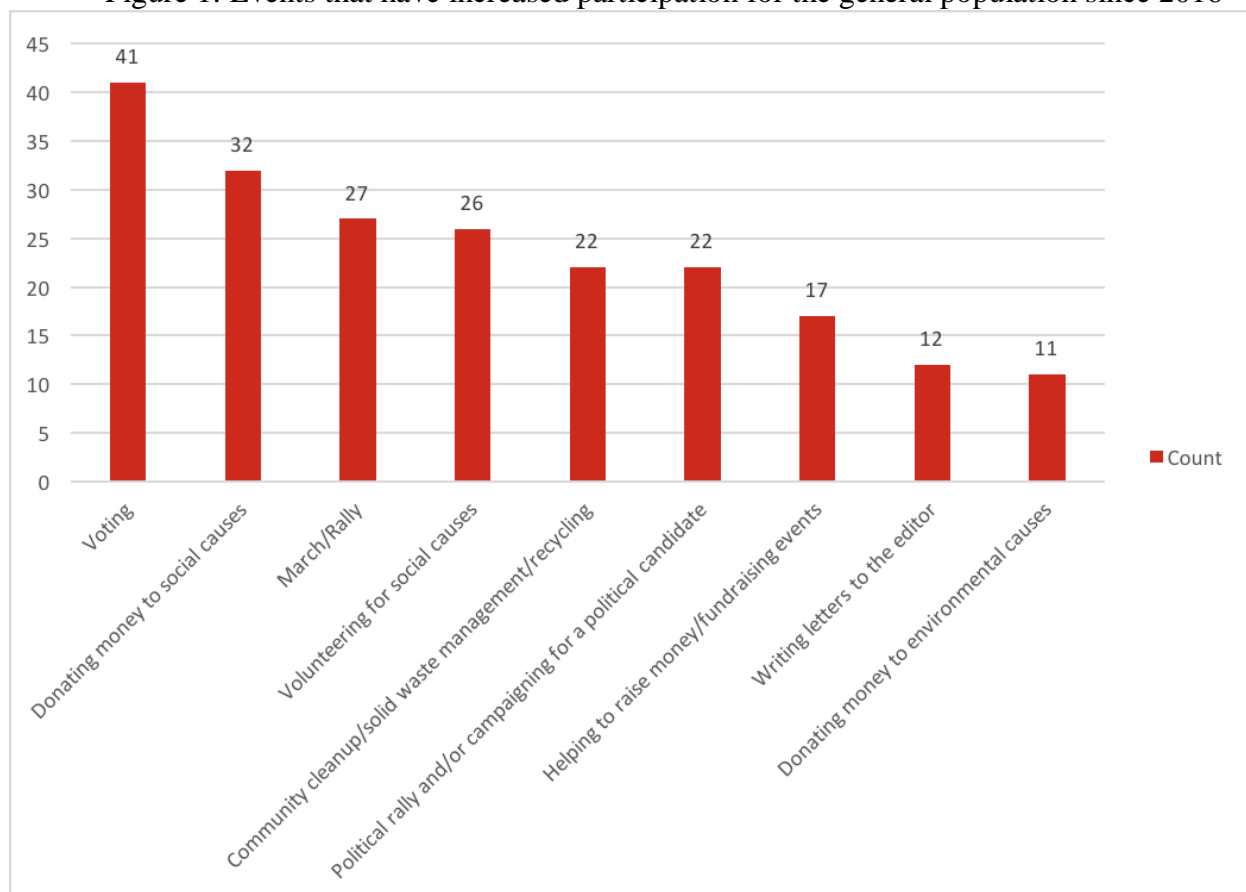
Table 2: Open-ended Responses to “Why has your level of Civic Engagement increased?”

Respondent	Response
1	<b>“Madman President”</b>
2	<b>“Unethical President”</b>
3	<b>“The great divide in our nation, and president Trump”</b>
4	<b>“In reaction to dismissal of the popular vote and the electoral college appointing an unqualified candidate as the president who LOST the popular vote by nearly 3 million ballots.”</b>
5	<b>“As a form of therapy”</b>

The top three means of increased types of civic engagement that respondents reported with higher frequency were: Voting (68%, 41/60), attending marches/rallies (45%, 27/60 ), and

donating money to social causes (53%, 32/60). When given the statement “The current political climate has influenced the increase in my civic engagement”, 85% (52/61) of respondents “agreed” or “strongly agreed”, with over half of respondents in strong agreement (32/61).

Figure 1: Events that have increased participation for the general population since 2016



### NGO members

We surveyed 27 members of NGOs and interviewed 10 members of NGOs in Saratoga Springs. Among survey respondents for this group, 93% (25/27) cited an increase in their level of civic engagement, and this increase was attributed mostly to increased severity of issues (40%, 20/50), increased polarity of issues (24%, 12/50), and increased opportunity to participate (20%, 10/50). Among NGO members that took our survey, the age range was mostly 41 and above,

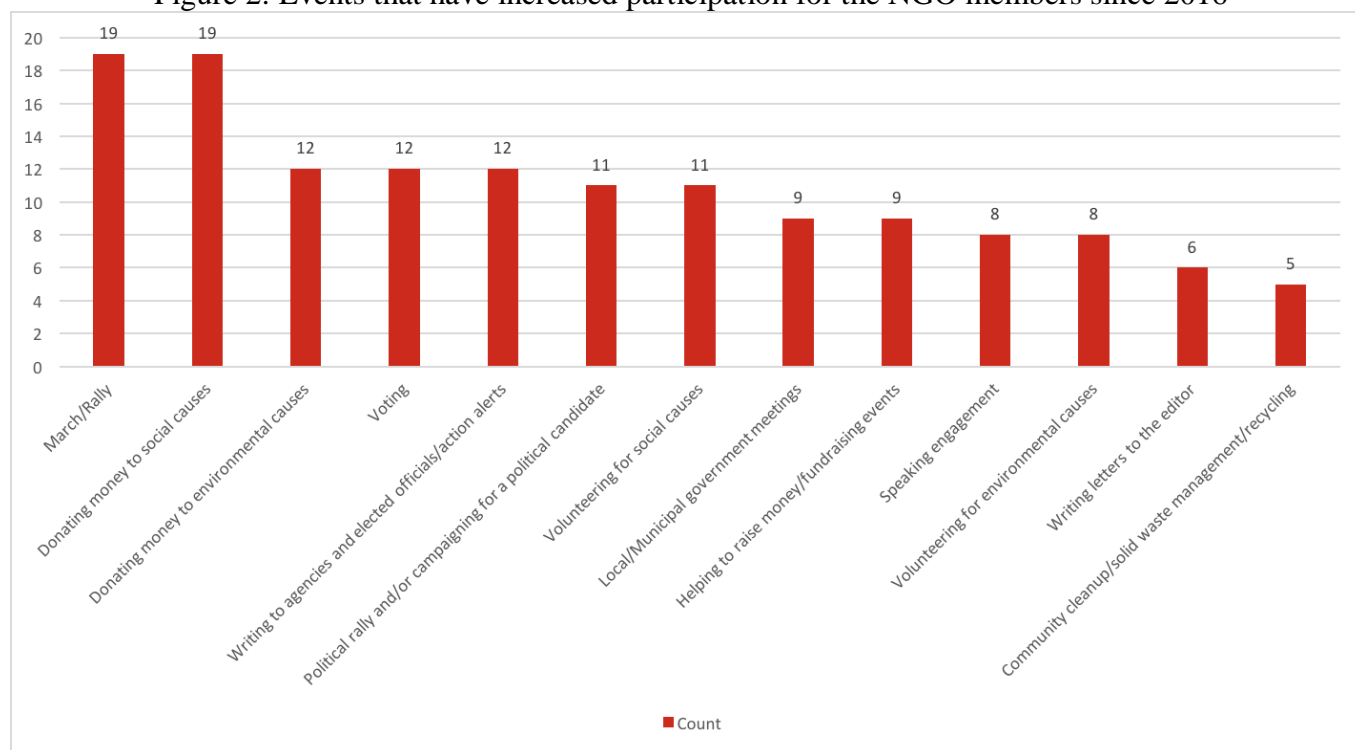
which reflects the “younger generation problem” that NGO representatives talked about during our interviews. It is hard for NGOs to attract the younger generation, even if they are more familiar with technology and social media; they are not becoming active members. The majority of our NGO respondents, 75% (21/28), were 41 years or older. As for the party affiliation, 24/27 (89%) of these respondents were Democrats and 7% (2/27) were Republican. One respondent commented that

Donald Trump has threatened communities, the environment, national safety, longstanding environmental laws, foreign nationals, families, global security, women, my right to have an abortion, your mom, civility, decency, and intelligent thought[...]and we must protect everything we've worked so hard to accomplish, by removing him from the White House.

This quote reflects the impacts of a more intense political environment, exacerbated by the actions of the President, and the continued erosion of Democracy and law.

In terms of events that NGO respondents participated in more since 2016, there was a similar distribution among the majority of our choices. Figure 1 reports the events that NGO respondents participated in more since 2016. The events that saw the largest increases after 2016 were: March/rally (68%) and donating money to social causes (68%). The variety of events that respondents were actively engaged in reflects on the diversity of opportunities that exist for increasing civic engagement in Saratoga Springs. When given the statement “The current political environment influence my decision to increase my civic engagement”, 22 out of 25 respondents strongly agreed (Count= 17) or agree (Count= 5), with 1 strongly disagreeing.

Figure 2: Events that have increased participation for the NGO members since 2016



President Trump was the most frequently mentioned motivation to be more civically engaged among NGO respondents. One respondent left the following comment in their survey:

I have become more aware of the necessity of civic engagement. I was very involved back in the early to late '80s when I lived in Syracuse, but drifted away from things. The election of Donald Trump made me realize it was time to get involved again, that too many people thinking 'It can't happen here' is one of the things that has caused us to be in the situation we are now in. Since 2016 I have been to two women's marches - one in NYC and one in Albany; I have gotten involved in the Saratoga Immigration Coalition, and have taken part in a couple of PRIDE marches.

This quote indicates that the policies of President Trump motivate more people to express their ideas because the voice can only be heard when people are engaged in issues. A direct response to this intense political climate is that NGOs have more marches and rallies for interested

Saratoga residents to attend. Many NGO respondents commented that there were more marches and rallies than prior to 2016, more civic engagement opportunities leading to an increasing level of civic engagement.

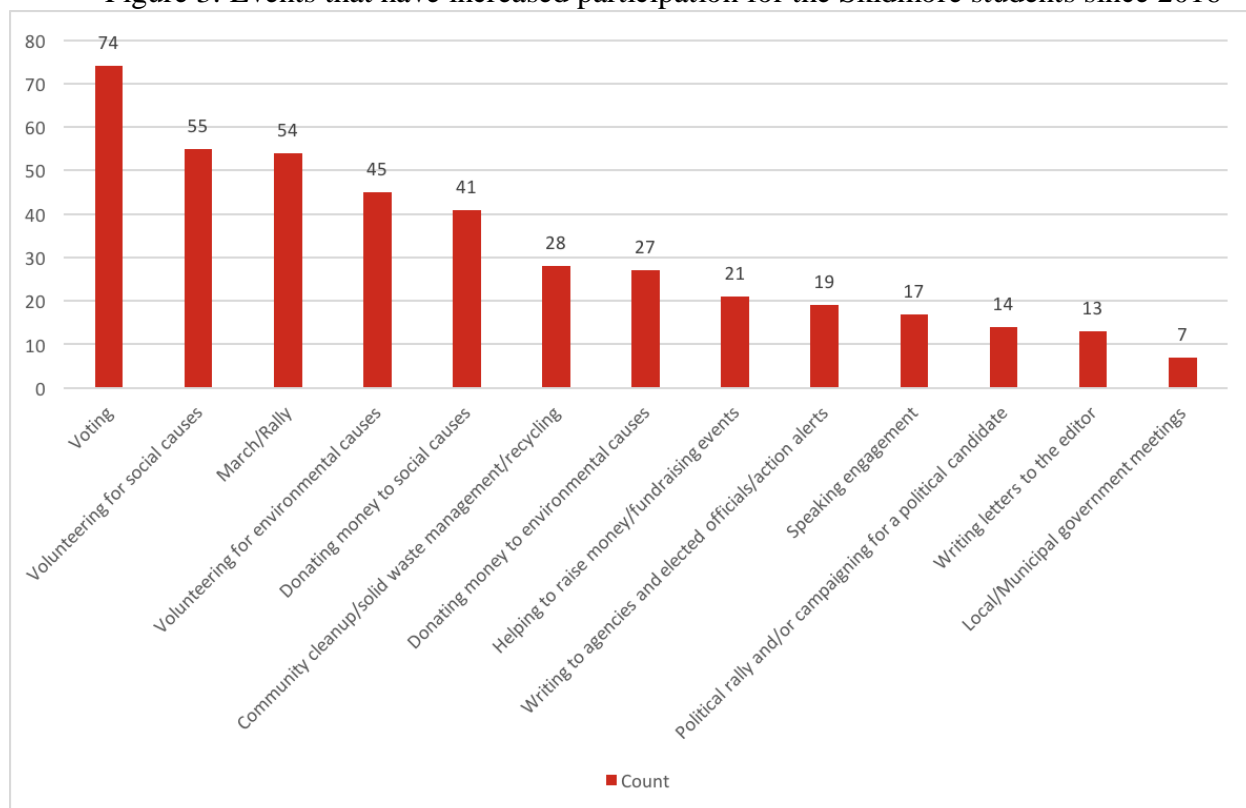
### **Skidmore College Students**

For the Skidmore College students that participated in surveys or interviews, the majority were in the 18-25 age group (96%, 109/113) and female (74%, 59/80). The majority of respondents for this survey also showed an increase in civic engagement, with 72% (77/108) of respondents indicating that their level of civic engagement has increased by an average of 56%. Of respondents who indicated an increase in civic engagement, this increase was attributed to increased awareness for social and environmental issues (56%, 60/107), increased severity of issues (51.4%, 55/107), and increased opportunities to participate (50%, 53/107). Of respondents that increased their level of civic engagement, the most popular types of civic engagement were: Voting (69%, 74/107), volunteering for social causes (51.4%, 55/107), marches and rallies (50%, 54/107), and community clean-up (26%, 28/107). When asked to respond to the statement, “The current political climate has influenced changes in my level of civic engagement”, 90% (70/77) of students either agreed or strongly agreed, with over 50% (40/77) strongly agreeing with the statement.

Skidmore College students were also asked to respond to the statements: “Skidmore College encourages civic engagement for its students through courses, events, and clubs” and “Skidmore College currently offers enough classes that are geared towards civic engagement”. The majority of respondents (70%, 75/107) agreed or strongly agreed that Skidmore College encourages civic engagement through courses, events, and clubs, but only 26% (28/107) of

respondents agreed that Skidmore offers enough classes geared towards civic engagement, indicating that while students recognize Skidmore for encouraging civic engagement in its students, there still could be more classes geared towards this end.

Figure 3: Events that have increased participation for the Skidmore students since 2016



#### *Current State of NGOs in Saratoga Springs: Membership Rates*

Most NGOs have experienced an expansion in their membership and attention level since 2016. For NGOs that have a long history in Saratoga Springs, their membership has increased or stayed relatively constant based on nature and establishing year of NGOs. However, for the NGOs that established in a response to the 2016 election, their followers on Facebook and members subscribing to newsletters increased significantly. For example, the Facebook group of Saratoga Unites, which was established in 2017, experienced membership growth from 0 members to over 1,000 members, in just a few years.



The Democrat party experienced tremendous growth in memberships, especially for new charters established after 2016. We interviewed Eddy, who was an active member of different Democrat-oriented organizations in Saratoga Springs. He reported that there was an increase in the Saratoga County Democratic committee, the City of Saratoga Democratic committee, as well as Democrats Socialist of America (DSA)(Personal Communication, 2019). Saratoga DSA did not exist until mid-2018 and has grown tremendously since its establishment. Although the exact number of membership increase is unknown, the membership was probably in the range of double or triple (Eddy, Personal Communication, 2019). Locally, a significant uptake in people participating has also been witnessed. While Eddy was unsure about whether members were active before 2016, he was confident that the Democratic activities like campaigning and trying to get people elected to office definitely increased substantially (Personal Communication, 2019).

There were a lot of people who had previously not been active but had registered as members of NGO or political parties, that have increased their activity. More people ran for office and more people were doing work in campaigns to get people elected. For instance, Courtney, from the Saratoga Democrats, also said that more energy has been observed from the Democratic Party, especially related to youth than the Saratoga Democrats had ever seen before. However, during our conversation with Matthew Veitch, Saratoga Springs City Supervisor and the President of Saratoga Preservation Foundation, he commented that it is still hard for the Saratoga County to get the same level of engagement that the city gets. People don't come to participate in most of their public meetings, nor do they come to the public comment periods at the county (Personal Communication, 2019). Furthermore, there is only limited media exposure about what the county and the city is working on with their agendas.

For NGOs that have existed for a long time in Saratoga Springs, the membership has stayed quite steady since 2016, but innovative events have attracted new members. Samantha, Vice President from the Saratoga Preservation Foundation, told us that their historic home tour every summer has been very popular since the tour was changed from winter to spring a few years ago. People are interested in the history of nice buildings on Broadway and all around Saratoga Springs when they come to visit the city in its best season. In addition, Rachel from the Saratoga Preservation Foundation commented on the popularity of the Heart Bomb campaign on Instagram where people went around the town and took pictures of their favorite historic buildings during the Valentine's Day week. The public also talked about what they loved about historic homes and why it is important for the buildings to exist and continue to exist. This Instagram event has gained a lot of popularity among the younger generation, thus increasing the memberships.

The overall findings from our interviews with different NGO Directors and representatives are consistent with the general trends from our surveys. There was an increase in the level of civic engagement not only in the general population but also among NGO members. More people who were registered as members of NGOs increased their participation since 2016. Explanations for this change can be political and non-political based on the nature of organizations and events. The political climate has no doubt influenced the civic engagement of Saratoga Democrats, Saratoga Unites, DSA, Saratoga PRIDE, and the Saratoga Immigration Coalition. More appealing content, diversity in the nature or types of events, and more targeted campaigns towards younger generations will attract more members, thus increasing the overall civic engagement.

*Challenges/ Demographic*

Table 2: Challenges that NGOs are facing in Saratoga Springs

Challenges	NGO
Reliance on volunteers	Preservation Foundation, Sustainable Saratoga, Saratoga Democrats, Saratoga Unites, Saratoga PRIDE, Saratoga Immigration Coalition.
Youth engagement/ participation	Saratoga PRIDE, Bikeatoga, Sustainable Saratoga, Saratoga Democrats, Saratoga Preservation Foundation.
Engage meaningful conversations through social media	Sustainable Saratoga, Saratoga Unites, Saratoga Preservation Foundation, Saratoga PRIDE
Balanced age of membership	Saratoga Democrats
Balanced viewpoints among charters	Saratoga Democrats

Table 2 presents the five most frequently mentioned challenges during interviews with NGO Directors. The first challenge was a heavy reliance on unpaid volunteers, mentioned by Preservation Foundation, Sustainable Saratoga, Saratoga Democrats, Saratoga Unites, Saratoga PRIDE, and Saratoga Immigration Coalition. Because most NGO Directors have daytime jobs or other obligations, for example, the Director of Saratoga Immigration Coalition is also a Skidmore professor, they spend their spare time organizing meetings and events as well as updating newsletters and social media. When things caught up in daytime jobs, both Directors and unpaid volunteers have less time to spend on NGO agendas. It was a common problem in NGOs in Saratoga Springs because most NGOs rely on donations to operate, leading to limited budget to hire much full-time staff. One possible solution to fully utilize the potential resources

in Skidmore College: hire students who are willing to gain experience in NGOs through paid or unpaid internships.

The second challenge is that NGOs in Saratoga Springs want to increase youth participation and engagement, hinted at by Saratoga PRIDE, Bikeatoga, Sustainable Saratoga, Saratoga Democrats, and Saratoga Preservation Foundation. As shown in surveys for NGO members, the age range was 30 and plus, which left room for the younger generation to participate in. Referring back to the first challenge that NGOs in Saratoga Springs noted, reliance on volunteers, it is understandable that active members and directors who are 30 plus have daytime jobs. Thus, engaging more youth in events, meetings, and social media can potentially address this first challenge. NGOs can better utilize social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube to spread their missions far and wide. According to our surveys for the Skidmore College community, Instagram was the second favorite social media platform that the respondents use to get news. Since Facebook is already a well-utilized platform for all NGOs we interviewed, Instagram or YouTube could be the next social media platform to explore. In addition, a balanced age of membership is crucial to maintain a stable member base. Older generations have gone through a lot of battles and have an amazing experience, which can contribute valuable insights to events and meetings. Overall, engaging more youth is challenging, but maintaining a balance in terms of age is key to have balanced viewpoints in NGOs.

Another challenge related to social media is that it is difficult to stimulate meaningful conversations, so what we often see from social media sites like Facebook is surface-level engagement. Because NGO members might have Facebook friends who share different opinions on many issues, they are concerned about their posts and opinions. Trying to avoid unnecessary

arguments, many NGO members chose to have surface-level intensity conversations. Moreover, if members were having any kind of dialogue or discussion on different topics, it was important to make sure things stayed in an appropriate level, respecting different perspectives as much as possible (Courtney, Personal Communication, 2019). Considering these limitations, NGOs could establish a private Facebook page for active members to have more meaningful and engaging conversations on sensitive topics.

### *Motivations for Changes (NGO's)*

Since 2016, the political climate has inspired not only the changes in NGOs' popularity but also the establishments of many new NGOs in Saratoga Springs. These NGOs were formed in direct response to tensions brought on by the 2016 election. For example, organizations such as Saratoga Unites and Saratoga DSA were formed in response to the election and policies of President Trump. Eddy, an active member of the Democratic party in Saratoga Springs, commented that:

Seeing Donald Trump get elected was a shock. Just seeing the whole campaign unfold was deeply disturbing and then seeing him elected was like a serious shock. I feel like that we had reached a point where if I did not do something even just something small to try to make a difference a positive difference then I wouldn't be able to live with myself anymore. (Personal Communication, 2019).

Cindy, President of Saratoga Pride, also discussed that the current political climate and the difficulties her organization was facing motivates them to organize more events, such as marches and rallies. There are more events, marches, and rallies that Saratoga residents can

participate in compared to the number of events that existed before 2016. Thus, these increasing opportunities lead to an increasing level of civic engagement in Saratoga Springs.

Similarly, the difficulties in protecting historic buildings, healthcare system policies, and immigration policies and rhetoric motivate people to stand up and speak up about their viewpoints. As Saratoga Springs continues to grow, it is becoming increasingly difficult and a little more political trying to keep the history (Dunn, Personal Communication, 2019). Thus, Saratoga Preservation Foundation has been motivated to use diverse social media tactics to attract residents' attention in Saratoga Springs. The changes in Saratoga Springs economic development motivate NGOs to change strategies. Moreover, difficult situations that freelance workers and immigrants are facing inspired establishment of the Alliance for the Creative Economy (AEC), as well as motivating the Saratoga Immigration Coalition to organize more events. It has been hard for people working in the creative industry to find jobs in business because the creative industry is not considered important for a thriving economy (Dunn, Personal Communication, 2019). However, it is the fourth largest economic contributor in the States. In order to encourage the government to take freelancing seriously, AEC is active in engaging people in response to these problems. Similarly, the current political climate and policies exacerbate immigrants' living environment, so Saratoga Immigration Coalition was motivated to make some changes.

#### *Volunteers/staff (NGOs)*

Many of the NGOs we spoke with were primarily created and run by volunteers and had few or no paid staff members on board. Lois Shapiro-Canter, from Saratoga Unites, made a very compelling point about the state of volunteers in Saratoga Springs, explaining that "I had no idea how much of our community is run by the power of retired people volunteering" (Personal

communication, 2019). This reflects sentiments indicated by multiple NGOs regarding the fact that most of their volunteers are on the older side, and there is generally less engagement, for the NGOs we spoke with, among younger citizens.

One barrier to growth for some NGOs is simply time. Because many NGOs are run primarily through volunteers, and these volunteers are not paid and participate mostly because they are interested and dedicated, not everyone consistently has time to dedicate to volunteering. Lois Shapiro-Canter, from Saratoga Unites, summed this point up nicely, stating that “People are really busy. They have kids they have jobs”, so NGOs are sometimes competing for volunteer time, which becomes limited when people’s lives become busier. On this note, Rachel Dunn, from the Saratoga Preservation Foundation, said that “Things happen. You have a paying job and you have meetings and things come up. And so it's something that you have to really kind of be passionate about” (Personal Communication, 2019). This echoes Lois’s feelings of simply not having enough time, and volunteers having to juggle between their normal lives and the needs of the NGO they’re participating in.

Jennifer Natyzak, from Bikeatoga, also noticed that the majority of volunteers were from the older, retired population in Saratoga Springs: “Really it’s mostly retirees. It’s interesting. So it comes in and waves where there’s there are young folks” (Personal communication, 2019). Even though retirees make up the majority of volunteers, she interestingly notes that students do come to volunteer in waves. One goal that Bikeatoga could work towards is transitioning the young volunteers that only participate occasionally into a more steady network of youth volunteers that regularly come out to support Bikeatoga events and initiatives.

*Changes to event coordination (NGOs)*

Wendy Mahaney, Sustainable Saratoga's Director, noted the changes they have undergone in terms of event coordination, explaining that one change they have made is bringing on younger staff members in order to facilitate the NGO's social media presence and help connect with the younger generation of potential volunteers (Personal communication, 2019). Courtney DeLeonardis, from Saratoga Democrats, expressed a desire to gear some of their events more towards the younger generations in order to broaden the reach of the organization (Personal communication, 2019), and Norah Brennan from Saratoga Unites mentioned that one thing their organization has done to generate more members is diversifying the type of events available to members. For example, the group wanted to have a particular person come speak, but her rate was very high, so in order to make it more affordable, the NGO opted for an online webinar, which cost less. As a result, they saw a larger amount of viewers and even had people tuning in from all over the world (Personal Communication, 2019). These changes make sense, considering that our survey respondents ranked social media as their second top source for getting information on news and events in the area. It would be a logical decision for NGOs to put their efforts into social media and online presence since survey respondents have made it clear that this is where they are most active.

### *Social Media*

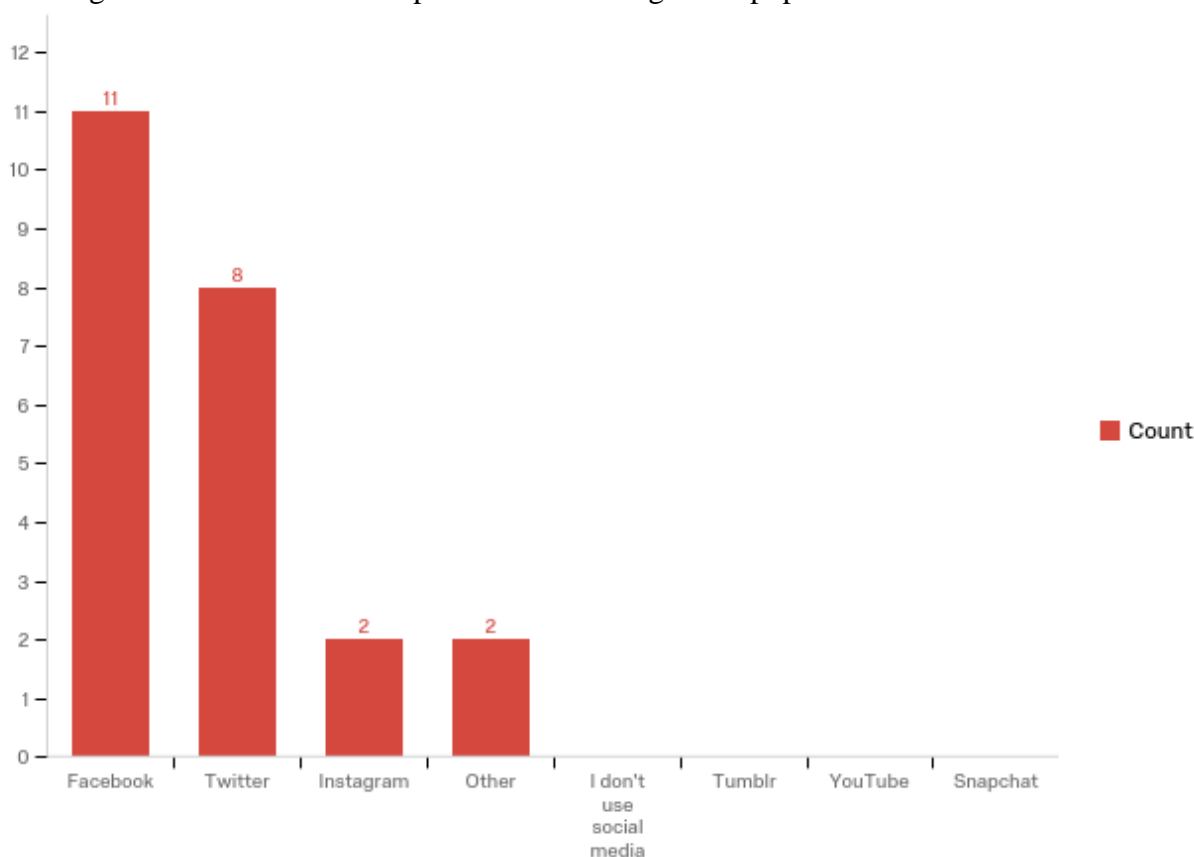
#### **General Population**

When asked if social media has had an influence on respondent's changes in engagement, 79% (48/61) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that social media has such an influence. Similarly, when we asked respondents what their primary source was for staying informed on news and events, the top two answers were online news outlets (27%, 27/101) and social media



(24%, 24/101). “My friends and family” was the least popular option (7%, 7/101)). Respondents were also asked to select which social media outlet they used most to gain information on news and current events, and Facebook proved to be the overwhelming favorite among respondents, with 48% (11/23) of respondents selecting this as their most used social media outlet. The second most popular social media outlet for getting information on news and current events was twitter (35%, 8/23), followed by Instagram (9%, 2/23), and “other” (9%, 2/23). Respondents that listed “other” had the option to write in an answer and two respondents entered in “BuzzFeed” and “wechat”. Lastly, when asked the question “ What is your primary source of information for staying engaged with community organizations, action alerts, and civic engagements events?”, the majority of respondents (47.5%, 48/101) listed social media.

Figure 4: The social media preference for the general population



## **NGO members**

The results for NGO members are different from those for the general population and Skidmore students: there is more polarity in responses. When asked “Social media has helped to instigate the increase in my level of civic engagement”, 27% (7/26) of respondents disagree and strongly disagree with this statement, a much higher number than the general population and Skidmore students. 65% (17/26) of respondents agree and strongly agree with this statement. Among those in agreement that social media increases the level of civic engagement, advantages of social media include but are limited to “easier connection to local people and events”, “knowing what is happening and where it is happening in the area and beyond”, “NGOs, elected officials, community groups, etc. have really increased their use of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to advertise community events, action alerts, educate me on issues, and make sure the public and members are aware of what to do, where to be, and the immediacy of social and environmental issues”. On the other hand, social media plays a negative role: respondents comment that “it's reminded me that I need to spend more time off of social media”, “upsetting to see the lack of proper information being shared”, or “I purposely do not use Facebook, Twitter, or other social media sites”. Therefore, respondents resonate with social media differently based on personal interests and experience. However, We believe the majority agree that social media is a great place to obtain the latest information.

## **NGO Directors**

Sustainable Saratoga, Saratoga Democrats, Saratoga Immigration Coalition and Saratoga Unites all listed Facebook as their main social media platform. Of the NGOs who use Facebook, they cite a variety of reasons for choosing to engage on the Facebook platform. Sustainable Saratoga reports using Facebook to provide a vector of information to followers about recycling

(Mahaney, personal communication, 2019). Since people sometimes don't know what's recyclable, one of the goals for their Facebook page is to inform people about what they can and can't recycle.

Lois Shapiro-Canter, Saratoga Unites Director, thought that it is possible for meaningful engagement to occur over social media: "We actually have some pretty in-depth conversation there that you don't see on the Facebook page that is open to the public, and so and we have a much smaller audience on the private page"(Personal Communication, 2019). Saratoga Unites formed a private Facebook page where page members could converse without the fear of being ostracized by people living in the surrounding community, which is largely Republican. Courtney DeLeonardis, from Saratoga Democrats, reported that monitoring Facebook can be a particularly tough challenge, explaining that "If you're having any kind of dialogue or discussion on different topics you know you really want to make sure things stay in an appropriate level" (Personal Communication, 2019 ).

The Saratoga Preservation foundation said that while Facebook is probably the 2nd biggest facilitator as far as getting people together for the foundation's various events. Since their main demographic tends to be on the older side, the group reported that emails are still the best way to gather members for events. Cindy Swadba from Saratoga PRIDE, on the other hand, indicated that the group doesn't have much of a Facebook presence, although there is interest in developing new outreach strategies, including social media, to reach younger audiences (Personal Communication, 2019). Maxine Lautenberg, Saratoga Immigration Coalition Director, reported that the group is trying to broaden their online reach with the help of other NGOs and that they plan to make updates to their website so that information is clear and up to date (Personal Communication, 2019). Jennifer Natyzak, from Bikeatoga, said that "I think social

media's been a great way for us to get in touch with the younger crowd”, echoing the sentiments of various NGOs who found social media to be a great tool for connecting with the younger generation.

These results indicate that while many NGOs realize the value that social media can have for outreach and event coordination, most NGOs also thought that it was an area that they could improve upon. Representatives for multiple NGOs, including Saratoga Unites, Saratoga Democrats, Saratoga Preservation Foundation, and Bikeatoga all expressed interest in making improvements to their social media accounts in some way and engaging the younger generation was a primary motivator for this interest since younger people tend to be more engaged on social media. There seemed to be some disagreement about how useful social media is to instigate civic engagement, with many NGO representatives acknowledging that while Social media platforms are capable of producing meaningful discussion, they are also capable of polarizing people even more, and inciting people to “post” rude and argumentative comments that they would likely not say in person. This relates back to the Slacktivism hypothesis that claims that more social media use only engages people on a surface level and has a greater potential to cause disagreement.

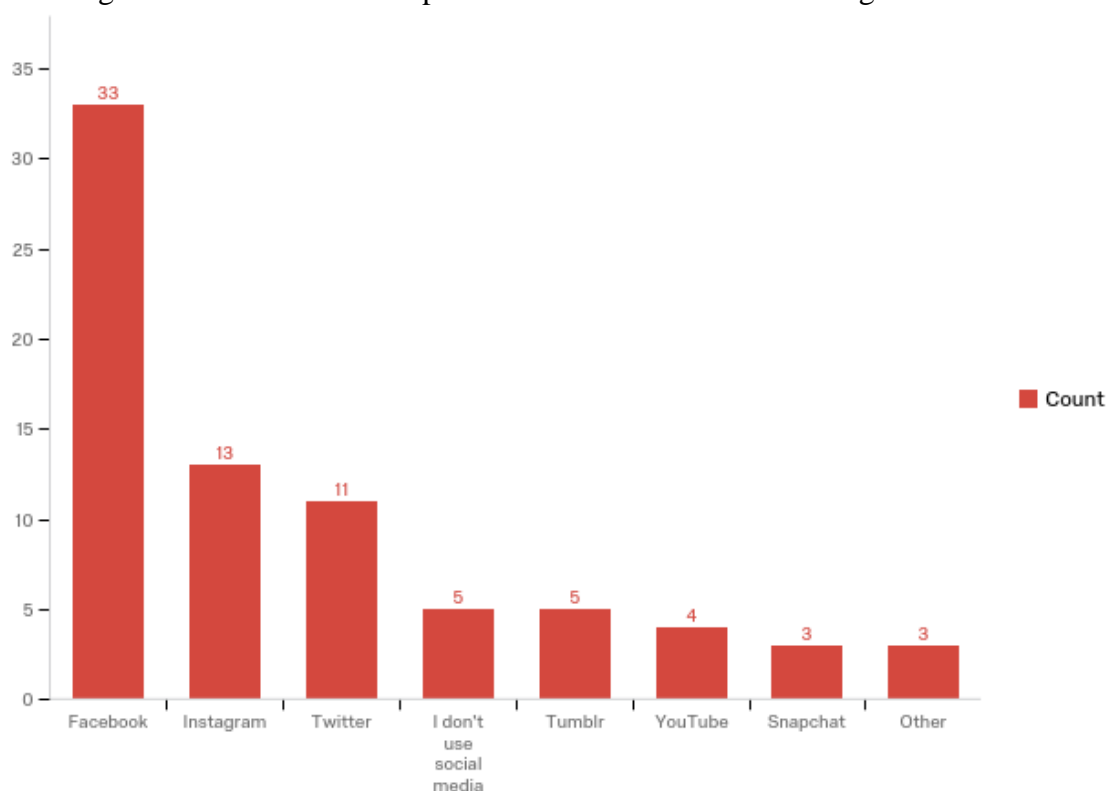
### **Skidmore College Students**

Results for social media were similar to findings reported for the general population survey. When asked to respond to the statement “Social media has helped to instigate the increase in my level of civic engagement”, 79% (85/107) of students agreed or strongly agreed. When asked to list their primary source for staying informed of current events and news, the majority of students listed online news outlets (40%, 43/107) and social media (36%, 39/107) as their primary sources for information. Similarly, when respondents were asked to list their

primary source for staying engaged with community organizations, action alerts, and civic engagement events, almost half of respondents (45%, 48/107) listed social media and their number one source.

When asked about *which* social media platform was mostly used as a source for information on news and current events, Facebook was again the most popular outlet, with 43% (33/77) of respondents listing Facebook as their most used source. The second most popular social media outlet was Instagram (17%, 13/77), followed by Twitter (14%, 11/77). The least popular options were YouTube (5%, 4/77) and Snapchat (4%, 3/77 ).

Figure 5: The social media preference for the Skidmore College students



## Recommendations

One of our biggest recommendations to the NGOs who expressed that they would like to broaden their membership is to improve on social media and online presence. This could be accomplished by designating someone to the role of Social Media Coordinator so that there is one person in charge of updating and monitoring all social media accounts. Many NGOs also expressed the desire to bring younger audiences into their circle. The Saratoga Springs NGO scene relies heavily on the retired population of volunteers in the area, so getting younger people involved could help broaden and diversify their reach. A potential solution that could help solve this problem would be for NGOs to hire a college intern since younger people are typically more invested and interested in social media and may have an easier time creating pages and accounts that resonate with younger audiences. The intern, like most, could be unpaid, but would still be fully dedicated to their tasks, since taking on an internship would require more accountability and possibly impact the individual's occupational future.

Many NGOs cited that since their operations run primarily with the help of volunteers, and volunteers have lives and other occupations that they need to give some of their time to, not everyone can be 100% dedicated to promoting the NGO. If an intern were given this responsibility, they would have more time to dedicate to helping the organization, and since their work would reflect on themselves, there would also be motivated to produce good quality work and spend a lot more time on projects than people juggling different jobs and obligations may be able to.

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We also want to thank all of the people who took time to participate in our online surveys, as well as leaders from the various NGOs we interviewed. With these leaders' participation, we were able to get a much better idea about the state of civic engagement in Saratoga Springs, and areas that different organizations want to improve in.

Additionally, we'd like to thank the folks at Saratoga TODAY for including a story about our research, helping us reach a larger audience with our surveys, resulting in more accurate response data. Without the help of all of these people and groups, we would not have been able to complete this research.

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## Appendix:

### *Survey 1: Civic Engagement for the Skidmore Population*

#### Q1

This research assesses level of civic engagement for individuals at Skidmore college. Civic engagement can be defined as attending or participating in events and groups that revolve around issues of public concern or making any kind of differences to the civic life of a given community. Civic engagement can be political, environmental, secular, or connected to different social issues, and can be in-person, online, or through the mail. The purpose of this research is to determine changes in levels of civic engagement across different populations in Saratoga Springs, specifically since the 2016 election. Results collected from this survey will be used for our Skidmore Senior Capstone research paper and presentation, and all responses are anonymous. The survey takes about 5 - 8 minutes to complete.

Q2 Do you consent to lend your results to our research efforts and take this survey?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

Q3 Select your age range

- ☐ 18-20 (1)
- ☐ 21-25 (2)
- ☐ 26-30 (3)
- ☐ 31-35 (4)
- ☐ 36-40 (5)
- ☐ 41-45 (6)
- ☐ 46-50 (7)
- ☐ 51-55 (8)
- ☐ 56-60 (9)
- ☐ 61-65 (10)
- ☐ 66-70 (11)
- ☐ 71-75 (12)
- ☐ 76-80 (13)
- ☐ 80 and over (14)

Q4 With which gender do you identify?

- ☐ Female (1)
- ☐ Male (2)
- ☐ I prefer not to answer (4)

Q5 I identify with the following political party

- ☐ Democrat (1)
- ☐ Republican (2)
- ☐ Green Party (3)
- ☐ Independence (4)
- ☐ Libertarian (5)
- ☐ Conservative (6)
- ☐ Working Families (7)
- ☐ Women's Equality (8)
- ☐ Reform (9)
- ☐ Other (10) \_\_\_\_\_

Q6 Please list any Saratoga Springs, national, or international NGO's (non-governmental organizations) of which you are currently a member.

Q7 How has your level of civic engagement changed since 2016? (For example, this may include voting, contacting elected representatives, attending rallies or marches, signing petitions, volunteering, engagement with community organizations, etc.)

- ☐ I have increased my level of civic engagement since 2016 (1)
- ☐ I have decreased my level of civic engagement since 2016 (2)
- ☐ My level of civic engagement has not changed since 2016 (3)

Q40 Slide the bar to answer the following:

0      10      20      30      40      50      60      70      80      90      100

My civic engagement has increased this much (percentage) since 2016? ()

Q8 Why has your level of civic engagement decreased? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ I have an decreased awareness of social and environmental issues (1)
- ☐ Increased polarity of issues (2)
- ☐ There are less opportunities to participate (3)
- ☐ Other (5) \_\_\_\_\_

Q9 Why has your level of civic engagement increased? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ I have an increased awareness of social and environmental issues (1)
- ☐ Increased polarity of issues (2)
- ☐ There are Increased opportunities to participate (3)
- ☐ Increased severity of issues (4)
- ☐ Other (5) \_\_\_\_\_

Q10 Since 2016 I have attended and/or participated in more of the following types of events in Saratoga Springs, than prior to 2016:

- ☐ March/Rally (1)
- ☐ Speaking engagement (2)
- ☐ Political rally and/or campaigning for a political candidate (3)
- ☐ Community cleanup/solid waste management/recycling (4)
- ☐ Volunteering for social causes (5)
- ☐ Volunteering for environmental causes (6)
- ☐ Donating money to social causes (7)
- ☐ Donating money to environmental causes (8)
- ☐ Voting (9)
- ☐ Local/Municipal government meetings (10)
- ☐ Writing letters to the editor (11)
- ☐ Helping to raise money/fundraising events (12)
- ☐ Writing to agencies and elected officials/action alerts (13)
- ☐ None of the above (14)
- ☐ Other (15) \_\_\_\_\_

Q11 Respond to the following statement

Strongly Disagree (1)   Disagree (2)   I don't know (3) Agree (4)   Strongly Agree (5)  
 The current political climate has influenced the increase in my level of civic engagement

Q12 Respond to the following statement

Strongly Disagree (1)   Disagree (2)   I don't know (3) Agree (4)   Strongly Agree (5)  
 Online Social Media has helped to instigate the increase in my level of civic engagement

Q13 Place these issues in order from most to least important

- \_\_\_\_\_ Economy (1)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Environment & Climate Change (2)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Healthcare (3)
- \_\_\_\_\_ National Security/Terrorism (4)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Me-too/ sexual harassment (5)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Gun control (6)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Education (7)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Immigration (8)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Marijuana Legalization (9)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Support for Military (10)
- \_\_\_\_\_ LGBTQIA and gender equality (11)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Racism and Discrimination (12)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other (13)

Q14 What is your primary source for staying informed of current events and news? Choose only one.

- ☐ Magazines and Newspapers (1)
- ☐ Television News (2)
- ☐ Online news outlets (CNN, Fox News, CNBC, Al Jazeera, Democracy Now, etc.) (3)
- ☐ Social media sites (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Tumblr, Snap Chat, YouTube, etc.) (4)
- ☐ National Public Radio (6)
- ☐ My friends and family (5)
- ☐ Other (7) \_\_\_\_\_

Q15 Which Social Media Outlet is your primary source for information on current events and news?  
 Choose only one.

- ☐ I don't use social media (1)
- ☐ Facebook (2)
- ☐ Instagram (3)
- ☐ Twitter (4)
- ☐ Tumblr (5)
- ☐ YouTube (6)
- ☐ Snapchat (7)
- ☐ Other (8) \_\_\_\_\_

Q16 What is your primary source of information for staying engaged with community organizations, action alerts, and civic engagements events?

- o I'm not engaged in any of these activities (1)
- o Word of mouth (2)
- o Social media (3)
- o Email (4)
- o Newspaper and/or magazine (5)
- o Phone apps (6)
- o Paper flyers hanging in my community/school (7)
- o Other (8) \_\_\_\_\_

Q17 Respond to the following statement

Strongly Disagree (1) Disagree (2) I don't know (3) Agree (4) Strongly Agree (5)  
 Skidmore college encourages civic engagement for its students through courses, events, and clubs.

Q18 Respond to the following statement

Strongly Disagree (1) Disagree (2) I don't know (3) Agree (4) Strongly Agree (5)  
 Skidmore College currently offers enough classes that are geared towards civic engagement

Q19 What specific clubs, events, or initiatives at Skidmore College have encouraged or provided you with opportunities for civic engagement?

Q20 How many ACE (applied civic engagement) classes have you taken at Skidmore. If you are unsure, please select the "unsure" box.

Q21 Please enter any other comments you may have about how or why your level of civic engagement has, or has not changed since 2016

Q22 If you would be willing to participate in a brief 15 minute telephone or in-person interview for our senior Capstone research project, please provide us with your name/telephone/ and/or email address:

Q23 If you want to be entered into a drawing for a gift card to Uncommon Grounds, please provide us with your name and contact information. We will not share or save your information after the completion of this study.

## *Survey 2: Civic Engagement for the general population of Saratoga Springs, NY*

Q1 This research assesses level of civic engagement for individuals living in Saratoga Springs. Civic engagement can be defined as attending or participating in events and groups that revolve around issues of public concern or making any kind of differences to the civic life of a given community. Civic engagement can be political, environmental, secular, or connected to different social issues, and can be in-person, online, or through the mail. The purpose of this research is to determine changes in levels of civic engagement across different populations in Saratoga Springs, specifically since the 2016 election. Results collected from this survey will be used for our Skidmore Senior Capstone research paper and presentation, and all responses are anonymous. The survey takes about 5 - 8 minutes to complete.

Q2 Do you consent to lend your results to our research efforts and take this survey?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

Q3 Select your age range

- ☐ 18-20 (1)
- ☐ 21-25 (2)
- ☐ 26-30 (3)
- ☐ 31-35 (4)
- ☐ 36-40 (5)
- ☐ 41-45 (6)
- ☐ 46-50 (7)
- ☐ 51-55 (8)
- ☐ 56-60 (9)
- ☐ 61-65 (10)
- ☐ 66-70 (11)
- ☐ 71-75 (12)
- ☐ 76-80 (13)
- ☐ 80 and over (14)

Q4 With which gender do you identify?

- ☐ Female (1)
- ☐ Male (2)
- ☐ I prefer not to answer (5)

Q5 I identify with the following political party

- ☐ Democrat (1)
- ☐ Republican (2)
- ☐ Green Party (3)
- ☐ Independence (4)
- ☐ Libertarian (5)
- ☐ Conservative (6)
- ☐ Working Families (7)
- ☐ Women's Equality (8)
- ☐ Reform (9)

Q6 How has your level of civic engagement changed since 2016? (For example, this may include voting, contacting elected representatives, attending rallies or marches, signing petitions, volunteering, engagement with community organizations, etc.)

- ☐ I have increased my level of civic engagement since 2016 (1)
- ☐ I have decreased my level of civic engagement since 2016 (2)
- ☐ My level of civic engagement has not changed since 2016 (3)

Q7 Slide the bar to answer the following:

0      10      20      30      40      50      60      70      80      90      100

My civic engagement has increased this much (percentage) since 2016? ( )

Q8 Why has your level of civic engagement decreased? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ I have a decreased awareness of social and environmental issues (1)
- ☐ Increased polarity of issues (2)
- ☐ Increased political tension (3)
- ☐ There are less opportunities to participate (4)
- ☐ Other (5) \_\_\_\_\_

Q9 Why has your level of civic engagement increased? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ I have an increased awareness of social and environmental issues (1)
- ☐ Increased polarity of issues (2)
- ☐ There are Increased opportunities to participate (3)
- ☐ Increased severity of issues (4)
- ☐ Other (5) \_\_\_\_\_

Q10 Please list any Saratoga Springs, national, or international NGO's of which you are currently a member.

Q11 Since 2016 I have attended and/or participated in more of the following types of events in Saratoga Springs, than prior to 2016:

- ☐ March/Rally (1)
- ☐ Speaking engagement (2)
- ☐ Political rally and/or campaigning for a political candidate (3)
- ☐ Community cleanup/solid waste management/recycling (4)
- ☐ Volunteering for social causes (5)
- ☐ Volunteering for environmental causes (6)
- ☐ Donating money to social causes (7)
- ☐ Donating money to environmental causes (8)
- ☐ Voting (9)
- ☐ Local/Municipal government meetings (10)
- ☐ Writing letters to the editor (11)
- ☐ Helping to raise money/fundraising events (12)
- ☐ Writing to agencies and elected officials/action alerts (13)
- ☐ None of the above (14)
- ☐ Other (15) \_\_\_\_\_

Q12 Respond to the following statement

Strongly disagree (1)    Disagree (2)    I don't know (3)    Agree (4)    Strongly agree (5)  
Online Social Media has helped to instigate the increase in my level of civic engagement

Q13 Respond to the following statement

Strongly disagree (1)    Disagree (2)    I don't know (3)    Agree (4)    Strongly agree (5)

The current political climate has influenced the increase in my level of civic engagement

Q14 Place these issues in order from most to least important

- \_\_\_\_\_ Economy (1)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Environment & Climate Change (2)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Healthcare (3)
- \_\_\_\_\_ National Security/Terrorism (4)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Me-too/ sexual harassment (5)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Gun control (6)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Education (7)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Immigration (8)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Marijuana Legalization (9)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Support for Military (10)
- \_\_\_\_\_ LGBTQIA and gender equality (11)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Racism and Discrimination (12)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other (13)

Q15 What is your primary source for staying informed of current events and news?

- ☐ Magazines and Newspapers (1)
- ☐ Television News (2)
- ☐ Online news outlets (CNN, Fox News, CNBC, Al Jazeera, Democracy Now, etc.) (3)
- ☐ Social media sites (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Tumblr, Snap Chat, YouTube, etc.) (4)
- ☐ National Public Radio (6)
- ☐ My friends and family (5)
- ☐ Other (7) \_\_\_\_\_

Q16 Which Social Media Outlet is your primary source of information for current events and news?

- ☐ I don't use social media (1)
- ☐ Facebook (2)
- ☐ Instagram (3)
- ☐ Twitter (4)
- ☐ Tumblr (5)
- ☐ YouTube (6)
- ☐ Snapchat (7)
- ☐ Other (8) \_\_\_\_\_

Q17 What is your primary source of information for staying engaged with community organizations, action alerts, and civic engagements events?

- ☐ I'm not engaged in any of these activities (1)
- ☐ Word of mouth (2)
- ☐ Social media (3)



- ☐ Email (4)
- ☐ Newspaper and/or magazine (5)
- ☐ Phone apps (6)
- ☐ Paper flyers hanging in my community/school (7)
- ☐ Other (8) \_\_\_\_\_

Q18 Please enter any other comments you may have about how or why your level of civic engagement has or has not changed since 2016

Q19 If you would be willing to participate in a 15 minute telephone or in-person interview for our Capstone research project, please provide us with your name and telephone or email address:

Q20 If you want to be entered into a drawing for a gift card to Uncommon Grounds, please provide us with your name and contact information. We will not share or save your information after the completion of this study.

### *Survey 3: Civic Engagement for members of different NGOs*

Q1 Do you consent to lend your results to our research efforts and take this survey?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

Q2 Select your age range

- ☐ 18-20 (1)
- ☐ 21-25 (2)
- ☐ 26-30 (3)
- ☐ 31-35 (4)
- ☐ 36-40 (5)
- ☐ 41-45 (6)
- ☐ 46-50 (7)
- ☐ 51-55 (8)
- ☐ 56-60 (9)
- ☐ 61-65 (10)
- ☐ 66-70 (11)
- ☐ 71-75 (12)
- ☐ 76-80 (13)
- ☐ 80 and over (14)

Q3 With which gender do you identify?

- ☐ Female (1)
- ☐ Male (2)
- ☐ I prefer not to answer (4)

Q4 I identify with the following political party

- ☐ Democrat (1)
- ☐ Republican (2)
- ☐ Green Party (3)
- ☐ Independence (4)

- ☐ Libertarian (5)
- ☐ Conservative (6)
- ☐ Working Families (7)
- ☐ Women's Equality (8)
- ☐ Reform (9)

Q5 Which community and/or national/international NGOs were you already a formal member of prior to 2016?

Q6 If you became a new member of any community or national/international NGO since 2016, please list the groups below.

Q7 How has your level of civic engagement (voting, attending marches/events, signing petitions, etc) changed since 2016?

- ☐ Increased level of civic engagement (1)
- ☐ Decreased level of civic engagement (2)
- ☐ No change in level of civic engagement (3)

Q8 Slide the bar to answer the following:

0      10      20      30      40      50      60      70      80      90      100

My civic engagement has increased this much (percentage) since 2016? ()

Q9 Why has your level of civic engagement increased? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ I have an increased awareness of social and environmental issues (1)
- ☐ Increased polarity of issues (2)
- ☐ There are Increased opportunities to participate (3)
- ☐ Increased severity of issues (4)
- ☐ Other (5) \_\_\_\_\_

Q10 Why has your level of civic engagement decreased? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ I have an decreased awareness of social and environmental issues (1)
- ☐ Increased polarity of issues (2)
- ☐ There are less opportunities to participate (3)
- ☐ Other (5) \_\_\_\_\_

Q11 Respond to the following statement

Strongly Disagree (1)    Disagree (2)    I don't know (3) Agree (4)    Strongly Agree (5)  
Online Social Media has helped to instigate increases in my level of civic engagement

Q12 How has your use of social media influenced your level of civic engagement?

Q13 Since 2016 I have attended and/or participated in more of the following types of events in Saratoga Springs, than prior to 2016:

- ☐ March/Rally (1)

- ☐ Speaking engagement (2)
- ☐ Political rally and/or campaigning for a political candidate (3)
- ☐ Community cleanup/solid waste management/recycling (4)
- ☐ Volunteering for social causes (5)
- ☐ Volunteering for environmental causes (6)
- ☐ Donating money to social causes (7)
- ☐ Donating money to environmental causes (8)
- ☐ Voting (9)
- ☐ Local/Municipal government meetings (10)
- ☐ writing letters to the editor (11)
- ☐ Helping to raise money/fundraising events (12)
- ☐ Writing to agencies and elected officials/action alerts (13)
- ☐ None of the above (14)
- ☐ Other (15) \_\_\_\_\_

Q14 Respond to the following statement

Strongly Disagree (1)   Disagree (2)   I don't know (3)   Agree (4)   Strongly Agree (5)

The current political climate has influenced my decision to increase my level of civic engagement.

Q15 Place these issues in order from most to least important (1 being the most important)

- \_\_\_\_\_ Economy (1)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Environment & Climate Change (2)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Healthcare (3)
- \_\_\_\_\_ National Security/Terrorism (4)
- \_\_\_\_\_ #Me-too/sexual harassment (5)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Gun control (6)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Education (7)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Immigration (8)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Marijuana Legalization (9)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Support for Military (10)
- \_\_\_\_\_ LGBTQIA and Gender Equality (11)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Racism and Discrimination (12)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other (13)

Q16 Please enter any other comments you may have about how or why your level of civic engagement has, or has not changed since 2016

Q18 If you would be willing to participate in a brief 15 minute telephone or in-person interview for our Senior Capstone Research project, please provide us with your name/telephone/ and/or email address:

Q19 If you want to be entered into a drawing for a gift card to Uncommon Grounds please provide us with your name and contact information. We will not share or save your information after the completion of this study.

