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To cite this article: Abdelhamid M. Ahmed, Saba M. Qadhi, Sami H. Arar, Mohamed S. Keshta, Nesreen A. Koffa, Ola M. Aburajoh & Abdelazeem S. Ahmed (2024) Civic Engagement Opportunities and Challenges in Qatar: A Quantitative Assessment of University Students' Views, *Journal of College and Character*, 25:4, 329-353, DOI: [10.1080/2194587X.2024.2407272](https://doi.org/10.1080/2194587X.2024.2407272)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/2194587X.2024.2407272>



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Published online: 20 Nov 2024.



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## Civic Engagement Opportunities and Challenges in Qatar: A Quantitative Assessment of University Students' Views

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### Abstract

This study explores how university students in Qatar view and engage in civic activities, examining the opportunities and challenges they face. Through a survey of 400 undergraduates, the research reveals gender-based differences in civic engagement, with women more involved in activities like volunteering and raising awareness, while men participate more in voting and donating money. Academic performance correlates with higher engagement levels, but parental education and pre-university backgrounds show limited impact. Barriers like time constraints are common across all students. The findings suggest that targeted strategies are needed to enhance civic engagement among university students in diverse contexts.

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## Introduction

Civic engagement is a multifaceted concept critical in enhancing the fabric of communities and promoting active participation in democratic processes. Civic engagement is defined by Ehrlich (2000) as the endeavor to make a meaningful difference in community civic life through a blend of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation. It encompasses various activities, including voting, volunteerism, service learning, and political engagement (Colby et al., 2007). The American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U, 2009) further emphasizes its importance, noting that civic engagement involves participation in activities that enrich the individual and positively impact the community.

Given its significance, civic engagement is increasingly acknowledged as essential for personal development, civic competencies, and fostering connections in a democratic society (C. Flanagan & Levine, 2010). It manifests in various forms, from interdisciplinary collaborations and democratic schooling to civic education programs outside school settings and integrating civic missions within higher education (Stanton, 2012). Higher education institutions bear the historical mandate of preparing professionals and civic-minded graduates to contribute positively to their communities (Gamson, 1997). This responsibility, influenced by the mission and values of these institutions, necessitates a strategic realignment to bolster democracy (AAC&U, 2009; Hartley et al., 2010).

Emerging research underscores the need to investigate how different student demographics perceive civic engagement, explore their motivations, and how these perceptions influence their present and future civic participation (Fernandes et al., 2021; Stanton, 2012). Civic engagement presents both opportunities for growth and challenges to overcome. Opportunities include fostering political involvement, social responsibility, community research, and education (Adler & Goggin, 2005). Challenges range from the lack of civic engagement-promoting curricula and community service participation to the accessibility of civic groups and support services for individuals from low-income families (McBride et al., 2006). This study aims to fill this gap by examining university students' perceptions of the opportunities and challenges they face in civic engagement in Qatar.

Various studies have explored the relationship between civic engagement and academic performance, yielding mixed results. While some research indicates a positive correlation (Ubaka et al., 2015), others find no significant impact (Fernandes et al., 2021), suggesting the need for a deeper inquiry with new performance indicators and qualitative analysis (Fernandes et al., 2021). This study aims to fill this gap by examining the relationship between civic engagement and academic performance.

This study expands on these areas by focusing on university students in Qatar, aiming to understand their civic engagement perceptions, the opportunities and challenges they encounter, and how these experiences correlate with their academic achievements. By delving into the unique socio-political context of Qatar, this research offers insights into the complex interplay between cultural norms, educational systems, and civic opportunities. It seeks to contribute to the discourse on enhancing civic engagement in higher education, advocating for policies and practices that support civic responsibility and social engagement, thereby nurturing a generation of well-rounded, civic-minded individuals capable of contributing to the vitality and sustainability of their communities and democracies globally.

## Literature Review

This literature review delves into the dynamic field of civic engagement, exploring its evolving definitions, the difference between civic engagement and disengagement, the diverse opportunities it presents

for community involvement, the challenges that participants may encounter, and its positive correlation with academic success. Drawing on student views and theoretical frameworks in previous research, the review offers a holistic understanding of civic engagement's role in fostering active community participation and individual development. Through this examination, the review aims to highlight the multifaceted nature of civic engagement and its significance in shaping engaged, informed, and cohesive societies.

### **Civic Engagement Definitions**

The conceptualization of civic engagement has undergone significant evolution, with early contributions from Gastil et al. (2005) defining it as participation in public life through various activities like volunteering, voting, and engaging in political and social actions. This foundational view set the stage for subsequent elaborations. Nash (2009) broadened the scope to include a wider array of participatory actions, such as advocacy and philanthropy, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of civic involvement. Hoffman et al. (2012) further expanded the definition to encompass individual and collective efforts to address public concerns, highlighting the dual nature of participation. This trajectory was continued by emphasizing active participation across all facets of community life and framing civic engagement as a collaborative process for enhancing collective well-being (Dolan et al., 2016; Mudrick et al., 2018). This progressive broadening of the definition reflects an increasingly inclusive understanding of how individuals and collectives contribute to civic life.

### **Difference Between Civic Engagement and Disengagement**

When it comes to civic engagement at universities, the roles of engagement and disengagement are pivotal. Universities play a significant role in fostering engagement, which involves active participation in community and political activities, instilling a sense of duty and responsibility among students. For example, C. A. Flanagan and Christens (2011) stressed the importance of youth civic development through educational initiatives that promote active participation in civic duties. Similarly, C. Flanagan and Levine (2010) discuss how the transition to adulthood involves increased civic engagement, a process supported by university programs.

Disengagement should not be viewed as a mere absence of engagement but rather as a distinct position on political and civic matters. Disengagement can take active antipolitical forms, such as rejection or disgust with politics, and passive apolitical forms, like disinterest (Ekman & Amnå, 2012). Lannegrand-Willems et al. (2018) further elaborated on the various forms of civic engagement, including political participation (both formal and nonconventional, such as activism), civil participation, psychological involvement, and disengagement (both antipolitical and apolitical).

Feelings of alienation or disillusionment with civic processes can lead to disengagement. Hart et al. (2011) highlight that students who feel disconnected from their community are less likely to participate in civic activities. Similarly, Ekman and Amnå (2012) suggested that political and social challenges contribute to student disengagement.

It is crucial for universities to address factors that contribute to disengagement. It is argued that by creating inclusive and supportive environments, universities can counteract disengagement (Hardy et al., 2011). Community and religious involvement can provide contexts for positive identity change, thereby

increasing civic engagement. This proactive approach can help universities enhance civic engagement and reduce disengagement among students.

### **Civic Engagement Opportunities**

Civic engagement manifests through diverse opportunities that enable significant community impact, starting with the foundational role of civic engagement in fostering community well-being through community service projects, as Nash (2009) highlighted. Building on this, Hoffman et al. (2012) explored specific avenues of engagement, such as volunteering with local nonprofits and joining community groups focused on critical issues, thereby enhancing the quality of civic life. Dolan et al. (2016) and Mudrick et al. (2018) further expanded on the means of engagement by introducing community events and political advocacy as pivotal forms of civic participation. These activities offer platforms for individuals to actively shape their community's governance and social fabric, showcasing civic participation's dynamic and evolving nature.

### **Civic Engagement Challenges**

Despite the opportunities, civic engagement faces multifactorial barriers. Gastil et al. (2005) highlighted a lack of trust in institutions and skepticism about the efficacy of individual contributions as significant obstacles. Nash (2009) pointed to financial constraints as a principal barrier, while Hoffman et al. (2012) addressed geographical and social barriers, noting the challenges faced by individuals in rural areas and those encountering discrimination. Dolan et al. (2016) identified information scarcity as a hurdle, emphasizing the need for effective communication and outreach. Mudrick et al. (2018) added time constraints and discomfort with public roles to the list of challenges.

Moreover, within the Qatari higher education context, Abdelazeem et al. (2022) emphasized that civic engagement barriers relate to university students, the university environment, civil society volunteer organizations, and Qatari society in general. Overcoming these barriers will contribute to creating a robust culture of civic engagement and aligning educational practices with the broader goals of sustainable development in Qatar. These barriers underscore the complexity of promoting inclusive civic participation and the need for targeted strategies to address them.

### **Civic Engagement and Academic Success**

Civic engagement has been linked to enhanced academic outcomes, with research indicating that participation in civic activities correlates with superior academic performance (Gasper et al., 2016). This positive impact is attributed to the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills through civic activities. Additionally, civic engagement fosters a sense of purpose, motivation, and community connectedness among students, contributing to their academic success. This evidence underscores the significant role of civic participation in fostering individual development and academic advancement.

## Previous Research Studies About Civic Engagement

Extensive research has been conducted on civic engagement, encompassing a broad spectrum of issues related to civic engagement, ranging from the determinants of participation to the profound impact such activities have on communities and individuals alike.

A significant strand of this research focuses on the demographic and socio-political factors that drive civic participation. Studies by Hoffman et al. (2012), Dolan et al. (2016), and Mudrick et al. (2018) have shed light on how variables such as age, gender, education level, social connections, and political interest play a crucial role in influencing an individual's likelihood to engage in civic activities. For instance, higher levels of education are consistently associated with increased civic engagement, suggesting that educational attainment equips individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary for active participation (Hoffman et al., 2012). Furthermore, robust social networks, often facilitated by community groups or club membership, have enhanced one's propensity for civic involvement (Dolan et al., 2016).

The impact of civic engagement extends beyond individual participants, significantly benefiting communities through enhanced social cohesion, effective addressing of social issues, and overall improvements in quality of life (Nash, 2009). Additionally, volunteering has been linked to positive individual outcomes, including better physical and mental health, strengthened social connections, and a heightened sense of purpose (Mudrick et al., 2018).

The relationship between civic engagement and political participation has also been a focal point of scholarly inquiry. Research indicates that individuals more involved in civic activities are more likely to partake in political actions, such as voting, highlighting the interconnectedness of civic and political spheres (Dolan et al., 2016; Mudrick et al., 2018). Moreover, civic participation has been associated with improved governance and policy outcomes, underscoring its significance in democracy (Mancini & Lang, 2018).

Another dimension of civic engagement research explores its association with social capital, revealing that higher levels of civic engagement correlate with increased social trust and community cohesion (Gastil et al., 2005). This underscores the role of civic activities in building and sustaining the social fabric of communities.

Technological advancements and media have also transformed the landscape of civic engagement. Studies have examined how digital platforms, particularly social media, can facilitate civic participation by mobilizing individuals around public concerns (Momeni, 2017). However, some research cautions against over-reliance on online engagement, suggesting that face-to-face interactions and in-person events may offer more substantive opportunities for meaningful civic involvement (Hoffman et al., 2012).

## Student Views of Civic Engagement

Civic engagement represents active individual involvement in the political, economic, and social realms of community life, with students offering varied insights into its significance for both personal growth and communal health. Smith (2018) highlighted civic engagement's empowerment potential, underscoring its capacity to empower individuals to shape community and personal decisions, thereby driving societal progress. Thompson (2020) underscored the importance of civic engagement in fostering community ties and a sense of belonging, contributing to collective well-being and personal satisfaction. Rodriguez (2019) discussed civic engagement's role in mitigating social inequalities, noting that active participation in local efforts can lead to more equitable and inclusive communities, underlining the importance of civic action in advancing social justice. Supporting these views, the Corporation for National and Community

Service (2016) found that engaged students are more likely to participate in civic behaviors like voting and volunteering, linking civic activities to increased civic responsibility. The National Conference on Citizenship (2015) also pointed out the educational advantages of civic engagement, such as enhanced critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills, which contribute to personal growth and the ability to effect change in the community.

Nonetheless, challenges remain, as a Campus Compact (2014) survey indicates that some students view civic activities as onerous or superficial, pointing to obstacles that impede meaningful engagement. Overall, student perspectives on civic engagement highlight its vital role in promoting democratic engagement, community connection, and social fairness. It also notes the need for more impactful civic opportunities to foster a more participatory, informed, and united society.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The current study draws upon Civic Engagement Theory (CET) as its theoretical framework. The CET has been explored through various lenses, highlighting the multifaceted nature of civic participation and its implications for democratic societies. Lenzi et al. (2014) emphasized the role of educational environments, particularly democratic school climates, in fostering adolescent civic responsibility and future civic engagement intentions, mediated by civic discussions and perceived fairness. Similarly, McBride et al. (2006) investigated civic engagement among low-income families, revealing the challenges faced by individuals with limited resources and their active involvement through volunteering and community activities, suggesting a nuanced understanding of engagement that transcends socio-economic barriers. The interplay between civic engagement, social capital, and ethnic heterogeneity has also been examined. Andrews (2009) found that associational life and political participation can enhance mutual respect and social cohesion in diverse urban settings. Furthermore, Bekkers (2005) highlighted the complex interplay of human and social capital, personality traits, and political values in driving civic engagement, underscoring the multidisciplinary nature of CET.

These studies underscore the importance of considering various factors, including educational environments, socio-economic status, ethnic diversity, and individual attributes, in understanding and fostering civic engagement. The current study contributes to a deeper understanding of how civic engagement is viewed from university students' perspectives at a university in Qatar. It focuses on identifying civic engagement opportunities and examining the challenges that university students perceive. The CET offers valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and community leaders aiming to promote and strengthen active engagement.

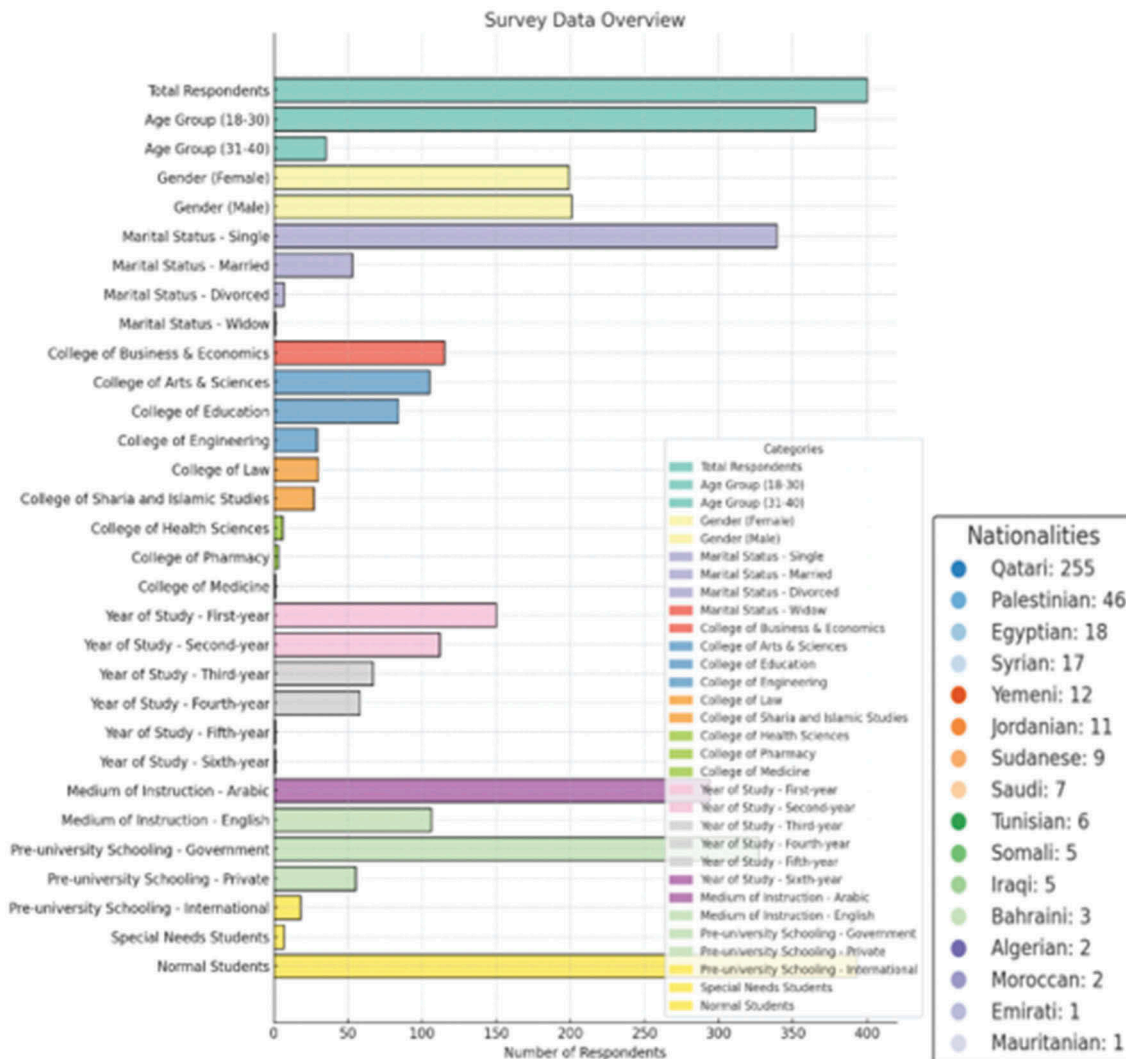
In conclusion, the literature review has explored civic engagement, revealing its complex and evolving nature. By examining its definitions, opportunities, challenges, and impacts on academic success, it is evident that civic engagement plays a crucial role in fostering active and informed community participation. The review underscores the diverse ways individuals can engage in civic life, from volunteering and advocacy to political participation. It highlights the significant barriers hindering such engagement, including institutional distrust, financial constraints, and social barriers. Importantly, the positive correlation between civic engagement and academic achievement emphasizes the value of civic activities in enhancing critical skills and fostering a sense of community and purpose among participants. The insights from student perspectives and theoretical frameworks further enrich our understanding of the motivations and impacts of civic involvement.

## Methods

### Respondents

As shown in Figure 1, four hundred multi-national respondents completed the questionnaire. They are 18–40 years, 365 respondents were 18–30, and 35 were 31–40. In the current study, 199 women and 201 men respondents participated. As for their marital status, 339 respondents were single, 53 were married, seven were divorced, and one was a widow. They were all undergraduate students representing different colleges at a university in Qatar. They were enrolled in different colleges. As for the year of study, 150 respondents were first-year students, 112 were second-year students, 67 were third-year students, 58 were

Figure. 1 Respondents' Demographic Data





fourth-year students, one was fifth-year, and one was sixth-year students. In the current study, 294 students were enrolled at the site university in the Arabic as a Medium of Instruction (AMI) track and 106 in the English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) track. Regarding respondents' pre-university schooling, 327 were in government schools, 55 were in private schools, and 18 were in international schools. Seven of the 400 respondents identified themselves as Special Needs Students, and 393 were typical students.

## Data Collection

In the current study, we used the survey as our data collection instrument. The questionnaire was designed after we reviewed the literature and previous research on civic engagement definitions, importance, opportunities, and challenges (e.g., Evans et al., 2019). It consists of 42 close-ended items and is divided into the following sections: (a) Demographic data, (b) civic engagement opportunities, and (c) Civic engagement challenges.

Five colleagues reviewed the Arabic and English versions of the questionnaire to check its face and content validity. They provided some amendments, based on which we produced the final form of the questionnaire. We obtained the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the concerned university. Once obtained, we started the data collection process. Issues of privacy, confidentiality, anonymity, and secondary use of data were ensured.

The reliability of the measurement was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient, chosen for its widespread adoption and recognized status as a key objective measure of reliability (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011, p. 53). A Cronbach's alpha value was 0.85, generally considered acceptable for internal consistency. The questionnaire was piloted on ten students, five men and five women. Respondents raised some concerns about some unclear terms, which were clarified accordingly.

We used a convenience sampling strategy. We asked university instructors to send the questionnaire to their previous and current students voluntarily. The questionnaire was sent to 1500 students, but only 400 completed it, or 26.66%.

## Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed for normality using the Shapiro-Wilk test, and the data proved to be non-normal, requiring nonparametric statistical tests such as the Kruskal-Wallis H. and Chi-square test. [Table 1](#) provides a structured overview of how each research question is aligned with its corresponding hypothesis and the appropriate statistical analysis method.

## Ethical Issues

The BERA ethical guidelines (2018) were followed. First, students were voluntarily asked to participate in the study, ensuring they had the right to withdraw at any time for no reason. Second, students were asked to consent to participate in the study electronically. Students were anonymized, and their data was kept private and confidential for research.

Table 1

**Research Questions vs. Research Hypotheses and Their Statistical Analyses**

#	Research Variables	Research Questions	Research Hypotheses	Statistical Analysis
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Gender</li> <li>● Types of Civic Engagement Opportunities</li> </ul>	What are the predominant civic engagement opportunities among male and female students?	There are distinct differences in the types of civic engagement opportunities predominantly pursued by male and female students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Chi-Square Test</li> <li>● Shapiro-Wilk Normality Test</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Participation in Civic Engagement</li> <li>● GPA</li> </ul>	Is there a significant difference between participation in civic engagement opportunities and academic performance, as measured by students' GPA?	There is a significant relationship between participation in civic engagement and academic performance as measured by GPA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Shapiro-Wilk Normality Test</li> <li>● Kruskal-Wallis H Test Results</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Parents' Education</li> <li>● Students' Civic Engagement Participation</li> </ul>	Is there a significant difference between parents' education and students' participation in civic engagement?	Students with parents having higher educational qualifications are more likely to participate in civic engagement opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Shapiro-Wilk Normality Test</li> <li>● Kruskal-Wallis H Test Results</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Pre-University Education</li> <li>● Students' Civic Engagement Participation</li> </ul>	Is there a significant difference between students' pre-university education and their participation in civic engagement opportunities?	Students' participation in civic engagement opportunities is significantly influenced by their pre-university educational background.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Shapiro-Wilk Normality Test</li> <li>● Kruskal-Wallis H Test Results</li> </ul>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Gender</li> <li>● GPA</li> <li>● Different Colleges</li> <li>● Barriers to Civic Engagement</li> </ul>	What are the predominant barriers to civic engagement among male and female students with different GPAs and from different colleges?	The predominant barriers to civic engagement differ significantly among male and female students with different GPAs and from different colleges.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Frequency Analysis</li> <li>● Chi-Square Test</li> </ul>
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Gender</li> <li>● Civic Issues of Interest</li> </ul>	What are the predominant civic engagement issues among male and female students across GPAs and colleges?	Male and female students have significantly different predominant interests in civic engagement issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Frequency Analysis of Issues</li> </ul>
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● College</li> <li>● Gender</li> <li>● GPA</li> <li>● Participation in Civic Engagement</li> </ul>	Is there a significant difference between students' college, gender, GPA and participation in civic engagement opportunities?	Students' participation in civic engagement opportunities is significantly influenced by college, gender, and GPA.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Descriptive Statistics</li> </ul>

## Research Results

This section presents the research results in response to each research question.

### Research Question 1

*Research Question 1: What are the predominant civic engagement opportunities among men and women undergraduate students?*

*Hypothesis 1: There are distinct differences in the types of civic engagement opportunities predominantly pursued by men and women students.*

The normality test was checked for the data in this research question, showing that the data is nonparametric. To answer the research question and verify the hypothesis, the Chi-square test was used to compare the “gender” with the civic engagement opportunities as follows:

**Table 2** Chi-square test results for students’ participation in civic engagement opportunities, comparing gender differences.

The Chi-Square Statistic measures the strength of the association between gender and civic engagement opportunities. The p-value assesses statistical significance. A p-value below 0.05 typically indicates a significant difference. Based on the Chi-Square results above, the following six civic engagement opportunities proved statistically significant: volunteering in a campus club (0.0314), helping other students (0.0097), participating in community service not related to university (0.0397), researching a community issue (0.0145), raising awareness about a civic engagement issue, whether online or face-to-face (0.0187) and helping your neighbors (0.0192). This suggests that gender may play a role in determining who participates in these activities. Therefore, these results support the hypothesis, suggesting that there are distinct differences in the types of civic engagement opportunities predominantly pursued by men and women students in these six specific civic engagement opportunities mentioned above. In summary, the hypothesis is supported for certain civic engagement opportunities where the p-value is below 0.05, indicating gender-based differences in participation. However, this is not uniformly the case across all types of opportunities.

#### **Gender Preferences in Civic Engagement**

The results suggest that women students are generally more engaged in a wider variety of civic engagement opportunities compared to men students, with significant differences noted in specific activities such as Civic Engagement Opportunities (4) [Volunteering in a campus club], (8) [Researching a community issue], (10) [Raising awareness about civic engagement issue whether online or face-to-face] and (11) [Raising money for an issue, campaign or group]. However, men students show a higher participation rate in certain opportunities like (2) [Voting in local elections], (6) [Helping other students], and (19) [Donating money or needed items to people].

### Research Question 2

*Research Question 2: Is there a significant difference between participation in civic engagement opportunities and academic performance, as measured by students’ GPA?*

Table 2

**Chi-square Test Results for Students' Participation in the Different Civic Engagement Opportunities, Comparing Gender Differences**

#	Civic Engagement Activity	Chi-Square Statistic	p-value	Degrees of Freedom	Statistical Significance
1	Participation in a civic engagement opportunity	3.8788	0.4227	4	Statistically insignificant
2	Volunteering for campus events.	2.7869	0.5941	4	Statistically insignificant
3	Volunteering in local elections	2.0712	0.7227	4	Statistically insignificant
4	Volunteering in student elections	7.5861	0.1079	4	Statistically insignificant
5	Volunteering in a campus club	10.6001	0.0314	4	Statistically significant
6	Leading campus or in a student club	6.1597	0.1875	4	Statistically insignificant
7	Helping other students	13.3430	0.0097	4	Statistically significant
8	Participating in community service not related to university	10.0422	0.0397	4	Statistically significant
9	Researching a community issue	12.4155	0.0145	4	Statistically significant
10	Civic engagement as part of a class/ academic course	6.2923	0.1784	4	Statistically insignificant
11	Raising awareness about a civic engagement issue, whether online or face-to-face	11.8284	0.0187	4	Statistically significant
12	Raising money for an issue, campaign or group	6.4124	0.1704	4	Statistically insignificant
13	Participation in a local or national campaign	5.8582	0.2100	4	Statistically insignificant
14	Volunteering your time (at a hospital, daycare, youth program, or community service agency)	1.7590	0.7800	4	Statistically insignificant
15	Contributing to beautifying your city (i.e. planting trees, painting walls, decorating places ... etc.)	6.5844	0.1596	4	Statistically insignificant
16	Expressing your opinions on issues via social media or the Internet	2.4302	0.6572	4	Statistically insignificant
17	Being involved in social media platforms, live events, e-mail marketing, learning opportunities	7.0071	0.1355	4	Statistically insignificant
18	Being involved in counseling, mentoring, job coaching, or training	1.4622	0.8333	4	Statistically insignificant
19	Persuading university stakeholders to make choices that benefit the community	6.1876	0.1856	4	Statistically insignificant
20	Donating money/needed items to people	7.2327	0.1241	4	Statistically insignificant
21	Helping your neighbors	11.7625	0.0192	4	Statistically Significant
22	Participating in community events (e.g., meetings, celebrations, or activities)	0.4685	0.9765	4	Statistically insignificant

*Hypothesis 2: Students who participate in civic engagement opportunities have significantly higher GPAs than those who do not.*

The normality test was checked for the data in this research question, showing that the data is nonparametric. Therefore, the Kruskal-Wallis H Test was used to assess the significance of differences in participation across various civic engagement opportunities, categorized by students' GPA ranges. The results reveal a mix of significant and nonsignificant differences in participation levels across different GPA groups.

Table 3 indicates that the following eight civic engagement opportunities show statistically significant differences in participation across GPA categories ( $p < .05$ ), suggesting a potential association between these specific civic engagement activities and academic performance.

- Volunteering for campus events.
- Volunteering in a campus club
- Leading campus or in a student club
- Researching a community issue
- Participation in a local or national campaign
- Expressing your opinions on issues via social media or the Internet
- Being involved in social media platforms, live events, e-mail marketing, learning opportunities
- Donating money/needed items to people

The other 13 civic engagement opportunities did not show statistically significant differences, indicating that participation in these activities does not vary significantly by GPA category.

### **Research Question 3**

*Research Question 3: Is there a significant difference between parents' education and students' participation in civic engagement?*

*Hypothesis 3: Students with parents having higher educational qualifications are more likely to participate in civic engagement opportunities.*

The normality test was checked for the data in this research question, showing that the data is nonparametric. Therefore, the Kruskal-Wallis H Test was used to assess whether there are statistically significant differences between the median scores of three or more independent groups. It is the nonparametric alternative to the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The Kruskal-Wallis H Test

Table 3

**Kruskal-Wallis H Test Results**

No.	Civic Engagement Opportunity	P-Value	Significant Difference
1	Volunteering for campus events.	0.000013	Yes
2	Volunteering in local elections	0.534866	No
3	Volunteering in student elections	0.061598	No
4	Volunteering in a campus club	0.000019	Yes
5	Leading campus or in a student club	0.000493	Yes
6	Helping other students	0.808877	No
7	Participating in community service not related to university	0.552873	No
8	Researching a community issue	0.000377	Yes
9	Civic engagement as part of a class/ academic course	0.083207	No
10	Raising awareness about a civic engagement issue, whether online or face-to-face	0.226903	No
11	Raising money for an issue, campaign or group	0.123944	No
12	Participation in a local or national campaign	0.013541	Yes
13	Volunteering your time (at a hospital, daycare, youth program, or community service agency)	0.389086	No
14	Contributing to beautifying your city (i.e. planting trees, painting walls, decorating places ... etc.)	0.050682	No
15	Expressing your opinions on issues via social media or the Internet	0.002872	Yes
16	Being involved in social media platforms, live events, e-mail marketing, learning opportunities	0.006241	Yes
17	Being involved in counseling, mentoring, job coaching, or training	0.336913	No
18	Persuading university stakeholders to make choices that benefit the community	0.278171	No
19	Donating money/needed items to people	0.038831	Yes
20	Helping your neighbors	0.810939	No
21	Participating in community events (e.g., meetings, celebrations, or activities)	0.513736	No

results, comparing participation in civic engagement opportunities against the educational backgrounds of students' fathers and mothers, are presented in [Table 4](#):

Most civic engagement opportunities do not show statistically significant participation differences across parent education categories, as indicated by the p-values greater than 0.05. However, there are notable exceptions: Opportunity 12 (Participation in a local or national campaign) and Opportunity 21 (Participating in community events (e.g., meetings, celebrations, or activities) show a significant difference in participation based on the mother's education. These results suggest that for most civic engagement opportunities, participation does not vary significantly with the educational backgrounds of students' parents, with a few specific activities showing potential associations.

Table 4

**Kruskal-Wallis H Test Results**

No.	Civic Engagement Opportunities	P-Value (Father's Education)	P-Value (Mother's Education)
1	Volunteering for campus events.	0.423919	0.148465
2	Volunteering in local elections	0.716581	0.196512
3	Volunteering in student elections	0.092946	0.139137
4	Volunteering in a campus club	0.306898	0.336972
5	Leading campus or in a student club	0.703734	0.878133
6	Helping other students	0.542144	0.325243
7	Participating in community service not related to university	0.081382	0.639293
8	Researching a community issue	0.701763	0.084763
9	Civic engagement as part of a class/ academic course	0.976183	0.928150
10	Raising awareness about a civic engagement issue, whether online or face-to-face	0.655751	0.184501
11	Raising money for an issue, campaign or group	0.392412	0.132217
12	Participation in a local or national campaign	0.635763	0.011357
13	Volunteering your time (at a hospital, daycare, youth program, or community service agency)	0.156160	0.339831
14	Contributing to beautifying your city (i.e. planting trees, painting walls, decorating places ... etc.)	0.775504	0.090411
15	Expressing your opinions on issues via social media or the Internet	0.632574	0.399665
16	Being involved in social media platforms, live events, e-mail marketing, learning opportunities	0.384502	0.239355
17	Being involved in counseling, mentoring, job coaching, or training	0.798570	0.141925
18	Persuading university stakeholders to make choices that benefit the community	0.921158	0.345686
19	Donating money/needed items to people	0.996813	0.268277
20	Helping your neighbors	0.624543	0.275427
21	Participating in community events (e.g., meetings, celebrations, or activities)	0.947173	0.021898

**Research Question 4**

*Research Question 4: Is there a significant difference between students' pre-university education and participation in civic engagement opportunities?*

*Hypothesis 4: Students' participation in civic engagement opportunities is significantly influenced by their pre-university educational background.*

The Shapiro-Wilk normality test results for the response columns (1 to 21) indicate extremely low p-values (all below 0.05), suggesting rejecting the null hypothesis for normal distribution. This indicates that the data in these columns does not follow a normal distribution, which is a crucial consideration for any subsequent statistical analysis. Given these results, nonparametric statistical methods would be more appropriate for further analysis, as they do not assume a normal data distribution.

**Kruskal-Wallis H Test:** This test is useful when comparing three or more independent groups, which could be different categories of pre-university education (e.g., Government School, Private School, International School). It assesses whether there are statistically significant differences between the median scores of civic engagement participation across these groups.

The Kruskal-Wallis H Test results, comparing participation in civic engagement opportunities against the type of pre-university education (School Attended), are presented in [Table 5](#):

In [Table 5](#), opportunities 1 and 18 show significant differences in participation based on the type of school attended, suggesting that the pre-university educational environment may influence participation in these specific civic engagement activities. The other 19 opportunities did not show statistically significant differences, indicating that participation in these activities does not vary significantly by the type of pre-university education.

## Research Question 5

*Research Question 5: What are the predominant barriers to civic engagement among men and women students across GPAs and colleges?*

*Hypothesis 5: The predominant barriers to civic engagement differ significantly among men and women students with different GPAs and from different colleges.*

### **Frequency Analysis of Barriers to Civic Engagement**

The frequency analysis of the barriers to civic engagement mentioned by the students reveals the following predominant barriers:

[Table 6](#) highlights the most frequently mentioned barriers, with “Lack of Time” being students’ most significant obstacle to civic engagement. Other notable barriers include family obligations, community disapproval, and religious considerations. Some students also lack interest in involvement or perceive no obstacles to engagement.

The Chi-Square Tests of Independence reveal that perceptions of barriers to civic engagement among students are significantly influenced by their GPA but not by their gender or the college they attend (see [Table 7](#)). Specifically, gender differences show no statistical significance in perceived barriers, with a p-value of 0.1118, suggesting no notable difference between men and women students. Conversely, a strong correlation exists between students’ GPAs and their perceptions of barriers, highlighted by a statistically significant p-value of 0.0007, indicating that academic performance is a key factor in how students perceive these barriers. Additionally, the analysis finds no significant variation in perceptions across different colleges, as evidenced by a p-value of 0.8404, underscoring that the college of attendance does not affect students’ views on barriers to civic engagement.



Table 5

**Kruskal-Wallis H Test Results**

No.	Civic Engagement Opportunity	P-Value	Significant Difference
1	Volunteering for campus events.	0.041324	Yes
2	Volunteering in local elections	0.263030	No
3	Volunteering in student elections	0.410777	No
4	Volunteering in a campus club	0.818961	No
5	Leading campus or in a student club	0.519406	No
6	Helping other students	0.739252	No
7	Participating in community service not related to university	0.433376	No
8	Researching a community issue	0.824727	No
9	Civic engagement as part of a class/ academic course	0.779805	No
10	Raising awareness about a civic engagement issue, whether online or face-to-face	0.077660	No
11	Raising money for an issue, campaign or group	0.406282	No
12	Participation in a local or national campaign	0.413369	No
13	Volunteering your time (at a hospital, daycare, youth program, or community service agency)	0.098404	No
14	Contributing to beautifying your city (i.e. planting trees, painting walls, decorating places ... etc.)	0.320194	No
15	Expressing your opinions on issues via social media or the Internet	0.095929	No
16	Being involved in social media platforms, live events, e-mail marketing, learning opportunities	0.326222	No
17	Being involved in counseling, mentoring, job coaching, or training	0.404412	No
18	Persuading university stakeholders to make choices that benefit the community	0.024871	Yes
19	Donating money/needed items to people	0.873759	No
20	Helping your neighbors	0.752472	No
21	Participating in community events (e.g., meetings, celebrations, or activities)	0.357359	No

**Research Question 6**

*Research Question 6: What are the predominant civic engagement issues among men and women students across GPAs and colleges?*

*Hypothesis 6: The predominant civic engagement issues differ significantly among men and women students with different GPAs and from different colleges.*

Table 6

**Frequency Analysis of the pre-dominant Barriers to Civic Engagement**

Rank	Barrier	Frequency
1	Lack of Time	297
2	Social and Cultural Factors*	103
3	Family	103
4	Community Disapproval	103
5	Religious Barriers	103
6	I Do Not Want to Be Involved	61
7	There Are No Obstacles	59

Note. "Social and Cultural Factors" includes entries (e.g., peer, family, community disapproval, ... etc.), each mentioned 103 times.

Table 7

**Chi-Square Test Results for Barriers to Civic Engagement**

Category	Chi-Square Statistic	P-value	Significant Difference
Gender and Barriers	24.29	0.1118	No
GPA and Barriers	111.46	0.0007	Yes
College and Barriers	119.61	0.8404	No

To address the research question and test the hypothesis, we performed the frequency analysis of issues to count how frequently each issue is mentioned across different categories (gender, GPA, college) to identify predominant issues in each group (See Table 8).

The expanded frequency analysis of civic engagement issues across all colleges reveals a diverse and widespread engagement in various civic issues across different academic disciplines. Key issues such as "Community Organizing," "Education," "Global Issues," "Human Rights," and "Not Interested" are represented across all colleges, though the specific intensity and focus may vary.

1. **Widespread Engagement:** Issues such as "Education" and "Human Rights" resonate across nearly all colleges, indicating a universal appeal of these topics among students from various academic backgrounds.
2. **College-Specific Patterns:** While certain issues are prevalent across all colleges, the degree of engagement in specific issues like "Global Issues" or "Community Organizing" may vary, reflecting each college's unique academic and social environment. For instance, students from colleges like

Table 8

**Average Civic Engagement Scores by College, Gender, and GPA**

<b>By College</b>	
<b>College</b>	<b>Average Score</b>
Arts & Sciences	56.08
Business & Economics	52.63
Education	53.38
Engineering	57.31
Health Sciences	59.17
Law	52.07
Medicine	46.00
Pharmacy	61.33
Sharia & Islamic Studies	47.93
<b>By Gender</b>	
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Average Score</b>
Female	54.89
Male	52.75
<b>By GPA</b>	
<b>GPA Range</b>	<b>Average Score</b>
1.00–2.00	49.66
2.01–3.00	55.80
3.00–3.05	56.40
3.01–3.05	55.98
3.06–4.00	55.86

Law and Sharia and Islamic Studies might show a heightened interest in “Human Rights,” while those in Health Sciences may be more inclined toward public health-related civic issues.

3. **Disengagement Indicators:** “Not Interested” across all colleges also highlights a segment of the student population that is either disengaged or less active in civic matters, an important consideration for outreach and engagement strategies. Therefore, it is crucial for universities to address factors that contribute to disengagement. It is argued that creating inclusive and supportive environments can help universities counteract disengagement (Hardy et al., 2011). Community and religious involvement can provide contexts for positive identity change, thereby increasing

civic engagement. This proactive approach can help universities enhance civic engagement and reduce disengagement among students.

This view underscores the multifaceted nature of civic engagement interests among students, cutting across disciplinary boundaries. It emphasizes the need for a holistic approach to fostering civic engagement that acknowledges students' diverse interests across different fields of study.

## Research Question 7

*Research Question 7: Is there a significant difference between students' college, gender, GPA and participation in civic engagement opportunities?*

*Hypothesis 7: Students' participation in civic engagement opportunities is significantly influenced by their college, gender, and GPA.*

The analysis indicates that there are variations in civic engagement participation across different colleges, genders, and GPA ranges:

1. **College Influence:** Significant differences in average civic engagement scores are observed among students from different colleges. For instance, students from the College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences show higher engagement scores than those from the College of Medicine or Sharia and Islamic Studies.
2. **Gender Influence:** Women students have a higher average participation score in civic engagement opportunities than men students, suggesting a gender-related influence on civic engagement.
3. **GPA Influence:** Students' GPA appears to correlate with their participation in civic engagement opportunities. Higher GPA ranges generally show higher average engagement scores.

These observations support the hypothesis that students' participation in civic engagement opportunities is influenced by their college, gender, and GPA. The data suggests that these factors contribute to varying levels of engagement, highlighting the need for tailored civic engagement strategies that consider these demographic and academic variables.

## Discussion

### Civic Engagement and Gender

Our study reveals notable differences in how men and women students engage in civic activities. Women students tend to be more involved in a broad range of activities, including volunteering, researching community issues, raising awareness, and fundraising. On the other hand, men students are more active in voting, helping other students, and donating money or items. These patterns suggest that universities should consider these gender-based preferences when designing civic programs. For example, women's preference for community-oriented activities could be supported through online platforms that encourage collaborative engagement, as highlighted by Stefani et al. (2021). Meanwhile, men's interest in political

activism indicates the need for more direct political engagement opportunities within civic programs. It is crucial for universities to examine and adapt their civic engagement frameworks to ensure they are inclusive and meet the diverse needs of all students. This approach can help foster a more effective and engaging civic environment for everyone.

Previous research also supports the idea that disengagement from civic activities often stems from a sense of disconnection or challenges within the community. Students who feel excluded or unsupported are less likely to participate in civic activities (Ekman & Amnå, 2012; Hart et al., 2011). Therefore, creating an inclusive and supportive environment is essential to counteracting this disengagement. Universities that prioritize inclusivity can play a significant role in increasing civic engagement among students by providing the necessary support and opportunities for involvement. Hardy et al. (2011) emphasize that community and religious involvement can offer students positive identity experiences, further encouraging their participation in civic life.

### **Civic Engagement and Academic Performance**

One of the significant findings of our study is the positive correlation between civic engagement and academic performance. Students who are more actively involved in civic activities tend to achieve higher GPAs, which suggests that civic engagement might contribute to academic success. This relationship is not only about academic achievement but also about overall student well-being. Webber et al. (2013) support this view, suggesting that students who engage in civic activities experience a range of benefits, including enhanced academic outcomes and improved well-being.

Universities could strategically integrate civic engagement into their academic curricula to boost both educational outcomes and civic responsibility among students. By doing so, they can create an educational environment that values and promotes civic participation as part of the learning process. Co-curricular activities, such as involvement in student societies, peer tutoring, and community service, also play a crucial role in this process. These activities complement academic learning by helping students develop essential life skills, career readiness, and personal growth. Frade and Tiroyabone (2017) highlight that such experiences contribute to a holistic educational experience, preparing students for success in both their professional and civic lives.

Central to the relationship between academic success and civic engagement is the concept of relational engagement. Positive relationships within academic and co-curricular settings enhance students' sense of belonging, which can mitigate feelings of alienation and support academic integration. Case's theory of relational engagement (Case, 2007) underscores the importance of these interactions, particularly for nontraditional students who may face additional socio-economic challenges. Wisker and Masika (2017) further elaborate on how co-curricular activities help foster a supportive community, which is essential for academic success and well-being. By fostering strong connections among students, peers, instructors, and the broader university community, universities can significantly enhance student engagement, leading to better academic and personal outcomes.

### **Civic Engagement and Parental Education**

Our findings indicate that parental education does not significantly impact most forms of civic engagement among students. However, there are some exceptions, such as participation in campaigns and

community events, where a mother's education seems to have a more noticeable influence. This suggests that while parental education can play a role in certain civic activities, it is not a determining factor for most students' civic engagement. Research by Neundorf et al. (2016) aligns with this, showing that school-based civic education can help bridge the gap left by insufficient parental political socialization. This is particularly important in ensuring that students without strong civic foundations at home still receive the education and encouragement they need to participate in civic activities.

Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) further pointed out the broader benefits of parental involvement in education, which not only boosts academic and emotional well-being but also indirectly encourages civic participation by fostering academic engagement. Dotterer and Wehrspann (2016) added that parental engagement in education can lead to better academic outcomes, which in turn can promote greater civic engagement. Together, these findings highlight the crucial roles that both parental involvement and structured civic education in schools play in cultivating active and engaged citizens.

### **Civic Engagement and Pre-University Education**

In our study, pre-university education backgrounds showed a limited impact on civic engagement at the university level, with a few notable exceptions hinting at the influence of early educational environments. However, previous research highlights the critical role of pre-university education in developing civic-mindedness among students. The IEA Civic Education Study (Torney-Purta, 2002) emphasizes the need for schools to provide comprehensive civic education, including lessons on democratic engagement and community participation, to foster responsible citizenship from a young age.

Historical examples also illustrate the enduring value of integrating civic engagement into educational settings. For instance, the civic involvement promoted by private Black colleges in the mid-20th century (Gasman et al., 2015) and the push for an "engaged campus" in higher education (Furco, 2010) demonstrate how early education can shape lifelong civic habits. These insights affirm that early education is crucial for instilling civic values and practices, setting the stage for continued engagement in higher education and beyond.

### **Civic Engagement Barriers**

Identifying and addressing the barriers to civic engagement is crucial for fostering a culture of active participation within universities. Our study highlights several institutional and societal challenges that can hinder students' involvement in civic activities. The most significant obstacle is time constraints, which many students cite as a primary reason for their limited participation. Other notable barriers include family obligations, community disapproval, and religious considerations. Some students also report a lack of interest in civic involvement, which further complicates efforts to increase engagement.

Previous research identifies additional barriers to university civic engagement, including institutional issues and broader societal challenges. Heinecke et al. (2016) pointed out that entrenched institutional traditions and divergent views of democracy can misalign with the needs of modern civic engagement. Forren and Woiteshek (2013) noted that departmental silos and a lack of cross-disciplinary cooperation, along with funding and faculty role limitations, can restrict the scope of civic initiatives. Additionally, societal factors, such as public perceptions, gender dynamics, and the diversity of student

activists, particularly in minority-serving institutions (Fassett et al., 2018), add further complexity to student engagement efforts.

Within the Qatari higher education context, Abdelazeem et al. (2022) underscored that the following four categories of barriers hinder civic engagement at university: university students, the university environment, civil society volunteer organizations, and Qatari society. In response to these barriers, Abdelazeem et al. (2022) proposed a framework to enhance civic engagement. This framework has six interconnected dimensions: the student, the teacher, the university administration, the partners (i.e. parents and civil society organizations), and sustainable development. This framework required a collaborative, inclusive approach among universities, faculty, students and communities to create environments that support diverse forms of civic participation. By doing so, universities can help overcome the challenges that limit student engagement and foster a more active, engaged student body.

## Conclusion

This study has meticulously investigated civic engagement among university students in Qatar, uncovering detailed insights with significant consequences for educational bodies, policymakers, and academia. By examining the influence of gender, academic achievement, parental education, pre-university schooling, and perceived barriers, the research illuminates the intricate web of factors that drive students' involvement in civic endeavors.

The research underscores the critical role of gender in determining the nature of civic engagement opportunities students engage in, with notable differences in participation in activities like volunteering, community service, and advocacy on civic issues. This highlights the necessity for gender-inclusive approaches in civic engagement programs to ensure that both men and women students have equal opportunities for involvement. As reflected by students' GPAs, academic performance is identified as a key factor in civic engagement, suggesting that higher academic achievers are more likely to participate in civic activities. This points to the potential of academic success catalyzing civic involvement, advocating for integrating civic engagement elements into academic curricula to promote a culture of social responsibility among students. Surprisingly, the level of parental education does not consistently affect students' civic participation, challenging preconceived notions about the impact of socio-economic status on civic involvement. This finding suggests a shift toward focusing on individual motivation and institutional support as more significant determinants of civic engagement.

The impact of pre-university education highlights the importance of early educational experiences in shaping future civic participation, indicating the need to embed civic education in early curricula to lay the groundwork for lifelong civic involvement. The study also points out universal recognition of barriers to civic engagement, such as time constraints and family commitments, with varying perceptions based on students' academic standings. This calls for creating flexible and innovative civic engagement opportunities, like virtual volunteering, to accommodate the diverse needs of students. Moreover, the findings reveal that a student's college, gender, and GPA collectively influence their civic engagement, suggesting a complex interplay of factors that necessitates customized approaches in designing civic engagement initiatives within educational institutions.

Despite its insightful contributions, the study faces limitations, including its reliance on nonparametric data, self-reported measures, and cross-sectional nature, which may affect the findings'

generalizability. Future research could overcome these limitations through longitudinal studies, objective engagement metrics, and broadening the demographic and geographic scope of the research. The study advocates for further investigation into the effectiveness of civic engagement interventions and a deeper, qualitative understanding of civic participation across different contexts. The implications extend to educational policy and curriculum design, emphasizing the need for civic engagement integration to foster active citizenship from an early age.

In conclusion, this research offers valuable perspectives on the factors influencing civic engagement among students. It advocates for a comprehensive approach to encouraging civic participation and calls for collaborative efforts among educational institutions, policymakers, and civic organizations to create supportive environments for active and engaged citizens, thereby reinforcing the foundations of democratic societies.

### Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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