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YOUTH LEADERSHIP IN CIVIC PARTICIPATION AND A BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF SDG 10 AND SDG 16 (1994–2024)

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ABSTRACT

Despite growing scholarly interest in youth leadership, significant gaps remain in understanding its role as a core dimension of civic participation and its contribution to Sustainable Development Goals 10 and 16. This study aims to analyze research trends on youth leadership and civic participation from 1994 to 2024. A bibliometric analysis was conducted using 63 documents indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, which were processed through RStudio, Bibliometrix, and Biblioshiny. The findings reveal a sustained increase in scientific production, with an annual growth rate of 6.15%, although international collaboration remains limited. The analysis also identifies key thematic clusters related to transformational leadership, community participation, youth resilience, civic education, digital activism, and democratic governance. Furthermore, the evidence indicates that recent scholarship increasingly recognizes young people as strategic actors in reducing inequalities, strengthening inclusive institutions, and advancing participatory processes across diverse social contexts. The study concludes that youth leadership is an emerging and consolidating field of research, with growing relevance for civic engagement, democratic innovation, and sustainable development. Nevertheless, further comparative studies, interdisciplinary perspectives, and stronger international cooperation are required to deepen understanding of the actual impact of youth leadership on social transformation and public participation, particularly in Latin America and other comparable contemporary institutional contexts.

KEYWORDS: Youth, Democracy, Civic Participation, Politics, Leadership, Sustainable Development Goals.

1. INTRODUCTION

Youth leadership is the capacity to guide and inspire peers and mobilize groups to achieve collective objectives. In this sense, self-confidence, responsibility, inspiration, critical thinking, interpersonal skills, decision-making ability, and a constant willingness to learn constitute the set of attributes that distinguish young leaders, shaping an empowered character capable of driving successful civic movements. This means that these leaders foster autonomy and provide support for community participation, while maintaining collaborative relationships with other key actors and accumulating experience to face new challenges and real responsibilities that contribute to social development and collective well-being (Chavez et al., 2024; Majeed et al., 2017; Shaikh et al., 2019; Yusof et al., 2014).

The effectiveness of leadership is not universal, as it is strongly conditioned by the cultural, social, and organizational contexts in which it is exercised. Therefore, leaders must adapt their styles and strategies to align with local values, expectations, and norms, thereby ensuring effective and contextually grounded leadership. At present, leadership requires the integration of digital competencies, collaborative abilities, and a strong commitment to sustainability and ethics—fundamental elements for navigating complex, technology-driven environments. Likewise, social change often entails a cultural transformation that enables societies to adapt to new norms and values, a process essential for fostering development and social evolution. Within this framework, youth empowerment emerges as a key component for sustainable development (AlHares, 2025; Chang et al., 2022; Eslava Zapata et al., 2023; Firestone et al., 2021; Nazarian et al., 2025; Portuguese-Castro & Castillo-Martínez, 2025; Rahman & Al-Azm Editors, 2023).

Civic participation is conceptualized as an inherently polysemic phenomenon, whose complexity increases when applied to the political sphere. This essential process is fundamentally defined as the deliberate effort to include individuals in public decision-making, and it is regarded as a core value of democracy and civic culture, as well as a key element in legitimizing democratic systems (Momeni et al., 2011; Subía & Antonio, 2020). Likewise, participation denotes a recognition between society and politics and involves a process of direct or indirect intervention by non-governmental actors who seek to propose alternatives for the management of public affairs. This, in turn, requires the adoption of multidirectional problem-solving approaches (Landa

Oregi et al., 2025; Osorno-Córdova, 2025).

1.1. Active Youth for Sustainable and Inclusive Development

Research and participatory actions led by young people represent highly strategic approaches for generating significant social change, as they contribute both to reducing inequalities and to strengthening institutions. However, these initiatives take place in complex contexts, where institutional support is insufficient, digital gaps limit full participation, and legal shortcomings hinder the consolidation of youth efforts. Within this framework, digital tools emerge as resources with high potential to facilitate interaction, organization, and visibility of these actions, although their effectiveness depends on strong institutional backing to ensure sustainability and promote inclusión (Bonsu et al., 2020; Kumar et al., 2023; Ofosu-Appiah et al., 2025; Prakasa & Fatmawati, 2024).

Youth-led projects have generated concrete impacts on public policy formulation, as evidenced by reforms in the sanitation sector in Ghana and the implementation of health policies in South Africa, highlighting the potential of youth-led research to influence local governance. Young leaders play a crucial role in anti-corruption efforts, promoting transparency through civil society engagement, reporting irregularities, and leveraging digital technologies. In this way, youth initiatives are able to overcome various obstacles by fostering anti-corruption education, using social networks as communication channels, and building trust through context-sensitive approaches (Ahlborg & Boräng, 2018; Cheliatsidou et al., 2023; Eide & Kunelius, 2021; Hariyani et al., 2025; Jacobs & George, 2022; López-García et al., 2025; Peña-Torres & Reina-Rozo, 2022; van der Merwe et al., 2021; Ying, 2025).

SDG 16 is recognized as a fundamental element for achieving the remaining Sustainable Development Goals, as peace, justice, and strong institutions are essential to ensuring equitable and sustainable development. In this sense, achieving the SDGs requires an integrated approach that considers the interconnection among the various goals, so that progress in one area reinforces advancement in others. Likewise, collaboration among governments, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and civil society is indispensable for coordinating resources, sharing knowledge, and ensuring the sustainability of initiatives. Therefore, strengthening governance, promoting inclusive participation, and harnessing the interdependence among the SDGs constitute key strategies for achieving

comprehensive sustainable development (Bulmer & Yáñez-Araque, 2023; Cardozo, 2017; Milton, 2021; Radin, 2019).

Young people are key actors in processes of social change; however, their effective empowerment depends on collaborative leadership that promotes intergenerational cooperation and is supported by strong structural backing. Within this framework, objectives related to youth participation have universal applicability and are fundamental to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as they address essential dimensions that sustain comprehensive development. Specifically, these objectives promote principles of justice, peace, and equality, strengthening institutions and social cohesion, and creating the necessary conditions for societies to progress in an equitable and sustainable manner. Therefore, fostering inclusive and culturally responsive programs that support youth participation in social, economic, technological, and environmental initiatives becomes an essential strategy for ensuring lasting impact (Borojević et al., 2023; Fukuda & Zusman, 2024; Seelajaroen & Jitmaneeroj, 2025; Singh, 2024; Vermeire & Van den Broeck, 2024).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The scientific literature on youth leadership in civic participation highlights that transformational leadership constitutes an essential component in promoting civic behavior, as it stimulates motivation, inspiration, and collective commitment oriented toward the common good. This leadership style not only guides young people toward shared goals but also strengthens social cohesion and enhances active engagement. In turn, it facilitates the peaceful resolution of conflicts and promotes balanced decision-making, both of which are fundamental to preserving harmony and achieving collective objectives. In this context, emotional intelligence enhances the capabilities of youth leadership, fostering constructive environments and contributing significantly to community well-being (Abdulrab et al., 2025; Alrubaysh et al., 2022; Bates et al., 2019; Bean et al., 2017; Linville & Kliuchnikov, 2021; Majeed et al., 2017; Razak, 2016; Shahab et al., 2018).

Research by Biffi (2023); Hinkle et al. (2018); Korich & Fields (2023); Mathiyazhagan (2020); Oubiña López & Gómez Baya (2025); Sciola et al. (2025); Shahab et al. (2018); Zvulun & Harel (2018), highlights that youth participation in civic life is closely linked to leadership, as both dimensions complement each other in the creation of inclusive

and resilient communities. Non-conventional forms of engagement—such as social activism, digital platforms, and community-based organization—provide spaces in which young people develop leadership skills capable of motivating and mobilizing others. Civic involvement also contributes positively to psychological well-being by reducing anxiety and strengthening resilience, thereby increasing the confidence required for effective leadership. Furthermore, participation in community initiatives fosters key competencies such as communication, decision-making, and conflict resolution, all associated with transformational leadership. Thus, civic participation not only empowers young people but also serves as a crucial formative space for developing leaders committed to social development and collective well-being.

Although research on youth leadership and civic participation has grown steadily, the literature continues to adopt a partial focus primarily centered on leadership styles and their socio-cultural implications. This limitation creates theoretical and methodological gaps that hinder a comprehensive understanding of the role of young people in civic action and their real impact on social transformation and the strengthening of democratic governance. In this sense, several studies emphasize that school experiences, both within classrooms and in non-formal settings, influence young people's political and social participation by strengthening their engagement with civic commitment. Within this same framework, digital media and participatory culture open new opportunities for political socialization, making youth participation more accessible and appealing (Biolik et al., 2025; Črnič, 2018; Ito et al., 2015; Palacios-Esparza et al., 2024; Santana et al., 2024; Tibbitts & Wong, 2024).

For this reason, the research contributes to the Sustainable Development Goals “Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (SDG 16) and Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10)” (ONU, 2015). With the purpose of strengthening youth empowerment, promoting active and inclusive civic participation, fostering the creation of democratic spaces, and advancing sustainable development through the involvement of young people in decision-making, this research aims to analyze trends related to youth leadership in civic participation in order to identify the main challenges that should be addressed in future studies.

Consequently, the central question guiding the study is: How has youth leadership in civic participation been addressed in the scientific literature? To tackle this issue, the following

research questions are formulated:

- (i) How has annual scientific production in the study area evolved?
- (ii) Which authors and affiliations have the greatest impact according to the H-index?
- (iii) Which countries concentrate the highest scientific output and international collaboration?
- (iv) What are the main topics and trends identified in the authors' keywords?

The article is structured as follows. In the first phase, the methodology employed is detailed and the study process is presented. In the second phase, the findings are revealed, highlighting the fundamental lines of inquiry. In the third phase, the research discussions are presented. In the fourth phase, the conclusions are developed, accompanied by the research implications.

Despite the growing interest in youth leadership, there is still limited bibliometric evidence that systematically examines its relationship with civic participation and its contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 10 and SDG 16.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted through a bibliometric analysis composed of the following structure: (i) formulation of the research questions, (ii) construction of the search strategy, (iii) collection of documents from databases such as Scopus and Web of Science (WoS), (iv) data processing using RStudio, and (v) application of Biblioshiny within Bibliometrix for the final assessment.

Bibliometrix enables researchers to analyze and

evaluate the development of scientific literature over time, allowing them to understand emerging trends and topics for future research. This software is designed to perform statistical analysis and generate visualizations to facilitate a successful evaluation using R. (Bibliometrix, 2025; Riaman et al., 2022; Z. Wang et al., 2025).

3.1. Use Of Artificial Intelligence Tools

In this manuscript, the authors exclusively used ChatGPT (OpenAI, San Francisco, CA, USA) to enhance the clarity, coherence, and style of the scientific text. The development of the data, analysis, and interpretations was carried out entirely by the authors. The contributions of the tool were critically evaluated, edited, and verified to ensure their accuracy and alignment with the original meaning. It is important to note that artificial intelligence was not used to generate original ideas, interpret results, create figures or images, nor to collect or analyze data.

3.2. Data Collection And Extraction

The search strategy for the articles was based on the Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) platforms, allowing for the identification of documents related to youth leadership in civic participation. The search query was structured as follows: (i) in Scopus, the "TITLE-ABS-KEY" field was used, and (ii) in Web of Science, "TS" was applied. It is noteworthy that in both platforms, documents published in 2025 were excluded, automatically generating a temporal range starting from 1993 in Scopus and 2014 in WoS (see Table 1).

Table 1: Search String.

Database	Query
Scopus	(TITLE-ABS-KEY ("youth leadership" OR "young leaders" OR "youth empowerment leadership" OR "youth political leadership" OR "youth community leadership" OR "adolescent leadership" OR "student leadership") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("citizen participation" OR "civic participation" OR "public participation" OR "community participation" OR "citizen engagement" OR "civic engagement" OR "public engagement" OR "community engagement" OR "citizen involvement" OR "civic involvement" OR "public involvement" OR "community involvement" OR "citizen empowerment" OR "citizen activism" OR "civic activism" OR "citizen deliberation" OR "citizen decision making" OR "participatory democracy" OR "participatory governance" OR "citizen coproduction" OR "citizen collaboration")) AND PUBYEAR > 1993 AND PUBYEAR < 2025
Web of Science (WoS)	(TS=("youth leadership" OR "young leaders" OR "youth empowerment leadership" OR "youth political leadership" OR "adolescent leadership" OR "student leadership")) AND (TS=("citizen participation" OR "civic participation" OR "public participation" OR "community participation" OR "citizen engagement" OR "civic engagement" OR "public engagement" OR "community engagement" OR "citizen involvement" OR "civic involvement" OR "public involvement" OR "community involvement" OR "citizen empowerment" OR "citizen activism" OR "civic activism" OR

	"citizen deliberation" OR "citizen decision making" OR "participatory democracy" OR "participatory governance" OR "citizen coproduction" OR "citizen collaboration")
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For Scopus, the search conducted on September 9, 2025, retrieved 60 articles. Similarly, for Web of Science on the same date, 22 records were identified. In total, as of early access in 2024, 82 records were

collected, of which 18 were duplicates and only 1 was excluded due to having a 2025 publication date (see Figure 1).

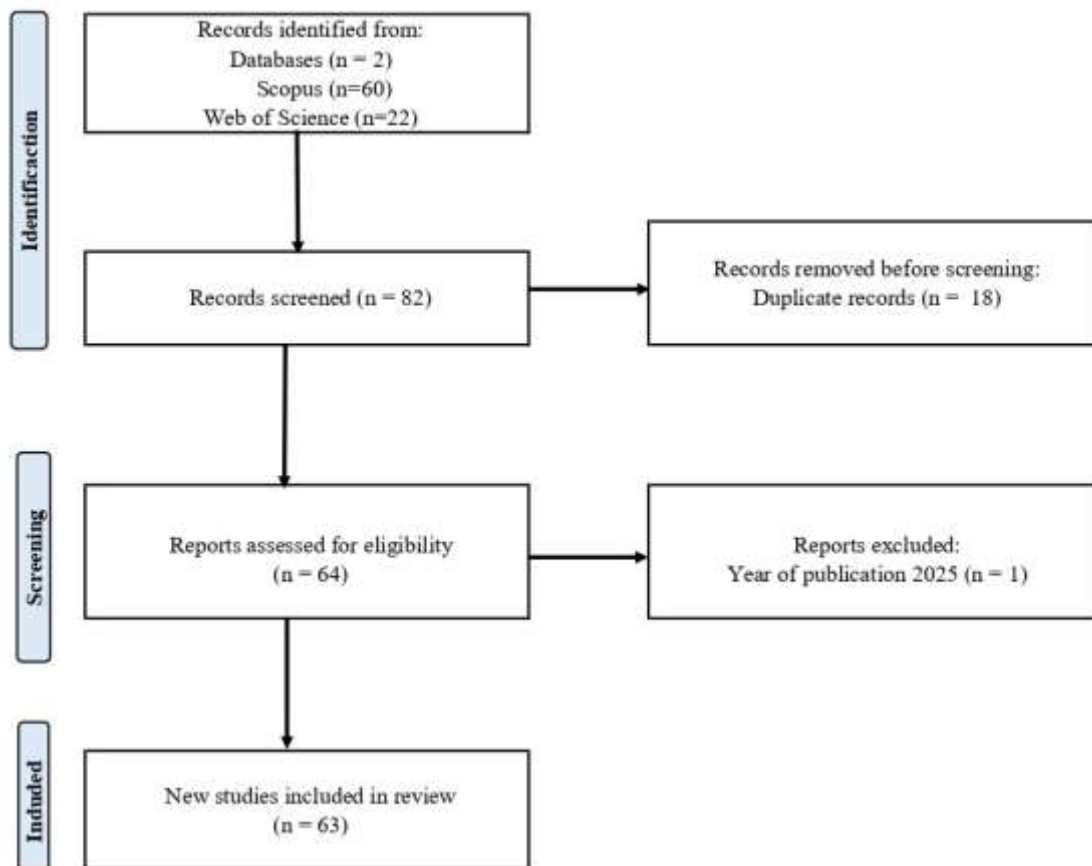


Figure 1: Prisma Flow Diagram.

3.3. Bibliometric Analysis Tools

The selected records were examined in Bibliometrix using the R Studio platform and Biblioshiny. Figures and tables for the study were generated accordingly. The original data were stored in CSV format, allowing for proper manipulation, analysis, and interpretation. Additionally, the evidence is available through the following link: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1CG_Rtg2AL-A5i68rtcNL3KByoaE4uHA8?usp=sharing.

4. RESULTS

The bibliometric study shows that between 1994

and 2024, 63 documents were produced, indicating a sustained growth of 6.15% per year. Production is primarily concentrated in articles (46), highlighting the role of academic journals as the main channel for knowledge dissemination. Similarly, an average of 11.49 citations per document reflects a moderate influence within the scientific community. Collaboration is also significant, with 3.7 co-authors per document; however, international co-authorship remains low at 7.93%. In the same vein, 320 Keywords Plus (ID) and 455 Author’s Keywords (DE) were recorded, demonstrating a wide thematic diversity and an expanding field of study (see Table 2).

Table 2: Database Description.

Description	Results
Time period	1994:2024
Sources (Journals, Books, etc.)	51

Documents	63
Annual growth rate (%)	6.15
Average document age	9.05
Average citations per document	11.49
References	0
DOCUMENT CONTENT	
Keywords Plus (ID)	320
Author's Keywords (DE)	455
AUTHORS	
Authors	229
Single-authored documents	10
AUTHOR COLLABORATION	
Single-authored documents	10
Co-authors per document	3.7
International co-authorship rate	7.937
DOCUMENT TYPES	
Article	46
Book	2
Book chapter	9
Conference paper	2
Note	2
Review	2

Figure 2 shows the evolution of scientific production over the period 1994–2024. A total of 63 articles were recorded, with initial productivity being very low and intermittent, as several years had no publications. From 2010, a turning point is observed, leading to a gradual increase that reaches greater stability from 2012 onward. Additionally, the

last decade accounts for the majority of production, with notable peaks in 2017, 2020, 2021, 2023, and 2024, each recording five to six articles per year. Therefore, these results indicate a recent consolidation process and confirm a sustained growth trend in research within this field.

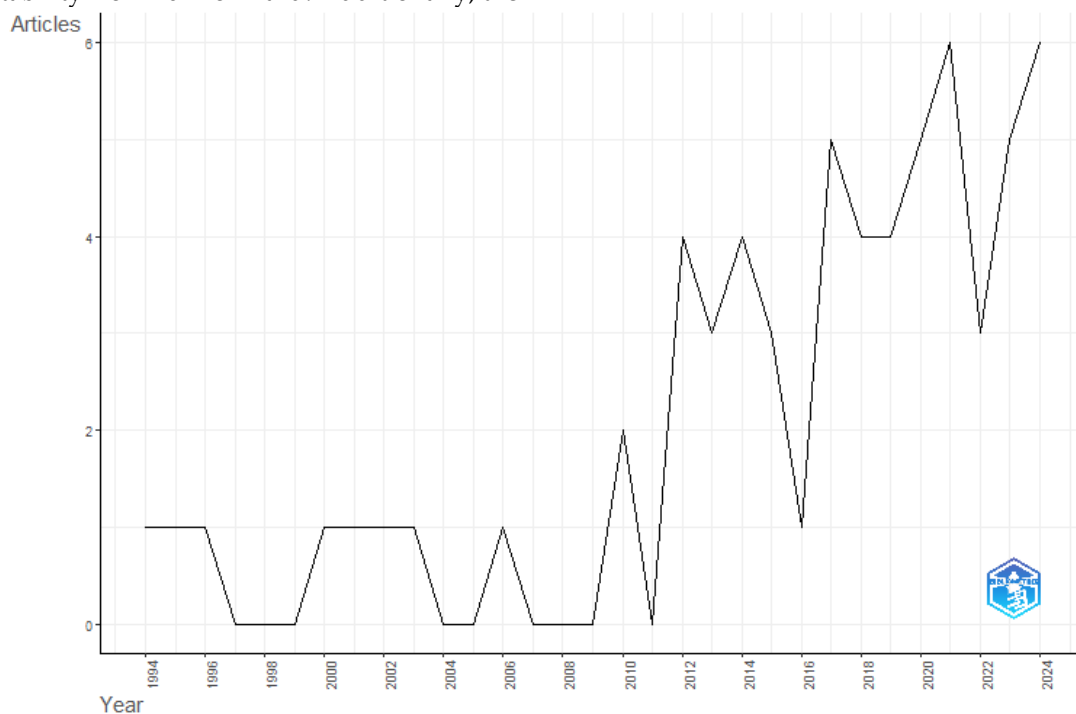


Figure 2: Annual Production.

It is observed that Anakwe A and Majee W each achieve an h-index of 2 with 6 citations, while Rath S also has an h-index of 2 but demonstrates greater impact with a total of 20 citations. Meanwhile, Khan

R has an h-index of 2 with 4 citations, and Agrawal T shows the lowest output with an h-index of 1 and a total of 4 citations. This contrast highlights that, although several authors share the same level of

productivity according to the h-index, differences in citation counts reflect significant variations in their academic influence (see Table 3).

Table 3: Local Impact of Authors According to the H-Index.

Author	h_index	g_index	m_index	TC	NP	PY_start
ANAKWE A	2	2	0.29	6	2	2019
KHAN R	2	2	0.40	4	2	2021
MAJEE W	2	2	0.29	6	2	2019
RATH S	2	2	0.33	20	2	2020
AGRAWAL T	1	1	0.08	4	1	2014
AHMAD A	1	1	0.17	1	1	2020
AHMAD M	1	1	0.20	2	1	2021
ALLISON K	1	1	0.13	8	1	2018
ARCHES J	1	1	0.04	13	1	2001
ASANTE R	1	1	0.20	3	1	2021

Capital Medical University leads the ranking with 13 publications, demonstrating notable leadership in scientific production. It is followed by the University of Michigan and the University of Missouri, each with 5 articles, consolidating their relevance in the study area. In the second tier, institutions such as Northeastern University, University of Cape Town, and the University of Massachusetts Boston stand

out with 4 publications each. Meanwhile, Basilan State College, Boston Children’s Hospital, and Universitas Jenderal Soedirman record 3 publications, reflecting a relevant but less dominant participation. In the third tier, Case Western Reserve University is included with 2 contributions, completing the top 10 most productive institutions in the analyzed field (see Figure 3).

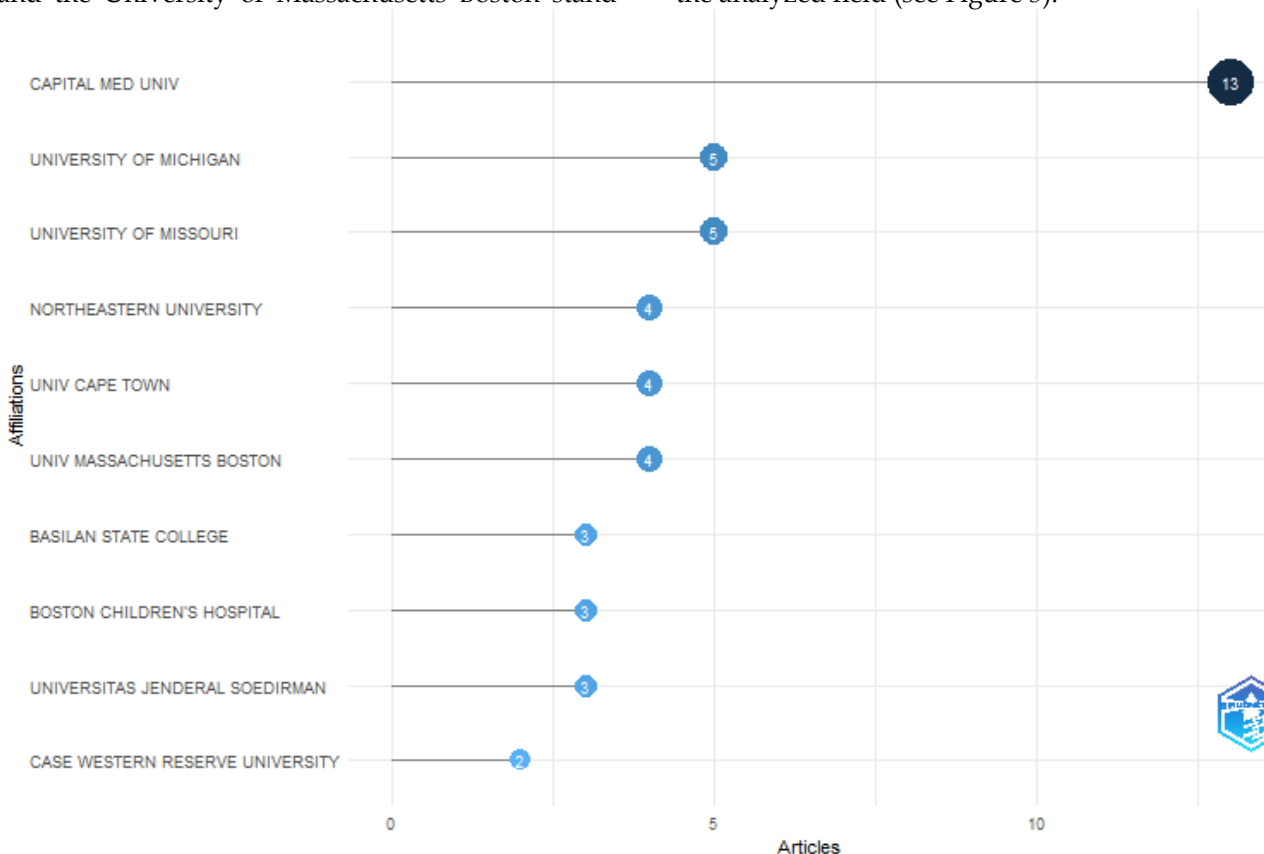


Figure 3: Most Relevant Affiliations.

Scientific production on this topic is concentrated in the United States (64) and China (15), forming the first level of global leadership. In the second tier, countries such as Australia, South Africa, and Brazil

stand out with 4 to 5 publications, followed by smaller contributions from Canada, Pakistan, Belgium, Peru, and South Korea. In the third tier, countries such as Japan, Indonesia, and the United

Research has shown a clear evolution over time. In the initial stage, prior to 2010, the terms “United States,” “Education,” and “Child” reflected a focus on child health and education, indicative of more descriptive and localized studies. Between 2010 and 2018, attention shifted toward social aspects, incorporating concepts such as “Civic Participation,” “Health Promotion,” “Leadership,” and “Organization and Management,” with a notable surge in leadership research during 2017–2018. This shift demonstrates a transition from specific approaches to more comprehensive analyses that emphasize the interaction between individuals and their social context. It also reflects a growing interest in understanding how management and participation strengthen community processes.

In the period from 2018 to 2023, research increasingly focused on “Community Participation,” “Universities,” “Young Adults,” and “Youth Leadership,” reflecting the consolidation of youth as central actors in social and academic development. This emphasis responds to emerging social and political concerns aimed at integrating young people into decision-making and community transformation. The diversity of terms confirms the interdisciplinary nature of the field, bringing together contributions from public health, education, and social sciences. Overall, these trends suggest that future research will not only delve deeper into the social impact of youth but also explore their capacity to lead sustainable and long-term change (see Figure 6).

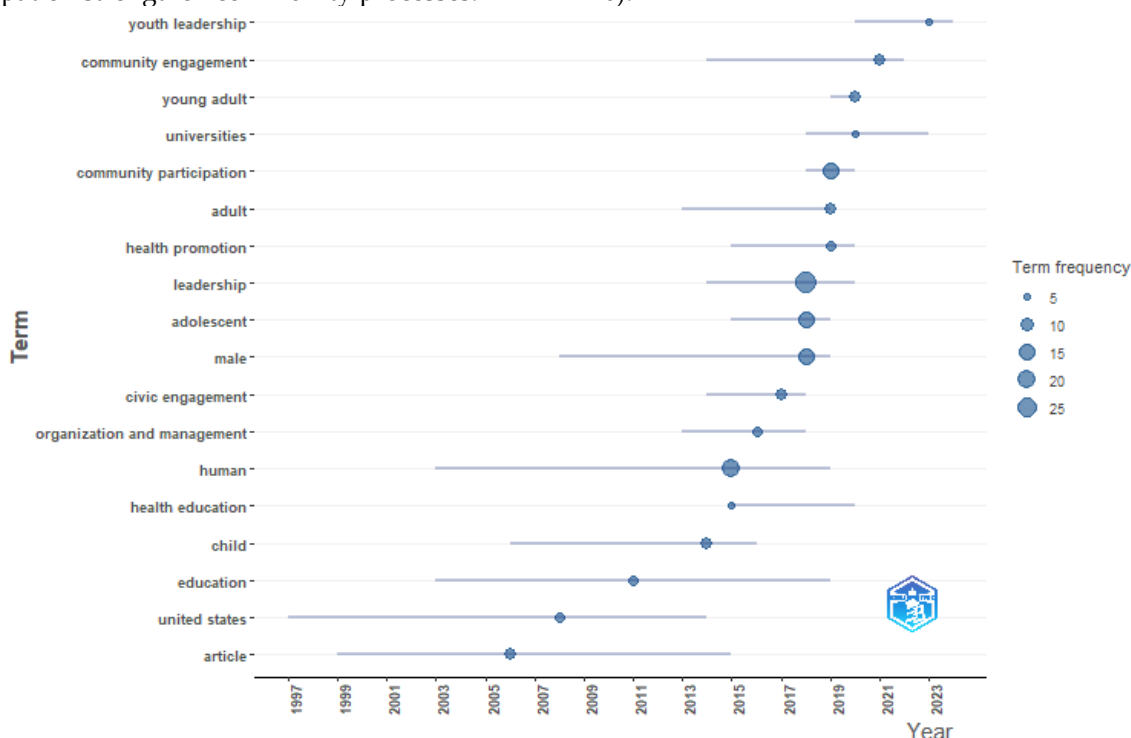


Figure 6: Trending Topics Based on Author Keywords.

5. DISCUSSIONS

The bibliometric analysis of youth leadership in civic participation shows a sustained growth in scientific production between 1994 and 2024, with a more pronounced increase in the last decade. This dynamism reflects not only the growing interest in understanding the role of young people as agents of social and political transformation but also the urgency of expanding research into contexts that remain underexplored. Regarding production by country, the United States and China lead by a wide margin, while other nations make sporadic contributions, highlighting an unequal distribution

of knowledge at the global level. Similarly, institutions such as Capital Medical University and the University of Michigan have established themselves as academic benchmarks, guiding trends and new lines of research. Concerning authors, significant heterogeneity is observed: although several exhibit similar productivity levels according to the H-index, differences in citation counts reflect disparities in their scientific influence.

The main limitations of this study relate to factors that affect the scope and generalizability of the results. On one hand, the exclusive use of information indexed in Scopus and Web of Science restricts the inclusion of potentially valuable research

available in other databases and academic repositories, which may provide a partial view of the phenomenon. On the other hand, the predominance of English-language literature introduces a linguistic bias that renders contributions in Spanish, Portuguese, or other local languages less visible, limiting the diversity of perspectives. Likewise, scientific production in this field remains limited and concentrated in a few countries, making it difficult to construct a truly global and equitable picture of youth leadership in civic participation. While these limitations do not invalidate the findings, they highlight the need to adopt more inclusive approaches, diversify information sources, and strengthen linguistic and geographic representation in future research.

The thematic analysis confirms the interdisciplinary nature of this field, where education, health, and social sciences converge, with central concepts such as youth, community participation, resilience, and transformational leadership. However, this breadth also reveals gaps regarding regional and cultural diversity, which questions the applicability of current findings. Future directions require deeper exploration of youth leadership in multicultural contexts and a critical assessment of its relationship with social justice, community cohesion, and democratic governance. It is also essential to analyze how digital environments enhance or distort youth political influence and to what extent resilience, empathy, and cultural identity shape transformational leadership. Consequently, the field is moving toward a more critical and contextualized understanding of youth leadership, conceived as a driver of civic participation and a strategic component in global democratic strengthening.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This study focused on two main dimensions. First, the performance of annual scientific production, along with the identification of the most influential authors, countries, and institutions. Second, the conceptual mapping, which enabled the recognition of thematic clusters related to education, community health, adolescent psychology, and social participation. The findings indicate that research on youth leadership has emerged as a growing and increasingly relevant field, grounded in approaches that highlight resilience, empathy, and cultural identity as key factors for civic engagement. Moreover, the evolution of the analyzed topics shows a shift from descriptive studies centered on childhood and education to research that positions

young people as protagonists in civic participation and social transformation.

This research is directly linked to SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by emphasizing the role of youth leadership in democratic strengthening and social inclusion, which is essential for consolidating public policies and initiatives that actively integrate young people into community transformation processes. In this sense, youth leadership goes beyond mere symbolic participation and functions as a catalyst for participatory governance, sustainable development, and social cohesion. However, its transformative potential faces structural obstacles, such as limited representation in decision-making, unequal access to educational and technological resources, and the lack of sustained policies that ensure the continuity of youth-led projects. These gaps reveal the need to strengthen institutional and regulatory frameworks that promote effective and equitable youth participation.

Furthermore, the connection between SDG 10 and SDG 16 underscores the urgency of advancing a more critical and intersectional agenda that recognizes cultural, territorial, and gender diversity in youth leadership processes. Reducing inequalities cannot be understood without a genuine commitment to social justice and the redistribution of power within public deliberation spaces. Therefore, promoting youth leadership entails moving from an assistance- or representation-based logic to one of co-creation, in which young people act as strategic actors in the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of policies. In this way, youth leadership is consolidated not only as a tool for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals but also as a means to reconfigure contemporary democracy through participatory, inclusive, and culturally sensitive practices.

7. IMPLICATIONS

The results of this research generate both theoretical and practical implications. On the theoretical level, they constitute a significant contribution to the understanding of youth leadership as a driver of civic participation by highlighting the interrelationships between culture, education, and social engagement. At the same time, they reveal gaps associated with regional and cultural diversity, representing important opportunities to expand the scope of future research. These gaps, if not sufficiently addressed, limit the ability to construct a comprehensive and comparative framework that reflects the complexity

of youth contexts across different social realities. Furthermore, the review highlights the need to consider interdisciplinary approaches that integrate psychological, political, and cultural dimensions into the analysis, in order to overcome partial perspectives. In this regard, the theoretical findings not only confirm existing trends but also propose new lines of inquiry that require further research attention.

On the practical level, the results underscore the importance of strengthening youth leadership training programs, promoting community participation through school settings as an initial strategy for civic socialization. They also emphasize the relevance of leveraging digital environments as

spaces for interaction and political socialization, providing young people with opportunities for organization, debate, and mobilization. These practices should be complemented by educational policies that recognize cultural diversity and integrate democratic values from an early age. Similarly, the findings stress the urgency of fostering international cooperation as a key mechanism to reduce inequalities in scientific production and balance knowledge distribution. Finally, the study highlights the need to formulate public policies that recognize young people as strategic actors in democratic development, ensuring their participation in decision-making processes and the consolidation of more inclusive societies.

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