Institute for Community Studies

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The Civic Journey

Summary of emerging research findings

Institute for Community Studies, 2022

"A lot of the time, it feels like you're in a field, and at night-time it gets very dark and you just have no idea which direction to go in. And you just have to wait for some light to come, if its going to. Wait for dawn, and then keep going and make your journey. But there's a lot of time wasted at night-time, when everything's in the dark - and a lot of time can be wasted if you end up going in the wrong direction. [Support] is like having a very rough roadmap in front of you. I think people with more privilege have a more specific and detailed roadmap, whereas, with less privilege, you have less of a roadmap."

Introduction

The Civic Journey is a two-year, youth-led programme, inspiring sustained engagement in social action, community activism and the democratic participation of young people across the UK. The programme builds understanding of the ways in which young people are and become active citizens as they grow up. It focuses on the places and spaces in which they develop knowledges, skills, attitudes, behaviours and experiences - and explores how local, regional, and national policy can better support young people in return. We use the term 'civic journey' as this is a process through which young people develop, mature, and change as they transition through different phases of growing up in terms, forming personal relationship(s) with - and participation in - their local communities, the public sphere, and the state.

This document presents emerging findings from the co-created, youth-engaged research process that has been the main focus of the project through its first year. The project, led principally by a team aged 16 to 30, has used three different participatory methods and a nationally representative survey to gain an initial baseline of young peoples' voice and views against three main research objectives. This summary is indicative of our early findings; it is not exhaustive, or conclusive

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Why focus on the 'civic journey'?'

The aim of the Civic Journey project is to reinvigorate and reimagine how opportunities for young people are designed and delivered, with a clear emphasis on maximising their catalysing and connective capacities. The Civic Journey seeks to ensure that national policy frameworks and spending are not only better integrated but also aligned with the stated needs of young people. In essence, the Civic Journey supports young people to become confident, engaged, and productive members of society. It responds directly to the question and challenge raised in The Ties that Bind (2018) Select Committee and report, as well as what is known, and not known, in the existing evidence base about how to support young people to thrive as citizens in the 21st century .

'We argue that the process we have called the 'civic journey' should be a smooth transition in which central and local government provide individuals with a framework for benefiting from and contributing to society - and assist them in overcoming the barriers to engagement.' ('The Ties that Bind', Select Committee on Citizenship and Engagement, House of Lords, 2018)

Five factors differentiate the idea of the civic journey from previous debates:

- It emphasises the need to work with young people to design and deliver a new policy portfolio

- It highlights the need for systemic thinking and an integrated approach

- It focuses attention on supporting young people across and through critical transition points

- It does not seek to impose any single or simple 'journey' but to facilitate choice and diversity

- It embraces the opportunity to seize a civic opportunity that dovetails with wider national ambitions

For young people, experiencing the impacts of Brexit and Covid during this 'coming of age' process, the need is urgent. Various surveys uncovered worrying levels of social anxiety and political apathy in young people, alongside a widespread sense of exclusion. In October 2022, for example, the Prince's Trust's *Class of Covid Report 2022* found that half of the young people surveyed felt their aspirations for the future were lower as a result of global events since 2020, such as the pandemic and now a cost of living crisis. Action needs to be taken to prevent a backsliding of active citizenship. Today's young people will shape future agendas for political and civic action. They also have to live in the future that the decisions of today create, especially with respect to climate change. Their engagement, empowerment and equitable treatment is vital.

Objectives of the Civic Journey project

- Understanding: What do the concepts of citizenship, service and societal change mean to young people today?

- Aspiration: How and on what basis would young people like to embody and make real their understandings of citizenship, service and societal change over time?

- Support: What do young people need in terms of learning opportunities, mentorship, mobility, momentum, and provision in order to make those aspirations a reality?

The value and purpose of this project

The Civic Journey project will review existing evidence to build understanding of when, where, how, and to what extent young people are socialised through civic education, community engagement, and political participation throughout their transitions into early adulthood. The primary aims are to deliver clarity on the distinctiveness, significance, and originality of the Civic Journey project; and to examine and expose the limits of the existing knowledge base. This will be achieved by collating, analysing, and evaluating evidence that has been produced by academics, governments, civil society actors, and young people both in the UK and internationally. There is no ongoing or sustained programme of research or evaluation that provides longitudinal evidence of young people's civic transitions as they grow up, or analysis of their impacts on attitudes and behaviours informing active citizenship, community belonging, or civic identity in later stages of adulthood.

One of the main challenges in undertaking an evidence review to inform our programme is the extensive but often disconnected research and evaluation landscape, which impairs our understanding of these civic transitions. The current evidence base reaches across the civic journey from childhood to early adulthood. There are, however, noteworthy disparities in the weight and focus of research and evaluation, with a significant amount of published work focusing on young people aged 11 to 21, and a particular focus on education and community-based policy and practice between the ages of 11 and 18. The unequal focus on the role and contribution of education-based activities is particularly acute when considering young people aged 18 and over, with most research concentrating on those who go to university. There is there very little work that takes account of the period of early adulthood beyond the age of 21. While evaluations of interventions during childhood, particularly the role of primary schools, has grown in the past

decade or advancing the knowledge base in this, this period still resonates to lesser extent in terms of policy, practice, and capacity evaluation. This is surprising, as evidence suggests the impact of interventions between the ages of four and 11 are significant both in terms of their immediate and their long-term effects on knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours informing life-long active citizenship.

There is a considerable amount of important work in the area of youth transitions (particularly social, education to work, and personal transitions), which focuses on personal, social, education, and economic aspects, but with little attention given to civic transitions. Existing research highlights that transitions from childhood to early adulthood are increasingly stratified, with economic, political, cultural, and social rights and responsibilities staggered and fluctuating over a prolonged period through childhood, youthhood, and early adulthood. Socio-cultural change has also matured. For example, many of the established markers connected to adulthood - such leaving home, buying a house, getting married, or having children - increasingly happen later, partly due to instability of financial and work arrangements and the inaccessibility of the housing market. The life choices and life courses of young people are critically important, and are informed by diverse family, educational, and employment timelines and experiences. These factors can influence if, when, how, and why young people learn about and engage and participate in civic life.

There is a lack of research—and there has been little discussion—into how children and young people understand and experience civic transitions, and indeed what constitutes a civic transition. The challenge is to develop understanding of how these civic pathways are understood and experienced, how they impact civic socialisation and actualisation both independently and collectively, and in what ways they can be thematically and chronologically mapped and connected to inform policymaking and practice. Furthermore, there is a need to review our understanding of what drives youth involvement in society, as we engage with a youth demographic with greater connectiveness and awareness of the challenges facing their futures.

The commonly used 'deficit model' understands young people as 'citizens in the making', who are largely disempowered in terms of their civic agency and ability to participate in democratic and community life when compared to older adults. This doesn't account for the 'civic learning' that takes place in family, community, digital, and peer-to-peer environments. For example, the advent of the internet and social media is increasingly acknowledged to have a powerful – and largely unregulated - effect in shaping and underpinning civic socialisation. These 'do-it-yourself' approaches raise important questions on whether young people's engagement with society should seek to reinforce or challenge the civic status quo. A critical challenge - often overlooked in the contemporary evidence base but which the Civic Journey project seeks to address - is the extent to which young people should uncritically replicate and reproduce civic norms, behaviours, and identities; or challenge such orthodoxies.

It is against this gap analysis of the existing evidence that we consider and present the emerging findings from our research engagement with young people aged 11 to 30 across the UK.

Dr Andy Mycock and Emily Morrison

THE CIVIC JOURNEY

Attitudes to and engagement with the state or communities can change over time. Our focus on the 'civic journey' emphasises that civic learning and participation is a lifelong process that underpins a young person's growth to adulthood.

As a concept, the civic journey allows us to identify major transition points that young people encounter or forge, and barriers or support available at these points. A person's journey may have 'entry points' where they began to become engaged (or re-engaged), 'exit points' where they stopped engaging, and moments that affect 'momentum' by spurring on or putting off further engagement . The civic journey process can be likened to a river, with each person's river marked by different key events, changes of perspective, and life events.

Keep the fire going

The Civic Journey concept recognises that young people may engage, not engage, or re-engage across their lifetime. It takes sustained effort to remain engaged, and life events or changes in motivation may lead to a scaling down of engagement, and an 'exit' (temporary or permanent) from the civic journey. Some young people perceived civic engagement as an 'ancillary' part of their lives, with separate sets of friends and places, meaning it is likely to be seen as a 'nice to have' against the priorities of work and school. During Covid-19, this meant many young people in our sample saw their engagement scale back substantially, and fail to recover after.

The source

Young people across the UK are born into a wide range of contexts that shape their interactions with civic institutions and attitudes towards engagement. In our data, sites of 'socialisation' (the process through which a young person is taught to be a 'member of society') include family, school, and the specific communities—geographic, interest-based, identity-based—they encounter and participate in. Experiences with these sites can determine a young person's motivation to take up later civic engagement.

Ebb and flow

Transition points are moments when an individual's role and priorities change significantly. For instance, leaving education, starting work, moving home, or having a child. Our research indicates that without access to 'scaffolding', which could support a young person through these changes, transition points often represent moments where young people exit their civic journey. For example, having to be financially self-sufficient was often cited as a barrier to civic engagement. At the same time, transition points can also be moments to deepen engagement. A common theme was for young people's sense of cultural identity to strengthen after migrating to the UK, motivating them to participate in local events focused on their community of identity.

The spark

The 'spark' is a catalyst moment of engagement with community. Our research shows that entry points into civic engagement, where a spark was felt, could be planned—for example, mandatory engagement by school translating into further interest; or unplanned - for example self-directed learning through social media in response to an event. The 'spark' might not be the first time a young person engages. Rather it may represent a move from a less critical approach to engagement (eg mirroring their parents) to a critical engagement that brings into focus meaningful learning about themselves as citizens.

Warm glow

Many of the young people interviewed described a process of engagement spurring further engagement, building 'momentum' in their civic journey. Our research suggests the mechanism underlying this process varies. It may be a 'warm glow' feeling, the development of social relations to form a sense of belonging, or the emergence of a political consciousness that motivates an individual to contextualise their action in pursuit of wider change.
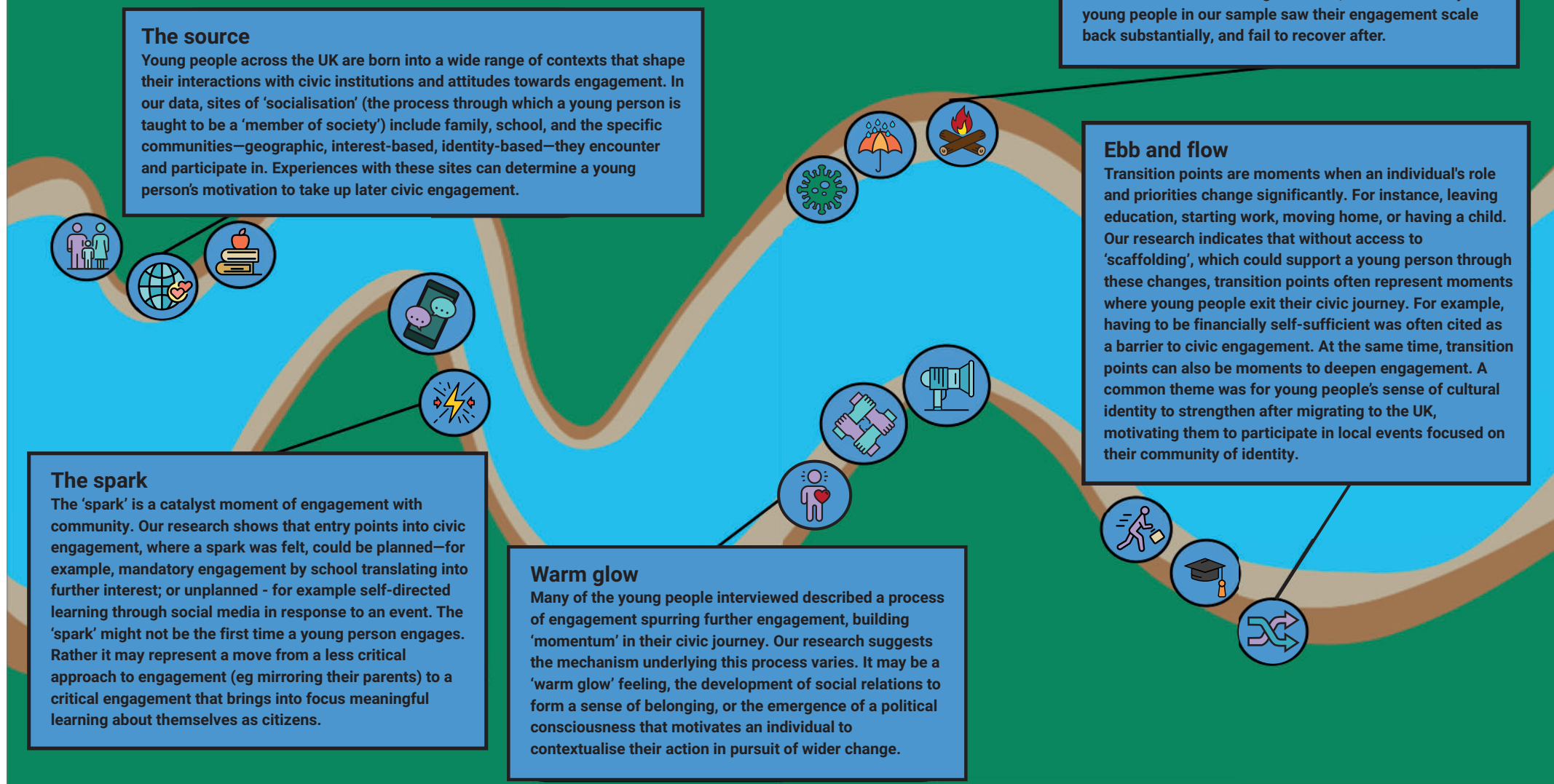
No single journey

Our research finds there are many different civic journeys. Life stages and transition points vary across geography, culture and circumstance. Equally, every young person is an active agent, shaping their journey for themselves—so the same factor could push two different individuals in different directions. Two examples, identified in the data, illustrate this concept:

• Experiences of marginalisation: Many young people reported experiencing marginalisation based on an identity characteristic such as race or sexuality. In some cases, that experience deterred further engagement, whereas in others it formed a motivation to become more actively engaged.

• Covid-19: Many young people described the pandemic as a significant life event in their civic journey. Although some young people experienced a withdrawal of support and access due to lockdowns, forming a barrier to engagement, others found they had new opportunities to engage with their local community.

Our data shows that, to design effective provision in support of young citizens' civic journeys, policy and social action projects must recognise these multiple pathways, and recognise individuals' agency in navigating or creating routes to adulthood. Inequalities in the provision of opportunities, material conditions, and systemic discrimination can affect the journey, but so do

young people themselves in responding to those barriers and forging paths of their own. There's an opportunity to rethink provision to accommodate a greater variety of journeys, such as youth-directed civic engagement, which can provide forms of support that work for a range of possible paths.

'Four pillars' of civic engagement

Within each individual civic journey, we found that young people undertake multiple forms of participation, which broadly reflect the infrastructure available to them, as well as their individual values and interests. The challenge is to develop an understanding of different forms of civic participation, how they are perceived and experienced, and in what ways they inform current and future policymaking and practice.

Based on research conducted as part of the Civic Journey programme, we have developed an initial typology of forms of civic participation. This categorises participation by its goals and characteristics of channels (formal, informal, and non-formal). It moves away from established terminology, which may be disengaging or 'loaded' for young people. Where other typologies focus on 'types' of participation (voting, volunteering, etc), our pillars focus on the purpose or aims of civic participation through the eyes of young people, creating space for emergent forms of participation, which may not yet be named or categorised:

HAVING A SAY

The formal channels and activities that young people might use to express their opinion and participate in decisions that affect them.

Key terms: democratic participation, voting, enfranchisement, political participation, youth council, student union.

HELPING OUT

The opportunities that young people might have to participate actively in and contribute to their communities.

Key terms: volunteering, community business, service learning, community engagement, year of service.

MAKING CHANGE

The informal or non-formal channels and activities that young people might use to create change on issues that matter to them.

Key terms: campaigning, activism, protesting, movement, social action.

BEING EQUIPPED

The opportunities young people might have to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to take part in different forms of civic participation

Key terms: citizenship education, civic learning, human rights, civic responsibility, citizenship.

The source

"Now I do a little bit with my mosque. We have weekly talks and sometimes I give talks. I don't know if that considers as civic engagement, but a branch from that is including younger people, organising events for them, and trying to raise money for the mosque."

24, female, urban, Asian/Asian British

The spark

"[I first started engaging with civic activities...] where I wasn't just following my parents. Where I actually became aware of my own opinions and stuff, I was about 16, I think Brexit was the thing that made me actually realise that I care about politics, basically."

21, male, rural, White—British, Irish, other

Warm glow

"It was an opportunity to always be doing something at the start, because it was during school holidays that I was [volunteering]. Then it got to a point where really liked helping other people and it made me feel better about what else I was doing in my life. It wasn't all just for me anymore, I was doing things for other people."

19, female, semi-urban, White—British, Irish, other

Ebb and flow

"I think volunteering and reaching out to new communities is very important and very helpful, [as] you make actual friends or these connections, but in a way these people are still strangers. That's when life takes a turn, you might just lose completely."

24, female, urban, White—British, Irish, other

Keep the fire going

"When I left school, I had a real dip in mental health because it was such a loss of structure and support. I felt very lost – no one told me how to figure out my next steps."

Participatory video participant, South Devon

Agency

The Civic Journey project set out to understand the civic engagement of young people and how they choose to make change. But what happens if they choose to make change by not engaging? We seek to resist treating young people as passive 'objects' who are buffeted by circumstance into a state of (desirable) engagement and (undesirable) non-engagement.

Giving a journey to those who are 'engaging', but not to those that aren't, ignores that many young people may critically choose to not engage. In a survey of over 2,500 young people conducted in February 2022, 9% of respondents stated they would never want to be involved in social action (defined as any activity done to benefit community or on topics that matter to the young person) or become an active citizen.

Respecting the agency of young people in shaping their own lives requires us to also respect that young people may actively choose to not engage (or engage in a way that doesn't fit under a specific definition of 'civic engagement') as the culmination of their civic journey. Yet understanding what motivates a young person is difficult without problematising non-engagement. This does not mean these young peoples' voices are less valid: we should listen to and learn from those who choose to critically not engage, or engage in ways that are not recognised as civic engagement.

Youth-directed engagement

Young people may also engage in ways that are not perceived as 'civic engagement'. Many saw engagement through a very broad lens, including raising awareness on social media, informal support for their community, and employment with social impact. Drawing on the pillars of engagement (page 6), this early evidence from our research suggests young people are highly motivated about 'making change' at a national or local level. Our survey, where 45% young people first became involved in social action said 'social issues I care about in the world' contributed to their involvement, and 26% were 'inspired by a social movement' (see page [11]). For a few young people, desirable social change required placing

"Things can seem like disengagement, but people just need a break. People might need to take a step back before coming back. Everyone has a different role to play."

Participatory video participant, Northern Ireland
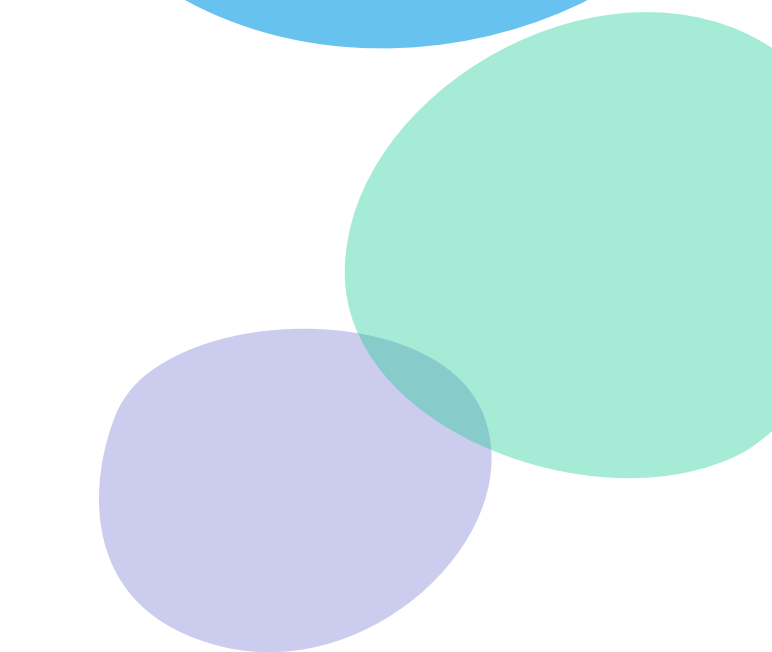
themselves in opposition to civic institutions through civil disobedience—for example during the Kill the Bill protests surrounding the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act of 2022:

"I think the only way to prevent the [Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act] is to make it unworkable, so make it unenforceable and that's through community, civil disobedience, basically…"

25, female, urban, Irish Traveller

Several young people cited technology and social media as allowing young people to create their own infrastructure for social action outside existing systems, in some cases overlapping with 'real-life' social relationships. These spaces helped young people to find others with similar interests and goals, organise informal support or protests, and engage in democratic debate in which young people felt heard.

This is not to say that young people do not want support in their civic journeys, or that inequalities in patterns of engagement and barriers to access civic institutions should be left as they are. However, it is a call to recognise that interventions must be tied to helping young people better express their agency, not to introducing systems that will mould them into 'better citizens'.

"The amount of people coming together to support a cause regardless of what the government or society have said shows that actually we have surpassed. Because that need has not been provided, I think certain groups of people have actually surpassed the need for somebody else to create that. They've begun creating that for themselves."
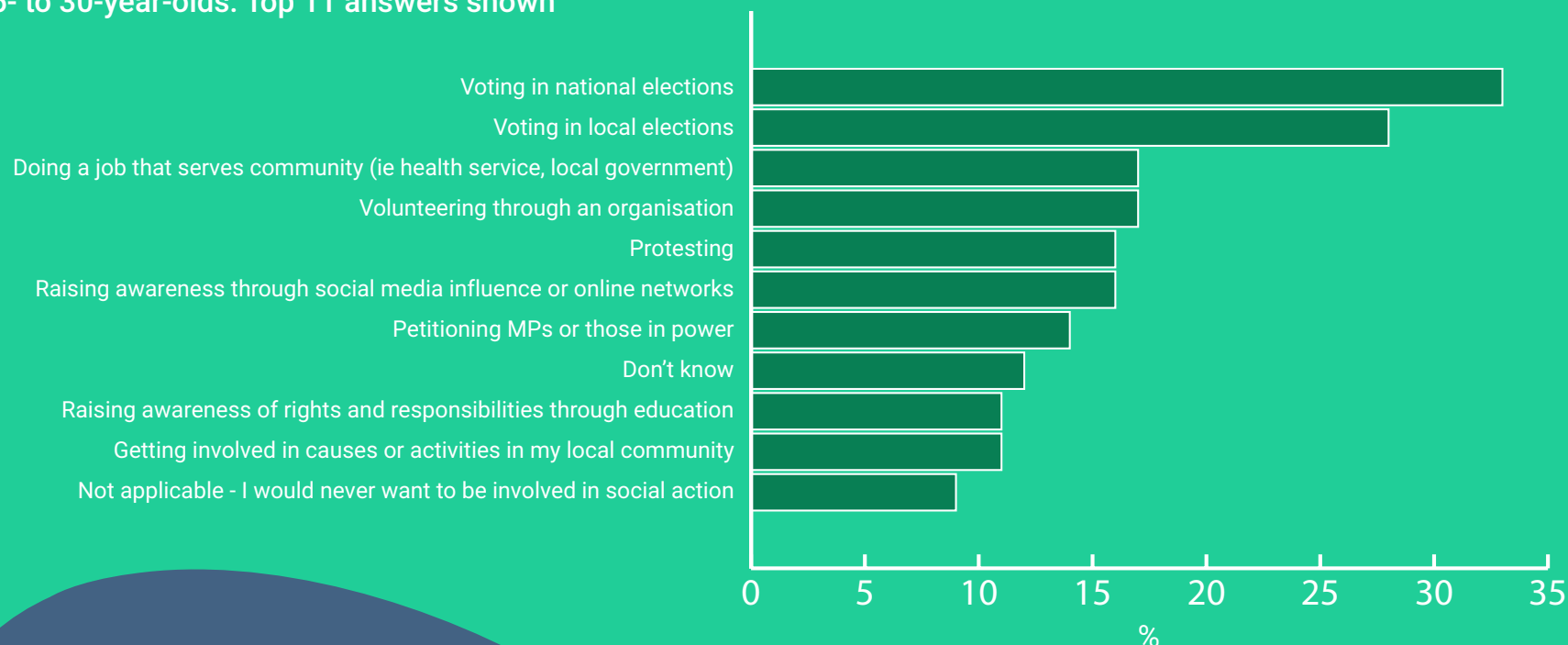
20, female, rural, White British, Irish, other

Perceptions of engagement

Which three, if any, of the types of social action listed below would you be most likely to do if you wanted to change society?
Base: 16- to 30-year-olds. Top 11 answers shown

Type of social action	%
Voting in national elections	33
Voting in local elections	28
Doing a job that serves community (ie health service, local government)	17
Volunteering through an organisation	17
Protesting	16
Raising awareness through social media influence or online networks	16
Petitioning MPs or those in power	14
Don't know	12
Raising awareness of rights and responsibilities through education	11
Getting involved in causes or activities in my local community	11
Not applicable - I would never want to be involved in social action	9

While perceptions of volunteering are explored in the Institute for Community Studies' rapid evidence review of Volunteering Journeys (Institute for Community Studies, 2022), our analysis so far also uncovered youth voices on protest and voting as forms of engagement. These were some of the most likely types of social action young people would engage in, according to our social action survey (in box, above).

Protest

Our sampled interview data revealed a wide range of views on protest. Many young people in the sample viewed protest as a form of civic engagement, and had protested themselves. Some even suggested that protesting was a 'young person' thing to do. There were other voices, however, viewing protest as reflecting 'extreme' views. Holding the middle ground in such cases was seen as desirable. Other voices felt that protest or general activism was the most effective or only route to the types of change they wished to see.

Voting

Many of the young people interviewed had strong views on voting. It was often characterised as a responsibility or civic duty. Some who had migrated to the UK saw the right to vote as a privilege they were motivated to exercise upon attaining citizenship. This view was particularly held by those coming from areas of civic unrest around democratic rights, such as Hong Kong.

Both these perspectives on engagement contrasted with a view that young people, as a political group, were not typically listened to in wider civic discourses, limiting the effectiveness of either type of engagement.

"Young people can organise protests and there are still some things they can do, but if there's no actual response and support systems to actually listen to what they have to say, then there's only so much active participation in our community we can do, because nobody's changing anything, because nobody's listening to us."

25, female, urban, White—British, Irish, other

"It felt like the more extreme view people either left or right would usually be the ones that protest and the people in the middle just didn't care."

21, male, rural, White British

"I particularly think if you are going to complain, you should be voting. I do think everyone should be voting just because it's just really stupid if you are going to live somewhere and not care about how it's governed and how things function."

22, female, urban, Asian/Asian British

"I think what makes me feel able to engage is that we have obviously principles in this country that I feel able to operate in so that everybody, people have a right to vote, can vote. I feel very confident in that principle being acted out. I feel able to engage."

23, female, urban, Black/Black British

Scaffolding

'Scaffolding', in this context, refers to underlying structures and provision that support young people in their transition to adulthood. These could include:

- institutions or networks in formal civic society: education, the welfare state, trade unions;
- social groups: friends, family, activity groups;
- place: transport, local organisations;
- informal spaces: social media, grassroots groups

For the young people we have worked with, scaffolding facilitates the civic journey through the provision of support, information and access to engagement opportunities. Yet we found the scaffolding young people encounter varies in capacity across place schools) and circumstance (eg family). These differences drive inequalities for young people in their civic journeys.
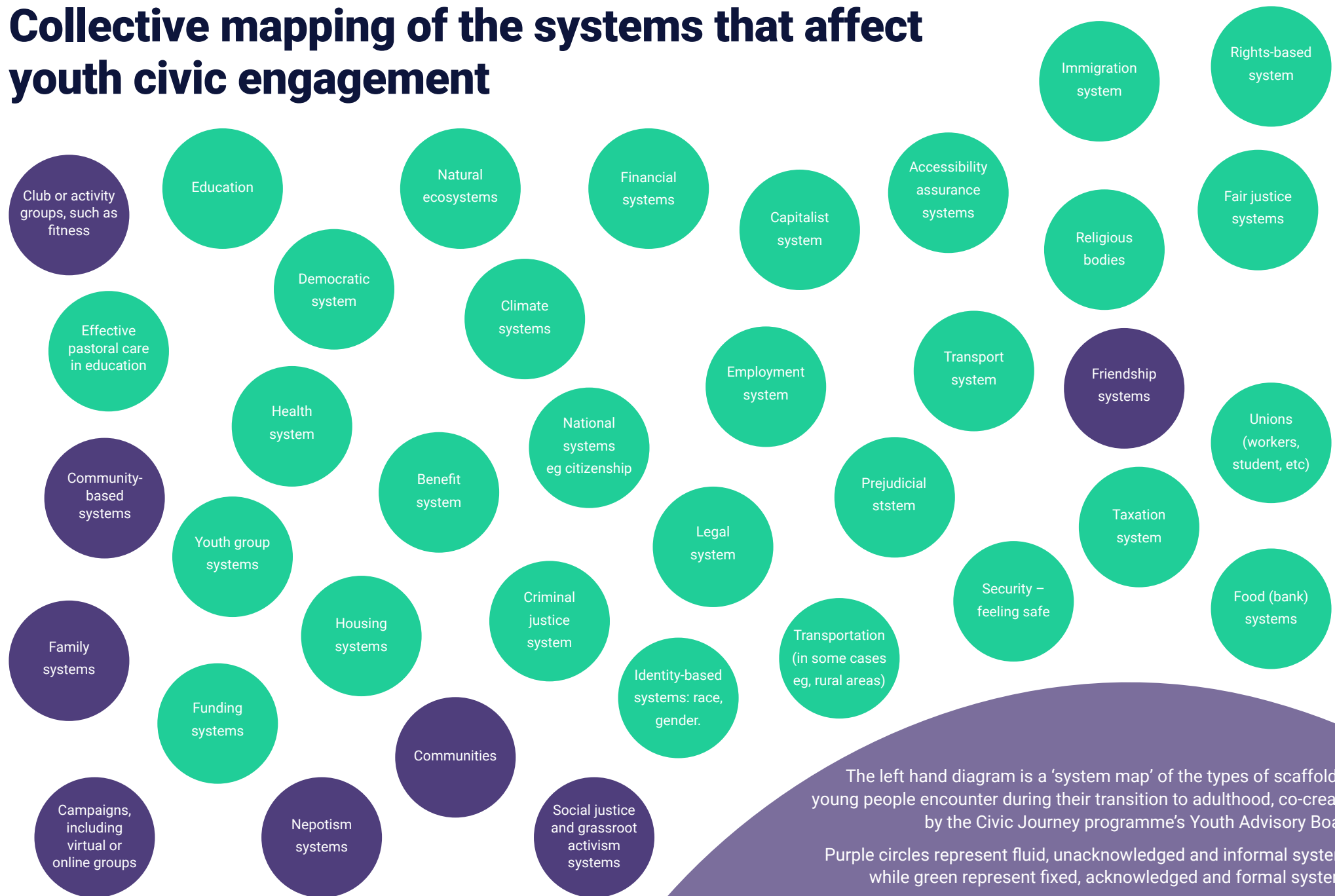
Which, if any, of the following factors contributed to you first becoming involved in social action? Highest five and lowest five answers shown.
Base: 16- to 30-year-olds who are currently involved in social action or have been in the past (1,249 respondents)
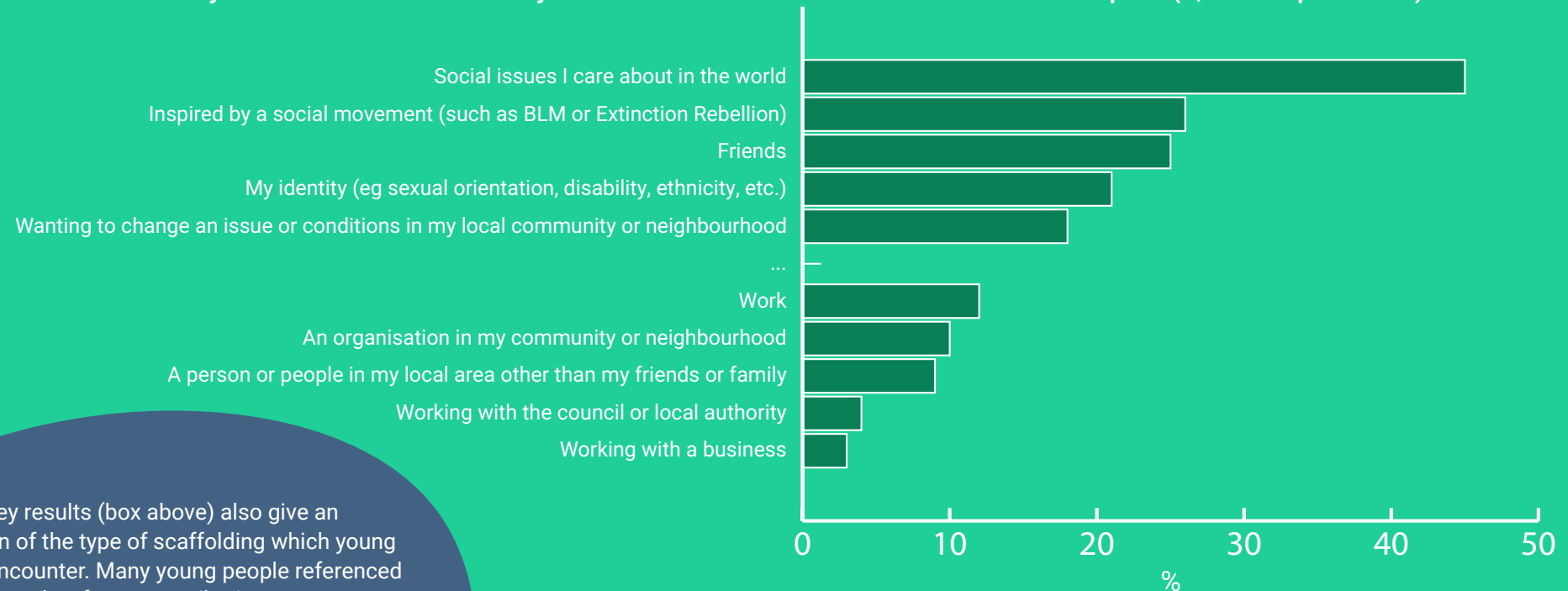
Our survey results (box above) also give an indication of the type of scaffolding which young people encounter. Many young people referenced 'friends' as a key factor contributing to involvement in social action. However, councils, businesses and local organisations were in the bottom five answers.

Collective mapping of the systems that affect youth civic engagement

Immigration system

Rights-based system

Club or activity groups, such as fitness

Education

Natural ecosystems

Financial systems

Accessibility assurance systems

Fair justice systems

Capitalist system

Effective pastoral care in education

Democratic system

Climate systems

Religious bodies

Health system

Employment system

Transport system

Friendship systems

Community-based systems

Benefit system

National systems eg citizenship

Unions (workers, student, etc)

Prejudicial ststem

Taxation system

Youth group systems

Legal system

Family systems

Housing systems

Criminal justice system

Security – feeling safe

Food (bank) systems

Funding systems

Transportation (in some cases eg, rural areas)

Identity-based systems: race, gender.

Communities

Campaigns, including virtual or online groups

Nepotism systems

Social justice and grassroot activism systems

The left hand diagram is a 'system map' of the types of scaffolding young people encounter during their transition to adulthood, co-created by the Civic Journey programme's Youth Advisory Board.

Purple circles represent fluid, unacknowledged and informal systems, while green represent fixed, acknowledged and formal systems.

The Institute for Community Studies has made minor edits to remove duplicate entries and make the map easier to read.

What makes scaffolding effective?

To identify interventions or redesigns of existing scaffolding that could better support young people, our research also needs to examine what makes particular forms of scaffolding effective or ineffective. The following boxes and quotes reflect emerging themes from our wider data analysis, exploring this question:

"So as a young person, I don't feel that there are many spaces in my community that are not- I mean, like physical community in my neighbourhoods- where I can meet other young people and understand how we together as a community within the community can support the community."

23, Female, urban, Black/Black British

Belonging

Scaffolding that helps to facilitate a feeling of community and belonging was often referred to by young people as being particularly effective. Our research so far suggests young people felt certain civic scaffolding wasn't 'for them' but for other generations. Sites that offer value and reassurance, and allow young people to feel ownership and responsibility for their place, were often associated with positive experiences of civic engagement for young people.

Transitions

Many young people described periods of disorientation following major life transitions. They often referenced 'structure' as desirable or lacking at these points in their civic journey. Our data shows that use of the term 'structure' differs to the definition used in the literature of civic engagement and structure. Rather than helping a young person become a 'citizen', 'structure' for young people often referred to apparatus that helped them understand their 'next step' in life. Transitions can risk the loss of scaffolding as a young person moves into an unfamiliar space (both socially and environmentally) that they find difficult to navigate, or because of a genuine lack of civic scaffolding. In particular, moving away from the scaffolding-dense environment of education was often referenced by young people as a difficult period.

"...because I moved quite away from where I grew up to study while at university, and I didn't really feel part of a community there much at all because I was in a different city. I didn't really felt that I fit in in particular, so I felt quite odd."

26, female, urban, Middle Eastern/Middle Eastern British

"When you have that structure around you and then these opportunities go towards schools, at college and then universities. As a graduate, or as someone who's in the world of work or whatever it's not really there anymore."

20, female, semi-urban, Asian/Asian-British

Understanding non-engagement

Narratives around civic engagement implicitly assume that progress in understanding the self as a citizen or adult occurs through civic engagement, with transition points or reduced or non-engagement representing 'exit points'. In this, there is a risk that young people are presented as 'citizens in the making' and not as fully realised and thoughtful agents of their own destiny. In parallel, systems encountered by young people affect the choices available to them regarding engagement or their perceptions of different options. The Civic Journey programme's Youth Advisory Board, when designing the systems map on pages 10-11, said rights-based systems and youth group systems were seen as catalysts for engagement; but financial and housing systems were seen as barriers.

"Personally, if I want to be involved, I'll be involved. If I don't I won't. You know what I mean? If I'm being less engaged, it's because I've chosen [that]."

Participatory video participant, South Devon

Access

Our research shows young people often accessed more 'formal' scaffolding (eg civic institutions) after first moving through informal networks, such as friendship groups or family networks. These informal systems could be enabling (eg a friend introducing someone to a volunteering opportunity or protest group), but often generated barriers to access based on social capital. Some young people referred to avoiding spaces of engagement where they didn't feel safe or free of judgement, or felt the pressure to 'code switch', modifying their behaviour to fit in with oppressive social norms, in order to access engagement opportunities.

"When I was a teenager, I really struggled with the idea of like, 'how do I get my foot in the door?' That's where I learned things about changing my accent."

25, female, urban, Irish Traveller

"I'm starting a business, which is a social enterprise. It's similar in that the barriers there have just been the lack of structure and not being able to access opportunities, which if you were well connected, because you've got family and friends who are really in that sector, or they're super-rich, or they have those connections, it would be so easy to get an investor to speak to you.

20, female, semi-urban, Asian/Asian-British

Institutions with 'human faces'

Access to institutional scaffolding is not sufficient if human relationships are not there. A common theme emerging from our data is that positive experiences young people associated with scaffolding often hinged on feeling heard, valued, and supported by voluntary or paid staff. Mentorship relationships helped young people feel prepared to engage — or that their participation was useful. In contrast, difficulties in forming relationships with staff were often cited as barriers to engagement.

"When you engage with certain services, if the person that you're engaging within that service is not passionate about what they're doing, they can be very quick to dismiss you and pigeonhole you into a point where you're not really benefiting from that service"

28, male, semi-urban, White—British, Irish, other

"I went to a youth club quite a few years ago now and one of the youth workers that was at it, she formed a relationship with every single young person in the room. It was something my brother had introduced me to and I wouldn't have went otherwise and I probably wouldn't have been back, if that youth worker wasn't there"

19, female, urban, White—British, Irish, other

Methodology note

The Civic Journey project is a mixed-methods research project that began in 2021. One year into the project, several research streams have been completed:

- A survey of 2,512 16- to 30-year-olds from across the UK; a nationally-representative 'first wave' of 2,007 16- to 30-year-olds, followed by a boost of 505 16-to 30-year-olds in Priority 1 levelling up areas.

- **138 interviews conducted by a team of 30 peer researchers**

- **Eight participatory video projects in four locations across the UK (Northern Ireland, South Devon, Black Country, Greater Manchester)**

- **Six workshops (both online and offline) with a total of 93 participants.**

This note contains emerging findings from the research team, based on their experiences in their research streams, and a qualitative analysis of approximately 27 interviews, notes from the participatory video workshops, and a review of co-produced content between the Institute for Community Studies' research team and the Civic Journey programme's Youth Advisory Board. A top-down coding framework, based on known areas of the existing literature and critical perspectives provided by the Youth Advisory Board, were used to code the data, and a series of analysis workshops were used to identify emerging trends and themes.

As they represent an early 'first-pass' of the data from the Civic Journey project, these findings are preliminary. In particular, the sampled interviews under-represent voices from Northern Ireland as well as the 26-30 age bracket, and over-represent university-educated young people. Details on the sample of interviews used for this note are available upon request.
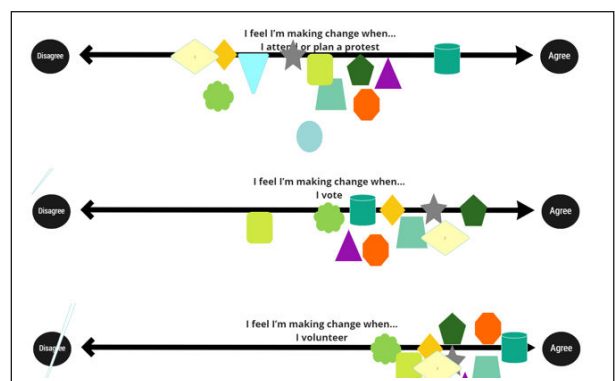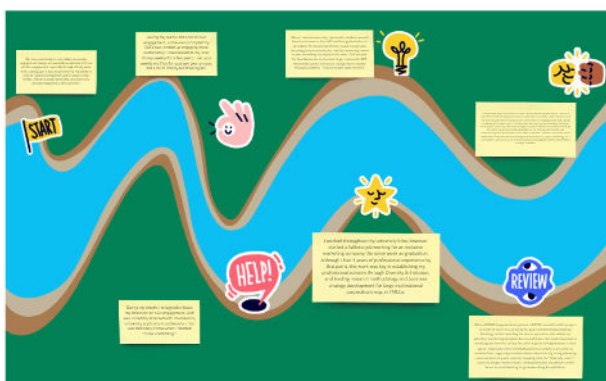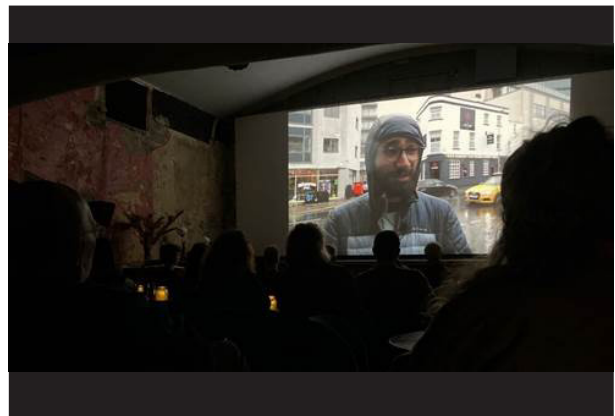
Next steps for the project

The Civic Journey programme has four areas of focus:

- **Youth agenda: create a Youth Agenda for civic renewal, exploring how—through what structures and means, and on what issues— young people seek to and are already taking action.**

- **Social action: delivery of multiple connected social action projects, created and led by young people, to pilot how gaps can be filled and how a holistic civic journey could work.**

- **Evidence-based research: assemble evidence of UK and international knowledge and expertise to understand what works to support young people's civic journeys and where there are gaps.**

- **Policy influence: create an infrastructure linking 16–to-30-year-olds with policymakers to inspire a new blueprint to support young people to become more active citizens.**

As part of the programme, we will publish a Gap Analysis in January 2023, which provides a concise survey of the research landscape, identifying areas and elements of the existing literature which we believe require further attention both within the context of the Civic Journey and across the wider research, practitioner, and policy ecosystem. It engages with two guiding themes of the Civic Journey project (the evidence ecosystem and youth civic transitions), and four 'pillars' which have been identified by young people as part of the initial youth-led engagement phase of our work. The Gap Analysis will provide the thematic foundation for our Call for Evidence which is distributed to civic society organisations, academics, and others interested research and governmental bodies.

The Civic Journey project will also publish its collaboratively produced Youth Agenda and a series of evidence and youth voice reports on the findings of the research, in Spring 2023.

How to get involved

We partner with community organisations, local authorities, policymakers, and young people in a variety of ways, from supporting local social action events to collaborative strategy work. Please email hi@icstudies.org.uk to find out more about the Civic Journey project.

The Institute for Community Studies is a research institute, with people and communities at its heart. Powered by and part of the not-for-profit organisation, The Young Foundation, the Institute gives increasing weight to the stories, experience and evidence created in communities, supported through its national network of researchers. It provokes direct engagement with business and those influencing change, bridging the gap between communities, evidence and policymaking.

The Civic Journey is a two-year, youth-led programme to reimagine the transition from adolescence to active citizenship. It seeks to capture the ways in which young people aged 16 to 30 grow and change into active citizens as they move through life, through a focus on their position, role and relationship with their wider community: understanding what they want to do for their community and how communities, local ecosystems and national policy can support them in return.

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