UK Democracy Fund

Closing the Gap: engaging the missing millions in electoral participation

Insights from the UK Democracy Fund 2019-21

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Executive summary

Voting in free and fair elections is the cornerstone of democracy, and an essential part of an inclusive and flourishing society. There is a huge gap in democratic and electoral participation in the UK, meaning millions do not have any say over who represents them or the consequent decisions and policies that shape their lives. Those missing from the register are predominantly younger, more likely to have been born overseas, more likely to be from a minority ethnic community, are more likely to rent their home, and are more likely to have a lower income and less education. These levels of disengagement should ring alarm bells for anyone who cares about democracy

Over the last two years (2019-2021), in an unprecedented electoral and social context, the UK Democracy Fund has provided over £1 million to support a range of initiatives to address the participation gap, supporting research to build the case for reform and extend the franchise, as well as a range of approaches to increase the participation of underrepresented communities in elections. Together, these projects have contributed to registering an estimated 370,555[1] people in the 2019 and 2021 general, local, regional, and devolved nation elections, as well as creating a range of learning and evidence to help better understand what works, and where there remains gaps in knowledge and action.

This report shares learning and insights from projects seeking to help close the participation gap. It breaks down insights into four areas of the electoral participation journey:

- **Understand and prepare:** there is more work to do to listen to and understand underrepresented communities; deep co-production can increase understanding and reach and help develop appropriate approaches; strategy, preparation and partnerships need longer term investment and time.
- **Inform and educate:** basic information about entitlements to vote is essential, but is still not reaching enough people; democratic education in schools can improve attitudes and intention to vote and reduce political inequality;

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[1] See note on evidence below for an in depth discussion of this data

perceptions of 'trust' in the messenger affects the receptiveness to electoral information.

- **Registration and turnout:** using established institutional interactions can create large-scale reach and better defaults; well-designed digital ad campaigns appears to successfully engage (young) people at scale; sharing examples of motivations and intentions to participate through media and social media influencers can model norms, but more needs to be done to understand the effect; community organising approaches can build immediate and longer term power.
- **Build and sustain:** efforts to support the missing millions in their voting journeys need to start earlier and not only focus on the short build up to elections; better data, evidence and experimentation is needed to understand and build on what works.

Based on the experiences of supporting the work of the grantees to date, learning suggests four areas for action for moving forward this agenda. Firstly, growing approaches which leverage the role of institutions and embed ways to reach underrepresented communities where they have day-to-day interactions. Secondly, ambitious approaches which develop well-designed, integrated and targeted digital ad campaigns to reach hundreds of thousands of people. Thirdly, enhancing the capacity of campaigns through coordination of work to enable strategy and multiply the effects of activities. Lastly, continue to back experimentation and learning that explores reach into underrepresented communities with the intention of spreading understanding of what works.

The UK Democracy Fund and grantees in isolation will not be able to close the participation gap alone. We all have a part to play and we need to grow the number of organisations, activists and funders committed to achieving change on this issue and develop more far reaching partnerships. There is no time to waste. Together, as funders, campaigners, researchers, civil society groups, media organisations, policymakers, and businesses, we must work to address the serious impacts of the missing millions, and their absence in influencing the future of the UK through the ballot box.

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A note on evidence

Put simply, evidence can help us know whether an approach makes a positive difference to what we are trying to change. When we try to support people to register to vote or use their vote, how do we know our efforts have worked? To close the participation gap in elections, we need to ensure that we are developing and implementing the most promising, impactful and efficient approaches. To do this, we need to have evidence of what works,

Evaluating impact is notoriously difficult for electoral participation projects as we share in section 2.4 of the report. The voter registration figures cited in this document are self-reported best estimates from grantees. We have worked with consultants at [New Philanthropy Capital](#) and grantees to review the data and develop ways to understand its accuracy. Projects have had to make assumptions on, for example, how to apply government data on the likely proportion of registrations that may be duplicates and on completion rates on the Register to Vote site. We have not included registration data from university enrolment schemes or from large-scale initiatives in mosques as this data was considered too unverifiable. The data used may include underestimates, overestimates or both, but is a best estimate.

Improving the evidence base is a key workstream of the Fund, and in the coming years we hope this will support the field to improve ways to capture and understand impact, and spread what works.

1.The electoral participation gap

We can participate in democracy and shape government decisions in a whole host of ways – from attending public meetings, involvement in citizens assemblies, co-production of services, or simple online petitions. But voting in free and fair elections is the cornerstone of democracy, and an essential part of an inclusive and flourishing society.

Whilst there is technically procedural equality in participation in elections – each enfranchised individual gets a vote – the reality is different. There is a huge gap in democratic and electoral participation in the UK, meaning millions do not have any say over who represents them or the consequent decisions and policies that shape their lives. Millions are missing from the electoral registers. In 2019, the Electoral Commission estimated that 17% of eligible voters – up to 9.4 million people – were not correctly registered. Even when registered, many more chose not to use their vote.

Those missing from the register are not spread evenly across the population. They are predominantly younger, more likely to have been born overseas, more likely to be from a minority ethnic community, are more likely to rent their home, and are more likely to have a lower income and less education; there are similar patterns in who is least likely to vote in local and national elections.

These figures have remained stubbornly high for decades, and there has been insufficient ambition and momentum to break through this pattern and shape a fairer, more inclusive democracy for all. Whilst there is broad political consensus on the need to improve political participation, initiatives that are intended to respond to this at sufficient scale, such as the government's Every Vote Matters agenda, appear to have stalled. Indeed, a number of researchers and campaigners have shared evidence that requirements such as voter identification outlined in the 2021 Elections Bill could further exacerbate, rather than address, the challenges of inclusion we face.

These levels of disengagement should ring alarm bells for anyone who cares about democracy. From ensuring the legitimacy of democracy to enabling accountability and public scrutiny of elected representatives, unequal participation matters. Unequal

participation also spells unequal influence, a major dilemma for representative democracy. Effective democracies must ensure the interests of all people are considered, where whole sections of society are not effectively considered, democracy is undermined.

There are also serious material impacts. In the US, Bartels' research found that policy outputs are often biased to the affluent, while the needs and preferences of the most needy can be overlooked. Analysis by Blais, Dassonneville, and Kostelka also shows evidence that a lack of equal participation produces a bias in public policy and reduces government responsiveness. In the U.K, the growth in relative number of older people in the voting-age population, coupled with considerable inequalities in voter turnout by age, have been pointed to in some research from Chrisp and Pearce to influence an outsized positive policy protection. In another context, analysis from Ford and Sobolewska has shown how decisions can be swayed by who participates in elections. In their research they outline that Scotland may have voted to leave the UK if its immigrant residents were disenfranchised; the UK might well have voted to stay in the European Union if EU migrants had had the right to vote. Where certain sections of society do not vote and do not express their needs and demands, government policy and action may give them less weight.

> "Governments are less likely to consider the silent groups that may need government protection or assistance the most, whilst the politically engaged garner even more government benefits."
> Russell Dalton, *The Participation Gap*, 2017

The chronic underrepresentation of certain populations is also seen to further compound the wider social, racial, and income inequalities they face. Scholars and pundits have offered many hypotheses for declining engagement, some of which are summarised in a recent House of Commons briefing paper. The explanations vary from global economics to social norms and cultural factors, as well as the role of practical and structural and emotional barriers.

Political engagement starts with agency and a sense of power. If you don't believe your vote or political action makes any difference, why bother? Why engage with a system that does not look or feel like it represents you? Increasing attention is paid to

the growth in frustration and sense of powerlessness – [more than half](#) of the country feels they have no influence at all over national decision-making, and even more feel the same over local matters.

Many point to the need for better information and education to support people to feel confident and motivated to participate, arguing that a basic level of accurate, accessible, balanced and relevant information is needed if our democratic system is to function inclusively. Research from James Weinberg points to the need for better [comprehensive democratic education](#), as [part of our formative childhood education](#). But of course this may be of value at points across our life course. [Some studies focus on the influence of cultural norms that impact behaviour](#), prompting consideration of how to tap into social norms and the role of [social pressure in motivating](#) electoral participation.

Support for modernisation of the electoral registration system has also been building, with the aim of removing barriers through [automated registration](#) via public services such as the DVLA or the tax system. This aims to ensure people aren't disenfranchised through moving house or where they may have recently gained the right to vote. As electoral eligibility diverges in devolved nations and with different rules for national and local elections, there is a need for greater clarity and more support for people such as Commonwealth citizens, young people attaining the vote, and EU citizens to navigate the increasingly complicated set up.

In spite of the pressing need for change in the area, many of the questions around who is and isn't participating, *why* they aren't participating, and the most effective remedies are left unanswered.

1.1 The UK Democracy Fund response

In response to these challenges and the need for significant new approaches to work at scale, the [UK Democracy Fund](#) (The Fund) was established as a pooled fund set up by the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust (JRRT) in the spring of 2019 and supported by a group of committed [funders.](#) Its focus is on participation in elections. It was set up in recognition of how little funding there is available to organisations working in this area. The Fund operates on an independent and non-partisan basis and aims to tackle

political inequality, improve voter participation, and increase the representativeness of the electorate, working for a healthy democracy in which everyone can participate and where political power is shared fairly. It has three broad goals:

1. **Enabling everyone to vote.** We will support reforms to ensure a simple, seamless and accessible voting system fit for the 21st century.
2. **Extending the franchise.** Advocating in support of expanding the franchise, specifically for 16 and 17 year-olds and settled UK residents from overseas.
3. **Increasing participation of everyone in our elections.** Efforts to raise the turnout of low propensity voters to improve fairness in our democracy.

Over the last two years, the Fund has provided over £1 million to support a range of initiatives to pursue these aims, including research and work to reform the system and extend the franchise (including building the case for votes at 16 and automatic voter registration), as well as a range of approaches to increase the participation of those on lower incomes, young people, renters, and Black, minoritised, and migrant communities in elections.

Together, these projects have contributed to registering an estimated 370,555[2] people in the 2019 and 2021 general and local, regional, and devolved nation elections, as

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[2] See note on evidence below for an in depth discussion of this data

well as creating a range of learning and evidence to help better understand what works, and how this could contribute to closing the participation gap.

1.2 2019 to 2021: the challenging context for electoral participation learning and experimentation

Understanding the unprecedented set of circumstances of 2019 to 2021 is critical to contextualising the learning to date.

The first activities supported by the Fund were in the lead-up to the December 2019 election. The snap decision to call an election did not provide campaigners much time to work to register and mobilise many underrepresented groups, and the political context was perhaps one of the most divisive and acrimonious in living memory.

The Fund then worked to support a range of projects for the 2020 elections, which were postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and eventually held in May 2021. May 2021 saw one of the most complex sets of polls held in recent times, with additional challenges presented by the pandemic. All of the projects and research supported by the UK Democracy Fund were hugely disrupted, and in many cases required serious workarounds and adaptation to deliver. The challenging context also meant that exciting progress for new levels of inclusion in Wales and Scotland, with the extension of the franchise to 16 year olds and residency-based voting rights, were thwarted.

In these extraordinary times, making a dent upon the electoral participation gap has not been easy. Nonetheless, the learning and insights from the work provide some emerging evidence of high potential approaches that could help address the challenge. The experience has also provided an even stronger case for the need for this work, with those facing the severest consequences of the pandemic the least likely to participate in elections. There is no time to waste in building a democracy that works for everyone.

1.3 About this learning paper

This paper shares the highest potential examples of activities from the first two years of learning from the projects supported by the UK Democracy Fund. It is aimed primarily at civil society and electoral participation activists and campaigners, who design and

deliver approaches to inform and engage people to participate in UK elections. We hope it is of particular interest to those working to close the participation gap for people underrepresented in our elections. This learning is intended to be the start of sharing insights and practice, with the intention that this can be built on further in the years to come. We hope others across the fiend will join in, sharing their learning and evidence so we can collectively learn more about how to close the participation gap.

This report is not intended to be a robust evaluation, as at this stage the evidence of what works is still underdeveloped. It does, however, use the evidence and insights of practice to outline areas of strongest potential. Whilst the Fund has supported a range of projects working to close the participation gap with underrepresented communities, to date we have supported a greater number of projects working with younger people. This is partly as a result of the extension of the franchise in Wales in the 2021 elections, and partly because of the relative strength of organisations in this part of the field. This paper therefore reflects greater learning from closing the gap for younger people. The Fund aims to support more work for other underrepresented communities in the future.

2. What have we learned to date?

The first two years of the Fund have highlighted a number of examples that show high potential to increase the participation of the missing millions in elections. Where possible this is backed up by quantitative or qualitative evidence of impact. But as we have outlined it is challenging to get robust evidence for some of this work at present. In the coming years there will be further lessons to solidify what works in some of these areas. There will also be new areas that have not yet been explored to date.

In many ways the voter participation journey is hard to carve up into wholly distinct segments, with each area overlapping. However, the insights in this report are categorised into four areas to help navigate the learning.

Insights have been clustered around 4 key stages of the electoral participation journey

UNDERSTAND AND PREPARE   INFORM AND EDUCATE   REGISTER AND TURNOUT   BUILD AND SUSTAIN
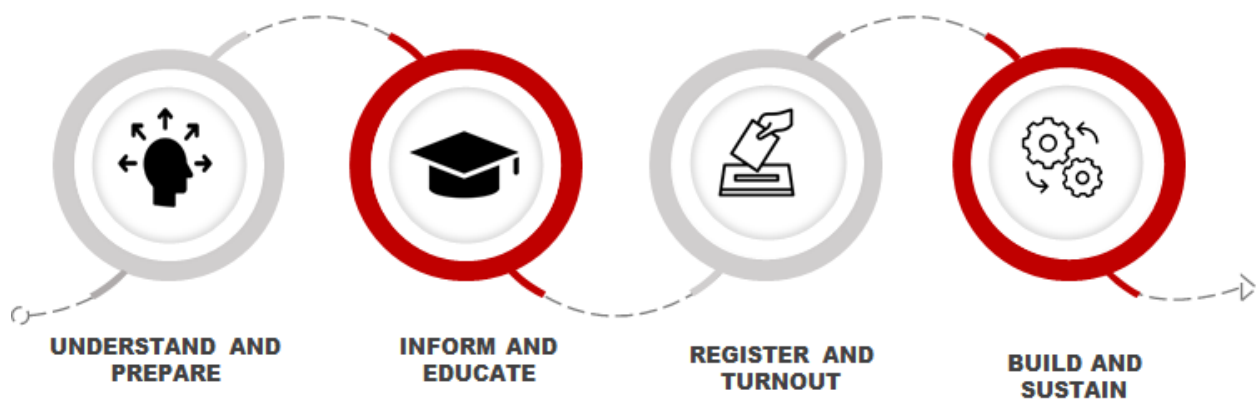
2.1 Understand and prepare

Whilst assumptions are often made about needs, barriers, and how best to reach the missing millions, many mainstream tactics have simply not worked to date. Understanding priority audiences better, including, what barriers and challenges prevent participation, and how they might be overcome is critical to success. Success also requires new actors, so strategies for developing partnerships to reach underrepresented groups unlock routes to reach underrepresented people are critical. Strategies to develop partnerships to unlock routes to reach underrepresented people are critical.

Three of learning are clearer from the work of projects to date:

- There is more work to do to listen to and understand underrepresented communities.
- Deep co-production can increase understanding and reach, and help develop appropriate approaches.
- Strategy, preparation and partnerships need longer term investment and time.

2.1.1 There is more work to do to listen to and understand underrepresented communities

There are still gaps in understanding the needs, barriers, motivators, and appropriate channels to reach many of the missing millions effectively. In research commissioned by the UK Democracy Fund, Sobolewska and Barclay outline that the democratic participation of ethnic minority people and immigrants in the UK is a significantly under-researched area. There are simply many things that are not yet known. The Fund has supported work by researchers and projects to do grassroots listening work, including work done by Mohammed Afridi with the South Asian community. The work reached out to 200 Asian groups, run by people from South Asian communities for South Asian communities. It found that 16% of organisations interviewed had done voter registration or democracy related work before, but 74% would be interested in working on it if supported. This demonstrates the significant potential to engage with communities that can reach where campaigns may not otherwise.

In 2019, the Runnymede Trust surveyed Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) to understand what they were doing to improve Black, minority ethnic, and Commonwealth electoral registration and turnout. There was a wide variation in methods and activities, with many EROs doing very little to register these groups. Language barriers and limited translated material prevented EROs and outreach officers from communicating effective messages about eligibility to vote during the annual canvass. EROs also showed limited knowledge of community institutions for outreach (compared to familiarity with local charities supporting disabled voters, for instance).

Connecting EROs to organisations with expertise in engaging with Black and minority ethnic communities could be significant in addressing this problem, although we know that EROs have faced significant resource challenges in recent years. The reforms to the annual canvass recently introduced may enable EROs more time and flexibility to undertake this work.

A number of projects were designed to listen, understand barriers, explore issues that mattered, and develop strategies alongside or with communities. This often challenged assumptions and reshaped plans. Citizens UK, for example, undertook listening campaigns with young people to understand the issues that they cared about, finding that issues around mental health, prejudice and discrimination, and having more of a voice and say over the future was most important. This informed their outreach, with Facebook ad campaigns using these issue-based posts garnering the most traction. My Life My Say found that young people often shared their fears, concerns, frustrations and ideas about democracy and elections during education programmes. This opened up discussions which could be used to address deeper disengagement through the perceived lack of understanding from politicians or futility of voting, and enabled young people to find meaning in the issues and decisions that mattered most to them.

Further insights from research and listening work, and using them to inform practices, can help shape more effective practice.

2.1.2 Co-production can increase understanding, reach and help develop appropriate approaches

TEAM MYM21
OUR PEER CAMPAIGNERS HAVE SURPASSED THEIR FIRST TARGETS IN REGISTERING PEOPLE TO VOTE!

EYST Make your Mark campaign approach worked with young people to shape the and implement the campaign.
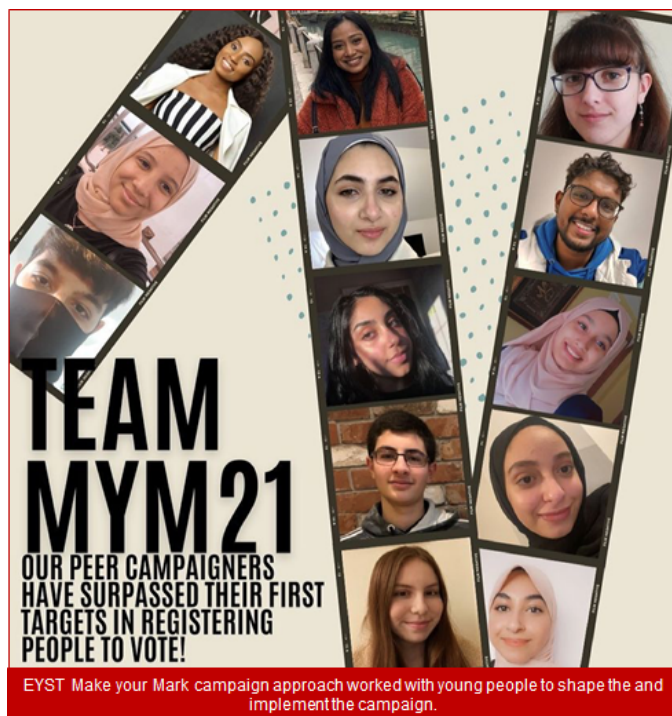
To better understand issues, overcome barriers, and reach underrepresented communities, a number of the projects supported by the Fund undertook co-production processes, working with key audiences to explore issues, design materials, and in some cases deliver whole campaigns. Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team Wales (EYST) worked with twenty young volunteers over several months to develop their campaign, focusing on educating and informing Black and minority young people about their right to vote in the May 2021 elections. The young people were from a broad range of backgrounds and shaped strategy, materials, messages, and engagement approaches. This not only informed the process, but also significantly strengthened the knowledge and

experience of the young volunteers who became leaders of the work. At its peak, EYST reported that this approach reached 3000 Instagram accounts with nearly 4000 short video views, with feedback indicating that it was reaching their target audience. Young volunteers directly supported over 220 Black and minority ethnic young people to vote, with wider impact data harder to collect.

In response to the extension of the franchise to qualifying foreign nationals resident in Scotland, the Scottish Refugee Council worked to ensure that refugee communities would be able to exercise their new right to vote. In a series of six co-production sessions, they worked to understand obstacles, key questions and potential responses. Through these sessions they discovered the importance of translated resources, instilling trust in proxy and postal voting, and information on different types of UK elections. Films and booklets were co-produced with communities and partners. The team is evaluating the approach, but there is clear value in better understanding what needs to be done differently to work for and with underrepresented communities.

It will be important for future campaigning approaches to harness both the intelligence and reach of co-production processes, alongside drawing from existing evidence of what works.

2.1.3 Strategy, preparation and partnerships need longer-term investment and time

Many organisations incorporate electoral participation campaigns alongside their work on other issues, with campaigns often popping up in the run-up to elections. Whilst this concentrates efforts around key times, it poses a number of challenges, particularly around strategy, developing partnerships, and ensuring there the relationships and routes to reach and engage key audiences.

A number of projects shared that it is often difficult to develop breakthrough strategies without longer-term planning and preparation. Developing partnerships and networks is

often essential to the reach of successful campaigns, from developing relationships with EROs, schools and educational institutions, influencers, businesses, religious institutions or community organisations. Where organisations had existing deep relationships in a field, working at pace was less of a hindrance. For example, Citizens UK and Citizens Cymru were able to build approaches from their connections with members and their wider relationships with schools, universities, churches, mosques and community groups. EYST worked with 33 local Black and minority ethnic groups including the Muslim Scout Group, Urban Circle, and the Centre for African Entrepreneurship Youth Network. Migrants Organise worked in partnerships with the Muslim Council for Britain, harnessing relationships with mosques to support large scale registration in the 2019 election.

Relationship building takes time, skill and a clear purpose. Creating quality partnerships that help make voting more culturally prominent requires longer-term planning, relationships and effective coordination across the field. To date, the levels of partnerships seen in places like the United States are almost entirely absent in the UK. Projects found it particularly hard to work with businesses, influencers and some community organisations who were concerned about being seen to be 'political'. Vote for Your Future, for example, failed to get a major employer voter registration scheme off the ground, despite an offer of support from a major newspaper to sponsor the initiative. Whilst guidance has been provided by the Electoral Commission and Charity Commission for non-party campaigning, alleviating the fear and uncertainty around being seen as 'political' is key to enabling a wider set of actors to feel comfortable with supporting underrepresented communities.

Unsurprisingly, given the resource challenges, the electoral participation field suffers from a lack of coordination that can be significant in developing collaborative campaign strategy capable of large-scale change. In the last two years, some action has helped overcome these challenges. In Wales, campaign groups supporting newly enfranchised 16 year olds were supported to meet and coordinate by the Electoral Reform Society in Wales, which was seen as enormously valuable by the field. There have also been numerous examples of collaboration between grantees. Some very clearly grew the reach and impact of efforts to increase participation; others had a more intangible positive impact on organisations' campaigns. Many projects made use of Migrants Organise's expertise on voting entitlements. Shout Out UK and My Life My Say joined a strategy group that provided support to the Vote For Your Future campaign. Migrants Organise, the3million and POMOC shared translated materials and coordinated approaches to reach and support communities. The Politics Project's

[Democracy Classroom](#) initiative – a constantly evolving pooled hub of resources, events and training opportunities from a range of organisations who support young people to engage in elections – is perhaps one of the most ambitious coordination approaches to date.

Whilst we do not know the impact of these collaborations, or whether they significantly improve the quality of reach and engagement, it is easy to recognise there is value in improving the collaborative capacities of the field to enable more effective campaigns. In reflections after the 2019 and 2021 elections, further coordination was one of the top issues that grantees wished to see improve.

2.2 Inform and educate

All of the projects that the UK Democracy Fund has supported to date have in some way aimed to address the information and education needs of underrepresented communities. For increased electoral participation to be successful, key groups must first be aware of their right to vote and have the information they require and a meaningful reason to participate. There are well-documented gaps and inequalities in the provision of political information and education, Three areas of learning are strongest from the work of projects to date:

- Basic information about entitlements to vote is essential, but still not reaching people.
- Democratic education in schools can improve attitudes and intention to vote and reduce political inequality.
- Perceptions of 'trust' in the messenger affects the receptiveness to electoral information.

2.2.1 Basic information about entitlements to vote is essential but still not reaching people

For a number of groups, basic awareness of entitlements to vote remains the biggest barrier to engagement. The changes to voting rights in devolved nations and different types of elections makes quality information and education even more important. Many of the projects supporting new voters found many people were not aware of their new rights at all. The Young Europeans Network, part of [the3million](#), and [POMOC](#), who both worked to support and mobilise EU citizens in local elections in 2021, found that many people did not understand their rights. In Wales, [this was an issue cited by a](#)

number of projects in their work to support the extension of voting rights to 16 year olds. Commonwealth citizens are significantly less likely to be registered to vote, even more so than other minority ethnic communities in the UK. A number of projects including Citizens UK, Runnymede Trust and Migrants Organise all reported that engagement with Commonwealth citizens tended to focus on providing information about entitlements.

A number of projects including EYST, The Politics Project, Runnymede Trust and Migrants Organise found that social media posts which clarified who could vote were shared most widely compared to other posts. Migrants Organise had greatest success at registering people who had recently gained the entitlement to vote or had only just found out about their entitlement. On street stalls, Migrants Organise found that large signs listing eligible Commonwealth countries increased engagement. Citizens UK's Can I Vote? website aimed to address this lack of knowledge and was viewed by 4,391 unique users in the ten days between its launch and the voter registration deadline in 2019 and in 2021 they expanded its use in the run-up to local elections to include EU Citizens who were also eligible to vote.

A number of projects also worked to create culturally competent materials and information, not only ensuring that information was available but that it was also designed for cultural identity and cultural context. Culturally competent approaches also recognise and design for plurality, and do not seek to create 'one size fits all' approaches based purely on nationality or cultural background. POMOC's Shevotes/ Ona Glosuje campaign was designed by Polish women for Polish women. The campaign engaged voters with information, but appealed to the audience through digital outreach, hustings, creative workshops, online fashion actions, an art contest, and an 8-hour live stream. All information was designed to have cultural and contextual resonance, but also aimed to recognise the different interests, perspectives, and life experiences of Polish women.

In focus… Raising awareness of the right to vote for refugees in Scotland
In February 2020, the Scottish Parliament extended the right to vote in Scottish elections to qualifying foreign nationals resident in Scotland. The Scottish Refugee Council worked with a variety of organisations, including local refugee, integration and English-as-a-second-language groups, the Electoral Commission and local government, to deliver a campaign of political education and voter registration for refugees living in Scotland.

They found very mixed levels of awareness, with some groups having no knowledge of this change at all; even where people did know of the change, they questioned why it had been brought about.

The Scottish Refugee Council found a big barrier to overcome was political trust – many refugees had lived under authoritarian political systems and therefore had little trust in the voting process. Others had never voted before. It was important to demonstrate that voting was worthwhile, and that the system was safe and secure. Crucially, it was important to convey that voting would have no effect on their immigration status. Even within politically engaged groups, there was little knowledge that registering to vote was required or what 'registering' meant. They found that there was often a presumption that you could just turn up at the polling place on the day of the vote.

A range of resources and communications were co-produced with refugees to help overcome these challenges. This included [materials and information for new Scots in 5 different languages](#), including a video aiming to raise awareness from refugees themselves – ["Make your voice heard – New Scots Vote"](#). Resources were distributed to civil society and integration organisations through the [New Scots Connect platform,](#) and through social media, national media coverage, 32 local authority resettlement teams, and a range of online voting information sessions supported by Electoral Registration Officers. In total, 17 sessions were delivered in partnership with local authorities, with a further two held at a national level with Scottish Parliament's Participation and Communities Team.

Whilst it proved hard to track how many people went on to vote, the partnerships and materials provide a great platform to continue to build a clearer journey for new Scots to know their democratic rights and participate in elections.

Information about entitlements should be easier to convey than messages that seek to change attitudes or motivations, but reaching audiences with key messages is critical. Whilst the projects made good progress in reaching audiences with information, there needs to be much more ambition for greater reach to close the participation gap.

2.2.2 Democratic education in schools can improve attitudes and intention to vote and reduce political inequality

A number of projects worked with schools to support young people's education and exposure. The EducateGE Programme, a collaboration between The Politics Project, the Association for Citizenship Teaching and Dr. James Weinberg, sought to bring together a wealth of information for teachers in the run-up to the snap 2019 general election, with a further 20+ partner organisations pooling information. This has now evolved into the Democracy Classroom.

To improve the evidence in this area, the programme included research into the impact of democratic education. The findings, based on surveys with 168 teachers and 403 students, demonstrate that democratic education in schools can not only positively impact on students' expression of voting intent and attitudes, but can 'close the gap' between White and Black and minority ethnic students, and between those who regularly discuss politics at home and those who never do. The study also found that:

- Students aged 17 to 18 years were 39% more likely to say they intended to vote if they had received one lesson dedicated to political education a week compared to those who had never received such classes. Mock elections increased students' expressed intention to vote by 25%.

- How students are taught matters most: participatory pedagogy was most strongly associated with increases in positive attitudes towards voting. Exposure to participatory teaching methods meant that students were 40% more likely to say that they intended to vote.

- In terms of likelihood of participating in other political acts (such as joining a campaign or contacting a politician), regular exposure to participatory teaching methods was able to overturn the participation gap between young White British men and Black and minority ethnic men, and reduce the gap with Black and minority ethnic women.

- There was a correlation between the number of years that students had received democratic education and the oldest students' knowledge about and expressed interest in participating in democratic institutions. This suggests that interventions are needed across the school career, not just when young people are about to be given the right to vote.

While it is not possible to evidence direct impact through numbers who registered or turned out to vote as a result of schools-based interventions, there is a strong correlation between changes in attitudes towards voting and impact on voter registration and turnout rates, as outlined by the Cabinet Office in Every Voice Matters in 2017.

These findings suggest that democratic education and schools-based interventions should be looked at as ways to both increase voter participation and reduce political inequality. However, this cannot be left to chance – we know schools and teachers face a huge amount of pressure, and it can be difficult to incorporate this work.

"We get sex education in school but not political education… So where else are we going to find out about politics?"
National Youth Theatre Wales Project Participant

In spite of the statutory requirements around citizenship education, it is often a peripheral subject and there is a need to support teachers and schools with a minimum education offer for all young people. There are a number of civil society led programmes seeking to support citizenship education including the Politics Project, My Life My Say, Shout Out UK, I have a voice, Citizens UK and many more. But it will need a concerted collaboration across schools, civil society organisations and policymakers to drive forward this agenda at the scale required. There are huge demands on teachers, and more needs to be done to connect schools, resources and projects systematically. Encouragingly, there is appetite for a more coordinated, nation-wide approach to include political education into the new curriculum across Wales in 2022 and beyond, which will create invisible learning for all parts of the UK.

The APPG on Political Literacy is working on this agenda, and aims to explore and discuss a wide range of strategic measures, ideas and interventions to strengthen provision for and teaching of political literacy in schools. Alongside schools-based provision, more evidence is required to understand the effect of non-school provision in youth clubs or arts engagement for example. More work also needs to understand how to support the education of people no longer in school or higher education, and how to create effective pathways and support for people across the course of their lives.

2.2.3 Perceptions of 'trust' in the messenger affects the receptiveness to electoral information

Projects repeatedly shared anecdotal evidence suggesting that some key audiences, particularly the most disengaged, were suspicious of information from non-familiar or

non-trusted sources. Projects also shared that people were hesitant to be told about 'politics' from people they did not know or had little experience with. Behavioural science research has shown that we are heavily influenced by who communicates information - the so-called messenger effect. Studies indicate that the weight we give to information depends greatly on the reactions we have to the source, the perceived authority of the messenger (whether formal or informal), demographic and behavioural similarities between the messenger and the recipient, the perceptions of the messenger as a peer, and feelings we have for the messenger.

In the electoral participation context, we need to consider how we develop understanding of messengers and who is best placed to act as conduits or partners to help transmit key information. Many people are supported in developing their knowledge and understanding of voting through family and friends, but this is not universal. Understanding different people's interactions with organisations, and how their voter journey can be developed, is critical.

In focus… Trusted local partnership helps to reach and reassure people vulnerably housed

ACORN is a mass membership organisation and network of low-income people organising for a fairer deal for communities. In the 2019 Election, their electoral engagement work sought to particularly reach renters and people who are vulnerably housed. As part of this, local organisers worked with a number of local community groups, including Foodhall, a pay as you feel community cafe and social space used by a mixture of homeless and vulnerably housed people. They had originally planned to run a voter information and registration stall, but quickly found this wouldn't work. Many people did not trust the new faces and refused to share information or engage.

However, once Foodhall volunteers, who were already known by attendees, vouched for the team, people began to open up and engage with the information. The volunteers also found it was necessary to turn up a few times to gain the trust of regular visitors. They found building trusting relationships, whilst more time consuming, was much more effective at engaging people who were disengaged.

Obviously these approaches are difficult to scale, and we have no evidence of how many people they reach. Unless these kinds of discussions and information sharing are embedded in the work of community organisations, it is likely that they will remain costly and marginal. Only when we have thousands of trusted messengers sharing this kind of information will we be able to have the reach to close the participation gap.

2.3 Register and turnout

To overcome the obstacles and barriers to the engagement of the missing millions, electoral participation campaigns use the power of networks, relationships, cultural norms, and powerful communications to effect change. The Fund has supported projects using a whole host of methods from working with institutions to embed registration processes: large-scale digital campaigns, an array of face-to-face or digital democracy cafes, workshops and events, or deep community organising work. What is clear is that the size of the challenge needs to be met with huge ambition and smart tactics.

Whilst projects have used both offline and digital approaches, the context of the 2019 and 2021 elections and the nature of evidence collected means there is greater learning around digital campaigns. This does not discount the essential role of offline engagement, and there will still be a significant role for offline and hybrid engagement. However, well-developed digital ads may enable the targeting of resources to those who need deeper engagement. It will also be important to develop a better understanding of the relationships and effect of offline and online campaigns. For example Urdd Gobaith Cymru reflecting on their 2021 work in the Senedd elections, anecdotally reported that a number of young people remembered offline engagement materials more than digital, and things like political campaign posters were significant for creating awareness.

Projects have used a variety of digital communications approaches. Some used more organic content to reach and share information; others used paid content to reach further and gain more traction. Both approaches have their merits, and we have little formal analysis of the impact of paid versus organic posts. Voting Counts found that their reach on their busiest day (polling day) was fuelled significantly by paid posts, but that the majority of their reach was organic. Feedback from grantees suggests that

increasing the knowledge, capacity and skills of smaller organisations to navigate digital campaigning would be beneficial. .

Four areas of learning are clearer from the work of projects to date:

- Using established institutional interactions can create large-scale reach and better defaults.
- Well designed digital ad campaigns can successfully engage (young) people at scale.
- Sharing examples of motivations and intentions to participate through media and social media influencers can model norms, but more needs to be done to understand the effect.
- Community organising approaches can build immediate and longer term power.

2.3.1 Using established institutional interactions can create large-scale reach and better defaults

Enabling easy ways to register to vote alongside other administrative processes, or when interacting with institutions such as churches, mosques, family centres, or schools, or even employers, unions and estate agents, could be a critical way to overcome obstacles for electoral participation and shape better default behaviour. The case for this type of approach has been building for some time, with some [calling](#) for automatic voter registration reforms to better integrate electoral participation into our lives. A number of grantees have worked with mosques, chuches, schools, colleges and universities to embed registration and turnout efforts within established institutional pathways and processes.

As part of its work to engage newly enfranchised young people in Wales in the 2021 Senedd elections, [Citizens Cymru](#) worked with all colleges and a number of schools on a [100% registered campaign](#). The process identifies and trains teachers to lead on voter registration in their schools, building core teams of around 25 students from across the college or school to champion voter registration actions. The training included sessions on why and how to register to vote, and worked to empower teachers and students to develop creative and fun actions. In order to track data more effectively, students competed in filling in and collecting paper copies of voter registration forms. In the colleges and schools they worked with, efforts managed to get 95% of over 14 year olds

registered to vote - 5,040 verified registrations of young people in total (it was not possible to track if they went on to vote).

Whilst data and research in this area is poor, the 2010 [Ethnic Minority British Elections Study](#) estimated the turnout of Muslim votes that year was around 47%. In spite of [declarations](#) to the contrary from leading religious leaders, there are still some in the community who have questioned the Islamic legitimacy of voting. The involvement of religious leaders in promoting voter registration is therefore seen as a significant area to help support the participation of Muslim communities in democracy. In 2019, Migrants Organise's [Muslims Vote](#) collaborated with the [Muslim Council of Britain](#) to enable outreach to Muslim voters through around 500 mosques. This campaign targeted worshippers at three consecutive Friday prayers. [Some](#) estimate that 300,000 Muslims registered to vote on 'Muslim Voter Registration Day'. Because of the distributed nature of the campaign, it was not possible to verify the impact of the campaign on registration and turnout. However, this showed huge potential to reach communities at scale.

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In focus… The role of universities in supporting young people to register and participate in voting

Young people, and students in particular, face particular obstacles to democratic participation. Frequent changes of addresses requires most students to re-register to vote every new academic year, and most have not developed the habitual experience of voting. Young people are more likely than any other age group to [report lack of knowledge or information as their reason for not voting.](#) To counteract this issue, [students living away from home can choose to register both a home and term-time address.](#)

Universities are a key touchpoint and source of civic education in a young people's life. The [Higher Education and Research Act (2017)](#) placed a statutory requirement on all English universities to facilitate student voter registration, enforced by the [Office for Students.](#) Whilst this does not apply to devolved nations, there has also been action in a number of universities in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

In October 2019 Vote For Your Future, working with [Times Higher Education,](#) conducted a study of the UK Higher Education sector based on universities' efforts to promote voter registration and turnout in advance of the December 2019 UK general

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election. They invited every UK higher education provider to participate in a survey and received over 70 formal responses, making this the largest data collection exercise ever undertaken on this in the UK.

A scorecard for assessing universities' performance was developed, with each institution awarded a score across five categories (Digital Integration, Communications, Turnout, Monitoring, and Engagement). They found that incorporating student electoral registration into digital enrolment processes is by far the most effective means for registering students en masse. This is widely known as 'the Sheffield model', after the university that first developed a system of this kind in 2014. The system collects all necessary data from students during enrolment, creating a pre-populated form for electoral registration. Provided the student is eligible to register and does not choose to opt out, this is then transferred to the relevant ERO for processing.

They also found a range of best practice examples and approaches. University of Hull had combined online voter registration with a compulsory e-learning module during enrolment. This teaches students about the importance of voting and when and how students can vote, before culminating in the Jisc voter registration platform. University of Sussex does not allow students to complete enrolment without having completed the voter registration form. Whilst there are ways to opt out, every student must acknowledge the requirement to register. These examples of best practices are shared in Vote for Your Future Student Registration Guide.

If these practices were spread to all 165 higher education institutions in the UK, this would create better defaults to encourage the participation of young people in democracy.

2.3.2 Ambitious, well targeted digital ads can successfully engage (young) people at scale

The scale of the challenge of the participation gap in elections requires an equal scale of ambition for reach and change. It is clear that there is a need to be audacious in designing approaches to reach thousands of people in meaningful and ambitious ways right for the target audience. The widespread adoption and use of digital platforms has provided democratic participation campaigns with an unprecedented opportunity to

reach audiences at a fraction of the costs. To date, however, more can be done to capitalize on this to bridge the participation gap.

In focus... Vote for your future's digital ad campaign to increase youth participation in the 2019 general election

Vote For Your Future (VFYF) was a group of young people working to deliver the highest ever youth turnout in a general election. One of their core approaches was a digital communications campaign: they have estimated that their ad campaigns were responsible for 290,000 young people registering to vote. Their ads were very high performing, outperforming every other major political advertiser between September and December 2019.

VFYF's campaign found that Snapchat was by far the most effective platform: all of their top twenty Snapchat ads outperformed the best Facebook and Instagram ads in cost-per-click. Twitter was not cost effective. Other platforms such as TikTok and dating apps like Hinge were not trialled because of resource constraints, but subsequently have grown substantially in reach, showing how platforms use will evolve in each election.

A partnership with Snapchat was very impactful. Snapchat claimed that 63,000 people registered to vote as result of one push notification to all UK users with a reminder to register. They also provided a free filter to VFYF, which was seen 1.7 million times on polling day alone.

Vote for Your Future spent five weeks rigorously testing their ads. Ads were based on research into the most effective messages and what young people cared about. They used experimental methods to test their digital messages, focusing on using dynamic norm messages rather than crisis or deficit-based messages, which are more likely to depress turnout. They had to tread the fine line between messages of urgency (deadline approaching, the importance of the election, the fact that young people's issues and voices have been ignored in the past) and dynamic norms ('people like you in your area are registering like never before'). They also used polling research on what young people cared about, such as mental health or the environment, to design issue-based ads,

Digital agency Uncovered managed their ads for free. The team shared weekly reports which set out how ads were performing on different platforms, and suggested further areas for testing for the next week.

They found three types of adverts were particularly effective:

- Influencers: ads recorded with celebrities across the political spectrum. The scripts were fairly generic.

- Deadlines: the performance of VFYF's ads increased exponentially as the deadline to register approached. They almost exclusively ran ads emphasising the imminence of the deadline in the final days. Roughly half (48%) of their click-throughs came in the last week of the campaign.

- Regional: constituency-specific ads, using actors/influencers from that area, which emphasised the 'marginal privilege' for those living in swing seats. Whilst the success varied, in some constituencies these ads were amongst the highest performing.

Vote for Your Future's Head of Digital estimated before the project started that the target audience would need to see content an average of seven times to act on it (an industry standard). The ads were seen 64.6 million times and generated more than 400,000 clicks). Given their reach, this means that on average targeted young people saw 22 separate reminders to register and turn out to vote.

In their testing phase, Vote for Your Future developed several ads aimed at Black and minority young people. These consistently failed to perform compared to other community or issue-based ads such as those targeting women or people identifying as LGBTQ+, perhaps because the issues themselves did not resonate or because the ads needed to be re-scripted. In the 2021 Senedd elections, EYST successfully reached Black and minority ethnic young people, as did Voice4Change in 2019 with 14,000 impressions reaching their target audience in the month leading up to the election. This demonstrates the potential for appealing to young Black and minority ethnic people, but will require ambitious strategic campaigns to test best approaches. The Fund has supported King's College, London and LSE to conduct a randomised control trial, which has worked with a number of key audiences including young people and renters.. The results are set to be published in 2022, which we hope will give further insights.

Other campaigns targeting young people also found paid digital ads to be effective: My Life My Say estimated that 43,000 young people registered as a result of their online campaign in 2019, Shout Out UK that 8,650 registered as a direct result of a music video they produced in 2019.

To date, much work supported by the Fund on digital campaigns has focused on young people. There is clearly intersectionality between underrepresented communities, but more would need to be done to understand the effectiveness for different underrepresented groups.

Effective large-scale digital communications campaigns require skills, expertise and resources. There is an opportunity to consider the capacity and expertise needed to support significant digital campaigning in the coming years. Vote for Your Future were able to broker significant pro bono contributions and partnerships with agencies, and large social media platforms could help to maximise the opportunities to address the participation gap.

2.3.3 Sharing examples of motivations and intentions to participate through media and social media influencers can model norms, but more needs to be done to understand the effect

Influencer JuiceMenace collaborated with Citizens Cymru to share her views on the importance of registering to vote in the run up to the 2021 Senedd elections.

A number of studies suggest that people are more likely to contribute to society when they see others contributing or participating. People often take their understanding of social norms from the behaviour of others, which means that they can develop and spread rapidly. A number of projects use the power of sharing social norms, amplifying this to spread pro-registration and voting behaviour through groups and networks.

There has been huge excitement about the potential of social media and influencer strategies and their power to influence registration and voter habits. More than 100,000 18 to 24 year olds registered to vote between 24th and 25th November in 2019, which made many people believe influencers were having a particular effect on youth participation. A Stormzy

tweet, alongside posts from rapper KSI, were [credited with a significant impact on registration](). However, other factors such as pushing a 'register to vote' message to the top of all UK users' Facebook feeds was likely to have had a very substantial impact on this traffic too.

[My Life My Say]() worked with a total of 58 influencers on Instagram, who all incorporated messaging into their posts encouraging young people to register and turn out to vote in the run up to the 2019 elections. This contributed to 864,000 online views throughout the election campaign, but there is no data on how the work of influencers specifically contributed to registrations and turnout.

[Citizens Cymru]() worked with young leaders to develop a media strategy for encouraging young people to register to vote, using digital channels and trusted influencers in the run up to the 2021 Senedd elections. A Zoom influencer event was held with 15 digital influencers from Cardiff, who had over 5,000 followers each. From this they developed short content pieces on Instagram and TikTok, explaining why they were registering to vote, why it is important, and linking people to the gov.uk register to vote website.

In 2019 Vote for Your Future's videos reached a combined following of 16 million people; four football clubs promoted posts to over 4 million followers .Whilst influencer and celebrity posts were some of the best performing [Vote For Your Future's ads](), it is unclear what the impact of influencers is more generally. In 2019, [Shout Out UK'](https://)s music video was shared by music promoters and artists with a combined following of 5 million. As the proportion of registrations completed online continues to increase, understanding these spikes will be important. Appropriate data sharing mechanisms between the Cabinet Office, Electoral Commission, researchers and campaigners could greatly enhance the ability to understand what works.

Many of the projects also use mainstream radio, television and print media to share motivations and experiences that model behaviours. The [Scottish Refugee Council]() secured extensive coverage of the new voting rights for refugees in the 2021 Scottish Parliament election, including on Scottish radio, BBC Scotland and Scottish print press. [POMOC]() secured extensive coverage of the 2021 She Votes Campaign with a range of Polish media, and developed great relationships to develop this further in the future.

2.3.4 Community organising approaches can build immediate and longer term power

At its core, community organising is about empowering communities and harnessing the power of individuals to work together in pursuit of mutual self interest. Good community organising builds power and relationships, with political and collective power to effect change core to the models. As a result, voter registration, electoral participation, and campaigning for change can be a core tactic to build this power.

Citizens UK, Citizens Cymru, ACORN and POMOC all used community organising methods to galvanise and mobilise communities. In 2019, Citizens UK supported voter registration drives led by 137 community leaders trained by local community organisers in 30 diverse civic institutions in 16 constituencies. This was followed by voter turnout drives led by 10 community leaders. These actions led to 1,415 verified voter registrations and 500 pledges of voter turnout through partner institutions. Whilst this shows immediate benefit, the longer-term impact and growth of action also needs to be considered. By training and empowering leaders, the approach works to embed culture, practice, and leadership in institutions. How this sustains and grows requires further exploration.

Prompted by the constraints of the pandemic, in 2021 Citizens UK, Citizens Cymru, ACORN and POMOC used digital approaches to support their organising. ACORN used digital ads and digital organising via WhatsApp groups, although data around effectiveness will not be available until 2022. POMOC and Citizens UK moved training online, which was well received by participants. Citizens UK created a range of training for leaders from schools, universities, faith groups, charities and housing associations on how to build their own voter registration campaigns. These sessions supported 38 leaders, with attendees going on to lead their own voter registration work. This was complemented by a digital ad campaign, to reach voters with information and prompts to register.

Offline community organising approaches appear as a relatively expensive model of supporting voter registration and turnout as compared to digital ads. Understanding how best to target these approaches for those who require a longer voter journey or face higher barriers to participation remain key. It would also be useful to better understand the ripple effects of developing community leadership to lead campaigns in the longer term. Better understanding of digital delivery will also no doubt be an

interesting area of development as organisations build on the learning from the adaptation in the pandemic. This could help multiply the reach of organising models.

2.4 Sustain and build

Public interest in major electoral events is increasingly driving electoral registration applications just before elections. This means that many grantee campaigns are also built around having two peak weeks – the week leading up to the registration deadline and the week of the election. However, these short term cycles likely means there is not enough of a strategic development to reach and engage people or build approaches which are capable of closing the participation gap.

Many of the missing millions are likely to be first time voters. [Research](#) from the Making Votes at 16 work in Wales-research team led by Nottingham Trent University highlighted that first-time voters have a journey contingent on several connected stages. Efforts to support young people and other first- time voters in their voting journeys need to start earlier. Whilst a sense of urgency and relevance are triggered by impending elections, grantees found that for some people a two week window in the lead up to an election is insufficient for their voter participation journey.

The political literacy and education projects supported by the Fund sought to share the many ways that people can engage with democracy beyond elections and demonstrate ways to effect change. This can go beyond political education being delivered in schools throughout the year. My Life My Say's [Democracy Cafes](#) for example, are hosted discussions for young people 18-30, aimed at discussing relevant current issues and embedding democracy as a part of everyday life. In 2019, 76% of young people who attended Democracy Cafe events said they had gained a better understanding of how to take part in local, regional and national decision-making. [POMOC](#), [Citizens UK,](#) and [the3Milion](#)'s Young Europeans Network also sought to engage people in campaigns for change in their communities, including issues in their area, and residency-based voting rights. Developing trust and showing longer-term commitments to communities was also seen as significant.

There is an interesting opportunity to explore how efforts such as action days or focused moments, such as [London Voter Registration Week](#), could be used to create greater social and cultural visibility for democratic participation activities. However, it is

important that these efforts are coordinated across different actors and partners to avoid duplication and confusion.

2.4.1 Better data, evidence and experimentation is needed to understand and build on what works

For many of the projects it has been very difficult to learn whether their tactics for improving electoral participation for underrepresented communities work, and for whom. The vast majority (92%) of applications to register to vote are now made online, and most successful campaigns drive people to the government's voter registration site. We do not know, however, what proportion of people who landed on the site completed their application – or how this varies between demographic groups.

Whilst it has, until recently, been possible to see the overall completion rates on the gov.uk Register to Vote site, there was not a way of knowing whether completion rates varied amongst different age groups or by the journey to the site (user searches or click-throughs from social media). The government's performance dashboard also did not display registration data by any breakdown other than age. It is also difficult for projects to know what proportion of people they register are duplicates. The number of new registrations is likely to be significantly less than the reported applications. The fact that there is no easy system to check whether you are registered online compounds this problem. Studies such as the British Elections Study get around this problem by verifying registrations against the electoral register, but this is costly and time-consuming and beyond the capacity of most campaign groups. Even where grantees have attempted to do this, they have sometimes experienced significant challenges in accessing the data.

It is even more challenging for projects to know their impact on turnout. A number of projects attempted to carry out follow-up surveys to track whether people voted. However, self-reported data on turnout has been found to be unreliable, perhaps because people feel some social pressure to vote and do not wish to admit that they haven't. Some projects record intention to vote, as a proxy, but of course this does not necessarily correlate to action.

Many of the projects also work in partnership, and can struggle to create processes where all information is recorded and accurate. Even where projects are able to overcome these challenges, it is very difficult to attribute efforts to an individual project.

Reflections from grantees also indicate an eagerness to be able to access academic and broader evidence on what works to avoid reinventing the wheel.

Together, this creates a very difficult set of circumstances to learn and understand impact. The Fund has recently commissioned a piece of research to review the electoral participation data ecosystem and identify short and longer-term approaches to enable improvements. This will be available in early 2022, and aims to be the first step in working to address some of these challenges. To address the participation gap, an evidence centre, bringing together evidence from academics and practitioners, may help accelerate the progress that can be made. The Fund is keen to explore this further.

3. What next?

In spite of the extremely challenging context, the learnings from the projects supported by the Fund in the last two years, offer some great foundations to build impactful campaigns and engagement approaches to close the participation gap.

In the coming years, the UK Democracy Fund will build on this learning to help galvanise and catalyse the field and enable a million more voters from underrepresented groups to participate in the next general election. To use resources most effectively, we want to work to support systemic reforms, reach underrepresented groups at greater scale, and improve our understanding of areas that we still don't know enough about (for example working with Black, minority ethnic, and migrant communities).

The size of the electoral participation challenge means that we need to be reaching millions of people, not hundreds. The learning suggests there is high potential areas to focus on:

- **Leveraging institutions:** growing approaches which leverage the role of institutions and embed ways to reach underrepresented communities where they have day-to-day interactions. What are the possibilities for large-scale partnerships with the likes of unions, mosques, or large employers? How might we create better defaults by embedding electoral registration and voting prompts with estate agents or colleges and universities? How might civil society organisations and public services organisations spread communications to their audiences at scale?

- **Supporting ambitious integrated digital campaigns**: approaches which develop well-designed, integrated and targeted digital campaigns have promise to reach and engage hundreds of thousands of people. There is a great opportunity to build on the experience of engaging young people at scale, but also, with further testing, other underrepresented demographics.

- **Enhancing campaign coordination capacity:** supporting the field to achieve greater impact by working together strategically to multiply the effect of activities, develop coordinated campaigns, and target high potential partnerships. This may also require the development of new capacities and skills.

There are some areas we do not yet know enough about, and some underrepresented communities will require different tactics to engage effectively. We therefore also aim to support work that helps uncover new learning to enable reach into communities, and experimentation where there are gaps in knowledge.

As outlined, there is a clear case to increase our expectations of developing better evidence of what works. The Fund wants to work with researchers, policymakers and campaigners to develop strategies to better understand what works and spread evidence of best practice. Key to this will be tackling data issues, but also supporting campaigns to develop their evidence plans.

The work of the UK Democracy Fund and grantees in isolation, will not be able to close the participation gap alone. We all have a part to play and we need to grow number of organisations, campaigners and funders committed to achieving change on this issue and develop more far reaching partnerships. There is no time to waste. Together as funders, campaigners, researchers, civil society groups, media organisations, policymakers, and businesses, we must work to address the serious impacts of the missing millions, and their absence in influencing the future of the UK through the ballot box.