



# IN THEIR WORDS: A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE IN CIVIC EDUCATION



International Foundation  
for Electoral Systems



KIMPACT  
DEVELOPMENT  
INITIATIVE





# **IN THEIR WORDS: A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE IN CIVIC EDUCATION**

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International Foundation for Electoral Systems  
2011 Crystal Drive, 10th Floor  
Arlington, VA 22202  
Email: [media@ifes.org](mailto:media@ifes.org)  
Phone: 202.350.6700  
Fax: 202.350.6701

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## Authors:

Ashley Law, Youth Engagement Specialist  
Sarah Timreck, Youth Engagement Program Officer

## Contributing Author:

Dr. Cassandra Emmons, Senior Democracy Data Analyst

## With Contributions From:

Kimpact Development Initiative

# ABOUT IFES

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) advances democracy for a better future. We collaborate with civil society, public institutions, and the private sector to build resilient democracies that deliver for everyone. As a global leader in the promotion and protection of democracy, our technical assistance and applied research develops trusted electoral bodies capable of conducting credible elections; effective and accountable governing institutions; civic and political processes in which all people can safely and equally participate; and innovative ways in which technology and data can positively serve elections and democracy. Since 1987, IFES has worked in more than 145 countries, from developing to mature democracies.

IFES uses a rights-based approach to empower young people to participate in democratic processes and acknowledges young people as partners and positive change agents. IFES applies an intersectional approach to its work, ensuring that programming is tailored to and inclusive of young people who identify with multiple marginalized identities including girls and young women; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) youth; young people with disabilities; Indigenous youth; conflict-affected and displaced youth; and ethnic, linguistic, and religious minority youth.

Recognizing that a healthy democracy enables and supports the engagement of children and young people, IFES aims to foster lifelong patterns of participation in community and public affairs through formal and nonformal civic education programs and by promoting youth engagement in elections and conducting advocacy and leadership trainings. IFES programs enhance young people's knowledge and skills and involve community and global actors such as election management bodies, civil society, government and ministry officials, educational institutions, and community leaders to build constructive partnerships and opportunities for young people to engage in civic and political life.

For more information, please visit [www.IFES.org](http://www.IFES.org).

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# ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS, KEY TERMS

## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

<b>CSO</b>	Civil society organization	<b>LGBTQI+</b>	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex
<b>EMB</b>	Election management body		
<b>FGD</b>	Focus group discussion	<b>KDI</b>	Kim pact Development Initiative
<b>IFES</b>	International Foundation for Electoral Systems	<b>KDS</b>	Kim pact Development School

## KEY TERMS

<b>Accessible</b>	A site, facility, work environment, service or program that is easy to approach, enter, operate, participate in, and/or use safely, independently, and with dignity
<b>Accessible formats</b>	Print, audio, or visual information that is accessible to persons with disabilities
<b>Advocacy</b>	The deliberate process of influencing decision-makers and creating change
<b>Assistive device</b>	A tool that aids completion of a task or other function that might otherwise be difficult or impossible
<b>Civic education</b>	Programming that seeks to foster an individual’s democratic attitudes, values, and behaviors, equipping them with knowledge and skills to support their active and informed participation in civic and political processes
<b>Election</b>	A process by which eligible individuals vote for an issue, political office, or position
<b>Formal civic education</b>	Civic education that takes place in formal, school-based settings
<b>Inclusion</b>	Ensuring that traditionally underrepresented and marginalized groups, including young people, can access and participate in civic and political life.
<b>Intersectionality</b>	The idea that individuals face experiences of discrimination resulting from the interconnected nature of multiple social identities such as age, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, class, religion, socio-economic status, and others
<b>Nonformal civic education</b>	Civic education that take place outside of formal, school-based settings
<b>Marginalized groups</b>	Traditionally excluded populations, including young people; women; LGBTQI+ persons; persons with disabilities; Indigenous Peoples; displaced persons; ethnic, linguistic, and religious minorities; older people; and others who may experience personal and systematic discrimination and inequitable access to resources
<b>Positive Youth Development</b>	An approach that empowers youth leadership by supporting and strengthening young people’s assets, agency, and contributions, and the enabling environment in which they operate. <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> United States Agency for International Development, 2022.

# FOREWORD

Since becoming a Member of Parliament at the age of 25, and throughout my long career in politics, I have seen the importance of engaging young people in civic and political life and investing in them as leaders of today and tomorrow. To strengthen our democracies, we must include young people in decision-making processes and ensure their voices and perspectives are represented in government policies and strategies.

Global democracy is challenged by the rising tide of authoritarianism and undemocratic processes that exclude young people. Yet, one of the strongest tools in our democratic arsenal is civic education. It is imperative that young people are engaged effectively through civic education interventions to equip them with knowledge and skills of how to exercise their rights and participate in civic and political processes as informed and active democratic actors. Civic education commenced in childhood can instill positive behaviors and practices that carry into adult life—not only the desire to vote in democratic elections or the knowledge that governments ruled by elected leaders create better standards of living for their constituencies, but also the certainty that everyone has a voice, the right to be heard, and the responsibility to use their voice. Like a rising tide lifting all boats, civic education has the potential to create a groundswell for democracy in countries around the world.

This guide shares insight into how we may craft civic education strategies that engage diverse groups of young people, with findings and analysis derived from the perspectives of young people themselves. The guide also underscores the need to tailor civic education strategies to reflect the intersectional identities of young people—young people with disabilities, young women, and young Indigenous people. Engaging young people with diverse identities and unique experiences is instrumental to creating a truly representative and inclusive democracy.

As we reflect on the challenges facing the global community—including the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, conflict and war, climate change, and digital threats to human security—we must partner with young people to find solutions and empower them to lead change in their communities. Young people are the protagonists in the current story of democracy. They must be engaged as architects in building sustainable and resilient democracies that deliver for all.

I want to thank Sida for the generous support provided to IFES and for their continued investment in young people. It is through work like this and organizations like IFES that the world will be able to deflect and overcome global threats to advancing democracy.

**Margot Wallström**

Former Deputy Prime Minister of Sweden and Former Minister for Foreign Affairs  
IFES Board Member



# PREFACE

A study exploring the best nonformal strategies for civic education for young people could not have come at a better time. Democracies, especially in low- and middle-income countries, have witnessed increasing apathy among young people, especially at the grassroots level. While this may be attributable to low literacy, incorrect notions of democracy, or indifference to governance, it does not bode well for democracies around the world. Sixteen percent (1.2 billion) of the world’s population is between ages 15 and 24.<sup>2</sup> Yet the Inter-Parliamentary Union reported in 2021 that the percentage of members of Parliament aged 30 or under reached barely 2.6 percent globally.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the Commonwealth’s 2020 Global Youth Development Index reported a decline in youth political participation, noting a “deterioration” in 102 of the 181 countries measured.<sup>4</sup>

Kimpact Development Initiative (KDI) is pleased to have partnered with IFES to better understand the opportunities that civic education can provide to address these challenges. After a mixed method research process to learn about the impact of nonformal civic education practices on youth engagement, the unwavering relationship between KDI and IFES produced this guide. Tips in the guide, informed by a global survey and FGDs, reflect the thoughts and experiences of young people as they pertain to their civic and political engagement. The guide supports current and future youth programming and young leaders, practitioners, and donors to ground approaches in young people’s input and lived experience.

KDI is an independent, nonprofit nongovernmental organization that inspires citizen-led democratic development anchored in the principle of participation, data-driven advocacy, strong democratic institutions, and public policies. We do this by building informed and active citizens who create a more supportive environment for citizen-led development. To build an active and informed citizenry, KDI implements a series of innovative civic education programs, one of which is the Kimpact Democracy School (KDS). KDS started in 2020 with the goal of supporting young people as democratic actors. More about the KDS initiative can be found in this guide, among others, which are reflective of the youth-driven approach that KDI takes in its programming.

We appreciate the hundreds of survey respondents across the world as valuable contributors. Special appreciation to the IFES team for this great partnership, especially Ashley Law, Sarah Timreck, Cassandra Emmons, and their colleagues for their resourceful expertise. I commend Joshua Olu’Seun Esan and Oluwafemi John Adebayo for dedicating long hours to ensure that we got results. We believe this guide is born from a wealth of experiences coupled with input from hundreds of young people across the globe. We hope to see youth, government institutions, media, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders use this guide in designing youth-focused civic education interventions.

**Bukola Idowu**

Executive Director, Kimpact Development Initiative

<sup>2</sup>United Nations, 2022.

<sup>3</sup>Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021.

<sup>4</sup>Commonwealth Secretariat, 2021.

# ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Civic education, when rooted in human rights and democratic principles, seeks to develop knowledge of democratic rights and how to exercise them in civic and political processes. It is achieved through activities that aim to develop one's democratic attitudes, values, and behaviors.<sup>5</sup> Civic education can take many forms, including formal, school-based learning and nonformal learning outside of school systems; it can also take place against a range of democratic landscapes.



Click this QR code and hyperlink to access the data map

Globally, marginalized youth populations lack access or opportunities to participate in formal civic education. In some cases, the COVID-19 pandemic further excluded young people from this type of engagement. Moreover, researchers often explore formal civic education and its impact rather than nonformal civic education. This guide seeks to fill that research gap and provide a better understanding of the various ways in which nonformal civic education programming can be used to engage all young people.

This guide, which is based on qualitative and quantitative data, shares the experiences of young people that were collected through a global survey and FGDs. IFES and KDI co-developed the survey, which was completed by 858 young people in 71 countries. Following the survey, IFES and KDI also held FGDs with young people in Tunisia, Ukraine, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, and Ecuador. The words shared by young people in the survey and FGDs are the building blocks from which the practical tips were identified. Young people's words provided the guidance outlined to design relevant, inclusive, and accessible nonformal civic education programming for diverse youth populations.

**“  
In order for young people to get involved, it is first necessary to investigate how to reach them.**

– Young woman, 25 to 29 years old, from Ecuador

There are two audiences for this guide: young people and practitioners who work with young people. The survey and FGD findings identified creative ways to design and implement nonformal civic education to better reach young people. This guide is meant as a peer resource for young people to learn from each other and for practitioners who are designing and implementing nonformal civic education programs for young people.



**If you are a young leader, this guide is for you.** These young leaders appear throughout the guide to identify actions that you can take in your youth-led activities to contextualize and implement ideas that your peers shared.

**If you are a practitioner working with young people, this guide is for you.** This icon will draw your attention to important program design elements that you can apply to your own civic education initiatives.

<sup>5</sup>Finkel, Ratway, and Sigal, (2022).

# INTRODUCTION TO CIVIC EDUCATION



**Civic education programming seeks to foster an individuals' democratic attitudes, values, and behaviors, equipping them with knowledge and skills to support their active and informed participation in civic and political processes.**

Civic education programming can be categorized as either formal or nonformal. Formal civic education occurs in schools or educational settings; partners are often Ministries of Education, universities, educators, and school administrators, and the primary recipients are students. Nonformal civic education is much more

flexible, as this type of programming occurs outside of formal institution and can involve diverse partners, facilitators, and recipients who engage in a variety of learning mechanisms. For example, nonformal civic education programming could be delivered by a youth-led CSO and include activities like conducting a leadership training with rural youth, facilitating a virtual town hall on social media to solicit feedback on a recent amendment to an electoral law, or creating a community mural as a peacebuilding and dialogue effort.

Civic education programs have proven to be effective tools for building and sustaining democracies, demonstrating long-term impact on not only those who participate in civic education programming but entire communities.<sup>6</sup> Traditionally, civic education programming has focused primarily on formal curricula implemented in schools—some of which are inequitable across racial and socio-economic dimensions. Civic education curricula can reflect these inequities and other democratic shortcomings embedded in a country that do not align with universal human rights. In these contexts, a formal approach to civic education alone will not include all young people, such as those who are not in school due to barriers related to gender identity, disability, language, and geography.



***Although young women can vote (at 18+) and run for office, women face far more obstacles than men. There are threats of violence (especially of a sexual nature), and women are not taken seriously, especially if they are young due to stereotypes about young women 'knowing nothing' in life. It is also much harder to get a young woman to be voted into any kind of senior leadership role because of this.***

*-Young non-binary person with a disability, 20 to 24 years old, from rural Canada*



<sup>6</sup> Law and Atkinson, 2021.

## The Power of Nonformal Civic Education

The authors created this guide to fill an important research gap. In countries where not all young people have access to formal school systems, nonformal civic education can play a strong supplementary and complementary role, bridging the gap for the most marginalized youth populations. Because nonformal civic education can be designed in flexible ways, it provides a great opportunity to better engage marginalized youth populations. This is often a challenge for formal civic education programs.

Barriers to engaging young people in civic education exist globally. Thirty percent of young women are not in employment, education, or training;<sup>7</sup> 25 percent of young people are affected by armed conflict;<sup>8</sup> 10 percent of children and young people have disabilities and are “49 percent more likely to have never attended school,” compared to children without disabilities;<sup>9</sup> and approximately 1 billion young people live in rural areas.<sup>10</sup> These barriers to traditional, formal civic education were further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic,<sup>11</sup> as two-thirds of the global population ages 25 years and younger did not have internet connections at home and could not access remote and virtual learning options.<sup>12</sup>

The rapidly growing and increasingly diverse youth population of 1.8 billion,<sup>13</sup> decreasing levels of youth political participation,<sup>14</sup> and global trends of democratic backsliding in established and developing democracies call for more sustained participation by all young people. As countries emerge from the pandemic and rebuild their communities, it is critical that young people are supported and encouraged to find new and meaningful ways to engage or reengage in democratic processes.

**“Work more on capacity building for activists and youth organizations at the grassroots level. Then they will themselves continue to work in their communities.”**

*-Young man, 30 years old, from Kyrgyzstan*

<sup>7</sup> United Nations, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Vision of Humanity, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), 2021.

<sup>10</sup> International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2019.

<sup>11</sup> UNICEF, COVID-19 and children.

<sup>12</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund and International Telecommunication Union, 2020.

<sup>13</sup> United Nations, 2022.

<sup>14</sup> Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening, 2019.



Young people and their contributions are directly linked to building and sustaining democracy.<sup>15</sup> Yet, young people are rarely involved in formal civic education curriculum design and implementation, as they are typically seen only as the recipients of such programming. However, there is room for diverse youth participation, including through youth-led or -focused CSO involvement in nonformal civic education design and implementation. This involvement may result in more contextually relevant activities that are more accessible to and inclusive of diverse youth populations. Nonformal civic education provides the flexible approaches needed to support and empower all young people to participate democratically in their communities and countries.

### Nonformal civic education programming can be the key to promote and reengage young people in democratic processes.

-  **Nonformal civic education can center young people in design and delivery.** Nonformal civic education that applies a Positive Youth Development approach<sup>16</sup> can empower young people to design and deliver civic education, drawing on their own agency, assets, and experiences.
-  **Nonformal civic education can be localized.** Nonformal civic education can be implemented at the grassroots level to localize content, partnering with community leaders to build young people's confidence to engage and shape democratic behavior at local, regional, and national levels.
-  **Nonformal civic education can be highly adaptable to integrate inclusion and accessibility.** This type of programming can be iterative, flexible, and responsive to diverse learning environments and provide opportunities for all youth populations including those not formally enrolled in school.

“

***I think non formal civic educations are very important in fostering the participation of young people in civic and political life. However, such programs should get more financial and institutional support from governmental and non-self-governing institutions.***

*-Young woman, 20 to 24 years old,  
from Ethiopia*

<sup>15</sup> Finkel, Ratway, and Sigal, 2022.

<sup>16</sup> Positive youth development engages youth along with their families, communities, and/or governments so they are empowered to reach their full potential. Positive youth development approaches build skills, assets, and competencies; foster healthy relationships; strengthen the environment; and transform systems. See YouthPower PYD Framework.



# RESEARCH APPROACH AND SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

IFES advances democracy for a better future and recognizes young people’s important role in building and sustaining democracies. To explore this connection, especially from the perspective of young people, IFES asked how civic education teaches young people to participate in democratic processes. Which strategies are effective in reaching all young people? How can civic education lead to or impact sustained political behavior?

IFES initiated a partnership with KDI, a longstanding youth partner of IFES’ work in Nigeria, to answer these questions. KDI’s priority areas align with IFES’ strategic areas of focus—in particular, a drive to create inclusive democracies that promote young people’s participation.<sup>17</sup> IFES and KDI also connect on the importance of using evidence-based research to inform all programming.

IFES and KDI developed a research approach that included a global survey and FGDs. In several meetings, IFES and KDI workshopped survey questions to ensure that they would gather a broad set of information on what works in civic education and what can be improved. The global survey (Annex 1) reached 858 young people in 71 identified countries (see Figure 1), far surpassing what IFES and KDI expected. After the survey, IFES and KDI organized FGDs with young people in countries where the survey response rates were highest. The FGDs allowed space to explore the themes covered in survey responses, gather more nuanced details, and expand on recommendations that were identified in the survey data. The FGDs were co-facilitated by young people who work at IFES and KDI and young leaders from countries where the FGDs were held, for a total of 47 participants from Ecuador, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, and Ukraine.

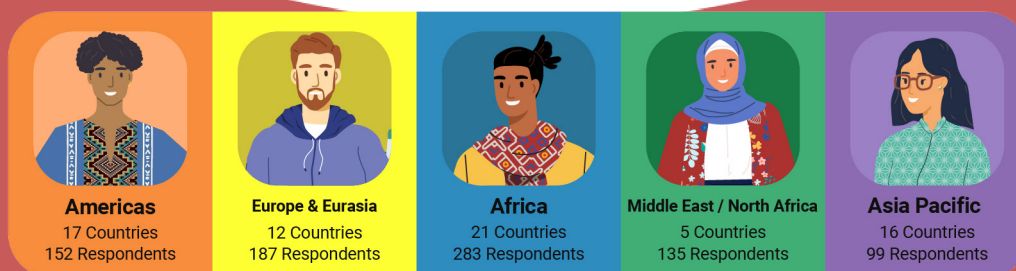
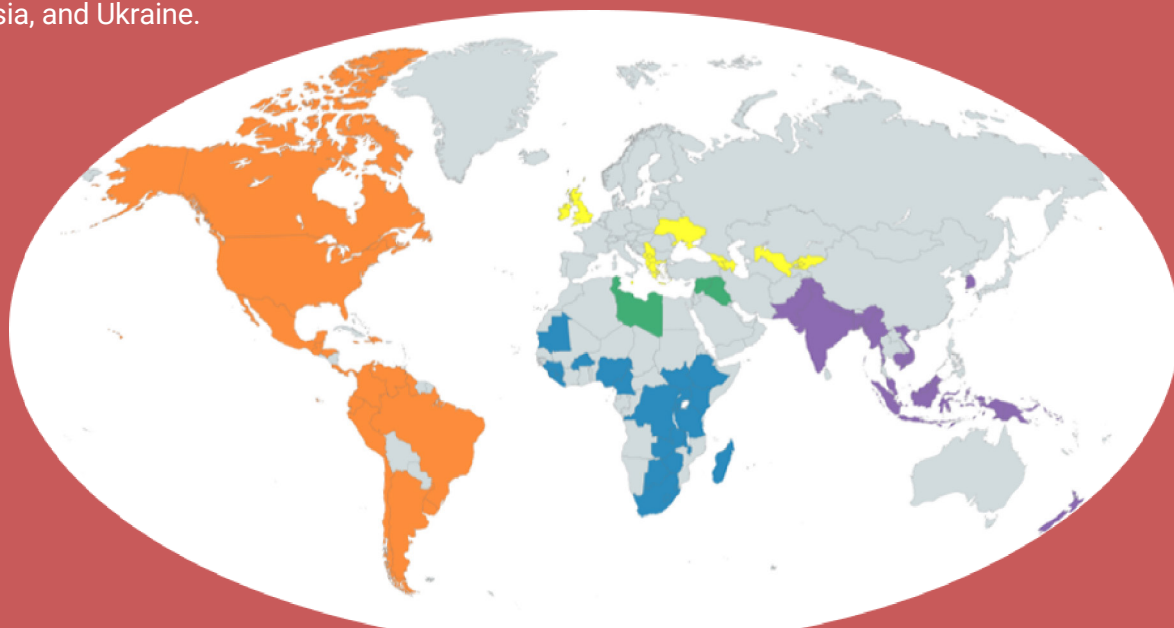


Figure 1 Global Distribution of Survey Respondents  
Note: 2 additional respondents did not identify their country/region

<sup>17</sup> More information on IFES’ Strategic Plan 2020–2024 can be found at <https://www.ifes.org/about-us>

# Demographics of Young People Engaged in the Survey and FGDs

The survey data reflect diverse regional representation, with the largest number of respondents from Africa. Men and women were represented almost equally represented, although 51 percent of men were 30 years or older, while 68 percent of those who identified as women were under 30 years old (see Figure 5). Across most regions, respondents identified as affiliated with CSOs; 61 percent were employed or self-employed, and 28 percent were students (see Figures 2 and 3). Among all respondents, about 85 percent identified as living in urban areas, and 15 percent in rural areas (see Figure 4); 10 percent identified as persons with disabilities (see Figure 6).

Figure 2 Survey Respondents' Organizational Affiliation, by Region

	AFRICA	AMERICAS	ASIA & PACIFIC	EUROPE & EURASIA	MENA
CSOs	140	23	50	31	99
Youth Groups	80	16	35	42	15
Government	23	27	12	10	10
EMBs	26	36	6	2	1
Political Parties	18	6	9	6	2
No Group Affiliation	56	57	19	118	22

Figure 3 Survey Respondents' Highest Level of Education Completed

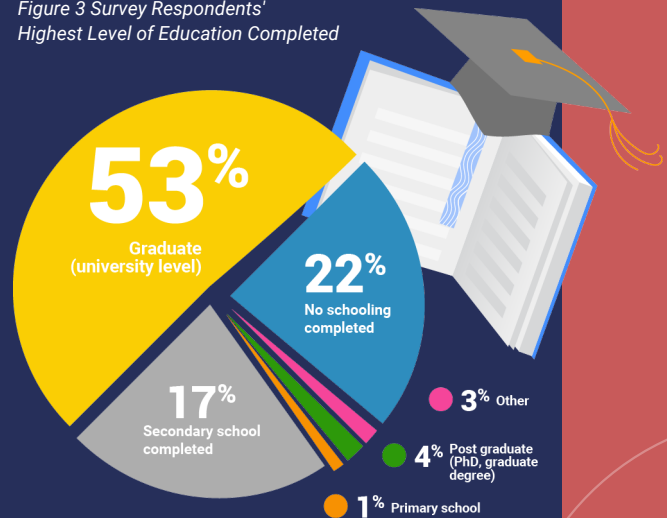


Figure 4 Survey Respondents' Geographic Location



Figure 5 Survey Respondents, by Age Group and Gender

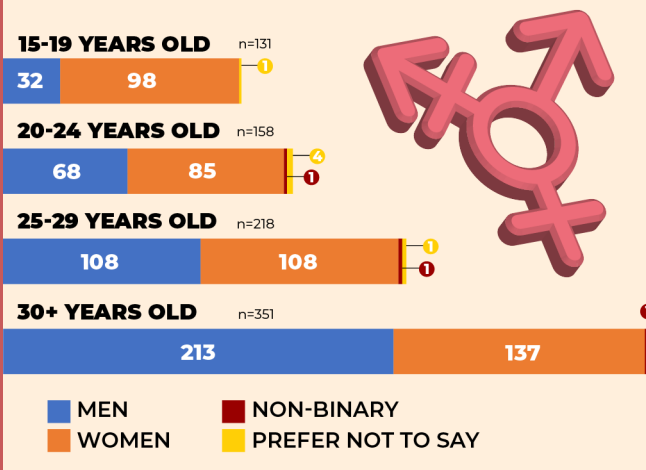
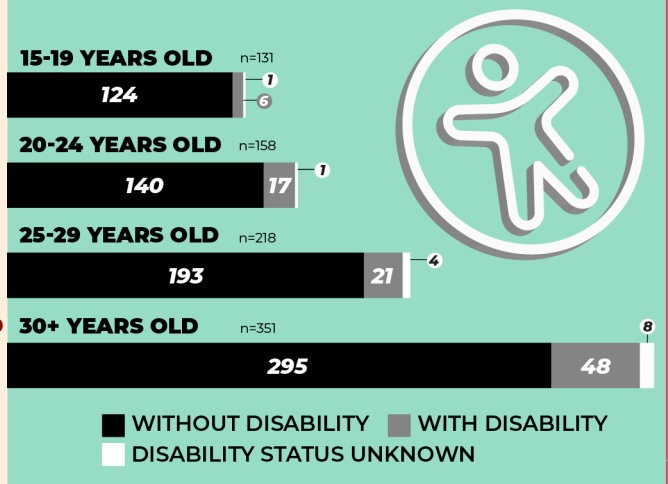


Figure 6 Survey Respondents, by Age Group and Disability Status



## Key Findings from the Survey and FGDs

Below are key takeaways and interesting data points gathered from the survey and FGD results.

**Young people are active in their communities.** Sixty-four percent of survey respondents claimed that young people were highly or somewhat engaged in electoral and governance processes in their country (Figure 7). When asked to describe their involvement in civic engagement, many cited volunteerism and service learning, advocacy and activism, and participation in youth associations or clubs. Respondents also identified electoral participation as one of the top ways that young people engage in their communities (Figure 8).

Figure 7 Observed Levels of Young People's Engagement in Electoral and Governance Processes

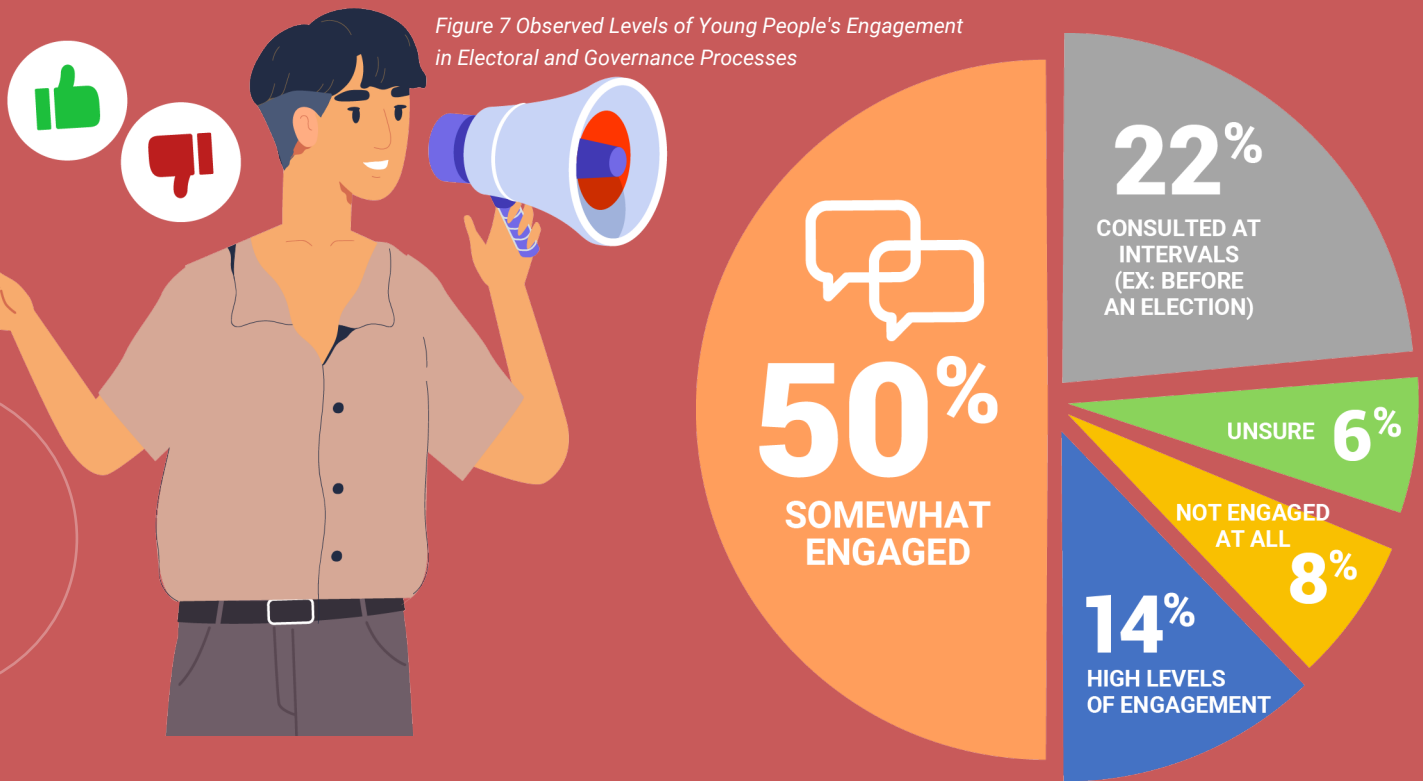
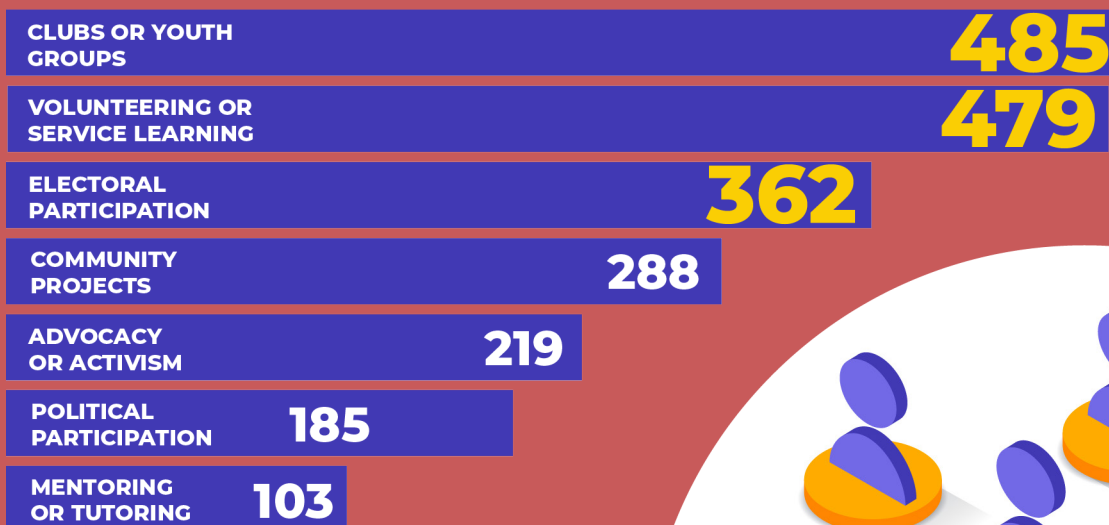
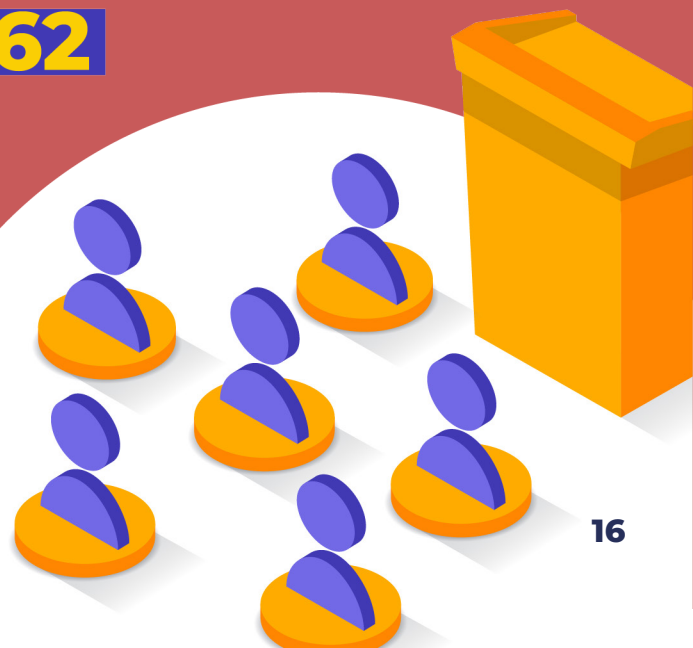


Figure 8 Young People's Observed Engagement in Civic Processes



Note for Figure 8: N=858 respondents. Respondents asked to choose the top three types of civic engagement that they observed young people participating in their country.





**Not all young people have equitable access to participate in civic and political life.** About half of all survey respondents believed that young women and young people with disabilities do not have equal access to engage in their communities (see Figures 9 and 10). This response rate was similar among women and respondents with disabilities. Societal exclusion, stigmatization and discrimination, cultural norms, and legal barriers were raised as obstacles to their participation.

Figure 9 Do young women have equal access to civic and political life?

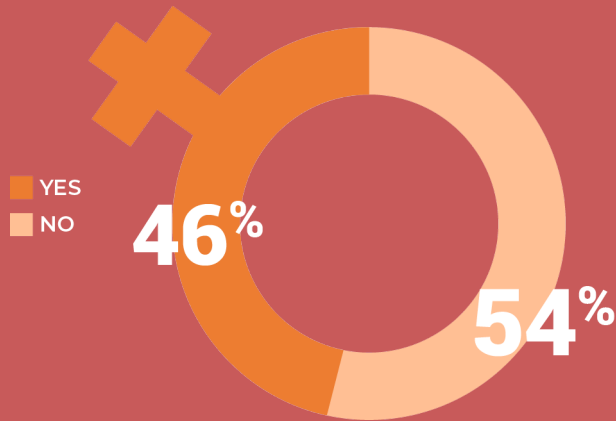
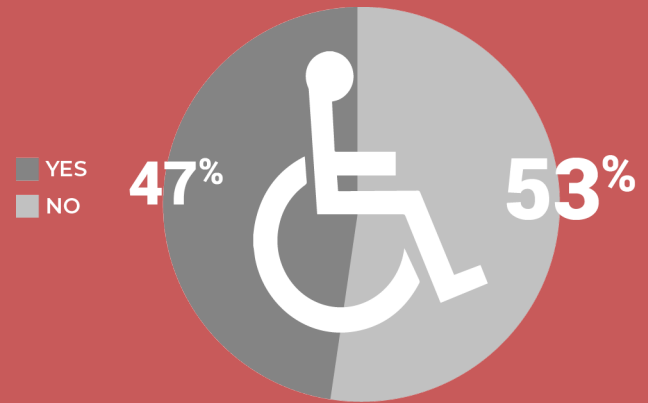


Figure 10 Do young people with disabilities have equal access to participate in civic and political life?



**Social media is an effective method for engaging young people.** Most survey respondents, including 78 percent of those living in rural areas, identified social media campaigns as the most effective nonformal civic education method for engaging young people (see Figure 11). Respondents also identified social media campaigns as the nonformal civic education strategy that they see young people leading most in their communities.

Figure 11 Nonformal Civic Education Methods Reported Most Effective at Engaging Young People, by Region

AFRICA AMERICAS ASIA PACIFIC EUROPE & EURASIA MENA

Method	AFRICA	AMERICAS	ASIA PACIFIC	EUROPE & EURASIA	MENA	Total
SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS	233	117	81	152	108	691
IN-PERSON ACTIVITIES	141	56	74	134	84	489
TV, RADIO, NEWSPAPER	101	43	26	62	42	274
COMMUNITY/RELIGIOUS LEADERS	111	28	42	50	43	274
POLITICAL PARTY-LED ACTIVITIES	82	46	29	27	22	206
EMB-LED ACTIVITIES	30	34	3	19	30	116

Note for Figure 11 N=856 respondents. Respondents were asked to choose up to three of the methods they observed being used the most effective at engaging young people in their country.

## TIPS FOR SAFE, RELEVANT, AND INCLUSIVE NONFORMAL CIVIC EDUCATION

The data gathered from the survey and FGDs were the basis for the development of the actionable tips discussed on the following pages. These tips reflect the words and experiences of young people and provide guidance to implementers on how best to honor those experiences. Before diving into the tips, however, it is important to emphasize that practitioners should safeguard young people's participation. Young people who took the survey and participated in the FGDs stressed this point.

When working with children and young people, it is integral to ensure that they feel secure physically, mentally, and emotionally when either delivering and participating in activities. At a minimum, practitioners should seek minor assent when engaging children and young people under age 18 in activities, as well as the permission of parents or caregivers. Minor assent—the agreement of those under age 18 to participate—provides an opportunity for children to express their agency by confirming that they understand and want to take part in an activity.

Localizing civic education and making it more relevant to young people and the environments in which they live may help to identify mechanisms and opportunities to better ensure their safety. Many respondents explained that learning occurs more organically and resonates more with them when activities are linked with their culture. Some respondents suggested art, theatre, and music as tools to educate young people about their political rights; others suggested that inter-cultural activities infused into civic education could build friendships that connect diverse populations. While culturally responsive activities make civic education more relevant, it is important to be mindful that some cultural norms create barriers to the participation of young women and youth with disabilities.

Remember, not all methods of engagement are accessible to and inclusive of everyone. Being aware of this, and anchoring activities with young leaders, CSO partners, and community and elected leaders can help ensure that engagement is equitable and inclusive. Indeed, rooting civic education efforts in community organizations and structures—such as youth clubs, cultural centers, and community places where young people gather and feel most safe and free to express themselves—is key to tailoring and implementing effective and sustainable programming.



***Families with limited income usually give preference to male children, especially in the regions, to access education; thus young men get more opportunities than young women... girls are not encouraged to participate in active civic and political life.***

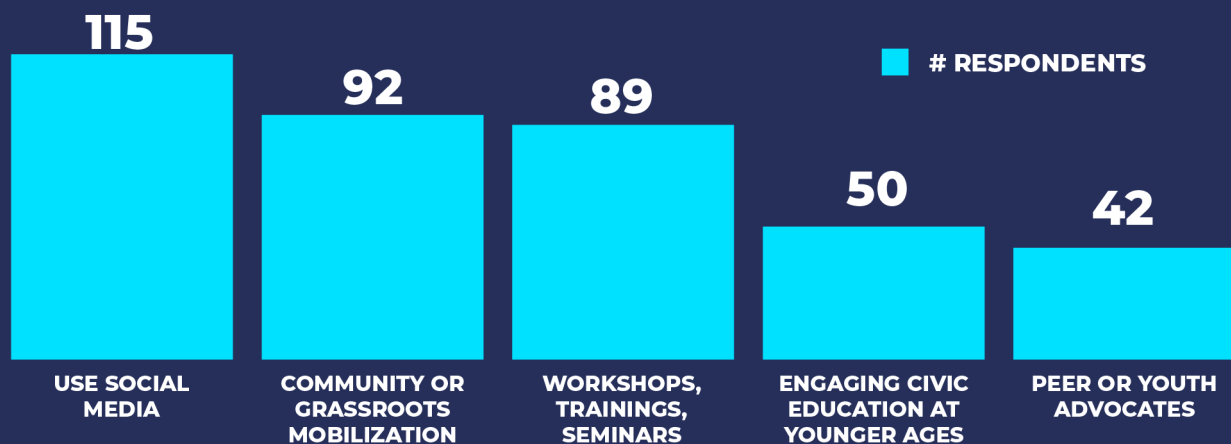
*-Young woman, 25 to 29 years old,  
from Uzbekistan*



## Tip 1: Recognize Social Media as a Platform for Leadership

Young people leverage social media in multiple ways. These include organizing virtual town halls, conducting digital advocacy campaigns to raise awareness of issues they care about, and mobilizing election participation through voter education. Survey respondents confirmed that social media is the number one way that young people lead nonformal civic education in their communities. Interestingly, this was also true for 96 percent of young people who identified as living in rural areas. Social media was also the method that survey respondents recommended most often for engagement (see Figure 12).

Figure 12 Respondents' Ideas for Increasing Engagement of Young People



Note for Figure 12: N=429 respondents who provided open ended responses

Young people's increased engagement in social media reflects their use of this platform as a valuable source of information. When asked to select the most effective method for conveying information, 45 percent of respondents across regions and age brackets, including women and urban and rural youth, selected social media. One focus group participant explained that this is because young people think social media is "the fastest and easiest way of disseminating information."



***[Use] social media, approach them at their places where they spend their spare time, identify what they like most and use that to bring them together and engage them.***

*-Young man, over 30 years old, from South Africa*



Take your leadership skills online. Map and engage your social media network. Amplify your efforts through messaging apps, image and video sharing sites.



Engage young people in the design and rollout of social media campaigns. Incorporate learning about leadership skills in online spaces.

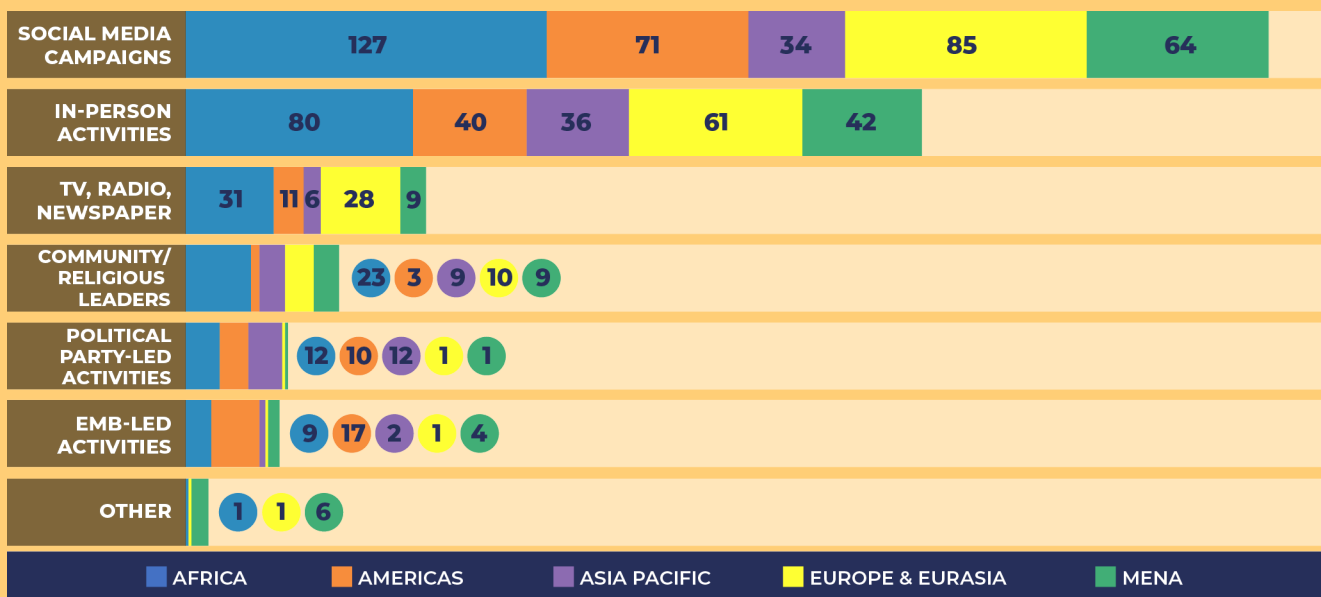
## Tip 2: Apply a Mixed Media Approach

While young people use social media, the data show that other methods might be equally important. When asked the most effective method for conveying information, survey respondents chose social media and in-person interactive engagement as their top choices. The first choice among respondents who completed school up to eighth grade was in-person engagement rather than social media, which was the first choice for all other demographics. FGD participants preferred

face-to-face engagement and interactive media because they allow for more human connections. Engaging young people through a mixed media approach—one that combines digital and social media with traditional media—could best engage young people across all demographics (see Figure 13).

“  
**A mix of social network visibility and workshop opportunity. The former contributes towards visibility while the latter can get us closer to greater involvement in advocacy.**  
 -Young man, over 30 years old, from the Dominican Republic

Figure 13 Engagement Methods Reported Most Effective at Conveying Information, by Region



The qualitative data further support the case for using a mixed media approach to nonformal civic education. Survey respondents explained that the most effective way to increase young people’s engagement in democratic processes is through social media, either in tandem with or followed by in-person approaches. Notably, through this nuance, young people are identifying ways to overcome the digital divide and challenges related to internet access and accessibility. Ensuring civic education efforts leverage multiple media approaches may more effectively engage diverse youth populations as they acknowledge that the digital divide is both a challenge and an opportunity.



Cross-post content on social media platforms and traditional media outlets like TV and newspapers. If safe to do so, livestream events or radio shows on social media to maximize your reach.



Include traditional and digital media approaches in learning materials to bolster young people’s skills to engage in person and digitally.

### Tip 3: Acknowledge Young People with Intersectional Identities

Marginalized populations, such as women, people with disabilities, ethnic or religious minorities, and Indigenous Peoples, often face barriers to political and civic participation. The survey data revealed that young people from marginalized populations feel the lack of equal opportunity acutely. This is particularly true for people with intersecting marginalized identities. Some respondents with intersecting identity markers, particularly young people with disabilities and young minority women, reported that they are prohibited by traditional customs or patriarchal practices from participating politically. One respondent shared that young women often face a “double burden,” as there is limited political space for both young people and women to participate. The survey also found that young people with disabilities face exclusion due to stigmatization, which further isolates them from decision-making processes (see Figures 14 and 15).

“  
**Although women are willing to take up political and civic leadership, their participation is low as they are forced to face various challenges. Specifically can be mentioned, physical threats, psychological threats, family responsibilities, social outlook etc.**  
 -Young woman, 20 to 24 years old, from rural Sri Lanka

Figure 14 Top Explanations for Why Young Women Cannot Equally Participate  
 N= 322 Respondents

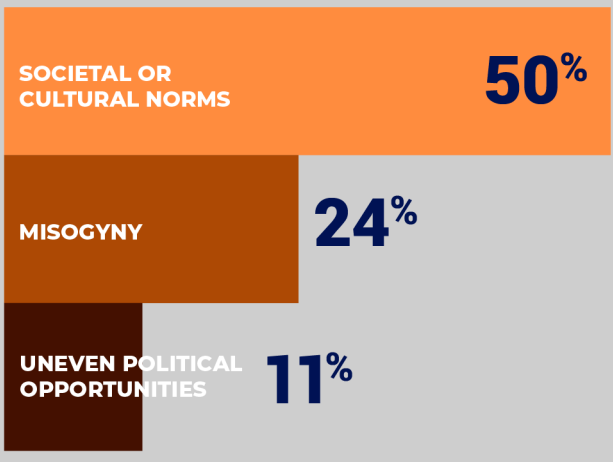
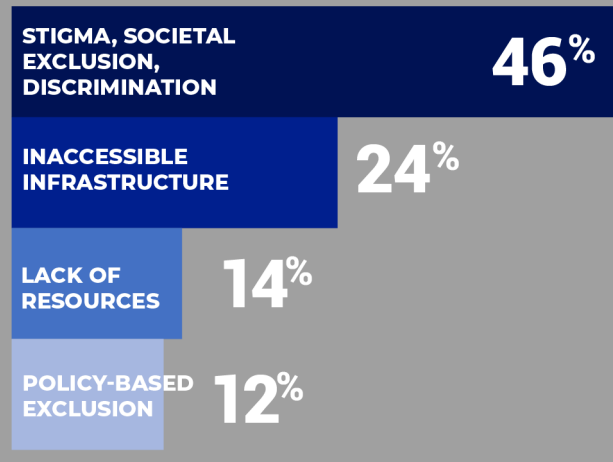


Figure 15 Top Explanations for Why Young People with Disabilities Cannot Equally Participate  
 N= 362 Respondents



In practice, inclusion should be a culture in which all young people are engaged and diversity is celebrated. This can start by purposefully engaging young leaders with diverse backgrounds and intersectional identities in activities. Learning materials should reflect their experiences, be relevant to their identities, and made accessible for people with disabilities.

Invite young people with diverse backgrounds and intersectional identities to inform, facilitate, and participate in your activities.

Apply an intersectional lens to program design to raise awareness of and tailor programming to the experiences of young people with intersecting identities to ensure accuracy, sensitivity, and representation.

## Tip 4: Make Civic Education More Accessible

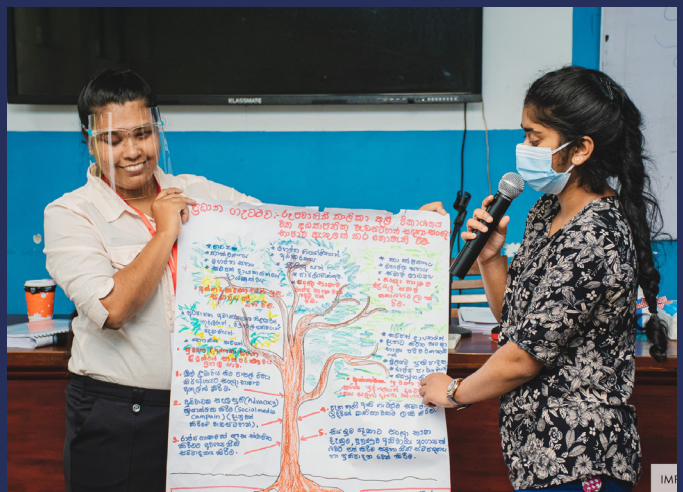
In addition to mainstreaming the intersectional identities of young people into programming approaches and honoring this diversity in democratic processes, practitioners should also make civic education available to and accessible for all learners. Accessibility goes beyond navigating physical barriers in institutional settings, such as schools and polling stations. Respondents cited economic conditions, a lack of education, and poor infrastructure such as internet access as challenges to engaging young people in rural areas. They also noted that the interests and engagement of young people will vary across geographical areas.



**There are no accessibility, awareness. Most people don't feel that persons with disabilities can be a part of the civic and political life, let alone providing opportunities.**

*-Young woman with a disability, 25 to 29 years old, from Bangladesh*

IFES' **award-winning** Engaging a New Generation for Accessible Governance and Elections (ENGAGE) is a political leadership course for young people with disabilities. The course builds leadership skills and provides practical experience through networking, internships, and community action projects. ENGAGE addresses the ableism and ageism that young persons with disabilities often face when engaging in civic and political life and provides opportunities to increase knowledge and build skills for leadership in their communities.



Two young women with disabilities participate in a training activity in Sri Lanka.

Focus group discussants noted that making the structure and format of civic education programming accessible is important to address the barriers that young people with diverse identities face as they enter public life. For in-person programming, accessibility measures can include holding activities on the ground floor of a building, inviting assistants of people with disabilities, offering transportation services, and providing child care. For online civic education efforts, this can include providing funds to top up phone credit and data, providing sign language interpretation or closed captions, and recording sessions. Whenever possible, invite program participants to inform the formats of initiatives based on their preferences.



Use alt text, closed captions, graphics, and different media such as radio, videos, or images to maximize accessibility and reach diverse youth populations.



Make sure activity locations enable all attendees to participate safely. Budget for reasonable accommodations and accessibility features for materials to ensure activities are accessible to all.





## Case Study: Inclusive Digital Advocacy Toolkit

IFES created the Inclusive Digital Advocacy Toolkit to support diverse advocates to enhance their digital advocacy skills and in response to increased activism in digital spaces.<sup>18</sup> The toolkit takes an intersectional approach, with particular attention to the unique experiences of people who identify with multiple marginalized groups, such as young people with disabilities or ethnic minority women. The toolkit also provides examples of ways that digital engagement can address barriers to meaningful participation. As of 2023, young leaders, including young people with disabilities, young Indigenous Peoples, and youth-led civil society stakeholders from 16 countries have used the toolkit.

The Inclusive Digital Advocacy Toolkit showcases how advocates can leverage digital tools for advocacy and provides guidance for digitizing in-person events to share activities with a larger online audience. In addition to actionable strategies for online advocacy, the toolkit stresses the importance of online safety. Indeed, focus group discussants identified the need for digital literacy as a component of civic education to ensure the safety of young people in digital spaces. The toolkit has been shared with CSOs and global youth activists who use it to develop their own social media campaigns, support youth inclusion in disability rights campaigns, and expand the digital reach of their efforts and the effectiveness of their online content.



Cover of the Inclusive Digital Advocacy Toolkit.

<b>TIP 1</b> 	<b>TIP 2</b> 	<b>TIP 3</b> 	<b>TIP 4</b> 
<b>RECOGNIZE SOCIAL MEDIA AS A PLATFORM FOR LEADERSHIP</b>	<b>APPLY A MIXED MEDIA APPROACH</b>	<b>ACKNOWLEDGE YOUNG PEOPLE WITH INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITIES</b>	<b>MAKE CIVIC EDUCATION MORE ACCESSIBLE</b>
<p>Outlines steps to create a social media advocacy campaign.</p>	<p>Identifies ways to amplify in-person engagement through digital tools.</p>	<p>Includes real world examples of diverse advocates from around the world.</p>	<p>Provides guidance on how to make content more accessible.</p>
<p>Follow the algorithm tips to maximize the reach of your campaign.</p>	<p>Take a quiz to determine what type of advocate you are and find relevant advocacy tools to employ in your efforts.</p>	<p>Map your digital environment and networks to ensure your campaigns are inclusive of diverse stakeholders.</p>	<p>Apply inclusive communication strategies such as alt-text and adding captions to videos to reach and engage all users.</p>

<sup>18</sup> International Foundation for Electoral Systems, January 2022.

## Tip 5: Engage Young People Under Age 18

Engaging people under the age of enfranchisement<sup>19</sup>, often 18, in civic education is critical to instill democratic norms, attitudes, and behaviors that will ensure lifelong civic and political participation.<sup>20</sup> Survey respondents and FGD participants repeatedly made this point, stressing the importance of engaging children to create more sustained patterns of engagement in adult life. One focus group discussant noted how school government or youth parliament programs can build political behaviors. Respondents also mentioned secondary impacts—the spillover effect.<sup>21</sup> For example, civic education for children can benefit others because children often talk about what they have learned with their families and friends; this secondary knowledge exchange has the potential to influence the behavior of those who have not participated directly in programming.



**To me, [civic education] sounds ... really effective to facilitate [the] social integration and adaptation of young individuals in the society in their adult life, and the sooner we start teaching young people or children about important topics of civic education, the more effective it will be.**

*-Young woman, 20 to 24 years old, from Ukraine*

The USAID-funded Youth Advocacy, Linkages and Leadership in Elections and Society program trained Guyanese youth to use **interactive civic education toolkits** to mobilize their communities. The toolkits use board and card games to teach players about democracy, the branches of government, advocacy, and inclusive problem-solving. The games can be played with peers, families, and community members.



Indigenous Guyanese youth (under age 18) play a civic education board game.

Survey respondents identified a need to move away from traditional learning structures such as formal school curricula and explore more interactive modalities, especially for younger learners. Using hand puppets, card games, trivia contests, or board games that merge entertainment with civic education is a fun way to bring friends and family into the learning process. Materials should be adapted to learning styles and age groups; they should use varied communication styles and age-appropriate text and images and should support cognitive development.



Invite parents, caregivers, and their children to participate in your activities when it is safe to do so. Provide opportunities for them to work and learn together.



Obtain consent from parents and caregivers and assent from learners under age 18 for their participation and use of their images or quotes. Add safeguarding mechanisms for the inclusion of young people under age 18 in programming scopes of work.

<sup>19</sup> In 90 percent of countries, the voting age is 18. See: Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening, 2019.

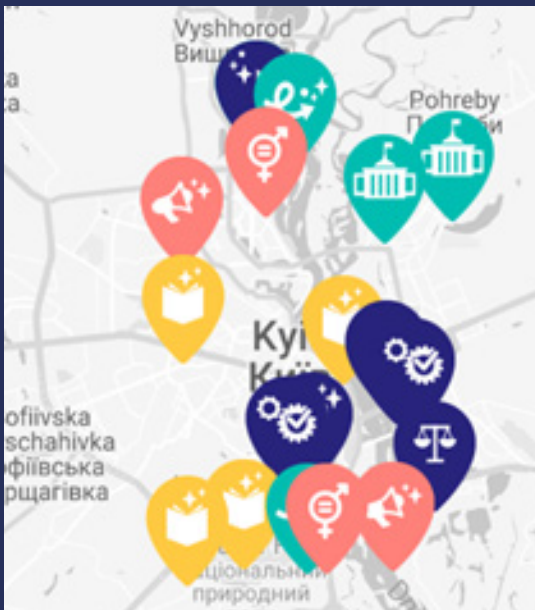
<sup>20</sup> Law and Atkinson, 2021.

<sup>21</sup> Finkel, Ratway, and Sigal, 2022.



## Tip 6: Incorporate Peer-to-Peer and Intergenerational Learning

IFES Ukraine’s **Democracy: From Theory to Practice** university course incorporates nonformal civic education programming through the capstone requirement in which students work together on community action projects to solve problems in their communities.



A **map** of community action projects in Kyiv, Ukraine.

Survey respondents identified engaging peer advocates through peer-to-peer learning as an effective and inclusive approach to civic education. They cited youth-led and -designed activities that invest in young people as advocates and educators as a sustainable approach to sharing information among communities (see box at left).<sup>22</sup> Partnering with young people as trusted colleagues can help ensure that programming is relevant and can reach diverse groups of young people. For example, consider reaching out to youth clubs, associations, or networks. Establishing feedback loops for young people to share ideas for programming were mentioned as opportunities to engage more youth voices; these could look like focus group discussions, youth councils, or working groups.



***In all of the projects that I have worked on, no tool has succeeded like that of peer educational approach where a group of persons are doing certain things together.***

*-Young man from Nigeria*

Intergenerational learning opportunities are also important—not just to provide young people with mentors and insights from the lived experiences of adult peers, but also to dispel the stereotypes that adults may have of young people and to share important civic education information with them. Young people’s exposure to democratic concepts through youth-focused civic education programs can be shared with adults; young people’s leadership and expertise can support their families, friends, and community members in navigating civic and political spaces, such as new social media platforms or polling stations.



Engage peers and youth champions of all ages in your activities. Invite youth champions from older age groups to share stories and experiences with younger age groups.



Provide opportunities for young people to network and work together with their peers and older community members.

<sup>22</sup> International Foundation for Electoral Systems. Democracy.

## Tip 7: Include Civic Education Throughout the Electoral Cycle

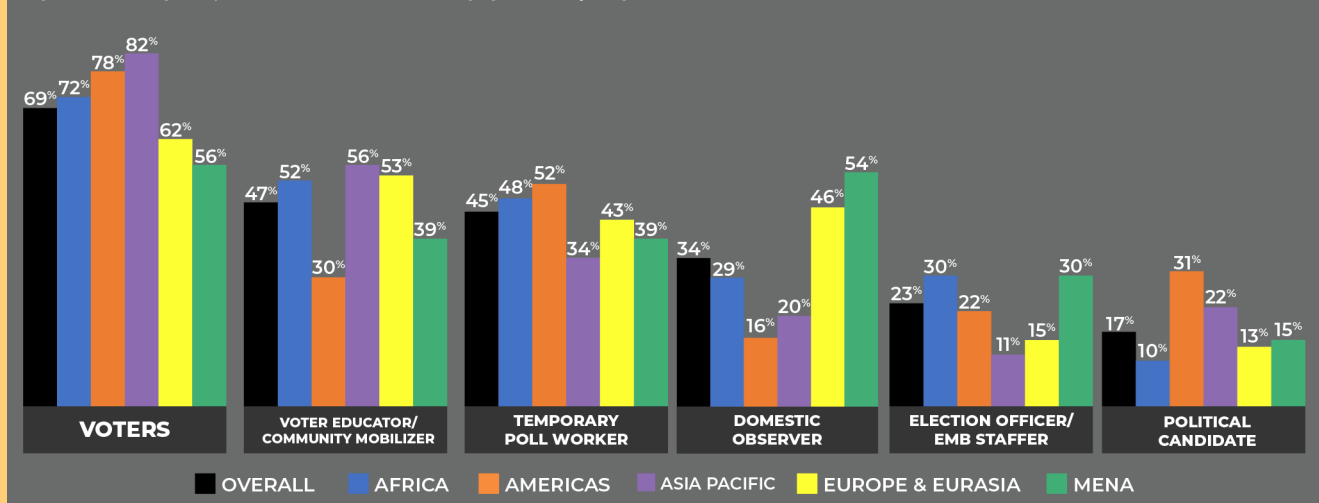
While respondents overwhelmingly expressed more interest in nonformal activities, they also noted the importance of youth participation in elections and the electoral cycle. Respondents identified the top three ways young people were observed participating in the electoral process—as voters, voter educators, and temporary poll workers (see Figure 16). Although observation of all behaviors varied by region, respondents in all regions observed young people voting the most. In Africa and the Asia-Pacific and Europe and Eurasia regions, an average of 54 percent of respondents observed young people acting as voter educators or community mobilizers. In the Americas region, 52 percent of respondents observed young people serving as poll workers.



**Advocacy campaigns, awareness of the electoral process and candidacies before and after election periods ... [and] with an ongoing focus on attracting new generations who are eligible to vote in elections and educating them on the democratic and electoral process and the rotation of power.**

-Young woman, over 30 years old, from Iraq

Figure 16 Young People's Observed Electoral Engagement, by Region



Survey and FGD respondents identified activities that young people can lead and participate in throughout the electoral cycle. These include conducting voter registration drives and party registration during the pre-electoral phase; mobilizing first-time voters and observing elections during the electoral phase; and advocating for electoral reform efforts that reduce barriers for young voters in the post-electoral phase. They also observed that building relations with EMBs and electoral authorities can foster more opportunities for youth engagement across the electoral cycle.



Connect your activities to all phases of the electoral cycle and include first-time voters and under-represented youth populations. Foster partnerships with the EMB to align your efforts.



Focus program design on each phase of the electoral cycle to strengthen young people's engagement in the pre-electoral and post-electoral phases and to build sustained habits of participation.

## Case Study: Kimpact Democracy Schools

In 2020, KDI started Kimpact Democracy Schools (KDS) to invest in young people and the democratic health of Nigeria. KDS offer meaningful opportunities for younger Nigerians to add to their democratic knowledge while building civic and political participation skills through interactive activities and civic learning experiences, which have nearly vanished in conventional schools in Nigeria. KDS provides safe spaces for young changemakers from different social and educational backgrounds who aspire to be active citizens and leaders, and to learn and exchange ideas on democratic ideals and civic life.

KDS offer trainings and camps throughout the year for cohorts ages 10–17 and 18–35. While the younger cohorts learn about democracy and its role in Nigerian history, the older age bracket focuses on skill building opportunities through leadership and peacebuilding initiatives. In just two years, KDS



Participants celebrate completing the KDS camp.

trained 615 young Nigerians on democracy and human rights, civic leadership and community organizing using a learning-by-doing approach. Alumni are encouraged to continue to engage with their peers through the KDS Alumni Network. Many KDS alumni are now active in civic life, advocate for the implementation of pro-youth policies, and demand accountability from public officials.

### TIP 5



#### ENGAGE YOUNG PEOPLE UNDER AGE 18

KDS engages young people ages 10 to 17 to instill leadership and democratic norms in their development process.

The age 10–17 cohorts learn about democratic ideals by discussing Nigeria’s history of governance and interacting with guest speakers who hold key democratic roles.

### TIP 6



#### INCORPORATE PEER-TO-PEER AND INTER- GENERATIONAL LEARNING

KDS alumni network allows for peer-to-peer and intergenerational learning and mentoring.

KDS activities offer participants first-hand practicum opportunities, including internships and site visits with public officials, EMBs, and CSOs.

### TIP 7



#### INCLUDE CIVIC EDUCATION THROUGHOUT THE ELECTORAL CYCLE

KDS promotes continuous and systemic learning during all three phases of the electoral cycle.

KDS teaches skills that enable young people to take post-election leadership to advocate for government accountability.

# LOOKING FORWARD

Young people should be at the heart of any programming that involves working with them. We thank the more than 900 young people consulted in the survey and FGDs for their contributions. Their insights provided a window into their experiences, examples, and ideas for more inclusive youth engagement through civic education programming.

While this guide focuses on program design, it is equally important to tie programming content to themes and trends that influence democracy. We know through evidence-based research that the stability of democracy is directly linked with young people's engagement. More research is needed to study how youth-led and -focused civic education programming can fight back when corruption or authoritarianism threaten democracy. It is important to develop a deeper understanding of actions taken at the local and community levels and how they can influence political processes at the national level.

This guide is one step in that direction. Concrete action must follow to ensure that these goals are met. In the next phase of this research, IFES will publish an interactive data visualization as a companion to this guide. It will disaggregate findings based on respondents' demographics, regions, and the survey questions themselves. We hope this data and the analysis in this guide will support implementers around the world in creating more responsive, youth-informed programming that can help create strong and vibrant democracies.



***Well I suggest when engaging young people in this non formal civic education can help young people to be open minded and try to bring positive mindset in their community.***

*-Young woman, 20 to 24 years old, from Papua New Guinea*



# ANNEXES

## Annex 1: Survey Respondents by Country

Total Number of Respondents = 858

COUNTRY	# RESPONDENTS
Albania	2
Argentina	4
Armenia	11
Bangladesh	22
Botswana	1
Brazil	1
Burkina Faso	1
Cambodia	7
Cameroon	2
Canada	2
Chile	1
Colombia	2
Dominican Republic	2
Democratic Republic of the Congo	2
Ecuador	116
Ethiopia	42
Georgia	8
Guatemala	1
Guinea	1
Guyana	8
Haiti	1
Honduras	1
India	3
Indonesia	4
Iraq	52
Ireland	1
Jamaica	1
Kenya	12
Kosovo	1
Kyrgyzstan	15
Lebanon	10
Lesotho	1
Liberia	1
Libya	8
Madagascar	3
Malawi	1

COUNTRY	# RESPONDENTS
Malaysia	2
Mauritania	1
Mexico	1
Montenegro	1
Myanmar	1
Nepal	12
New Zealand	1
Nigeria	191
North Macedonia	4
Pakistan	5
Palestine	2
Papua New Guinea	10
Peru	2
Rwanda	2
Serbia	1
Sierra Leone	2
Singapore	2
Solomon Islands	1
South Africa	2
South Korea	1
South Sudan	2
Sri Lanka	23
Tanzania	4
Timor-Leste	1
Tunisia	63
Uganda	7
Ukraine	139
United Kingdom	2
United States	7
Uruguay	1
Uzbekistan	2
Venezuela	1
Vietnam	4
Zambia	1
Zimbabwe	4
Not Identified	2








## Annex 2: Tips and Guidance for Young Leaders and Practitioners



### ACTIONS FOR YOUNG LEADERS



### ACTIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

<p><b>TIP 1</b> </p> <p><b>RECOGNIZE SOCIAL MEDIA AS A PLATFORM FOR LEADERSHIP</b></p>	<p>Take your leadership skills online. Map and engage your social media network. Amplify your efforts through messaging apps and image and video sharing sites.</p>	<p>Engage young people in the design and rollout of social media campaigns. Incorporate learning about leadership skills in online spaces.</p>
<p><b>TIP 2</b> </p> <p><b>APPLY A MIXED MEDIA APPROACH</b></p>	<p>Cross-post content on social media platforms and traditional media outlets. If safe to do so, livestream events or radio shows on social media to maximize your reach.</p>	<p>Include traditional and digital media approaches in learning materials to bolster young people's skills to engage in person and digitally.</p>
<p><b>TIP 3</b> </p> <p><b>ACKNOWLEDGE YOUNG PEOPLE WITH INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITIES</b></p>	<p>Invite young people with diverse backgrounds and intersectional identities to inform, facilitate, and participate in your activities.</p>	<p>Apply an intersectional lens to program design to raise awareness of and tailor programming to the specific experiences of young people with intersecting identities to ensure accuracy, sensitivity, and representation.</p>
<p><b>TIP 4</b> </p> <p><b>MAKE CIVIC EDUCATION MORE ACCESSIBLE</b></p>	<p>Use alt text, closed captions, graphics, and different media such as radio, videos, or images to maximize accessibility and reach diverse youth populations.</p>	<p>Make sure activity locations allow for everyone to participate safely. Budget for reasonable accommodations and accessibility features for materials to ensure activities are accessible to all.</p>
<p><b>TIP 5</b> </p> <p><b>ENGAGE YOUNG PEOPLE UNDER AGE 18</b></p>	<p>Invite parents, caregivers, and their children to participate in your activities when it is safe to do so. Provide opportunities for them to work and learn together.</p>	<p>Obtain consent from parents and caregivers and assent from learners under age 18 for their participation and use of their images or quotes. Add safeguarding mechanisms for the inclusion of young people under age 18 in programming scopes of work.</p>
<p><b>TIP 6</b> </p> <p><b>INCORPORATE PEER-TO-PEER AND INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING</b></p>	<p>Engage peers and youth champions of all ages in your activities. Invite youth champions from older age groups to share stories and experiences with younger age groups.</p>	<p>Provide opportunities for young people to network and work together with their peers and older community members.</p>
<p><b>TIP 7</b> </p> <p><b>INCLUDE CIVIC EDUCATION THROUGHOUT THE ELECTORAL CYCLE</b></p>	<p>Connect your activities to all phases of the electoral cycle and include first-time voters and under-represented youth populations. Foster partnerships with the EMB to align your efforts.</p>	<p>Focus program design on each phase of the electoral cycle to strengthen young people's engagement in the pre-electoral and post-electoral phases and to build sustained habits of participation.</p>

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