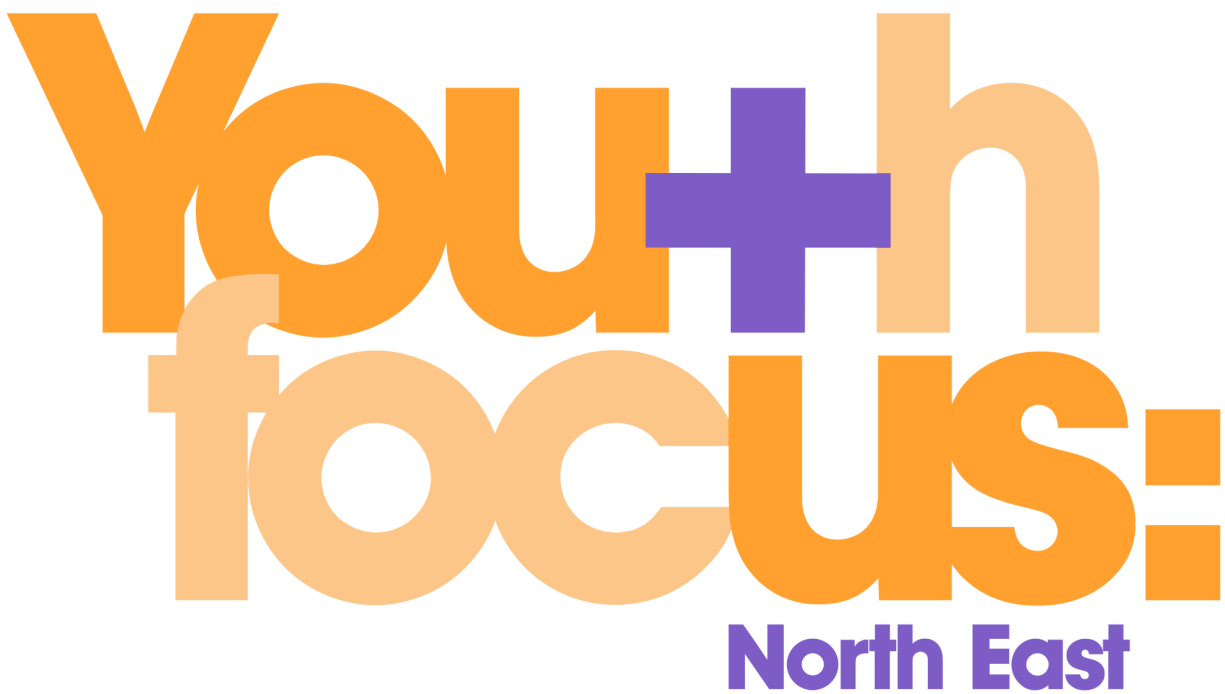Elizabeth Laurent & Olly Cockrill

Youth Participation

Youth Focus North East

Survey Analysis

This report is based on the findings of a survey conducted from February 11th until April 20th asking questions on the views surrounding young people held by others in society and how young people believe they are viewed by society; what platforms are available for young people to make a change or make their voices heard, and how useful they are perceived as acting in society.

The survey received 170 responses from respondents from a variety of age groups and backgrounds, some had experience working with young people and some did not. The findings from the report demonstrated that the age of respondents and their work with young people did influence their responses and their attitudes towards young people in society. The survey found that a lot of attitudes held around young people are divided and a consensus is rare, though these divisions are not always based on strict characteristics such as age and experience working with young people.

Literature Review

In response to policy, participation is a key factor in inciting change. However, participation is increasingly diminishing within younger generations and democratic societies (Karsten, 2011, pp. 22). This is to say that while youth participation is an existing form of activism, it is far from amplified. We believe that political efficacy is the main factor in the lack of participation of young people in today's society. Without access to those in power, relevant information, support from trusted individuals, and empowerment from the community, young people will face limitations on their ability to participate (Karsten, 2011, pp. 26).

In Harry Shier's *Pathway to Participation*, he notes several steps towards empowering children within society to make decisions and advocate for important issues (2001, pp. 111). Shier outlines the ladder as such: listening to children, supporting their views, take these views into consideration, involve young people in the decision-making process, and enable children to have the opportunity to share responsibilities within the decision-making process (2001, pp. 111). While this report acknowledges the role of platforms, age, and trust between older and younger members of society, it is vital to note

the resources children must have to initially involve themselves: support, education, and information.

The importance of resources in accordance with political efficacy and connectedness to the world can be seen in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement. In regards to the Black Lives Matter movement, many young people have been aware of the issue as they have grown up with the "BLM" rhetoric (Freelon, McIlwain, and Clark, 2016, pp. 7). Despite this, many education systems have refrained from teaching the context, history, and importance of BLM which would connect many students to their studies. Without the resource of education and information, many young people will continue to be disengaged with politics and unempowered to create change in their communities. Resources and accessibility are vital for children to participate and feel that they are important. Support and education offer children to develop a collective identity about themselves, an awareness of what is going on in the world and how this connects to themselves (Bonfiglio, 2017, pp. 113). Youth groups offer this support as a platform for learning and empowering young people to get involved. Using "emotion work" as a tool, children may connect to their communities through reflecting upon experiences and shaping emotions (Bonfiglio, 2017, pp. 112-114).

Age Groups

Within the survey, we have sorted respondents into 4 different age groups: 11 to 19, 20 to 29, 30 to 39, and people aged 40 and above. We did this based on the assumption that the views of respondents may change in line with their age brackets and their life experience, the large grouping of those respondents aged 40 and over was put in place as we thought that more of our respondents would be in the younger age brackets. Meaning that if we put in place age brackets of 40-49 and 50-59 for example, we would not see much difference in their answers when comparing the two groups. Of the 170 respondents to our survey, 53 were aged between 11 and 19, 58 were aged between 20 and 29, 10 were aged between 30 and 39, and 48 were aged 40 and above. This meant that around two-thirds of the respondents were aged 11-29, what would be typically seen as the youth and young adults of the country, with the least life experience; and a third of respondents were aged 30 and

above, who would be seen as adults with definite life experience. The reason for this disparity in the ages of respondents will be due to the lanes we used to spread the survey, as two students, the majority of people we know are aged within the lower two brackets and through spreading the survey to friends and asking them to follow suit, a network of young respondents will have taken shape. Respondents aged 30 and above will have come from family members and their friends, alongside professionals which the host organization had contacts and spread the survey to. Due to the large majority of young respondents, we expect the responses to questions to be biased towards the views of young people and therefore more reflective of what the youth of today think about specific issues. The still large number of older respondents will also be useful in determining how the older generations view young people and what they think young people care about.

Age and Trust

Out of 171 respondents to our survey, 9.5% of respondents answered "yes" to the question, "Do you feel that wider society trusts young people?" 55% of respondents answered that they felt this depends on a certain issue and 35.5% of respondents answered no. We hypothesized that most younger people categorized from 11-29 would feel that they are not trusted by society, and for older respondents to indicate the same. However, our findings reflected a different perspective. 68.75% of respondents who answered yes were 40 years or older whereas 12.5% of respondents who answered yes belonged to the 20-19 age bracket. Furthermore, 18.75% of those who answered yes were between the ages of 11-19. We found this data to be revealing of a different conclusion to one we had anticipated. Most people who believed wider society trusts young people were older whereas fewer younger people were found showing the same belief.

The majority of respondents (93 respondents/55%) answered that they believed society would either trust or distrust young people based on certain issues. 30% of respondents who answered in this fashion were 40+, 7% were between 30-39, 30% between 20-29, and about 32% were between 11-19. We believe most people answered this way because of the multitude of prominent issues that shape our current political landscape. We offered this answer in hopes to see what issues respondents of various age groups found most pressing and why this may be the case.

Of the 60 respondents that answered "no," 13.3% were 40+, 5% were between 30-39, 46.7% were between 20-29 and 35% were of the ages between 11-19. This was most surprising to us as fewer of the older respondents seemed to think that wider society did not trust young people. We were not surprised that most young people, in fact, the majority of respondents with this answer, believed that they were not trusted by wider society. This data reflects a lack of efficacy in young people that must be addressed. While older people may feel that society does trust young people, it is evident that most young people do not feel this way highlighting a key divide between generations in various communities. Moreover, most people believe that trust comes from certain issues reflecting the lack of consistent faith in young people within society. Knowing this, why are certain issues the determining factors of trust in young people? How can this inconsistency propel youth efficacy? Does this limit the ability for young people to enact change?"

Experience and Trust

Question 2 asked respondents if they worked with young people or not, and question 3 asked if they believed society trusts young people to make responsible decisions. This question could be answered with a 'yes', a 'no', or a neutral answer of 'it depends on the issue'.

The responses to Questions 2 and 3 can be analyzed together to determine if working with young people has influenced respondents' attitudes towards how much society trusts young people to make responsible decisions. 68% of respondents stated that they worked with young people, 32% said they did not, this large majority for working with young people may stem from the similar amount of respondents who are themselves, young people, meaning that most likely their work lives may be as students meaning that they work with young people. A 55% majority of respondents stated they believe that the levels of trust that wider society has towards young people making responsible decisions depend on the issue. While 35.5% of respondents stated they did not think that wider society trusts young people to make responsible decisions at all, and only 9.5% believed that wider society does trust young people to make responsible decisions. This clearly demonstrates that there is a

large feeling across the respondents that young people are either only partially trusted by wider society or are not trusted at all. Only 10 respondents that worked alongside young people stated that they believe that wider society trusts young people in all instances, so only 6 respondents who do not work with young people believe the same. This shows that the majority of those who work with young people in some way believe that society trusts them to make decisions, this could be influenced by their contact with young people and a lack of trust that they may see on a day-to-day basis. While also the majority of those who do not work with young people feel the same, perhaps showing that the idea of societal distrust towards young people is common across society and does not depend on experience working with young people.

However, after comparing percentiles of the responses to question 3 from those who work with young people. It can be argued that those who work with young people are slightly less likely to believe that society trusts young people and that they are much more likely to believe that it depends on the issue than those who do not work with young people. Those who work with young people are much more likely to say that societal trust depends on the issue, rather than outright saying society does not trust young people. This can be seen when analyzing the figures, 42% of those who do not work with young people said society does not trust them at all, compared to 32% of those who work with young people. Of those that work with young people, 11% said that society does trust young people to make responsible decisions, while 9% of those who work with young people agree. 46% of respondents who do not work with young people said that it depends on the issue, while a majority of 59% of those who work with young people agreed.

There is a gap of 27% between respondents who say that it depends on the issue and those who say society does not trust young people at all, compared to a gap of only 4% with those who do not work with young people. This could be due to a lack of actual experience with how young people interact with society and make responsible decisions, those who work with young people may see examples of society trusting young people on a daily basis and of society not trusting them. This could have led to them sitting more on the fence on this question, while those who do not work with young people may not have this experience, leading them to be more likely to believe that society does not trust young people at all, making the gap between the responses smaller.

Age and Responsibility

Our fourth survey question asked our respondents to consider if they believed that young people aged between 11-25 have the opportunity to make responsible decisions in their community. Out of 169 responses, 64% (108 people) answered "yes" while 36% (61 people) answered no. Of those that answered yes, 26.9% were aged 40 and above, 4.6% between 30-39, 35.2% between 20-29, and 33.33% were between 11-19. While the results show similar responses, it is evident that more young people aged between 11-29 believe that they or their peers have the opportunity to make responsible decisions.

Most reasons described for these responses were categorized between existing examples of young people holding responsibilities. These include having money, working, facilitating relationships, their education, social media, and the ability for 18+ to vote. Several respondents explained that people 16 and above would receive more opportunities and that it is difficult to generalize an eleven-year-old with an eighteen-year-old.

However, compared to those that answered "no", there is certainly a marginal doubt in opportunities given to young people. Of those that responded with "no," 31% were aged 40+, 8% between 30-39, 32.8% between 20-29, and 27.8% between 11-19. Despite the fact that only 36% of respondents answered "no," the ratio between the respondents is somewhat similar across all age groups with the exception of the 30-39 bracket. This is to say that both older and younger age groups recognize that young people may not attain the opportunities to make responsible decisions in their community.

Those who answered "no" had a variety of reasons as to why they believe young people lack the opportunities to make responsible decisions. Many explained how a lack of available resources due to different backgrounds and financial means would severely affect this. Others explained that institutions such as schools, communities, and the government do not provide enough opportunities to young people, or that when those opportunities are presented, young people find it difficult to be taken seriously. Several younger respondents noted that adults commonly doubt their responsibility and stereotype young people as less experienced and therefore less intelligent. Respondents from older age

brackets explained that people under 18 have a more difficult time as they cannot vote and may subsequently feel neglected. Furthermore, older respondents claimed that peer pressure was a major factor in preventing young people to seize opportunities within their communities. We found the differing explanations based on age to be interesting to analyze as perhaps experience and awareness (shaped by what age bracket the respondent fell into) may have influenced their responses. Older respondents focused on institutional flaws while younger highlighted the prejudice they face from their older cohorts.

Ranking Modern Issues

Question 5 asked respondents to rank issues in society in what they believed their order of importance is for young people. There were four issues given and the option was there for respondents to suggest another. The four options were, the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM), global warming, response to COVID-19, and global politics.

The issue that was perceived as being the most important to young people was BLM, with 38.7% of respondents believing so, with global warming being the most important people by the closest number of people, 29.8%. Global warming was most popularly seen as the 2nd most important issue (with 32.7%), followed by BLM (28.6%) and response to COVID-19 (22.2%). The 3rd most important issue was mostly seen to be the response to COVID-10 (33.5%), followed by BLM (22%), global politics (20.4%), and global warming (19.6%). The issues found to be majorly perceived as the least important issues were Global politics (51.5%) and the response to COVID-19 (25.7%).

This data shows that across all age groups and working experiences, there is relative consensus that the most important issues for young people are global warming and the BLM movement and that the least pressing issues are global politics and the response to COVID-19. This has a positive meaning, as it shows that older people, who may not work with young people, still know what issues are key to them and they are educated on what issues young people desire action and change.

Some respondents gave additional issues that they believe young people are interested in, these came from a mix of older and younger respondents and there were also similarities

in the answers. LGBTQ rights, social media, mental health came up the most as suggested issues that young people are interested in on top of the others. The mix of people giving these answers further shows that there is a clear picture, from people across society, of what issues young people care about.

Current Platforms and Effecting Change

Question six asked respondents if they felt that current platforms available to young people (voting, social media, online petitions, etc.) are effective methods for creating change. Out of 169 respondents, 105 people or 62% answered "yes" while 64 people or 38% answered no. We believe age brackets hold an influence on these responses as the question is geared towards specific modes of activism with which people of different ages will have different experiences with. For example, we hypothesized that most young people would answer "yes" as social media and online petitions are widely used within today's society regarding current issues such as global warming, BLM, and COVID-19. Conversely, we anticipated that most older respondents would disagree due to a lack of presence on social media and knowledge that young people are increasingly refraining from voting.

Of the respondents that answered "yes," 28.6% were 40+, 5.7% between 30-39, 36.2% were between 20-29, and 29.5% between 11-19. This was a surprising result as we thought that the majority of those who answered in this fashion would have been dominantly younger people yet a third of respondents belong to the older age bracket. While those aged between 11-29 hold a higher percentage, we believed they were still low for young people based on our hypothesis as we imagined the ratio between younger and older responses within this dataset would be staggered. Those who answered "yes" had similar reasons behind their opinions. The majority of respondents noted the influential aspects of social media explaining how widespread information can be, how appealing and accessible it is to young people, as well as the scope of demographics that it can reach. Others claimed that platforms such as social media, petitions, and voting enable young people's voices to be heard however many suggested that to amplify this, the voting age should be lowered from 18 to 16.

28% of respondents that replied "no" were aged 40+, with 6.25% belonging to the 30-39 bracket, 31.25% were between 20-29 and 34.4% were between the ages of 11-19. Surprisingly most people that responded "no" fell into the younger age brackets which negated our original hypothesis. The respondents offered several explanations for this. Social media was the main critique as many claimed it was more of an echo chamber for young people than an influential platform. In addition, many voiced that social media can be easily manipulated and facilitates the spread of misinformation which should be taken into consideration. Others expressed their belief that many people do not know how the voting system works or that due to its slow process, it may be a much more discouraging platform. In regards to petitions, several respondents claimed that they were a pointless platform that is more performative than anything, and often ignored by the government. Most older respondents critiqued social media, whereas many younger respondents found petitions and voting more problematic.

Current Platforms vs Direct Activism for Effecting Change

Question seven asked respondents whether they believed that the aforementioned current platforms were better for inciting change compared to activism or protests, or if they believed the two were of equal standing. We thought to analyze this in accordance with age as we hypothesized that most young people would be in favor of activism through protests and direct action whereas older respondents may be more inclined to practice activism through more traditional or institutional platforms. Of the 165 respondents, 14.5% voted that current platforms were more effective, 38.8% believed direct activism/protesting was more effective, and 46.7% believed that the two were equally effective. We found this data to be especially surprising as given the recent issues that have sparked mobilization, (BLM, global warming, women's rights, gun violence etc.) we anticipated that the results would reflect larger support for direct activism through protests.

33.3% of respondents that voted for current platforms were of the age 40+, 4.2% were between 30-39, 37.5% between 20-29, and 25% of respondents were between 11-19. Respondents had various reasonings behind their vote, mostly critiquing the role of protests in society. Many claimed that protests are often perceived in a negative light, instigate "troublesome" behavior, and may result in violence straying away from the goal of

creating change. In addition, respondents argued that current platforms are better for creating long-term change as voting is a critical institutional process that should be exercised. Those who advocated for current platforms mentioned the role of social media and how the broad, accessible, and fast spread of information is a key tool for creating change.

21.9% of respondents who advocated for direct activism and protesting were aged 40 and above, 1.6% between 30-39, 39% between 20-29, and 37.5% between 11-19. This data reflects how out of those that voted for protests as a more effective form of activism, most were aged between 11-29- in the younger age brackets. Several respondents argued that the physical act of mobilization is much more powerful than the other platforms as the ability to see how many people care about an issue holds a stronger effect. In accordance with this response, many people explained how heavy media coverage and the inability to ignore protests enables people to be aware of an issue that may not have a presence online. Furthermore, media coverage of protests will draw attention from the government towards a pressing issue at faster rates than the current platforms. Most young people argued that protesting encourages those to do more than just post online or sign petitions and escape the echo chamber that social media perpetuates.

Of those that answered "both," 29.9% were 40+, 7.8% were between 30-39, 31.2% between 20-29, and 31.2% were between 11-19. The written responses for these answers were much more diverse as most respondents answered this way. Most responses reflected the complementary aspects of both and how current platforms work hand in hand with protests to create the strongest form of mobilization and change. For example, many argued that platforms influence protests and vice versa as both have unique benefits that work towards a certain kind of agenda. However many respondents chose this answer to critique both saying that neither was an effective form of change and that the government system currently in place does not permit either to function properly. Although this response was not a popular one, it was expressed three times by younger respondents indicating how some still lack political efficacy.

Do Young People Hold Power?

This question asked respondents to state if they believed young people held power for change in society. If they answered 'yes' then they were asked to give an example of young people bringing change in their community and if they answered 'no', they were asked to give ideas on how this issue could be changed and share their reasoning.

57.1% of respondents stated that young people hold power for change, while 42.9% believed they do not. The close difference between the two responses demonstrates that there is some dispute over the power that is held by young people in society.

Those who believed that young people have power for change gave examples of movements related to climate change, BLM, and ones that are student-led for student-related issues. There were some responses, however, that could not give examples of young people bringing change in their communities, this is interesting as though they responded yes to the question they could not think of any example of young people having the power to bring change. This could be due to them living in elder environments, or in more rural regions (as stated by some respondents), showing that those

who are not in frequent contact with young people, or live in areas with a smaller population f young people, may not actually see young people wielding power yet believe that they do.

Respondents who believed that young people did not have the power to bring change shared sentiments that they feel young people are not listened to or respected by those in power and by those in influential positions. Some shared that they feel that protests and movements do not work, demonstrating a feeling that whatever young people try does not bring true change. Examples are given that could potentially help change, such as more encouragement for youth participation and the creation of channels of power such as youth councils and parliaments. The idea of lowering the voting age was given multiple times, showing the idea holds some ground among people. Teaching young people about politics and the system of decision making was given multiple times, showing that education of young people is a prominent idea for improving their influence in decision making. This could be inferred as meaning that people do not believe that young people are not informed enough to make the correct decisions, linking to question number 3 and

levels of trust in young people, and so are not given the power and responsibility to make decisions by those with power.

Conclusion and Limitations

Our survey responses did not entirely reflect our initial hypothesis regarding the attitude towards young people. For example, we did not expect the amount of older age brackets to indicate their trust in young people in today's society compared to the trust young people indicated in themselves. We did not expect a lack of support for direct activism or protesting as well, in comparison to current platforms for participation as well. However, the support for the compatibility of both methods of activism was a result we were aiming for and can conclude based on the majority of respondents advocating for both platforms as effective, that current platforms and protesting are a complementary force. In terms of the issues that were ranked, BLM being the top-ranked issue, we infer that the combination of media coverage, mobilization of advocates, and global impact influenced this vote. Despite COVID-19 being a heavily covered subject in the media, we suspect that people of all age ranges hold more support and knowledge surrounding the higher-ranked issues.

This is not to say our survey was developed without issues. The rollout of this survey was done during lockdown which prohibited us to meet with people and personally ask their account of our questions. Online surveys pose several issues. Firstly, we recognize that our 170 respondents do not reflect the data of wider society, but indicate a strong enough response for our conclusions given the variety of ages of respondents for our survey. Second, while the questions were developed in an unbiased fashion to the best of our ability, many people may feel obligated to respond a certain way that may be socially moral but unreflective of their actual opinions which will ultimately skew the data.

Conducting this investigation during COVID-19 was especially difficult due to the inability to contact a variety of sources in person, which could have enabled us to gain vital qualitative data to add to the report. For example, we were unable to meet with young people

involved in the Youth Focus program or youth supporters who have experience within the field that could have offered their personal perspectives on their relationship with young people and what they have learned from their role.

Particularly within our investigation, several respondents noted how they found it difficult to generalize an eleven-year-old with a nineteen-year-old. This led them to express their varying opinions for each age bracket and indicated how their responses may not have best reflected their opinion, which again, may potentially skew the data. Some respondents also noted how they desired other options for responses that were unavailable to them and thus opted out of responding or chose an answer by default.

Survey PDF

file:///C:/Users/oliver/Downloads/youth%20survey%20responses.pdf

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