Conference Papers   Centre for Applied Social Studies in Social Care

2015-3

The Pursuit of Civic Engagement: Youth Civic Engagement and the Role of Higher Education

Aideen McCormack
Technological University Dublin, aideen.mccormack@tudublin.ie

Aiden Carthy
Technological University Dublin, aiden.carthy@tudublin.ie

Cormac Doran
Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown, cormac.doran@tudublin.ie

Follow this and additional works at: https://arrow.tudublin.ie/casscon

Part of the Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons

The pursuit of civic engagement: youth civic engagement and the role of higher education.

AIDEEN MCCORMACK, AIDEN CARTHY AND CORMAC DORAN, INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY BLANCHARDSTOWN.
DUBLIN (MARCH 2015)

Civic engagement and higher education

- The Taskforce on Active Citizenship 2007
- Establishment of Campus Engage
- The National Strategy for Higher Education 2030
- Presidents of Irish higher education sign national charter for civic and community engagement.

So what does it mean to be civically engaged in the 21ˢᵗ Century?

Youth Civic Engagement

Previous research findings:

- Disagreements between academics over what constitutes 'civic engagement'.

- Two paradigm divide

My research - overview

- **Objective 1:** *to survey participant's, aged 18-25, patterns of civic behaviour, broadening traditional civic indicator measurements to include new indicators that will capture any alternative forms of youth civic engagement.*

- **Objective 2:** *to explore and gain an understanding of participants' attitudes towards their social and political engagement or disengagement.*

Methodology

A mixed-methods research strategy was employed involving both quantitative and qualitative elements.

Objective 1 – Quantitative Survey

Objective 2 – Qualitative Semi-Structured Interviews and Focus Groups

The data presented specifically relates to the role of higher education in educating students for civic engagement – covering the following themes;
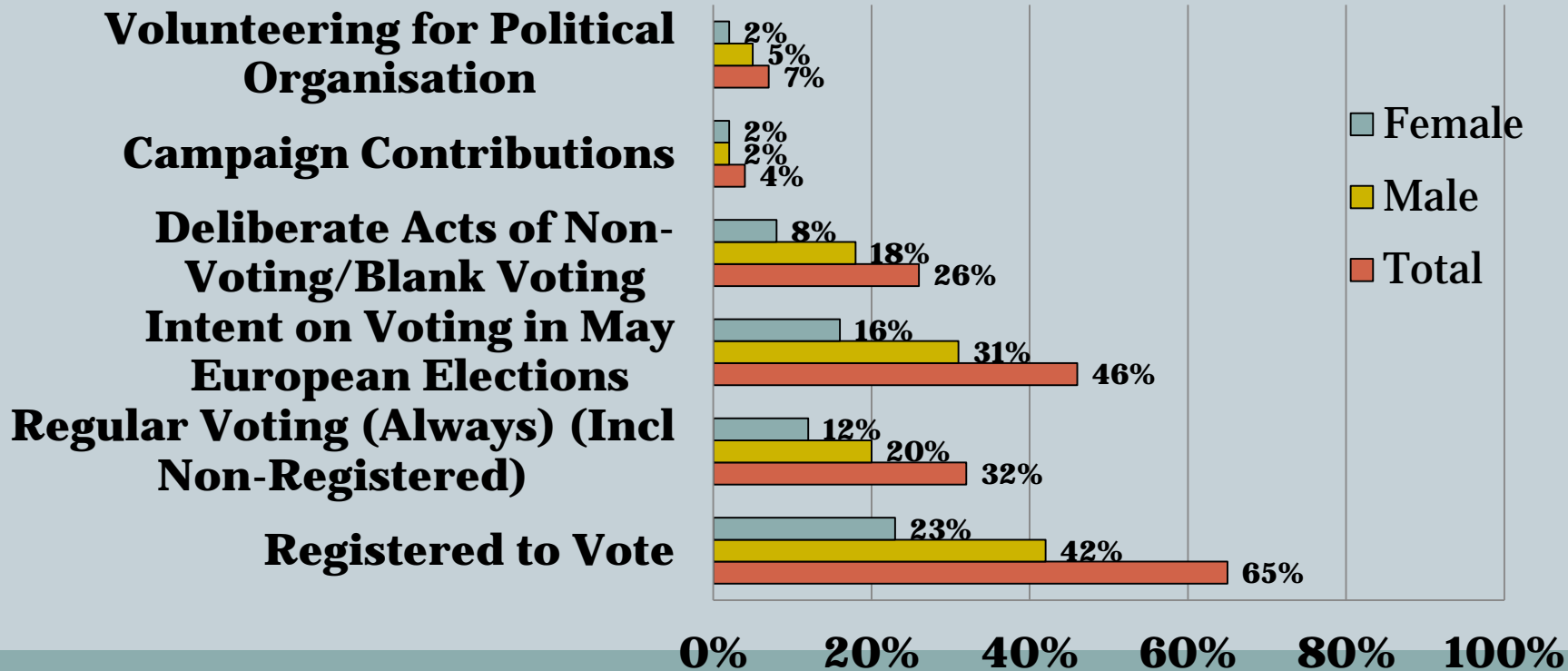
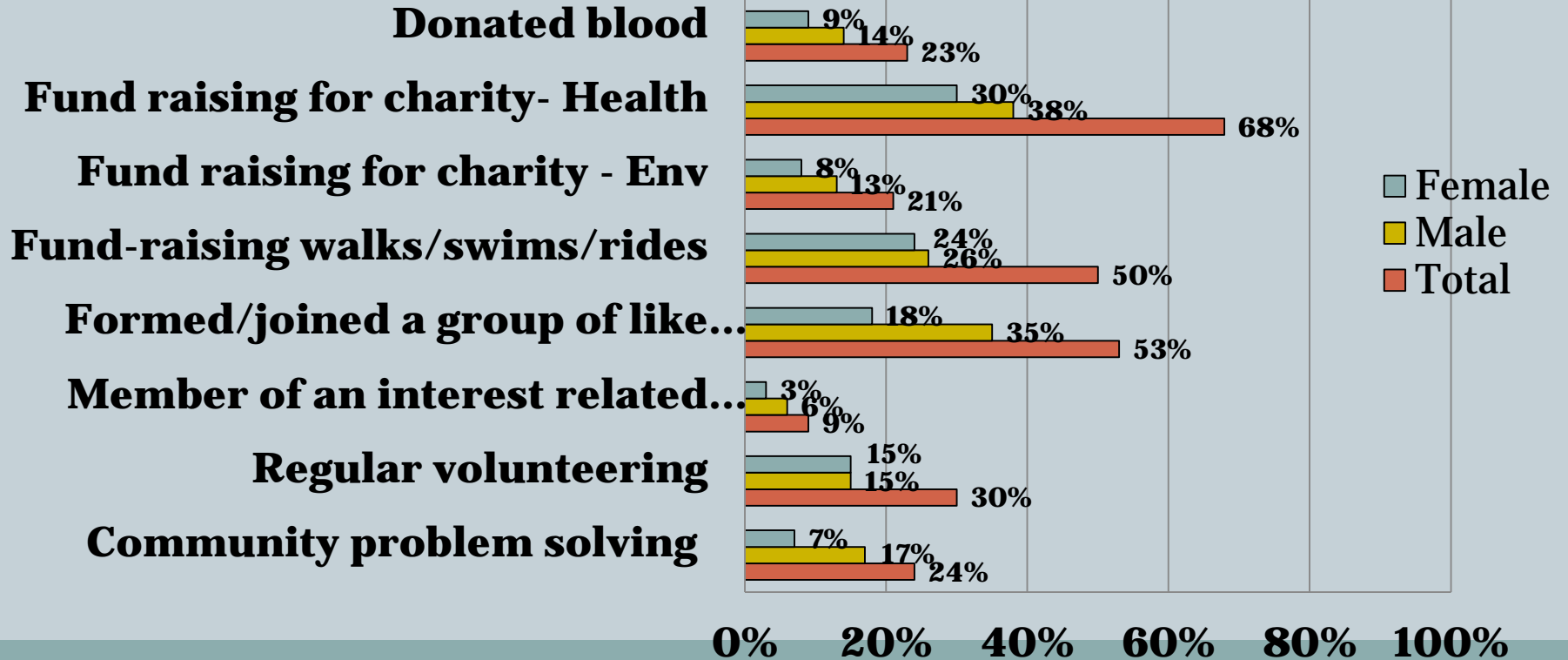F1 – Electoral Indicators

F2 – Civic Indicators

F3 – Public Voice Indicators

Variable	Count	Table %
Age		
18 - 21	88	54%
22-25	74	46%
Gender		
Male	94	58%
Female	68	42%
College Year		
Undergraduate	156	96%
Postgraduate	6	4%
Course of Study		
Business	49	30%
Engineering	20	12.5%
Social Care	30	19%
Community Development	7	4%
Creative Digital Media	11	7%
Computer Science	12	7%
Sports Management	24	15%
Horticulture	8	5%
Early Childhood Dev	1	0.5%

Electoral indicators

Civic indicators

Indicator	Female	Male	Total
Donated blood	9%	14%	23%
Fund raising for charity- Health	30%	38%	68%
Fund raising for charity - Env	8%	13%	21%
Fund-raising walks/swims/rides	24%	26%	50%
Formed/joined a group of like...	18%	35%	53%
Member of an interest related...	3%	6%	9%
Regular volunteering	15%	15%	30%
Community problem solving	7%	17%	24%

Public voice indicators
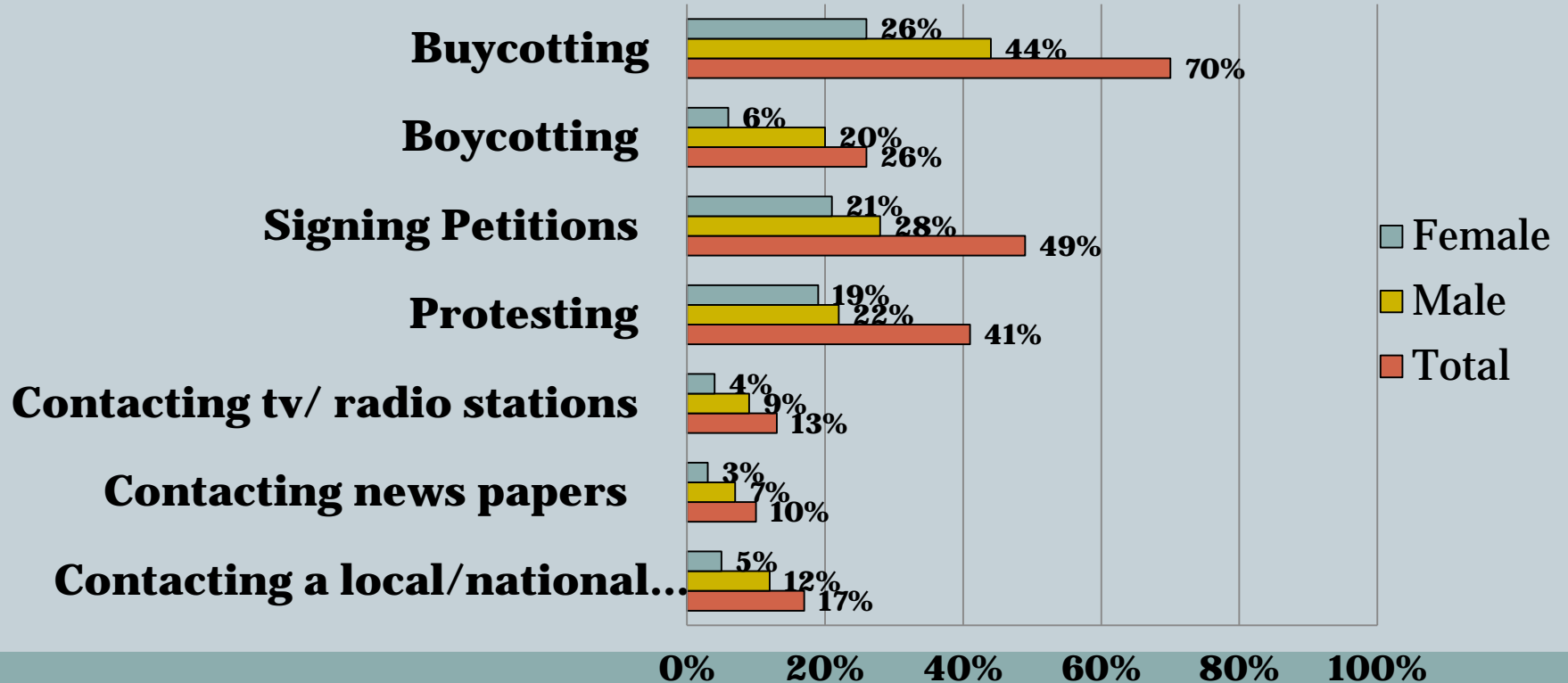
Preliminary qualitative findings - key themes

- Theme 1: young people outside of the political sphere
- Theme 2: political knowledge and efficacy
- Theme 3: youth political involvement

Theme 1: young people outside of the political sphere

- The main reason each student gave was "*politicians not reaching out to young people*" and not "*pulling them in*".

- The students also highlighted that there are a lack of young political representatives and that makes them feel '*out of place*'.

Theme 2: political knowledge and efficacy

- An evident lack of knowledge about citizenship, politics and political representatives.

- All citing difficulties in keeping informed - *"When I think of politics, I think that you have to know a lot to be able to be into it, you have to know everything that's going on and everyone involved in it"*.

- Hearing others views on issues that they disagree with makes them '*switch off*' or '*tune out*' because it gets very serious and they "*don't want to deal with that, it gets too much"*.

Theme 3: youth political involvement

Discussion

- Low rates of traditional forms of civic engagement

- Broader measurement provides evidence of engagement with alternative forms of civic engagement

- However, this does have consequences for young people politically and democracies survival.

Discussion

- It is not simply 'Youth Apathy'.

- Preliminary results point towards a lack of political and civic knowledge and efficacy.

- They raised issues of trust, corruption and negative media portrayal.

- Youth feel ignored.

Recommendations for the new TU Dublin

Berger (2009) three dimensions of Civic Engagement – **Political**, **Social** and **Moral** Engagement;

1. Community-based Learning (Social)
2. Ethical and Moral Reasoning Component (Moral)
3. Democracy Plaza (Political)

Community-based learning

Community-based learning (service learning) as an alternative to work placements for students across all departments.

Sports Management students working with the elderly

Infusing Community-based learning across the Curriculum

Connect
Community-Connected Department
Department-Connected Community

Design
Design of courses
Student learning outcomes
Meet the needs of the local community/organisation.

Implement
Direct community based learning
Indirect community based learning
Advocacy community based learning
Research community-based learning

Ethical and moral reasoning component

How will students' prejudices affect their ability to relate to others?

Will students have their stereotypes reinforced?

Will students adopt a saviour mentality or leave with a feeling of disconnection from the actual service they have provided?
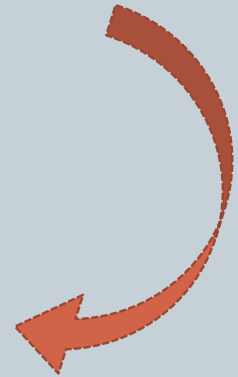
Ethical and moral reasoning component

Self-Knowledge

Introspection

Interpersonal Relationships

Democracy plaza

How do we address students current:

- Lack of political knowledge.
- Low forms of public voice expression.
- Low tolerance for dealing with conflicting views.

Democracy plaza

A Democracy Plaza is a structure within the campus grounds that is wall to wall of blackboard panels. It also has tables and chairs for students to gather and sit within its confines. Its interior can also be used to host events.

PASS THE MIC

GUEST SPEAKERS

- Engage in written debate
- Read and learn from others comments on the blackboards
- Host debates, talks, presentations
- Guest speakers
- Assignments and class presentations

Concluding remarks

As Delanty (2000) argues "the great significance of the university is that it can be the most important site of connectivity in the knowledge society (and) a key institution for the formation of cultural and technological citizenship (and for) reversing the decline of the public sphere".

References

Berger, B. (2011). *Attention deficit democracy: the paradox of civic engagement.* Princeton New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Bennet, W. L. and Wells, C. (2009). Civic engagement: bridging differences to build a fiels of civic learning. *International Journal of Learning and Media*, 1(3), 1-10.

Blosser, J. (2012). Beyond moral development: Re-theorizing ethical practices in service learning. *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*, 12(2), 196-214.

Delanty, G. (2001) . *Challenging Knowledge: the University in the Knowledge Society*. Buckingham: SRHE : Open University Press.

Department of Education and Skills. (2011) *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030.* Dublin, Ireland, 2011-2013.

Goddard, J. (2009). *Reinventing the Civic University.* United Kingdom: NESTA.

Goldfinger, J. (2009). Democracy plaza: A campus space for civic engagement. *Innovative Higher Education,* 34(2), 69-77.

Manning, N. and Edwards, K (2013). Why has civic education failed to increase young people's political participation?. *Sociological Research Online*, 19, (1), 1-17.

McTighe Musil, C. (2009). Educating Students for Personal and Social Responsibility: The Civic Learning Spiral. In B. Jacoby (Ed.). San Francisco: Jossy-Bass.

Welch, M. (2009). *Moving from service-learning to civic engagement.* In B Jacoby (Ed.). San Francisco: Jossy-Bass.