



CENTER FOR INFORMATION & RESEARCH ON CIVIC LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT

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Direct Civic Information and Political Homes Help Youth Vote

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Introduction

CIRCLE research, including analyses of our 2022 post-election survey, has illuminated some of the barriers to voting youth still face. For example, we found that only 40% of young people said they felt well-qualified to participate in politics, and 21% of young people who didn't cast a ballot said it was because they didn't have enough information about the candidates or the voting process. Just over half of youth (54%) were contacted by any type of political party or organization, and only 31% said they are currently an active member of a group—whether that is a local, religious, school, volunteer, or mutual aid group.

To address these barriers and inequities, our research points to the need for a holistic and extensive approach we call [CIRCLE Growing Voters](#). As we outline in that framework, we cannot rely on a single intervention or policy; instead, we must significantly shift the landscape of resources that are available to youth to support their involvement in political life.

One such resource that can support youth voting is exposure to civic information and opportunities for young people to discuss what they learn. Youth may see or hear about an election or about social, political, and economic issues from organizations and political parties. But civic information can also come from young people's personal networks (e.g. friends, family) or from mass media and social media.

Whether young people belong to organizations, groups, and movements may also play a role in whether they vote. Access to these civic spaces can play an important role as a source of both resources and community. Thus, these places and spaces can serve as 'political homes' where individuals can be in relationship with others who help build up their civic identity and power. Through belonging to a political home, youth may develop a stronger feeling of agency about what they can achieve as political actors, and may do better at making meaning of the information they are being exposed to. Political homes can also help youth make informed decisions about what actions to take on the issues they care about.

In this analysis, using data from our 2022 post-election survey, we explore the role that direct civic information, information from mass media and social media, and belonging to political homes played in self-reported voting among 18- to 29-year-olds. We also investigate the potential ways in which these domains interact within the environments that shape whether youth register and vote and the distribution of these domains among youth. Finally, we examine how these domains may be supporting youth voting by looking at links to young people's confidence as political actors and their self-reported barriers to voting.

Key Takeaways

- Having access to direct civic information and belonging to a political home may boost youth voting.
- Seeing information from mass media and social media also had a positive association with self-reported voting, but the effect was smaller than the effects of direct civic information and political homes on voting.

- Youth who are deeply embedded within political homes and have rich access to civic information—in other words, youth who may be characterized as activists and organizers—were the most likely to vote and feel confident about politics.
- Most youth (85%) do not have access to high amounts of direct civic information or to political homes. This is associated with lower levels of confidence when it comes to political involvement, and a lower likelihood of voting.
- Youth who lack access to civic information and support often cited lack of time, lack of information and thinking “voting is not important” as reasons for not voting. Among youth with greater access to civic information and support, if they did not vote it was often due to a lack of time.

Three Domains of Information and Support

Civic information from various sources and political homes are elements of an ecosystem of access and support that can shape whether a young person is informed, ready, and motivated to vote. We combined multiple responses from our 2022 post-election survey into three domains that capture different sources of support:

- **Direct civic information:** Whether youth were exposed to civic information within their close, personal networks (family, peers, neighbors) and whether they were receiving information about the election from organizations and political parties.
- **Civic information from mass media and social media:** How much civic information youth were getting from mass media (TV, radio, news websites, etc.) or on major social media platforms.
- **Political home:** To assess whether youth had a political home we asked whether they belong to a civic organization (religious, school group, volunteer/mutual aid group, other local organization) or were actively participating in a social or political movement.

Effects on Voting in a Youth Civic Ecosystem

Using a data analysis technique called structural equation modeling, we examined the role that each of these three domains may have in voting. The statistical model allowed us to consider the impact of domains that are each made of multiple variables and allowed us to calculate and compare the magnitude of each domain’s impact.

We found that all three of these domains were positively associated with a higher self-reported voting rate. We compared the impact of each domain using effect sizes, r standardized regression coefficients. The effect sizes allow us to compare the magnitude of the relationships between each dimension and the outcome of voting. Within a civic ecosystem where all three domains of information and support were present, receiving civic information directly—both through contact from organizations and political parties, and through discussions with people in one’s close network—was the largest predictor of voting, with a large effect size of 0.639. Having a political home had the

second-largest role in voting, with a medium effect size of 0.430. Getting information from mass and social media had the smallest effect: 0.247.

It is notable that information from mass media and social media has the smallest (though still positive) effect. Campaigns and organizations often put extraordinary time and resources into their outreach on these communication platforms and social networks; our research suggests that other efforts may have a higher impact on voting.

Receiving Direct Civic Information Is the Largest Predictor of Youth Voting

Direct civic information

0.639

Political home

0.430

Civic information from mass media and social media

0.247

Numbers represent effect sizes, or standardized regression coefficients. The effect sizes were calculated using a structural equation model in which we examined the relative magnitude of the impact of each of the three domains on voting.

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We were also interested in possible interactive effects between the civic information variables and the political home variable. Meaning: could civic information compensate for a lack of a political home, or could political homes multiply the impact of civic information?

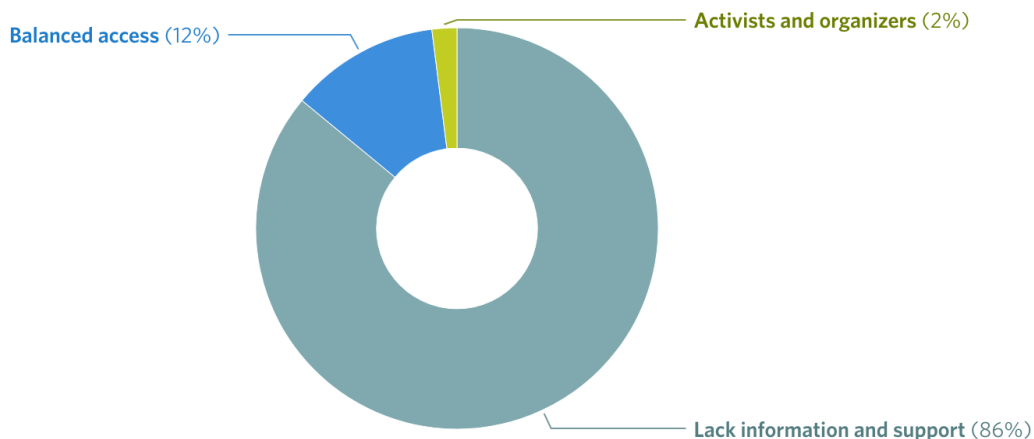
Our analyses show that, for those who are not connected to a political home having access to direct civic information plays a critical role. High amounts of direct civic information are associated with an increased likelihood of voting even in the absence of a political home, and when both direct civic information is low and youth are not in a political home, young people are very unlikely to vote. Meanwhile, for young people with a political home, direct civic information was less influential.

In terms of civic information from mass media and social media and political homes, these worked best in tandem: neither could compensate for the other. Regardless of whether youth belonged to a political home, civic information from mass media and social media has a positive effect on voting. At the same time, even if youth receive ample information from mass media and social media, belonging to a political home does have an impact and makes a young person more likely to vote.

Most Youth Lack Access to Civic Information and Political Homes

Knowing the positive associations between voting and the above-mentioned dimensions of a youth civic ecosystem (i.e., direct civic information, civic information from mass media and social media, and political homes), we wanted to understand which and how many young people have access to these support systems and resources. We also wanted more insight into why these assets may be related to voting. We used a latent profile analysis to place youth into one of three profiles based on the three dimensions.

The Vast Majority of Youth Lack Access to Civic Information and to Political Homes



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Thirteen percent of youth fell into the first profile, which has relatively **balanced access** across the board: they score highly on the political home dimension and were getting a decent amount of civic information—especially direct civic information. Youth in the second profile scored very highly on belonging to a political home; we think of these as the **activists and organizers** who are heavily involved in groups or movements. Likely due to the personal connections they have through their political homes, they also get even more direct civic information about issues and elections than those in the **balanced access** profile. However, they make up only 2% of youth.

The third profile, which includes the vast majority (85%) of young people, has fairly low scores across the board, especially when it comes to having a political home. These are civically neglected youth who largely **lack information and support**.

As suggested by the first part of this analysis, we find that access to civic information was fairly low throughout all three profiles and does not vary significantly between these subgroups of youth.

Three Profiles of Information and Support for Youth Voting

	Balanced Access (12% of youth)	Activists and Organizers (2% of youth)	Lack Information and Support (86% of youth)
Political home	4.6	9.5	0.6
Direct civic information	2.3	3.2	1.7
Civic information from mass and social media	1.3	1.0	1.1

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There were also some demographic and socioeconomic differences between each profile that underscore ongoing inequities in who is prepared to vote. Youth in the **lacks information and support** profile were less likely to be enrolled in school compared to youth in the other two profiles. Youth in the **lacks information and support** profile were also less likely to be employed compared to the **activists and organizers**. The difference in voting rates between young people who are and who are not enrolled in school remains a major inequities in youth political participation, and CIRCLE research has also highlighted the [challenges faced by young people who are not employed](#). This new analysis underscores the challenges to informing and engaging youth outside of these formal institutions and the need for broader outreach.

In terms of party affiliation, youth in the **activists and organizers** profile, compared to youth in the **balanced access** profile, were more likely to be Democrats.

Importantly, our analysis found no major differences by race, political ideology (which is separate from party affiliation), educational attainment, sexual identity, gender, or rurality between youth in all three profiles—highlighting that challenges to providing adequate information and support to youth are widespread across different communities.

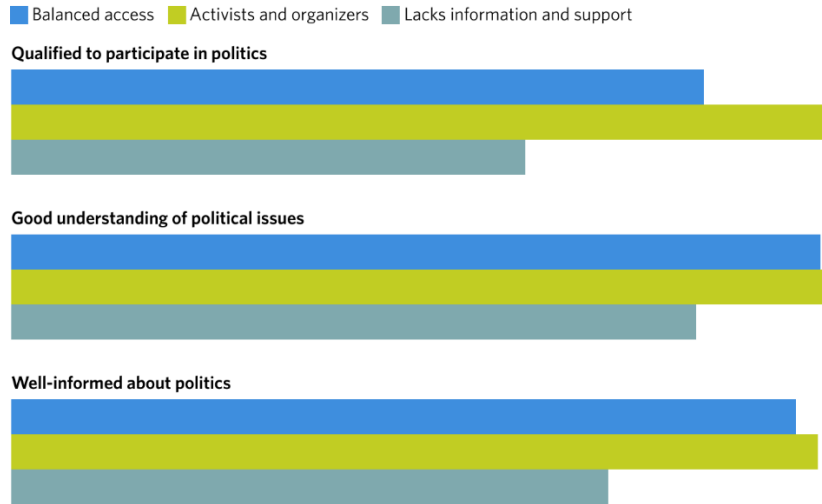
Confidence and Knowledge as Pathways to Voting

According to our analysis, youth in the **activists and organizers** profile were the most likely to vote in 2022, followed by those with **balanced access** to information and political homes. Not surprisingly, young people in the third profile (**lacking information and support**) were the least likely to have voted.

Investigating the attitudes of youth in each of the profiles shows some of the ways that access to civic information and supportive civic spaces can strengthen young people's motivation and readiness to vote, and their ability to overcome barriers to participation.

In our 2022 post-election survey we asked young people whether they felt well-qualified to participate in politics, whether they feel well-informed about politics, and whether they think they have a good understanding of political issues. Young people in the profile that **lacks information and support** were the least likely to say they “feel well-qualified” to participate in politics, while **activists and organizers** reported that they were well-qualified. Those in the **lack information and support** profile also did not feel they have a good understanding of the issues facing our country or feel well-informed about politics and government.

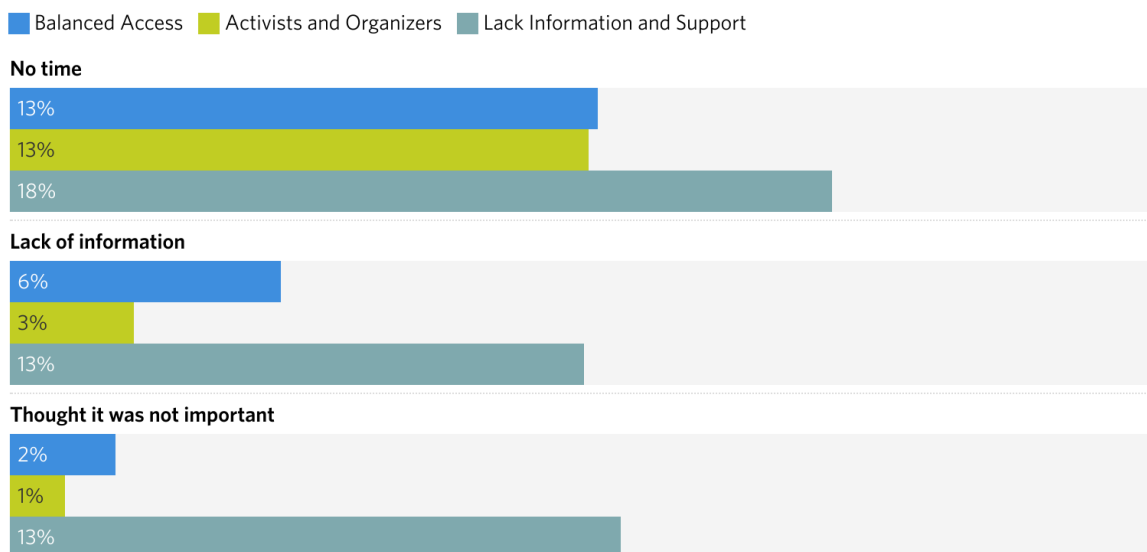
Youth Who Lack Access to Information and Support Feel Less Qualified and Informed about Politics



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Among youth who did not vote in 2022, self-reported reasons for not casting a ballot also differed among youth with different profiles. A majority of non-voters across all three profiles cited being too busy or running out of time as the top reason why they didn’t vote. However, those in the **lacks information and support** profile were much more likely to cite a lack of information or a lack of interest (i.e., saying “voting is not important”) than youth in the other two profiles. In particular, very few **activists and organizers** said they lacked enough information to vote, and if they did not vote it was often due to a lack of time. That underscores how logistical barriers related to time and access can get in the way of even the most motivated and prepared potential voters.

Youth With Access to Political Homes and Information Much Less Likely to Cite Lack of Information or Interest as Reasons for Not Voting



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Recommendations

This advanced statistical analysis adds further weight to the recommendations in our CIRCLE Growing Voters framework which call for more outreach and information to youth, more supportive spaces where they can wield that information, and a civic culture (or several community-specific cultures) that value and promote youth participation.

While traditional and social media has a positive effect on youth voting, hearing directly from people they care about and/or from organizations about elections and issues has the strongest impact on whether young people go on to cast a ballot. But information alone may not be enough: remarkably, in our analyses, youth in the first profile who score highest on access to direct information were still more likely to cite lack of information as a reason for not voting than those in the second profile who are deeply embedded in political homes. The power of these spaces to acquire, process, share, and use civic information helps youth feel better-positioned and qualified enough to participate in democracy.

These findings point to the steps that communities and organizations must take to fully support young people. [The CIRCLE Growing Voters report](#) and framework expands on how different stakeholders can take on these efforts, and our list of [24 ways to grow voters before the 2024](#) election can help individuals and institutions get started today.

CIRCLE (The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement) is a nonpartisan, independent, academic research center that studies young people in politics and presents detailed data on young voters in all 50 states. CIRCLE is part of the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life at Tufts University.

Learn more at circle.tufts.edu

