



# Educating for Democracy?

# Introduction- YUXI

- **The current education system doesn't adequately prepare students for critical citizenship.**
  - Many students feel the system is focused on standardized testing rather than developing rational, critical adults.
  - This limits their ability to engage as informed, active citizens in society.
- **Education should focus on both academic development and shaping responsible citizenship.**
  - Students should learn not only intellectual skills but also understand the structure of society and the impact of their behavior.
  - Education should help students view their role in society critically and responsibly.
- **This democratized approach fosters essential skills and prepares students for real-world engagement.**
  - Students learn to listen to diverse voices, respect differing viewpoints, and work together to achieve common goals.
  - It broadens their perception of democracy from competition to cooperation and accountability.
- **Implementing democratic education requires adapting to current educational systems and overcoming challenges.**
  - Schools need to find ways to integrate democratic practices without immediate, measurable achievement outcomes.
  - Educators must link these experiences to broader educational goals, fostering both personal growth and future civic engagement.

# The Problem: Dissatisfaction with the System-SHAY

**Students are dissatisfied with how the public school system prepares them for civic responsibilities.**

- Surveys show that many students feel the education system doesn't equip them for their rights and duties as citizens once they turn 18.
- According to EdSurge (2024), students receive only the bare minimum education for civic life.

**This lack of civic education contributes to low voter turnout among younger voters.**

**Many students lack critical civic knowledge and have little faith in current democratic institutions.**

- Most students are dissatisfied with modern democracy and do not feel confident in the effectiveness of institutions.
- Polls show that fewer than half of young adults (18-24) planned to participate in the 2024 Presidential election (Institute for Citizens and Scholars, 2023).

# Reasons for Change- SHAY

- **K-12 students are ready to engage in the democratic process.**
  - Example: Peter Jefferson, a young man involved in local politics and education bills, despite not being of voting age (EdSurge, 2024).
    - i. His involvement suggests that many students are eager and capable of participating in democracy with just a little encouragement.
  - Even students as young as fourth grade can engage in decision-making, such as through participatory budgeting.
- **U.S. schools, however, fail to create an environment conducive to learning democratic processes.**
  - Many schools do not effectively model democratic norms or provide opportunities for productive civic engagement.
  - Teachers need to better connect lessons to real-life democratic practices to foster critical growth in students.
- **Students are not given enough opportunities to practice democracy, affecting their future participation as adults.**
  - In the current system, students have little say in what or how they learn, leading to disengagement.
  - Providing students with more agency in their education can increase motivation and investment in their future.
- **To increase student involvement with the democratic system, schools must incorporate experiential pedagogies and structures.**
  - Educators should focus on developing critical thinking and civic knowledge to better prepare students for active participation in democracy.

# Existing Solutions- ANDREW

- **Arizona Civics Test:** Students must pass with 60% to graduate, but critics say it doesn't promote deeper engagement or critical thinking.
- **After-School Programs:** Programs like We the People and project citizen promote civic learning, but face issues like scheduling conflicts.
- **Student Budgeting Projects:** These involve students in decisions but often struggle with funding and low interest.
- **Relevance Gap:** Students often don't see how civic education applies to their lives, making it harder to engage them.
- **Financial Challenges:** Schools often don't have enough funding, and some programs are too expensive for students to join.

# Our Proposed Solution- BUNNY

## **Approach:**

- Create a survey targeting high school students and college freshmen.
- Focus on educational experiences, preparedness for civic engagement.

## **Method:**

- Use Google Forms
- Gather diverse insights from a wide range of participants (Focus Groups)

# Focus Group Implementation - SARA H

For the focus group, we planned to structure the interview questions around the survey topics and have the participants fill out the survey as the discussion progressed.

This approach will allow us to capture real-time feedback and streamline the data collection process.

## Challenges...

Initially, our team contacted **Metro Tech High School, located in Phoenix Arizona**. Metro Tech is a charter school with an enrollment of approximately 1,800 students across 9th-12th grade.

After emailing the principal, we were told that **unfortunately, the process of gaining approval for our visit would take longer than our timeframe for the project**. We decided to shift our focus to **a group of Ohio State University freshmen**, because they are fresh out of their high school experience, and many of them have just recently voted in their first election.

## ... And successes! - SARA H

Out of four students:

One had participated in student government, running and winning class president.

Four students had participated in civics classes, two of them reporting it had only been a semester class.

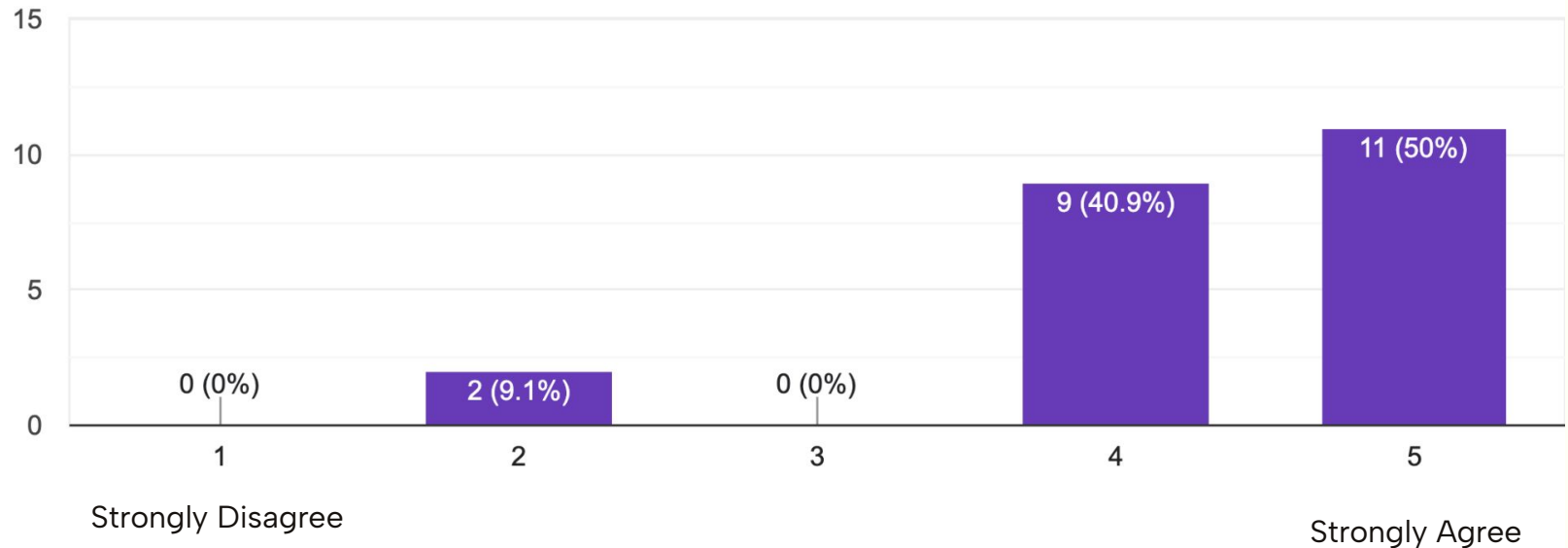
When asked about interest in civic learning in high school, the group was in agreement that they would have found it useful to learn these skills in the high school classroom - **one student compared it to not having the opportunity to learn how to file taxes.**



# Survey Responses- KENYA

I had the opportunity to learn about civics in high school.

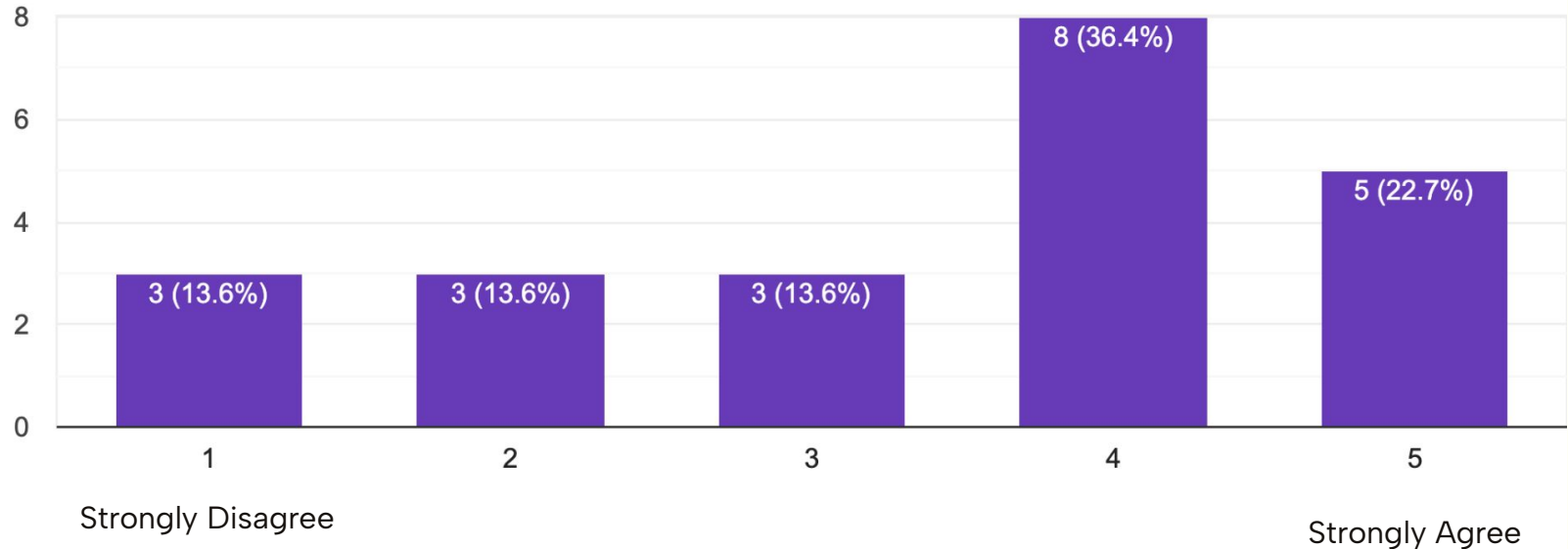
22 responses



# Survey Responses

I had the opportunity to participate in civics in high school.

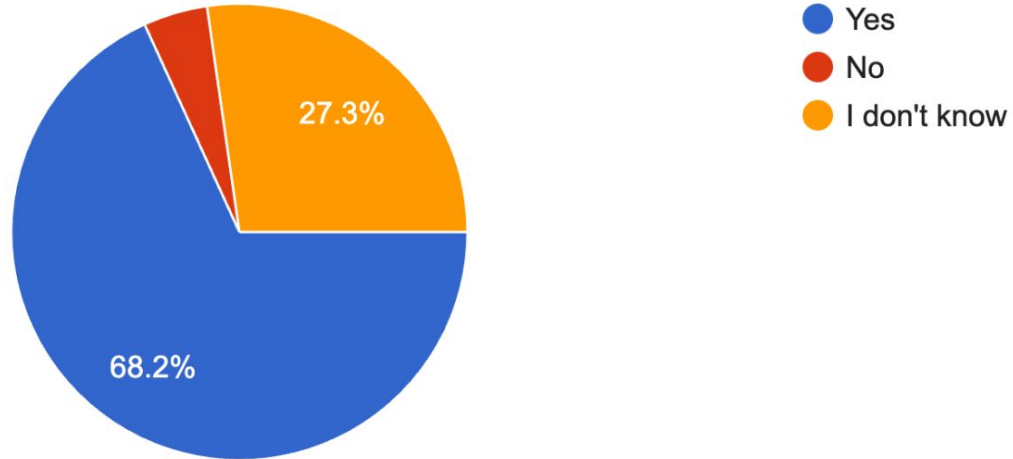
22 responses



# Survey Responses

To your knowledge, were civics classes offered during the academic year?

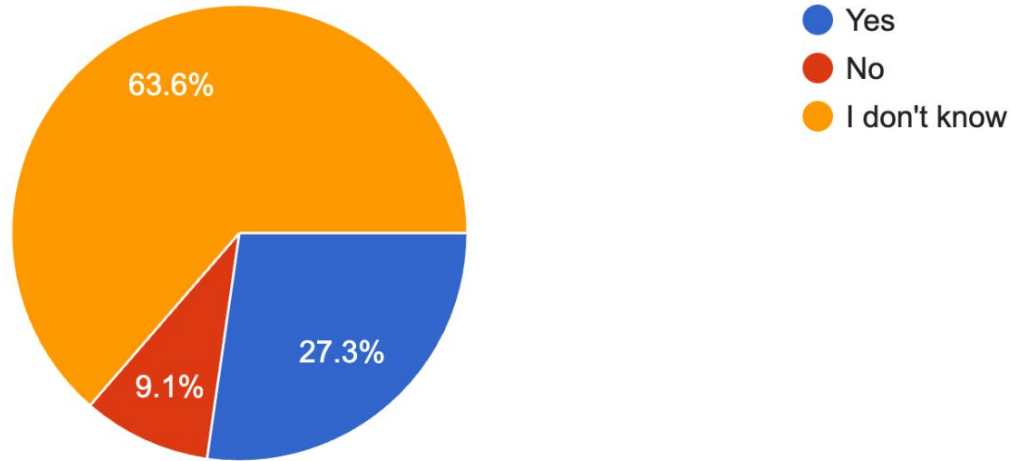
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# Survey Responses

To your knowledge, were civics clubs or programs offered after school during the academic year?

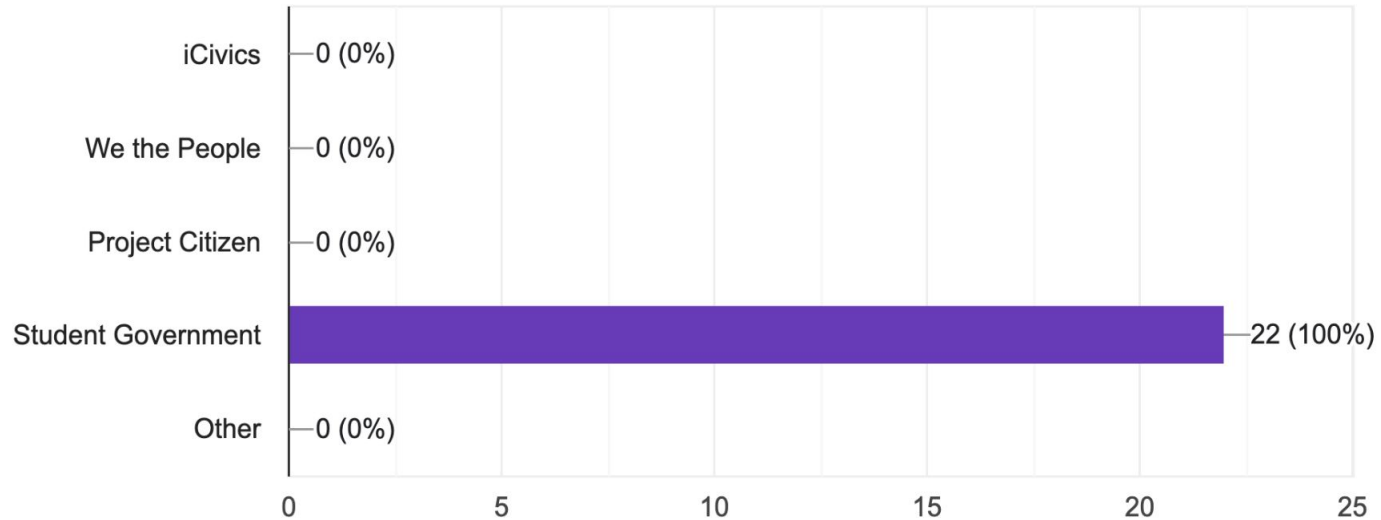
22 responses



# Survey Responses

What programs were offered at your school? (Check all that apply)

22 responses



# Survey Reflection- CIELO

This survey, though based on a small group of high school graduates and college freshmen, shows that while students learned about civics in school, they didn't often get to practice what they learned in real-life situations. Most of the focus was on learning about civics rather than actually being involved in civic activities. This points to a need for schools to provide more hands-on experiences to help students become active participants in their communities.

## In other words:

- Not a lot of students had chances to practice civics in real-life activities.
- Student government was the most common civics-related program offered.
- Schools focused more on teaching civics than on helping students participate in it.

# Developing Workshops and Post Survey Work -BUNNY

## Workshops:

- Sessions cover: application of classroom content to real-world situations and civic responsibilities
- Provide a platform for student-educator dialogue.
- Interactive environment for active student participation.
- Engage stakeholders to help advocate future changes

## Assessment:

- Follow-up surveys after each workshop
- Measure student engagement and educational perceptions 6 months after implementation.
- Evaluate success and identify areas for further improvement.

## Feedback Mechanisms:

- Continuous feedback that gathers student input through suggestion boxes, online forms, and follow-up surveys.
- Ongoing communication to refine educational approaches.

# Conclusion - YUXI

In summary, our proposed program stands out among civic education programs nationwide because it **focuses on the core issues of student engagement, real-world relevance, and the integration of democratic practices into the school day**. While projects like iCivics and We the People focus on a structured, theoretical approach to civic education, **our initiative adopts a practice-oriented Participatory model through practical application scenarios like Participatory Budgeting (PB)**

This program is important because **it addresses the disconnect that many students feel between their education and their future citizenship**. It shifts the focus from rote memorization and standardized testing to fostering critical thinking, collaboration, and responsibility.

In addition, the program stimulates students' interest in education more effectively by **making learning more relevant to their lives**. It prepares students not only for academic and professional success, but also for **active, informed, and constructive participation in community affairs and democratic processes**. This dual focus ensures that students are not only able to tackle complex societal challenges but also to contribute substantially to a pluralistic democratic society in a constructive way.



**Thank you so much!**