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# **Citizenship ceremonies as an opportunity for behaviour change: a quasi-experiment with London councils**

## **Abstract**

Research on pro-social behaviours has mainly concentrated on individually-tailored interventions, such as Get Out the Vote (GOTV) campaigns, rather than collective arenas where information and messages are experienced jointly. Citizenship ceremonies, in which new UK citizens are required to participate, provide a timely and unique opportunity to promote civil behaviours in a group context. The research for this paper, based on a quasi-experiment comparing ceremonies within London local authorities, tests whether providing volunteering opportunities and incorporating behavioural science interventions into the design of the ceremonies increase voter registration, volunteering, and blood donation intentions. Survey results show that providing volunteering opportunities generates an interest in registering to volunteer and donating blood, while the addition of behavioural interventions boosts intention to volunteer and registering to vote, with statistically significant effects of the behavioural interventions on the summed outcome measure. The research findings are a promising foundation for further tests using randomized controlled trials.

Key words: behaviour change, citizenship, integration 8,893 words

While much is known about how to encourage individual citizens to provide collective goods, such by Get Out the Vote (GOTV) techniques (Green & Gerber, 2019), less attention is paid to occasions where messages and signals are received by a group, like at election festivals (e.g. Addonizio, Green, & Glaser, 2007), or places where citizenship is celebrated. There is also relatively little investigation of ways to encourage newly-enfranchised citizens to undertake prosocial acts, especially studies that test for the impact of behavioural science or nudges on the attitudes and behaviour of new citizens, in contrast to the vast amount of research carried out on the general population, such as for voting (Gerber & Rogers, 2009a; Panagopoulos, 2011).

This paper is aimed to fill these gaps in knowledge by reporting the results of a pilot carried out with London local authorities in 2018. This quasi-experiment involved varying the offer made to new citizens at their citizenship ceremonies to encourage them to undertake more pro-social acts. The councils tried out whether having a volunteering service present and conveying behavioural insights in addition to the volunteering offer made a difference to civic intentions. Outcomes across control, volunteering, and behavioural insights ceremonies were measured by a telephone survey carried out between four and six weeks after the ceremonies. The findings reveal an increased willingness to carry out a range of outcomes, such as volunteering and registering to vote. These findings suggest that further work is needed to examine these ceremonies as sites for the promotion of civic resources, in particular whether the effects shown from these interventions turn into observed behaviours.

The first part to this paper contains a review of research on citizen mobilisation and behavioural insights, then the literature on celebration and citizenship is surveyed before a discussion of the research design and presentation of the results. Conclusions are drawn for future research on collective citizen occasions, the mobilisation of new citizens, and the use of behavioural science in this field.

## **Citizenship and celebration**

### *Mobilisation experiments*

Over the last twenty-five years or so, social scientists have gathered stronger evidence of ways to encourage citizens to do more for their communities, in particular through individual contacting and using gentle forms of persuasion. One of the classic examples is the Get Out the Vote (GOTV) campaign, which is typically targeted at someone's home and involves a message, usually delivered face-to-face, by telephone, or a mailshot (Gerber & Green, 2000; Green & Gerber, 2019). These impacts have considerable external validity as well as being evaluated by randomised controlled trials (Gerber & Green, 2017; Green, McGrath, & Aronow, 2013). The vast majority of experimental studies in political behaviour are focused on voter turnout, with less attention to other political activities, such as voter registration (see Bennion & Nickerson, 2011; Braconnier, Dormagen, & Pons, 2017; John, MacDonald, & Sanders, 2015; Kölle, Lane, Nosenzo, & Starmer, 2020; Mann & Bryant, 2019). The effects of mobilisation efforts extend to a range of other collective behaviours, such as volunteering, giving, and waste recycling, also tested with robust forms of evaluation (John, Cotterill, et al., 2019).

### *Behavioural science and citizen mobilisation*

Behavioural science as a tool of government and of civic society is a relatively recent phenomenon (John, 2018; Thaler, 2015; Thaler & Sunstein, 2009), with most interventions directed to policy outcomes, such as paying taxes (Hallsworth, 2014), settling court fines (Haynes, Green, Gallagher, John, & Torgerson, 2013), and conserving energy (Allcott, 2011). Also, more behaviourally-tailored interventions have been applied to acts of political behaviour, such as the impacts of reciprocity (Panagopoulos, 2011), social norms (Gerber & Rogers, 2009b), and social pressure (Gerber, Green, & Larimer, 2008) on voter turnout,

usually finding positive and statistically significant effects, though less effective for voter registration (Kölle et al., 2020). There is an extensive literature on whether such interventions can foster other kinds of pro-social behaviour. For blood donation, the belief in a social exchange is important (Titmuss, 1971), and where social obligation and the influence of friends matter (Sojka & Sojka, 2008; Wu et al., 2001). There is some indication that a nudge is effective in encouraging blood donations (Grieco, Lacetera, Macis, & Martino, 2018; Stutzer, Goette, & Zehnder, 2011).

### *Mobilisation and Identity*

Much research suggests that the same kinds of interventions that encourage the general population to participate and provide collective goods also work well with new citizens and/or those from diverse backgrounds, such as the effectiveness of SMS-text messages to get out the vote among immigrants in Norway (Bergh, Christensen, & Matland, 2016), and telephone calls to Latino (Ramírez, 2005) and Asian American voters (Wong, 2005). A considerable body of work by Michelson and colleagues done in the US successfully tests for the impact of GOTV techniques for Latino and Asian American voters, for example that a phonebank has a positive effect on Asian American voter turnout (Bedolla & Michelson, 2012). Other experimental studies show that more specific information has traction with ethnic voters, such as a social identity message (Valenzuela & Michelson, 2016). One study finds that information targeted to French immigrants encourages them to vote, but the same message does not work with non-immigrants (Pons & Liegey, 2018).

### *New citizens and behavioural strategies*

There is very little research on whether behavioural insights, such as social norms or activating a social side to citizenship, are important features of successful interventions to

mobilise new citizens. For political behaviour, behavioural techniques have been used to encourage eligible immigrants to register for citizenship. But this was not effective in contrast to a financial incentive (Hainmueller et al., 2018). This finding, however, might pertain to a different kind of act, an individual good with direct costs and benefits, rather than collective goods being asked for once the individual has gone through the journey of becoming a citizen. Subsequent experimental research on new citizens shows the advantage of a low-cost nudge for registration for citizenship applications (Hotard, Lawrence, Laitin, & Hainmueller, 2019).

As with voting and registration, there are only a few behavioural studies of new citizen contributions to public goods, such as blood donation (Amponsah-Afuwape, Myers, & Newman, 2002). Behavioural research on volunteering finds that reciprocity encourages volunteering among immigrants (Manatschal, 2015). Also, more interpersonal forms of communication like nudges are found to be more effective in encouraging blood donation than mass media appeals (Deedat, Kenten, & Morgan, 2013). However, the insights from the literatures on voter registration, volunteering, and blood donation do not indicate whether a specific type of behavioural intervention, such as a norm or act of reciprocity, is particularly appropriate for new citizens, which justifies the extended number of nudge treatments in this pilot project.

### *Collective experiences and celebration*

Individual-based interventions can miss out on the collective experiences of citizens as they experience the political system and its institutions, which may involve learning about civic behaviours and norms at a particular point in time and location. An example of this may be when a young adult turns eighteen, and becomes an enfranchised citizen alongside others of the same age. Some individual interventions do target such occasions. For example, the

Danish government mails young voters on their birthdays to remind them to vote, which has been shown to have a positive effect (Bhatti, Dahlgard, Hansen, & Hansen, 2015). Collective experiences may occur in school during classes on citizenship or in assemblies where participating in wider debates is encouraged.

More generally, there is a literature on whether interaction with other participants in collective settings can stimulate civic behaviour. Election day festivals encourage good feelings about voting by bringing communities together, stressing the social side to voting, and facilitating interpersonal communication (Addonizio et al., 2007), which improves voter turnout. This research is complemented by studies of other invitations to events, such as to a music festival for public health (Lim et al., 2012) and the impact of an arts festival on pro-environmental behaviours (Marks, Chandler, & Baldwin, 2016). Other research on voting shows how Saints Day festivals can increase turnout (Atkinson & Fowler, 2014) and stimulate other prosocial behaviours (Pazhoohi, Pinho, & Arantes, 2017).

Some voting interventions have sought to stress the group aspect of voting in a way that celebrates the citizen's contribution, such as to an ethnic group (Valenzuela & Michelson, 2016). It is likely that a citizenship ceremony will promote a sense of identity which has been associated with mobilisation in a range of studies (Rogers, Goldstein, & Fox, 2018). Early extensions of citizenship have already been shown to encourage people to vote in Sweden (Bevelander & Pendakur, 2011) and to foster political inclusion in Norway (Ferwerda, Finseraas, & Bergh, 2018). Research on citizenship stresses the importance of public spaces where citizenship is celebrated, and that the design of these spaces and their buildings influences civic attitudes and behaviour (Parkinson, 2012).

The additional factor that might make mobilization more effective at a collective is that a citizenship ceremony is a time of celebration when people feel good about being a citizen. Feelings of awe have been shown to increase pro-social behaviours (Piff, Dietze,

Feinberg, Stancato, & Keltner, 2015), which could be stimulated by a ceremony. It is also a time when a lot of bureaucratic procedures, often onerous as well as expensive, have been completed, so that citizens can be reasonably thought to be in a good mood at the end of this laborious process, and also when their friends and families are there to share in the celebration. Analogously, people are more willing to donate when they are feeling good about themselves (Isen & Levin, 1972).

Collective experiences are present in many democratic innovations, which have emerged as a popular form of engagement in recent years, and appear to show that encouraging debating politics can be a spur to greater civil engagement afterwards, though there is not a great deal of empirical research to support this claim (Carpini, Cook, & Jacobs, 2004). The argument is that face-to-face engagement in a large-scale democratic exercise can encourage citizen capacity and efficacy, which is backed up with survey evidence, such as Berry et al's (1993) study of urban participation exercises, though there is a mixed evidence of the impact of facilitation and community development in less developed contexts (Mansuri & Rao, 2012). Such potential is also seen in the wider literature on civic education, which may involve reflective exercises and occasions to think about citizenship in collective settings, such as classes involving debates about citizenship, though the impact of such practices tend to be more on political knowledge rather than on political behaviour (Niemi, Hepburn, & Chapman, 2000). It is also probably limited the extent to which citizenship ceremonies, which are formal occasions without much participation on the part of new citizens, can encompass much collective debate, but some informal discussions probably do occur in ways that might resemble what happens in these democratic innovations and educational forums.

Another area of research on collective engagement, is tests of the contact hypothesis, which has been revived in recent years (Paluck, Green, & Green, 2018). Although the



outcomes are different to civic behaviour, the idea is that the presence of people from different communities in a collective setting has a positive impact, usually evaluated experimentally, and which includes some measures of good citizenship (e.g. Scacco & Warren, 2018).

### *Asking citizens in a collective setting*

One benefit is that collective spaces allow citizens to be asked, which is an important element of civic engagement, empowering the kinds of citizens who may not often get the question posed to them (Lowndes, Pratchett, & Stoker, 2006). Asking often happens within social networks of friends and may exclude members of new communities who are not familiar with civic participation in a new national context (de Rooij, 2012, p. 470). A request can make up for a gap in political knowledge, which tends to be lower for ethnic minorities (Sanders, Fisher, Heath, & Sobolewska, 2014, p. 127). In this context, a request at a public occasion, such as a citizenship ceremony, might be seen to be particularly appropriate, and such requests might be similar or functionally equivalent to those that happen at other collective occasions, such as religious ceremonies. An intervention containing the request may be carried out within the organisation of the ceremony, which involves speeches and where audience members are seated for set periods of time without other distractions other than social media, and so ready to receive messages from people invited to the ceremony. Events where citizens are already demonstrating a civic act might be a good opportunity to make a request to carry out a wider set of behaviours.

A behavioural intervention allows messages to be delivered to everyone rather than just to people who respond and are interested in seeking out such information. These larger occasions might also be a non-intrusive way of influencing individuals, who are not confronted and put on the spot and can act alongside their peers, encouraging a social norm of good

citizenship. The conclusion to draw from this review is that there is not much evidence on the impact of interventions targeted at groups attending events rather than individual citizens in their homes, especially for new citizens.

### **Study setting and partners**

A citizenship ceremony is an occasion where someone who has successfully completed an application for citizenship affirms duties and rights. In the UK, citizenship ceremonies were made compulsory by the 2002 Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act. In England, they are organised by local authorities, with periodic events often taking place at the town hall or a similar location. The activity is contracted out to a private body and there is a charge for attending. Citizens are given a welcome pack and a certificate after the ceremony. Many citizens go through these ceremonies each year, with about 50,000 attending in London and 123,000 in the UK.<sup>1</sup>

This study was part of *The Citizenship and Integration Initiative (CII)*, which is a partnership between independent charitable funders, civil society, and the Greater London Authority (GLA), which supports work on citizenship and integration in London. As part of the CII, an opportunity was identified to encourage active citizenship through citizenship ceremonies. A pilot study was commissioned to test whether interventions in citizenship ceremonies could increase levels of active citizenship. In December 2017, the GLA invited London boroughs to bid to be part of the study, offering £5,000 in financial support to each participating local authority. Additional support was also made available to local voluntary sector infrastructure/volunteering organisations to enable their involvement. In total, twenty-one expressions of interest were received and from these six were selected. This sample of authorities provided a range of locations (inner and outer London boroughs), variation in

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<sup>1</sup> Home Office Immigration Statistics year ending March 2018 (Citizenship tables - cz\_01).

political control, and variety in their approaches to ceremonies and ideas for innovation. The authorities were Southwark, Westminster, Bexley, Barking and Dagenham, Hounslow, and Brent. During the course of the project, Brent was unable to deliver the interventions and so Southwark kindly agreed to conduct a further set of ceremonies based on those planned for Brent.

## **Method**

We tested a range of interventions at ceremonies taking place in each local authority, which we compared with ones that had no intervention where the ceremonies ran as usual. A follow-up survey with recruited participants measured three outcomes following each ceremony related to the following activities: voter registration, volunteering, and blood donation. Given the pilot study's focus on volunteering as a key aspect of active citizenship—and in keeping with the broader objectives of the CII—civil society groups became part of the design whereby we compared the presence of the volunteering service alone alongside the behavioural intervention. We thus tested whether having a volunteering service present was important without the behavioural insight. The voluntary organisation provided information about volunteering and other active citizenship opportunities. This was a general (but localised) offer rather than having discreet stalls relating to our three outcome measures. So, there were three groups: ceremonies with business as usual, one with a volunteering service present, and the other with the behavioural insight and volunteering service. Authorities were asked to select a ceremony date for each group. The ceremonies operate on a queuing system based on applications and they are organised in exactly the same way. There is every reason to think that no factor other than the timing of the ceremony influenced the selection making the design a quasi-experiment where the allocation was not random but equivalent to if one had taken place.

## Treatments

A planning meeting with the GLA lead officer was used to develop an initial range of ideas, drawing on the academic literature, practitioner experience, and insights from registrars as to what possible interventions might be effective. Six behavioural insights (one of which included two variants) were identified using a well-known guide to produce a relevant list (Dolan et al., 2012): messenger, collective action, commitment, timeliness, reciprocity, and social norms.<sup>2</sup> One-to-one meetings were then held between the research team and each local authority to discuss the ideas and refine them based on their feedback. The final set of interventions were then agreed with the local authority concerned.

### 1. *Messenger*

Who information is received from is as important as what the message is. People place more weight on information if they feel positively about the person delivering information (John et al., 2018). This intervention required us to identify someone who is likely to be perceived as an expert with similar characteristics or behaviours ('someone like me') or a peer (someone who has been through the same process and can talk positively about their experience).

Barking and Dagenham was designated as the messenger intervention. The former Mayor of Barking was chosen to deliver the intervention. The former Mayor is a naturalised citizen, who worked his way up to become Mayor of Barking, while also meeting his partner, marrying, and raising his family in the borough, which was considered to be both relatable and inspiring for the participants in the ceremonies. For this intervention to work effectively, it was important that the mayor's speech made a strong emphasis on civic engagement. It focused on voter registration, volunteering in the local community, and donating blood.

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<sup>2</sup> The full MINDSPACE list is: Messenger, Incentives, Norms, Defaults, Salience, Priming, Affect, Commitments, and Ego.

## 2. *Collective action*

As well as being motivated by personal benefit, people also act on the basis of intrinsic or collective incentives which relate to benefits felt by others, or felt internally through a non-material sense of ‘doing something good’ (Frey & Jegen, 2000). Belief in collective action can be activated by messaging about the benefits of active citizenship and the positive impact it has for local communities. Southwark (replacing Brent) was designated to represent this kind of motivation. It involved delivering a message about the benefit of active citizenship and the benefits and impact it has to local communities. This intervention used a testimony from someone that had recently been through the citizenship process to convey this internal incentive message. They were encouraged to use purposefully inclusive words, such as “family” “duty” “us” “together”, as words that promote the idea of active citizenship and community. This intervention did not include a separate or distinct ask, but rather sought to evoke a more subtle and general feeling of civic responsibility which was intended to encourage people to sign up.

## 3. *Commitment*

Individuals often find it hard to make decisions in the present which are likely to be in their long-term interests (O’Donoghue & Rabin, 1999). In order to counter this problem, commitments can help align current behaviour with desired long-term interests. Behavioural economics has shown that the effectiveness of commitments varies depending on its form, audience, and most importantly its associated cost of failure (Thaler & Shefrin, 1981). For instance, public commitments are often more effective than private ones as the cost of failure is enhanced. Hounslow was designated to trial the commitment intervention. Hounslow decided that the best moment for a civic pledge in their ceremony would be following the pledge all new citizens make to the Queen. Following the pledge to the Queen, the Deputy Superintendent Registrar asked the new citizens to make an additional civic pledge using the

following words: “As a British Citizen, I pledge to actively participate in our society. To be a responsible citizen and help my community and those who live in it.” Seeking commitments from people attending citizenship ceremonies to undertake some sort of active citizenship activity represented an opportunity to effectively encourage people to take part in a form of civic engagement. This intervention required some simple activities that people could sign up to and make that pledge visible to their peers/public. These were incorporated into the ceremony while thanking people for their commitments and reinforcing their desire to follow them through.

#### 4. *Timeliness*

The timing of an offer or demand affects how an individual is likely to respond. Individuals tend to act differently depending on their mood, which can lead to optimistic decisions when feeling good (Shepperd, Carroll, Grace, & Terry, 2002). There may also be other times when people are more susceptible to certain messages, such as purchasing self-improvement books or marketing smoking cessation programmes at the start of the year or to a pension defaults scheme that happens when there is a pay rise (Thaler & Benartzi, 2004). Since becoming a British citizen is a key moment in the lives of participants, this presents an opportunity to encourage new behaviours (of active citizenship). It is a moment of contentment and as people are likely to be happy, and this makes them more open to make optimistic decisions. Making a clear ask at a positive time in people’s lives – when they are participating in the citizenship ceremony - is an effective way to encourage them to get involved in socially beneficial activity. The ask was designed to be simple and clear making it easy for people to say yes and seizing the moment when they are likely to be more open to trying new things. Bexley was designated to trial the timeliness intervention. The intervention involved the Mayor of Bexley emphasising the ways people could get involved with the community including volunteering, donating blood, and registering to vote. He informed people that

information on this had been provided in their packs (and flyers were inserted). He also said that the employees of the council and the volunteer centre were in attendance on the day who were happy to talk to attendees after the ceremony.

### 5. *Reciprocity*

Humans tend to have an instinct toward fairness. Mutual exchange or reciprocity is often an important part of displaying fairness. Reciprocity is best understood in relation to giving and receiving something. The act of accepting something, such as a gift, act of generosity, or kindness, often leads an individual to feel indebted to the giver and therefore more likely to act in a reciprocal way at some point in the future (Andreoni, 1990). Gift-giving is often used by fundraisers, for example through the offer of a pen in fundraising marketing materials, to attempt to create feelings of reciprocity between fundraising charity and the consumer (Rand, Yoeli, & Hoffman, 2014). By offering something to participants and then asking them to give something back by agreeing to take part in an active citizenship activity, an innate desire to reciprocate was used to encourage participation. This intervention sought to offer a gift to newly naturalised citizens in order to stimulate their wish to reciprocate it. It also required a clear and simple way of asking them to do something, with the same person giving and receiving.

Southwark was designated to trial the reciprocity intervention. During the Southwark citizenship ceremony, each citizen was given the opportunity to have a photo taken in front a portrait of the Queen whilst receiving their citizenship certificate. This was coupled with a clear and simple request of the participants to do something involving civic engagement. The photo was taken by a professional photographer, and usually costs £20 to purchase after the ceremony. The intervention involved offering this photo for free, and making it a reciprocal gesture by simultaneously making a direct ask of the citizen to get involved in the three outcomes.

## 6. *Social Norms*

The behaviour of those around us has a strong influence on our own actions. In behavioural economics this is referred to the effect of social norms. Social norms are the often-unwritten social rules and behavioural expectations which govern how we act in groups, and in society as a whole (John, Sanders, & Wang, 2019). Using social norms to reinforce the perception that others are active citizens was used to increase the likelihood of people taking up active citizenship opportunities. This intervention took the form of a carefully structured insert into the citizenship pack (see Figure 1), which highlighted statistics that made active citizenship activities (volunteering, blood donation and voting) look normal and the done thing.

Westminster was designated to try out the social norm intervention.

[Figure 1 here]

### **Participants**

The researchers sought to recruit all individuals who participated in each ceremony, both for ceremonies where the interventions took place and also where they did not. The researchers asked individual participants whether they wanted to participate in a research project and were willing to be contacted for a telephone interview between four and six weeks after the ceremonies had taken place. Using an iPad to record the responses their contact details, along with information of where and when they attended a ceremony, consent to the research was sought, obtained, and recorded. The research team provided a protocol for the local authority offices and the researcher to follow (including an information sheet about the project – see Appendix A). In total, 490 participants were recruited across the six local authorities as reported in Table 1.



[Table 1 here]

In total 240 telephone interviews were carried out across the six local authorities and three ceremony types as reported in Table 2, which represents a 50 per cent response rate. It is important to note that the response rate differs according to group, with the control group at 39.5, the volunteer group at 59.4, and the intervention group at 50.3 per cent. This differential attrition may mean the results from the outcomes are an artefact of the response rate. This possibility will be discussed later in the paper.

[Table 2 here]

### **Outcome measures**

The interviewers asked questions about civic engagement, so as to make a comparison of responses between the different ceremonies, allowing an assessment the effectiveness of the interventions promoting civic engagement for three changes in collective action: volunteering, giving blood, and voting/registering to vote. As it takes time from deciding to undertake the desired outcome and actually doing it (i.e. to donate blood or actually volunteer), both the intention and the actual behaviour were measured. Consequently, it was decided to ask research participants whether they had either undertaken the desired outcome and had taken active steps to do so (recorded as ‘expressed an interest in or registered’ to do something) or had the intention to do something, with the exception of registering to vote where it did not make sense to ask whether someone had ‘registered an interest’ in registering to vote. The survey focused on participants’ recollections of their citizenship ceremony, whether they participated in any of the active citizenship activities and demographic information about themselves. The questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix B.

## **The sample**

The sample is on average in their late thirties, and approximately equally composed of men and women. People from sixty-one different countries were involved, with just under a third from EU countries, a proportion that no doubt reflects the sharp rise in the number of EU27 nationals applying for British citizenship following the Brexit referendum.<sup>3</sup> Table C1 (in Appendix C) is a table of outcomes, with statistical tests of differences with the comparison group which show the groups are balanced.

## **Qualitative work**

In addition to the telephone surveys, a focus group and a set of follow up interviews were conducted with participants to explore the themes of the project in more detail. The focus groups and follow-up interviews explored general perceptions of what British citizenship means, participants' experience of their citizenship ceremony and their understanding of active citizenship (see Appendix G for the interview sheets). A semi-structured interview/discussion guide was designed to help the interviewer to probe the motivations and influences on behaviour as well as inform future potential interventions and approaches.

1. What are your reflections and recollections of the citizenship ceremony? – What do you remember about your ceremony? How did you feel? Do you remember what happened/was said? This might generate useful insight for us to understand how people are feeling and what might influence their behaviour at that time.
2. What does it mean to you to be a British citizen? – understanding whether perceptions of being a British citizenship include (or don't) notions of 'active citizenship' (as we've defined them – narrowly – in terms of volunteering, giving blood and registering to vote).

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<sup>3</sup> Reported in *The Guardian*, 14 March 2018.

3. What do you understand active citizenship to mean? – had you thought about before/already done any volunteering, donated blood or registered to vote [bearing in mind that some people will already have had voting rights as commonwealth citizens]? What are your feelings about these sorts of ‘active citizenship’? What might encourage or prevent you from doing these things? What sort of things might interest you and why?

### **Survey results**

Table 3 below reports the responses to the survey for the volunteering and the comparison groups as well as the differences between them, while Table 4 does the same for the behavioural interventions. The final column in both tables reports the probability of the differences being statistically significant. Appendix D contains the regression results that confirms these findings. The main difference is between those who were offered volunteering opportunities and the comparison group (who were not) was in expressing interest or registering to volunteer. There was a 12-percentage point difference with those being offered volunteering, twice as likely to have expressed interest in doing so as the comparison group. This finding is statistically significant. There are also differences for registering to volunteer and expressing interest in volunteering which are also statistically significant. The other difference is in interest in or having registered to donate blood with a six-percentage-point difference between the comparison group and the volunteering ceremony group. There is an encouraging result for intention to vote at a probability of near ten per cent for a five-percentage-point difference. Those who received the behavioural interventions were significantly more likely to say they intended to volunteer, with a 15-percentage point difference with the comparison group. It shows that 66 per cent of the intervention group said they intended to volunteer, compared with 52 per cent of the comparison group, which is a

statistically significant difference at the 95 per cent level. The other impact of the behavioural intervention is for registration to vote where there is a fourteen-percentage point difference with 45 per cent of the intervention group and 31 per cent of the comparison group saying they had registered to vote. This finding is statistically significant at the 90 per cent level.

[Table 3 and 4 here]

When taking the outcomes together, by adding scores for each reported activity from the survey responses, we find that overall the behavioural intervention was effective and statistically significant at the nine-five per cent level with the volunteering groups raising outcomes at the ten per cent level. Table 5 shows the difference in means for this summed variable.

[Table 5 here]

As the number of people involved in the individual behavioural pilots was quite small, passing most statistical tests becomes challenging, which makes it better to use the aggregate measure, which leverages more variations across individual councils. Figure 2, panels A and B, shows the results from statistical analysis of the impact of the volunteering group and the intervention group respectively reporting ninety per cent confidence intervals from marginal estimates of the treatment effect in each council/intervention (see Appendix E for full regression results). We find that the volunteering group did not have an overall impact on outcomes in each council, with perhaps a negative or backfire effect in Barking. The picture is positive for the behavioural interventions with stronger results for the collective incentive and social norms.

[Figure 2 here]

As discussed earlier, it is important to account for differential attrition. As this potential bias is unknown, it is hard to estimate. The best way of dealing with attrition is to estimate the bounds of the likely effect, which can calculate how the estimate would vary with no attrition. A common approach is Lee bounds (Lee, 2005). The estimates for the volunteering only intervention reveal the lower bound for the volunteer intervention as  $-.016$  and the upper bound of  $.34$ . The 90 per cent confidence interval for the estimate ranges from  $-0.4626$  to  $1.6972$ , which takes the estimate below zero so no effect cannot be ruled out. For the behavioural intervention group, the result is more positive with a lower bound of  $.27$  and an upper bound of  $1.21$ , which are both above zero. However, the confidence interval around these estimates is  $-0.2626$  to  $1.6959$ , which also crosses zero so also not ruling out a null effect for the intervention.

### **Qualitative findings**

We used open questions in the telephone survey, along with in-depth phone interviews and a focus group, to explore themes of British citizenship, active citizenship, and participants' experiences of their ceremonies. British citizenship is the end of a long journey for people, many of whom have lived in the UK for considerable amounts of time. As such, participants generally did not say they felt that the ceremony constituted a significant change in their perceptions of Britain as they tended to feel settled already in the UK. Citizenship merely cemented these prior feelings and associations. Some of the perceived benefits and value of citizenship are practical: being able to vote, shorter and different queues at passport control, and certainty of residency in the face of uncertainty (in particular from Brexit). For others, citizenship is more emotionally based, having a sense of greater belonging, feeling accepted,

and being 'at home' in the UK. Understanding these different motivations and perceptions is important if the full potential to encourage active citizenship is to be harnessed through citizenship ceremonies. It is clear that not being a British citizen is seen by some people as a barrier to participate more fully in community life. This suggests that becoming a British citizen offers people the chance to become more involved, which presents a particular opportunity which can be capitalised on.

*"... because I am now fully integrated into society here, so would also like to participate in community. I'd done it before by helping with Hounslow air quality, or the local football club but also would like to get more involved, and being a citizen would allow it."*

For many participants, the values of being British are clear – however they are not necessarily seen as 'distinctly British' but rather are often perceived as universal values. One said: *"The official at the ceremony said there were some things that were important about being British. For example, respecting the community and those people around you. It was nice to hear. But it was also things you would expect to hear. It was general things that apply to everyone, rather than specifically being British. Respecting others is a universal thing"*

What is widely perceived is that it is an honour and a privilege to be a British citizen and those going through the ceremony are generally extremely positive about it. However, in understanding this view, it is worth recognising that new citizens have spent a considerable amount of money on the process and so they may be more inclined to justify its value in order to validate their decision to do so. Behavioural economists refer to this type of cognitive bias as 'post-purchase rationalisation' (Nancarrow & Bayley, 1998). Nevertheless, people's experience of their citizenship ceremony was overwhelmingly positive and numerous participants spoke warmly about their registrars and those helping at the event: *"I was honestly expecting it to be really formal and boring but it wasn't. It was really engaging and nice."* The experience was clearly emotional and for many brought a sense of relief after a

long and sometimes difficult process: *“It was interesting experience after all the stress going through citizenship process. It was surprisingly friendly. At the back of my mind I thought there would be more questions to answer etc. It was a nice end to a stressful process.”* And: *“I was surprised how momentous it felt. I didn’t expect to feel as much as I did. I felt excited and I felt the weight of what I was doing.”*

Although understanding of what it means to be an active citizen varied somewhat, there was a good level of comprehension about the breadth of activity and values that underpin any meaningful definition. This suggests that new citizens are familiar with ways of participating in their communities and society – ranging from democratic participation (voting and standing for office), as well as formal volunteering and community participation. They recognise the contribution of civil society and the benefits of active citizenship on society: *“Being an active citizen mean voting, I registered to vote as one of the first things I did when I become a citizen, so I was able to vote in the May local elections. Also, more generally, it means being involved, engaged and aware of the local environment around you. And hopefully participating in it.”* And: *“I think it is about taking the time to try and help the community and actively engage, and make the lives of people around you better. It is about not just living in your house and not caring, but making sure you help your neighbours.”*

It is important to recognise that new British citizens bring with them considerable experience of being active in the past and from cultures of volunteering that exist in many other countries. Their knowledge and understanding of active citizenship do not begin in the UK and in many instances will be ‘normal’ behaviour which they will be keen to continue. *“Before coming to the UK I was always active, even in my home country, where I volunteered for the UN for 3 years.”* However, much like the wider population, certain barriers exist that are felt to limit people’s active participation, such as a lack of awareness of volunteering opportunities and time constraints when balancing volunteering with work, family life, and

other competing demands on their time. *“I am not active because of my work. I have big time constraints.”* *“(since the ceremony I have been)...looking for what charities need help, in the area and what’s possible with my working schedule as also would like to have weekend to also see family so it’s hard to find somewhere that will fit in with all of that.* This suggests the importance of making a clear volunteering offer and of presenting opportunities to people in a timely and practical way. It is also important to ensure that the offer reflects the interests and time available that people have to contribute. *“Really it is able the prioritisation of my time, that is the biggest barrier. When I did contact somewhere to volunteer, I was told I would need to come during the day, which I couldn’t do.”*

Presenting volunteering opportunities to new citizens that relate to their specific interests, are compatible with their working and family lives, and give them a sense of purpose and value are likely to be well received: *“It is perhaps easy to find things, but maybe I am not looking hard enough. I do find it hard to do regular volunteering, and one- off volunteering is easier for me, but this is harder to find.”*

## **Conclusions**

Citizenship ceremonies tend to be neglected by policy-makers and researchers as sites for encouraging wider social inclusion and greater civic participation. As our qualitative findings show, they are valued as places for celebration. With this positive environment, they are also opportunities for new citizens to learn about citizenship by offering volunteering opportunities through the voluntary service and from the prompt of behavioural insights, which can help make the ceremonies more meaningful experiences. Volunteering and blood donation intentions were increased by ensuring a volunteering service was present at the ceremonies. Other promising findings came from provision of behavioural insights tailored to each local authority, which show an overall positive effect as well as a more specific finding



for registering to vote. The study adds to a very sparse literature on the potential of collective venues to promote citizenship (e.g. Addonizio et al., 2007), and to the small number of studies examining the potential for behavioural science to stimulate pro-social behaviours among new citizens (e.g. Hainmueller et al., 2018; Hotard et al., 2019).

The limitations of the study are its relatively small scale in terms of numbers of respondents in each location reflecting the pilot nature of the interventions, the reliance of surveyed rather than observed behaviours, and the problem of differential attrition across the treatment arms. Also, as a quasi-experiment, the allocation of ceremonies is not randomised; though there is no reason to believe that the authorities chose a particular ceremony date to ensure the interventions worked more effectively, as there was no observed difference between the ceremonies other than the time period. Future research could build on these findings by using a randomised controlled trial across a greater number of locations.

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