

# How Engaging is Civic Engagement?:

## Interaction at Civil Society Organization Convenings

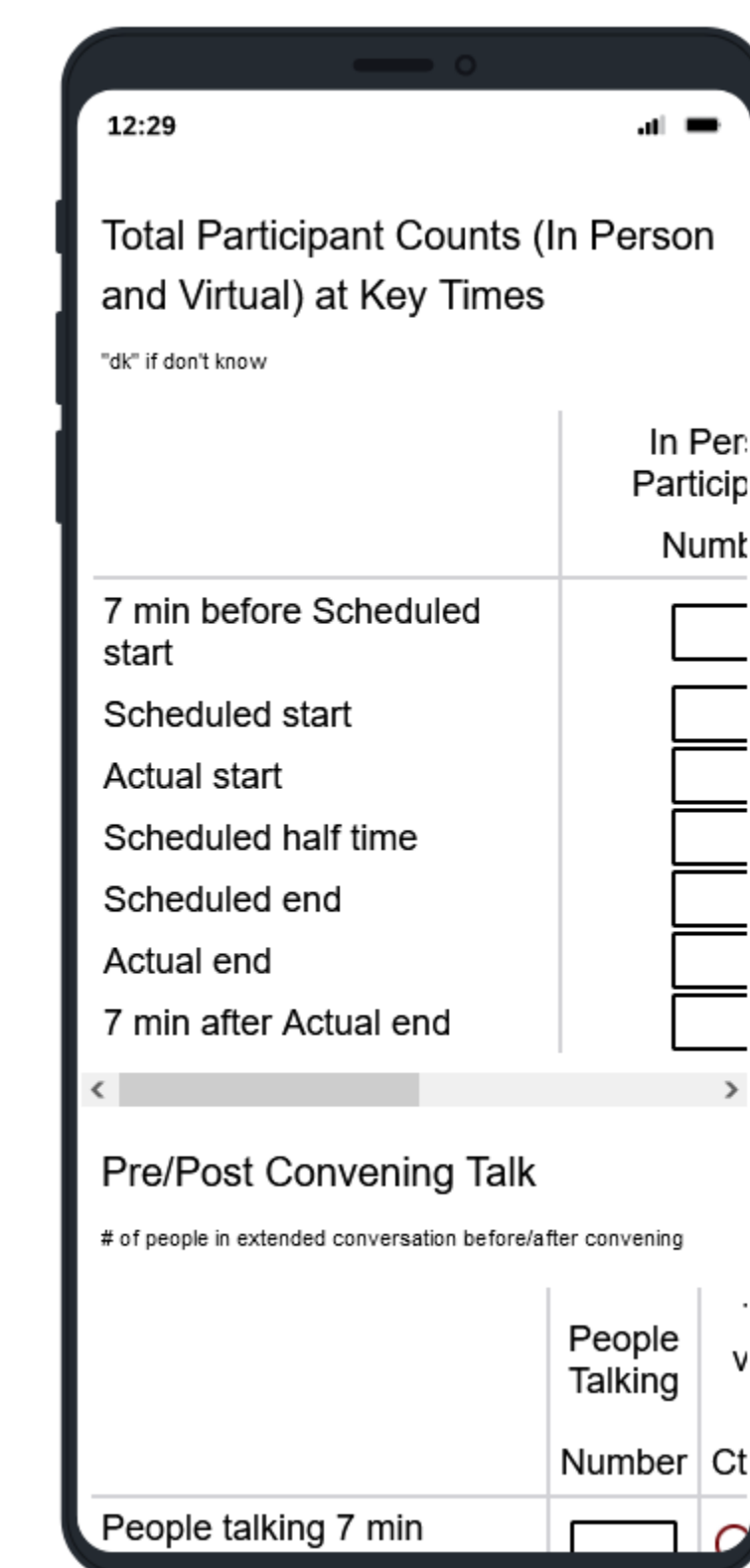
### BACKGROUND

Civil society organizations (CSOs)—like hobby clubs, religious congregations, chambers of commerce, or advocacy groups often hold convenings (meetings, events, and activities) that are expected to bring together lots of ordinary people who socially interact in pursuit of common goals and interests. Previous research, however, has not effectively measured how often this actually happens.

### QUESTION

How many people attend CSO convenings and, of those, what proportion interact?

### METHOD: SYSTEMATIC SOCIAL OBSERVATION



We have sent 31 trained research assistants to more than 400 convenings held by 25 CSOs in Bloomington, IN. They carefully observed what happened and recorded what they saw in a specially-designed, 128-item survey form on a tablet computer.

For this analysis we use counts of all participants and of participants who were interacting at several key points during each observed convening.

### RESULTS

Most CSO convenings are small (2-10 participants), but some are quite large (100-232 participants).

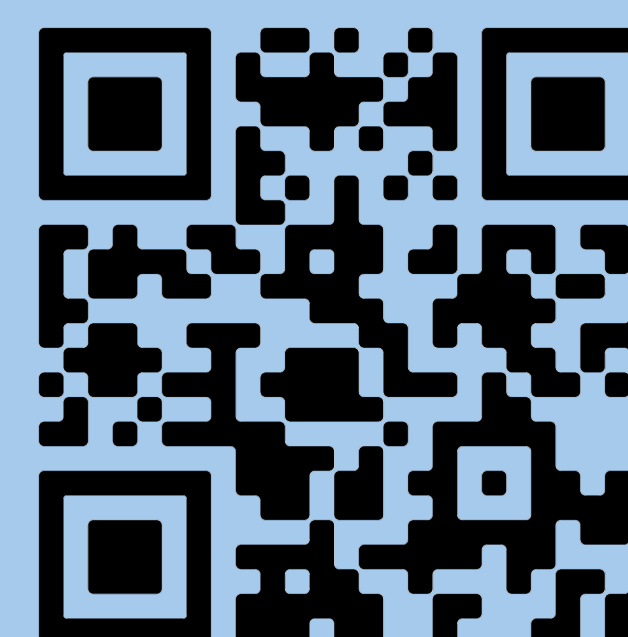
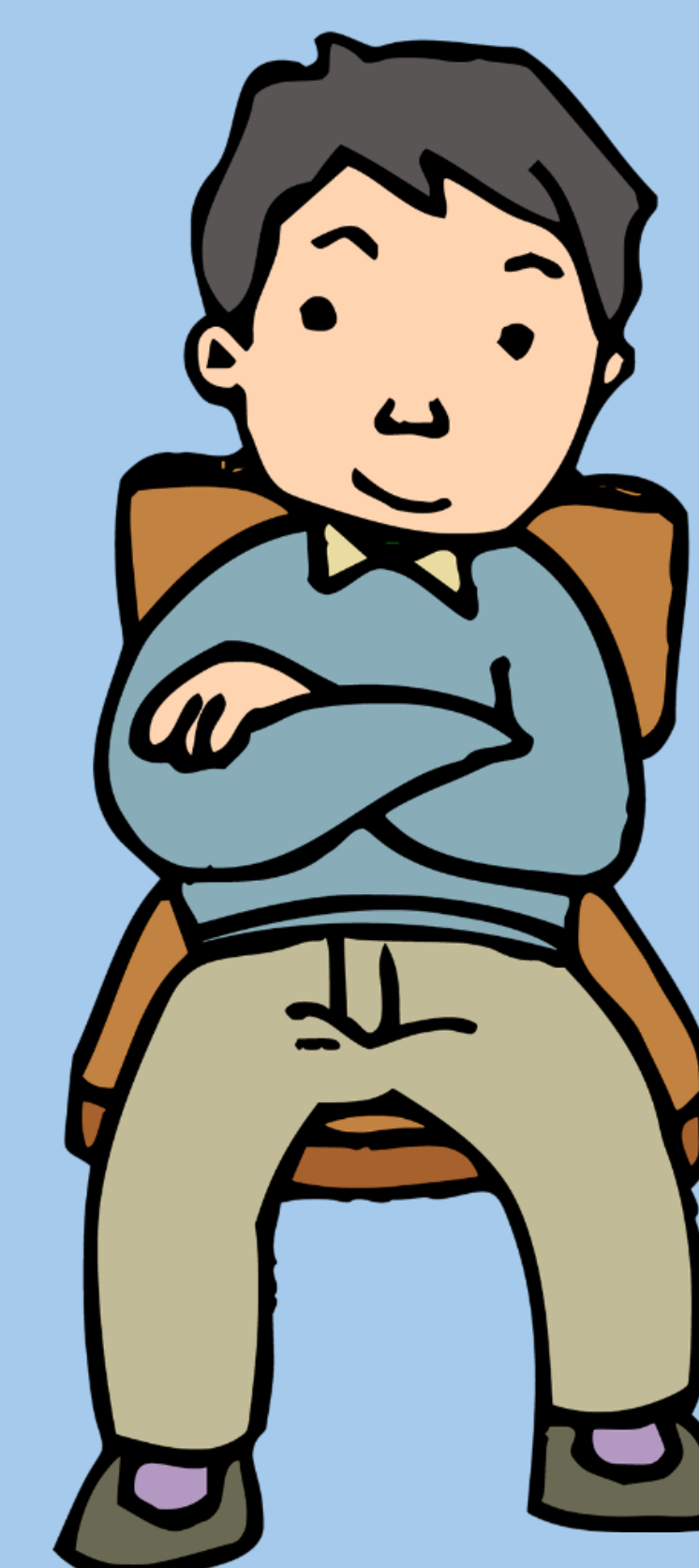
Social interaction is common at convenings, but not universal. At the average convening 10% of participants do not interact when organizers ask them to, and at 22% of convenings *no one* interacts when asked.

Most of the difference in rates of interaction across convenings is because of the nature of the convening activity, but some is also due to the nature of the CSO that hosts it.

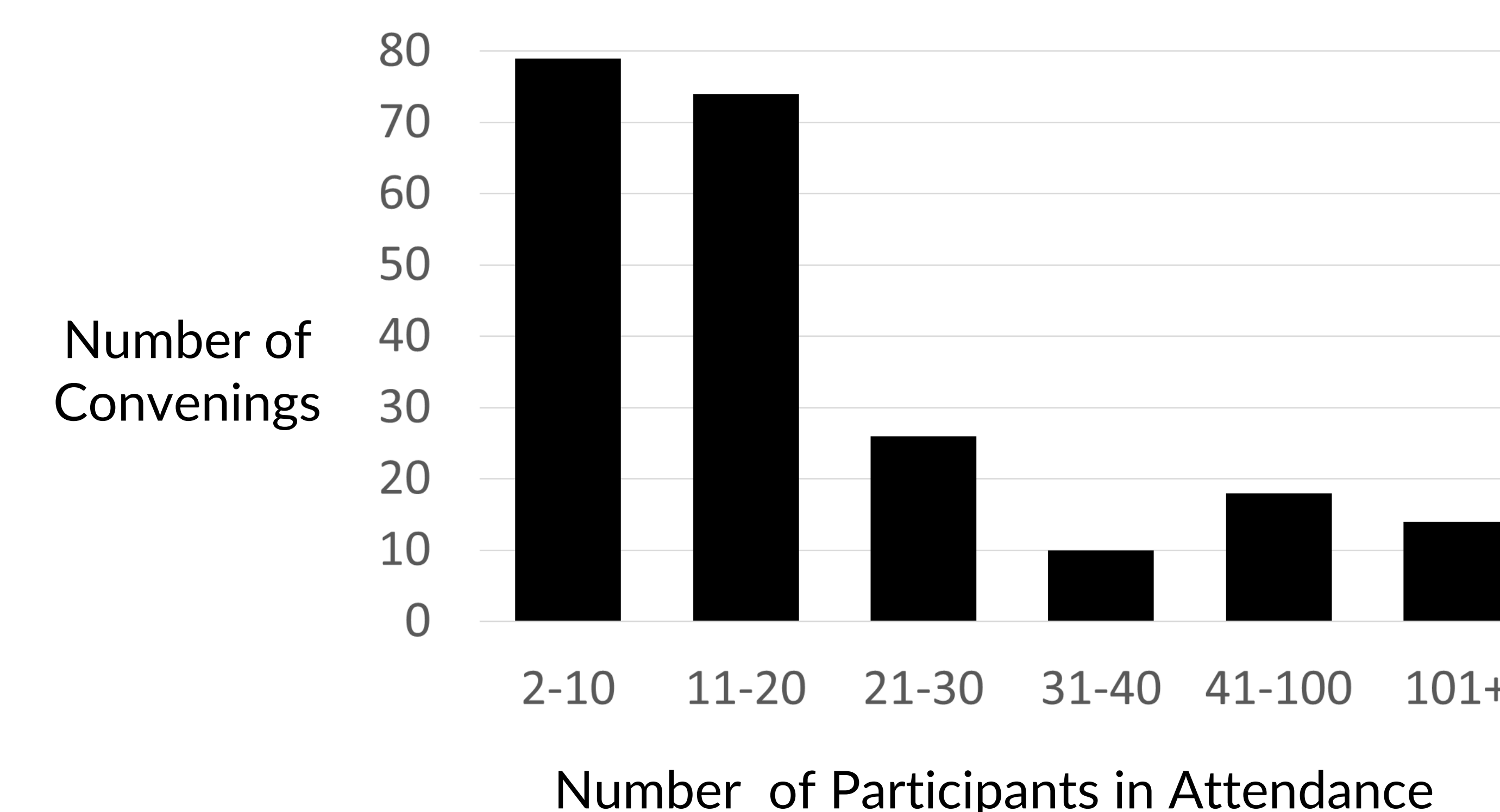
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# Civil society organization convenings are usually small and interactive, but some attendees do not interact.

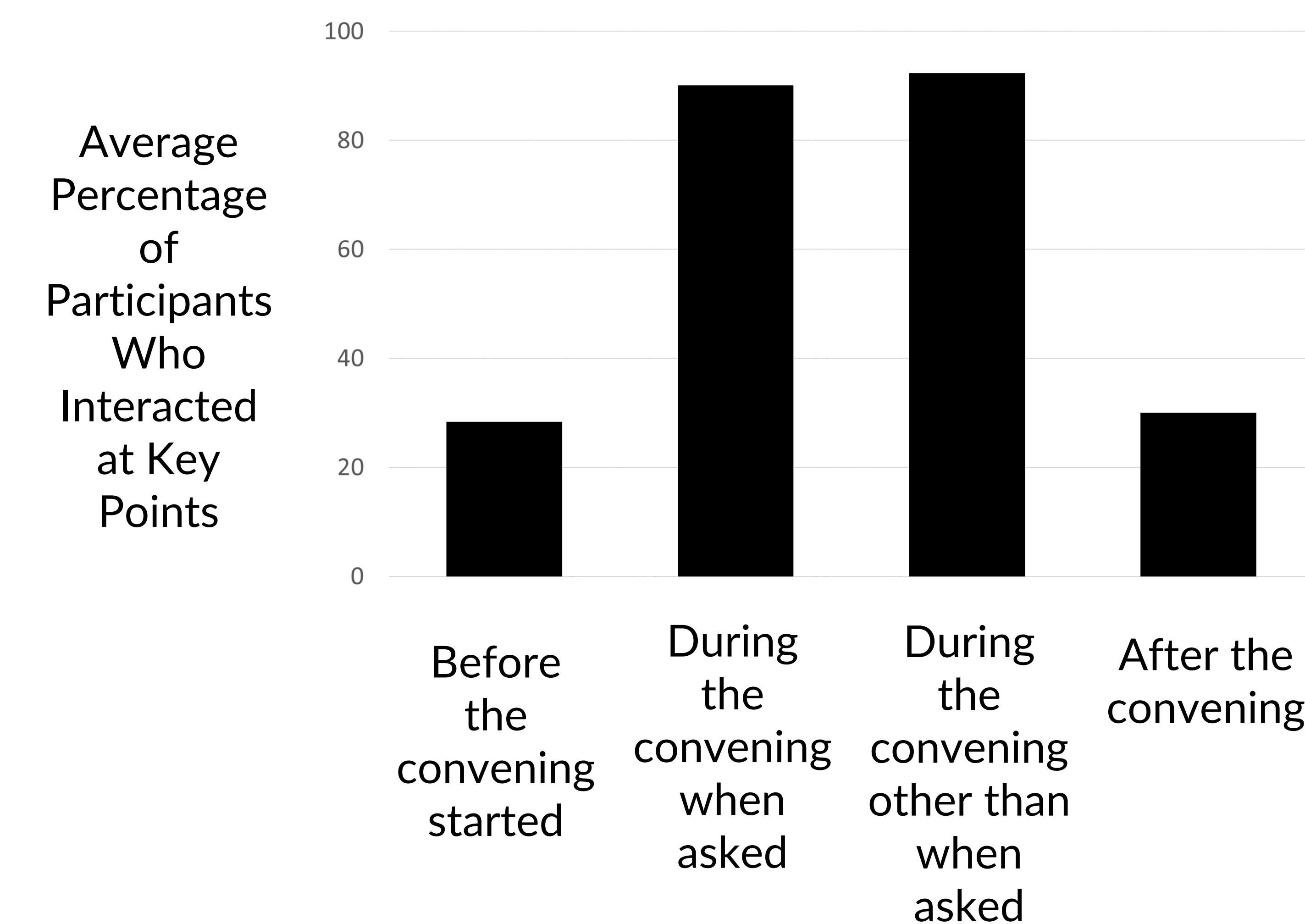


Most CSO convenings are small. They have just 2-10 participants.



A few are quite large. The largest we observed had 232 participants.

At the average convening about 90% of participants interact during the convening and about 30% interact before or after.



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