

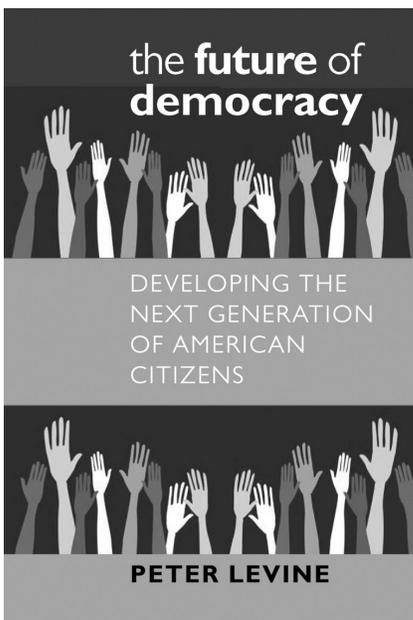
## NEW BOOK: THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY: DEVELOPING THE NEXT GENERATION OF AMERICAN CITIZENS

**T**he *Future of Democracy: Developing the Next Generation of American Citizens* is a manifesto for youth civic engagement, based on a critical review of recent research. CIRCLE's director, Peter Levine, is the author of this book, but it is based on work by our staff, grantees, and advisory board, among others. All proceeds will benefit CIRCLE. The book was commissioned by Tufts University Press/University Press of New England for its Civil Society Series and was published in June 2007.

*"Levine's book is a little gem that I will keep on my bookshelf, close at hand."* —**John M. Bridgeland, Former Director, White House Domestic Policy Council & USA Freedom Corps**

*The Future of Democracy* begins by defining "civic engagement." Moving beyond a list of actions and attitudes, Levine proposes some essential principles. He then argues for broad civic engagement as a path to social justice, efficient and responsive institutions, diverse cultures, and meaningful human lives. Next he asks why we should be especially concerned about young Americans' civic engagement. Not only does engaging young people create lasting skills and habits, thereby strengthening American democracy; it also helps young people to develop in healthy and successful ways.

At this point, *The Future of Democracy* examines recent trends in civic engagement among American youth, finding a mix of bad news and promising signs. Young Americans are increasingly likely to volunteer and are highly tolerant. Some are



*In "The Future of Democracy: Developing the Next Generation of Citizens," Peter Levine makes a number of valuable contributions to academic and 'real world' debates over the state of U.S. democracy.* —**Michael X. Delli Carpini, Dean, The Annenberg School for Communication of the University of Pennsylvania**

inventing exciting new forms of civic engagement, including online methods. On the other hand, they score poorly on assessments of civic knowledge, they are relatively mistrustful of other citizens, they are less likely than in the past to join or lead traditional membership organizations, and they usually vote at low rates. Most are skeptical about their own power to make a difference in their communities.

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The rest of the book explores two basic models for understanding these challenges. The first is a “psychological deficits” model. It assumes that there are problems with young people’s civic skills, knowledge, confidence, and values. These problems are not the fault of youth. Hardly anyone would hold a sixteen-year-old personally accountable for lacking interest in the news or failing to join associations. If we should blame anyone, it would be parents, educators, politicians, reporters, and other adults. Nevertheless, the problems are located (so to speak) inside the heads of young people. We should therefore look for interventions that directly improve young people’s civic abilities and attitudes. Such interventions include formal civic education, opportunities for community service, and broader educational reforms that are designed to improve the overall character of schools. *The Future of Democracy* devotes a chapter each to schools, universities, and community-based organizations that serve youth.

An alternative to the idea of psychological deficits is an “institutional reform” model. This paradigm assumes that there are flaws in our institutions that make it unreasonable to expect positive civic attitudes and active engagement. For example, citizens (young and old alike) may rightly shun voting when most elections have already been determined by the way district lines were drawn. They may rightly ignore the news when the quality of journalism, especially on television, is poor. And they may rightly disengage from high schools that are large, anonymous, and alienating.

If this model holds, then we do not need interventions that change young people’s minds. Civic education that teaches people to admire a flawed system is mere propaganda.

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**PETER LEVINE** is Director of CIRCLE, the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Education, which he helped launch in 2001. He holds a doctorate in philosophy from Oxford University and is also Research Scholar at the Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy in the University of Maryland’s School of Public Policy. He has served as Executive Committee chair of the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools and in other advocacy roles. He has published five books and numerous articles on politics, civil society, the Internet, and moral philosophy, and literature.



Peter Levine, CIRCLE Director

**CIRCLE** (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement) promotes research on the civic and political engagement of young Americans. Although CIRCLE conducts and funds research, not practice, the projects that we support have practical implications for those who work to increase young people’s engagement in politics and civic life. CIRCLE is also a clearinghouse for relevant information and scholarship. CIRCLE was founded in 2001 and is funded predominantly by Carnegie Corporation of New York and The Pew Charitable Trusts. It is based in the University of Maryland’s School of Public Policy.

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Instead, we should reform major institutions. *The Future of Democracy* argues for specific institutional reforms in schools, the news media, and elections. This book is not a polemic in favor of one basic model over the other. In the final chapters, Levine argues that we need a broad movement to improve civic education while also reforming the institutions in which citizens engage. We must prepare citizens for politics, but also improve politics for citizens. Neither effort can succeed in isolation from the other. Educational curricula, textbooks, and programs, if disconnected from the goal of strengthening and improving democracy, can easily become means of accommodating young people to a flawed system. But political reform is impossible until we better prepare the next generation of citizens with appropriate knowledge, skills, habits, and values. Students should feel that they are being educated for citizenship, but also that they can help to renew American democracy. ■

### ORDER "THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY"

*The Future of Democracy* is available for purchase through the Tufts University Press, University Press of New England. Visit <http://www.upne.com/1-58465-648-4.html> to purchase the book online. *The Future of Democracy* is 184 pages and costs \$27.95. ISBN 1-58465-648-4

### CIRCLE IN THE NEWS

#### RECENT NEWS ARTICLES CITING CIRCLE RESEARCH...

- ≡ "Students Rally Round the Internet to Help Darfur," by Virginia McLean, **USA Today** 6/13/2007
- ≡ "Hillary Hip?" by Elizabeth Benjamin **New York Daily News** 5/31/2007
- ≡ "Group Headed by Norman Lear Steps Up Campaign to Get 19-Year-Olds to the Polls" **Congressional Quarterly**, 5/11/2007
- ≡ "Why Go to School," by Steven Wolk **Phi Delta Kappan** 4/27/2007
- ≡ "Poll Shows Youth Vote Boost Favoring Obama, Guiliani in Presidential Race" by Aaron Blake **The Hill**, 4/19/2007
- ≡ "Women's Vote is a Big Factor in 2008" by Anna M. Tinsley **Ft. Worth Star-Telegram**, 6/11/2007
- ≡ "Drafting Youth...For Service" by Ben Waxman **Philadelphia Daily News** 6/12/2007
- ≡ "Education on the Rule of Law" by Judge Stephen O. Rushing **St. Petersburg Times**, 4/30/2007
- ≡ "Tossing Hat into the Ring Online: Help or Hindrance" by Paul Carrier, **Portland Press Herald** 5/14/2007

## RESEARCH ROUNDUP

The Research Roundup column highlights recent research findings commissioned or generated by CIRCLE. Also included is an update on new CIRCLE products such as Fact Sheets, Research Articles, Research Abstracts, Bibliographies, and Datasets.

### CENSUS DATA CONFIRM INCREASE IN YOUTH VOTER TURNOUT

Nearly two million more young Americans under the age of 30 voted in the 2006 midterm elections as compared to the 2002 midterm elections, according to new Census data analyzed and released in a CIRCLE Fact Sheet "Youth Voter Turnout Increases in 2006." The data confirm early estimates by CIRCLE that 10.8 million young Americans voted in the 2006 midterm elections.

*The youth turnout rate jumped from 22.5 percent in 2002 to 25.5 percent—an increase of 3 percentage points. This was the greatest percentage point increase in turnout for any age group for the second election in a row.*

The youth turnout rate jumped from 22.5 percent in 2002 to 25.5 percent—an increase of 3 percentage points. This was the greatest percentage point increase in turnout for any age group for the second election in a row. The turnout rate for all voters rose only 1.7 percentage points, while the rate for voters over the age of 45 rose one percentage point. Voters under the age of 30 accounted for 11.2 percent of all voters in 2006, which is an increase of one percentage point compared to the 2002 midterm elections.

"We have now seen two consecutive elections with substantial increases in youth turnout," said CIRCLE Director Peter Levine. "The increase in 2006 is particularly striking because the turnout of the whole adult population hardly rose at all. It seems likely that the Millennial generation is more involved in politics than Generation X, or that deliberate efforts to mobilize young voters are effective—or both. Given this trend and the magnitude and attention around the 2008 elections we expect record numbers of youth voters."

In the 2002 midterm election, 22.5 percent of young adults voted. However, the best comparison to the 2006 election may be the 1994 midterm, because it was the last midterm to follow a surge in youth voting in a presidential election year, comparable to the 11-point surge in 2004. In 1994, 26.1 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds voted.

**TABLE 1: MIDTERM ELECTION YOUTH VOTER TURNOUT**

	<b>National Youth Voter Turnout Rate</b>	<b>Number of Youth Voters (ages 18-29)</b>	<b>Youth Share of Votes Cast</b>
<b>2006</b>	<b>25.5%</b>	<b>10.8 million</b>	<b>11.2%</b>
<b>2002</b>	<b>22.5%</b>	<b>8.9 million</b>	<b>10.2%</b>
<b>1994</b>	<b>26.1%</b>	<b>10.6 million</b>	<b>12.2%</b>

**Source:** Authors' tabulations from the 2006, 2002, & 1994 November Supplements of the Current Population Survey.

#### TURNOUT VARIES BY STATE

In 2006, the three states with the highest level of youth voter turnout were Minnesota (43 percent), Wisconsin (40 percent), and South Dakota (39 percent). In contrast, the three with the lowest youth turnout rates were West Virginia (16 percent), Texas (17 percent) and Utah (17 percent). These differences are most likely driven by high profile gubernatorial and Senate races as well as statewide ballot initiatives in the higher turnout states.

CIRCLE has released state-by-state facts sheets which examine voter turnout rates from 1978-2006, turnout rates by subgroup, and partisanship (where available from the National Election Pool, Exit Poll surveys). Visit <http://www.civicyouth.org/?p=169> to download individual state fact sheets.

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#### VOTING TRENDS BY DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS

In many cases, 2006 voter turnout rates among young people of different demographic groups were similar to 1994 rates. However, between 2002 and 2006, turnout among African-Americans and Native-Americans declined by one point and 14 points, respectively. The Midwest region experienced an increase of six

percentage points in youth voter turnout between 2002 and 2006, leading all other regions in voter turnout in both elections. Visit [www.civicyouth.org](http://www.civicyouth.org) for more information on youth voter turnout in the 2006 midterm elections. \*

## CIRCLE FACT SHEETS

*CIRCLE has produced numerous Fact Sheets, which are brief documents with basic information and graphs on various topics. The following Fact Sheets have been recently added to CIRCLE's Web site:*

### ≡ **Quick Facts About Young Voters by Metropolitan Area.**

Using data from the 2006 Current Population Survey, November (Voting) Supplement, this fact sheet analyzes voter turnout rates by metropolitan area including New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C.

### ≡ **Young Urban Voters in the Midterm Election Year 2006.**

This fact sheet presents voter turnout data by urban, suburban, and rural areas by subgroup and age. Uses data from the 2006 Current Population Survey, November (Voting) Supplement.

≡ **Quick Facts About Young Voters by State.** Using data from the 2006 Current Population Survey, November (Voting) Supplement, these facts sheets examine voter turnout rates from 1978-2006, turnout rates by subgroup, and partisanship (where available from the Election Pool, Exit Poll surveys) for all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

≡ **Youth Voter Turnout Increases in 2006.** This fact sheet uses new data from the 2006 Current Population Survey, November Supplement, to determine the youth voter turnout in the 2006 midterm election. Also, this fact sheet includes information on voter turnout trend lines, voter turnout by demographic variables, voter turnout by state, and partisanship.

≡ **Volunteering Among Young People.** Based on a variety of data sources including CIRCLE's 2006 Civic & Political Health of the Nation survey, Monitoring the Future data from 1976-2005, HERI data from 1984-2005, & NELS data from 1988. Compares youth volunteering with that of other generations, tracks high school and college student volunteering over time, and breaks down youth volunteering for organizations by organization type.

≡ **Youth Volunteering in the States 2002 to 2005.** Uses the Current Population Survey (CPS) September Volunteer Supplements from 2002-2005, administered by the Bureau of the Census and the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Offers a breakdown of volunteer rates by states and age groups.

≡ **Civic Religious Attendance and Civic Engagement Among 15-to-25-Year-Olds.** This fact sheet reports that young people who attend religious services are more likely to vote and volunteer. The data also showed that those who attend religious services regularly are more likely than their counterparts to belong to groups involved in politics, display a campaign button or sign, and donate money to candidates or a party.

## RESEARCH ROUNDUP

## EVALUATING ADOLESCENT CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: NEW MEASUREMENT TOOL AVAILABLE

Evaluating the levels of civic engagement among teenagers requires appropriate methods and tools. In CIRCLE Working Paper #55 "Civic Measurement Models: Tapping Adolescents' Civic Engagement" Connie Flanagan, Amy K. Syvertsen, and Michael D. Stout provide a rich set of civic measures with good psychometric properties that are appropriate for use with young people ages 12-18. These measures tap aspects of adolescents' civic behaviors, opinions, knowledge, and dispositions. They are easy to administer and can be used by educators, staff of community-based organizations, program evaluators, and scholars.

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The data used to derive the civic measures were gathered from two waves of surveys with 1,924 students ages 12-18 from 88 social studies classes in the Northeastern United States.

## CATEGORIES OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The civic measures are divided into 14 broad categories, allowing them to be used in a variety of ways. Organizations wishing to assess the overall civic engagement of their participants may choose to administer all of the measures in a pre/post test manner. Others who are interested in certain components of civic engagement may use questions from one or more of the following 14 categories (see below).

## 14 CATEGORIES OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• civic behaviors</li> <li>• elected officials and government</li> <li>• conventional civic engagement</li> <li>• alternative civic engagement</li> <li>• political efficacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• equality and injustice</li> <li>• citizenship types</li> <li>• parents' civic engagement</li> <li>• political conversations with others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• values</li> <li>• media consumption and perceptions</li> <li>• school climate</li> <li>• personal beliefs</li> <li>• civic knowledge</li> </ul>
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## THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN USING THE CIVIC MEASURES FOR EVALUATIONS

The civic measures can be easily administered and can be used by a variety of groups. When interpreting the results of the measures it is important to note that all measures are based on students' self-assessments. This means that participants are being asked to evaluate themselves, and not all participants will evaluate themselves the same way every time. Furthermore, when using the measures to evaluate program effectiveness, it is important to be aware that the measures do not correct for issues of self-selection (students who are highly motivated may "self select" into a program, thus making it appear that the program causes participants to be civically engaged). Finally, it is important to highlight the future orientation of many of the items in the constructs. For example, several of the questions ask students to estimate the likelihood that they will engage in various community and political activities after high school. Other items ask students to rate their perceived ability to respond in various ways to a hypothetical scenario (e.g., illegal drugs being sold near a school).

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The complete report can be downloaded at [www.civicyouth.org](http://www.civicyouth.org). 

## RESEARCH ROUNDUP

## EXAMPLES OF CIVIC MEASURES

## CATEGORY: CONVENTIONAL CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

*When you think about your life after high school, how likely is it that you would do each of the following?*

- Vote on a regular basis.\*\*\*
- Wear a campaign button to support a candidate.\*\*
- Volunteer for a political party.\*

\*Items drawn from the California Civic Index (Kahne, Middaugh, & Schutjer-Mance, 2005.)

\*\*Items adapted from the Civic Engagement Questionnaire (Keeter, Zukin, Andolina, & Jenkins, 2002.)

\*\*\*Items adapted from the IEA Civic Education Study (Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswarld, & Schultz, 2001.)

## CATEGORY: ALTERNATIVE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

*After high school, would you consider doing any of the following?*

- Trying to talk to people and explain why they should vote for or against one of the parties or candidates during an election? \*\*
- Expressing your views about politics on a website, blog, or chatroom? \*
- Participating in a poetry slam, youth forum, live music performance, or other event where young people express their political views? \*
- Working as a canvasser (i.e., someone who goes door to door) for a political or social group, or candidate? \*\*

\*Items drawn from the California Civic Index (Kahne, Middaugh, & Schutjer-Mance, 2005.)

\*\*Items adapted from the Civic Engagement Questionnaire (Keeter, Zukin, Andolina, & Jenkins, 2002.)

## CATEGORY: SERVICE-LEARNING

The questions below ask about your experiences in the last 3 years. ***As part of a class, have you worked on a service or volunteer project?*** Students who responded "yes" were then asked to provide an open-ended response to the question "What did you do?" They were then asked to answer the four dichotomous (Yes/No) questions listed below.

- Did you have an opportunity to think and talk about your experience with other students in class?
- Did you apply information learned in class to your service project?
- Did you learn about possible causes of and solutions to social problems you were addressing in your service project?
- Did you discuss what the government could do to solve the problem?

## CATEGORY: EQUALITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

*How much do you agree or disagree with each of these statements?*

- It makes me angry when I think about the conditions some people have to live in.
- When I think about the hard times some people are going through, I wonder what's wrong with this country.
- I get mad when I hear about people being treated unjustly.

**Source:** CIRCLE Working Paper #55 "Civic Measurement Models: Tapping Adolescents' Civic Engagement" by Connie Flanagan, Amy K. Syvertsen, and Michael D. Stout

## RESEARCH ROUNDUP

## TRENDS IN YOUTH VOLUNTEERING

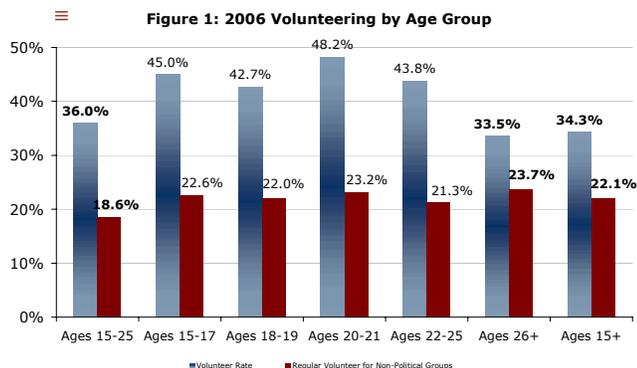
Newly updated with data from the 2006 Civic Political Health of the Nation Survey (CPHS), "Volunteering Among Young People" is a new CIRCLE Fact Sheet showing trends in volunteering—and the organizations for which young people volunteer—utilizing data from many sources.

## FREQUENCY OF VOLUNTEERING

Young people generally report greater levels of volunteering than their adult counterparts (See Figure 1); however, their volunteer rates appear to be declining. According to the 2006 CPHS, during the year prior to June 2006, 15-to-25-year-olds reported volunteering at the rate of 36.0 percent compared to 33.5 percent for adults 26 and older. For young people, this volunteering rate, while higher than adults, was down from 40.2 percent in 2002. Similarly, while youth volunteering grew from 2002 to 2005, the Corporation for National and Community Service's analysis of the Current Population Survey (CPS) found a decrease in the volunteer rate from 2005 to 2006 among all respondents ages 16 and older. Also, the Monitoring the Future (MTF) surveys of twelfth, tenth, and eighth graders all show declines in reported volunteering in recent years.

## REASONS FOR VOLUNTEERING

Young people volunteer for different reasons. However, regardless of the type of organizations young people volunteer for, the single most common reason cited for volunteering is "to help other people." Young people who volunteer for political and environmental organizations appear to have different motivations from young people who volunteer for other types of organizations.



Source: Author's tabulations from the 2006 Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey (CIRCLE)

Among young political volunteers, 41.2 percent volunteer "to address a social or political problem." Those who volunteer for environmental organizations are the most diverse in their reasons—22.8 percent volunteer "to address a social or political problem" and 24.3 percent volunteer for "some other reason."

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## HOW VOLUNTEERS ARE CONTACTED

Overall, the single most common way young people report finding volunteer opportunities is by contacting an organization directly themselves. Political organizations are the most likely to recruit young people to volunteer (35.1 percent). Environmental organizations most heavily rely upon having someone else put the volunteer together with the organization (28.7 percent). Volunteers for civic or community groups and environmental groups are the most likely to report that they contacted the organization themselves (47.0 and 46.7 percent, respectively).

## VOLUNTEERING FOR ORGANIZATIONS

Two-thirds of young volunteers volunteer for youth organizations. The next most common venue for youth volunteering is a civic or community group such as a health service organization or social service organization; collectively, they draw 53.9 percent of young volunteers. Compared to their older counterparts, young people are more likely to volunteer at an environmental organization, but are less likely to volunteer at a political organization or for a political candidate.

For more on youth volunteering, including state-by-state volunteering rates, visit <http://www.civicyouth.org/?cat=7>.

## SUPPORTING THE FREE PRESS THROUGH SCHOOLS

First Amendment principles are fragile unless they have widespread public support. People form lasting views about civil liberties and other political issues in adolescence. They are influenced by many factors, including what they learn and experience in schools. Therefore, schools' treatment of the Constitution and the press is important for the future of the First Amendment.

New CIRCLE research uses multivariate analysis of data from the Knight Foundation 2005 Future of the First Amendment Survey and other sources. The authors investigate the effects of courses, state educational policies, school media, and other variables on students' attitudes toward media, attention to media, knowledge of media, and media usage (a full list of variables can be found in Table 1 of the Working Paper). The authors find promise in state policies designed to encourage and support explicit discussion of the news media, especially if students are required to employ news sources in classrooms.

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### SCHOOL COURSES

Discussing the news media in class enhances students' attitudes and habits related to the free press. For instance, of those students who say that they took a class that discusses the role of the media in society, 87 percent believe that people should be able to express unpopular opinions, compared to 79 percent of students who did not take such a class—an eight point difference. Even when controlling for other factors, the authors find a significant difference of three points.

Students are more likely to use the news media regularly when their teachers have required the use of news media in classes. These students are five percentage points more likely to say that student journalists should be allowed to report controversy, and six and a half percentage points more likely to believe that people should be allowed to express unpopular views. Students who have been required to use the news media are also more trusting of journalists and considerably better informed about what is going

on in their own high schools. (All results control for the factors measured in the survey.)

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*Students are more likely to use the news media regularly when their teachers have required the use of news media in classes.*

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### SCHOOL MEDIA

Students who are directly involved in scholastic media have generally more favorable attitudes toward the First Amendment. It is still not certain that participation boosts attitudes and knowledge. The reverse could be true: those favorable to free speech might choose to participate in scholastic media. Still, students who are members of the school newspaper staff show positive results in the model, the biggest being their strong opposition to government censorship of newspapers.

### IMPACT ON THE STUDENT BODY

In schools with student newspapers, the student body is somewhat more favorable toward government censorship of newspapers and somewhat less concerned that other Americans take the First Amendment for granted, compared to students in otherwise similar schools. (These are average results that do not take into account variations in the quality, function, and history of school newspapers.) Magazines and student television stations show scattered positive results and not many negative ones. For instance, in schools with student magazines, youth are more than five percentage points more likely to support school newspapers' right to report controversy. Having a television station correlates with higher student consumption of media, including newspapers.

### STATE POLICIES

In general, the state policies that deal explicitly with civics and social studies do not correlate significantly with the student outcomes measured in the Future of the First Amendment Survey. The authors suggest two explanations for the general lack of statistical relationships between state policies and the student outcomes measured in this survey. First, the effects may be too indirect to have a significant impact on students. For example, although state policies may influence schools, and schools may influence students, these effects are not large enough for state

Continued on page 12

## RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

*From Research to Practice, a column dedicated to recognizing successful "bridges" between researchers and practitioners, reports on research with practical implications for youth civic engagement. Additionally, it presents concrete examples of how practitioners have applied this research to encourage the participation of young people in civic and political life.*

### HOW TO READ AND USE RESEARCH TO MAKE YOUR JOB EASIER

A GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS AND PRACTITIONERS WHO MAY BE NEW TO RESEARCH

Research has many purposes, but one of its most important is to help inform practice. However, translating research findings into actionable program strategies can be a difficult task. This article provides a quick guide on how to read and use research to improve program outcomes. Included is a summary of the most common types of research found in the field of youth civic engagement, advice on how to choose the right type of research for your particular program needs, and finally reflection questions designed to help integrate the research findings into daily program activities and future planning.

#### TYPES OF RESEARCH

Below are five types of research, none of which are mutually exclusive. There are many more types of research, but these are the most common in the field of youth civic engagement. The type of research matters so that a reader can judge the significance of the research findings. For example, findings from an evaluation of one small youth organizing program may or may not be helpful to a given practitioner, but an experimental project with five youth organizing groups across the country is more likely to provide information that can be generalized.

- **"Quantitative:** Measures that strive for precision by focusing on things that can be counted."\*
- **"Qualitative:** Measures that provide descriptive information about situations, events, and/or behavior of individuals."\*
- **Longitudinal:** Information gathered from participants over a period or multiple periods of time, generally a year or longer.
- **"Experimental:** Potential program participants are randomly assigned to either the experimental or the control group."\* This method can be especially helpful in determining program effects because it can reduce the likelihood that the measured outcomes of a program are due to a participant's predisposition to choose the program.
- **"Evaluation:** The systematic collection of information about activities, characteristics, and outcomes of a program in order to make judgments about the program, improve program effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future programming."\*

\* **Source: Excerpts from the James Irvine Foundation "Evaluation Terminology"**

#### QUESTION TO ASK ABOUT RESEARCH

Following are questions you can ask about a given research project that will tell you how applicable the research is to your work.

- **Is the topic of the research relevant to my work?**  
Various youth engagement strategies (service-learning, youth organizing, volunteering) can provide opportunities for research on many types of outcomes (knowledge,

#### THE LANGUAGE OF RESEARCH

*This is a brief glossary of terms that will help you de-code what's going on and may help you talk to those who speak this language, like faculty.*

**Control/Comparison Group:** A technique that allows you to compare two similar groups: one that receives an intervention (such as a service-learning course) and the other that receives no treatment. Results are analyzed to see if the intervention results in changes in the comparison group, but not in the control group.

**Correlation:** A relationship between two or more variables. For example, there may be a correlation between newspaper readership and civic outcomes such as increased voting. However, a correlation simply suggests a relationship. It does not suggest causality. In this example, if there is a correlation between newspaper readership and voting it does not mean that newspaper readership causes increased voting.

**Generalizability:** Extrapolating results from a sample of the population to the larger population. In order to generalize to the larger population, the sample should have demographic characteristics that are similar to the larger population.

**Outcome:** A change in behavior, attitude, knowledge or skill level that results from an intervention. This is used often in program evaluations. For example, an increase in civic behavior could be an outcome of a civic education course.

**Causality:** An outcome that is the result of a particular program. Pinpointing the cause of a particular outcome can be difficult to measure since there are many outside factors that can cause changes. Randomized experiments are the "gold standard" for determining causality.

**Efficacy:** One's belief that s/he can make a difference. This term is often used in civic engagement research since efficacy is highly correlated with desired civic behaviors such as volunteering.

## RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

behavior, habits, values, skills) that may or may not interest you. If you are interested in learning about the complex values and opinions of a specific group, qualitative research will provide richer information. Quantitative research is best for providing trends, comparisons, or information about the impact of programs.

- **When was the research done?** It is important to consider when the research was conducted. What may have changed since the research was completed? For example, a 1990 study on youth internet use will provide much different usage estimates than research conducted in 2007.
- **What is the sample size?** A larger sample size is generally better for making generalizations (surveys are best that have a minimum sample of 120 respondents).
- **What are the demographics of participants in the research?** Young people of different ages, who live in different places, or who have different educational experiences sometimes engage in civic and political life in different ways. Are the findings from a particular study too specific to a group of youth to help you? For example, a study about the political attitudes of high school immigrant youth may provide information that is relevant only to this specific population.
- **What methods did the researcher use for collecting data?** Was it systematic or does it rely on anecdotal evidence? Does the research method match the question being asked? For example, research that was done through an online survey that seeks to find out information on youth who do not regularly use the internet will not result in reliable answers to the research question.
- If the research is claiming that a program has caused a particular impact or outcome, **does the research use a design that will adequately prove causality?** Often there are outside effects that can significantly impact research findings. Researchers interested in proving causality will be careful to control for these variables. A randomized experiment is particularly useful for establishing causality. If a project is not a randomized experiment, participant self-selection may complicate the interpretation, though there are many ways to account for this.

## REFLECTING ON IMPLICATIONS FOR YOUR PRACTICE

Integrating research into practice requires reflection. The following questions are meant to provide a framework for reflecting on the many ways research can help inform and improve practice.

- Could this research tell you anything new about the young people you work with?
- Do these findings mirror your experiences (e.g., with a particular strategy)? If not, why do you think that might be the case?
- What effective/best practice(s) were identified in the research? Is this a strategy similar to one you use or could use? Are there specific components of this best practice that you could build into your work?
- Would it be beneficial for me to communicate these findings with any of my colleagues?

## INFORMING RESEARCH

At CIRCLE, we believe it is crucial to have a two-way conversation between research and practice. We encourage comments and questions. Consider the following questions when thinking about research and your work:

- What more do you want to know?
- What would be helpful for you in your work?
- What do people ask you about that you don't have an answer for? \*

## WHY SHOULD I CARE ABOUT RESEARCH?

- Provides a Grounding in Your Field
- Learn about Newly-Established Best Practices to Strengthen Your Work
- Affect a Research Agenda to Help You More in the Future

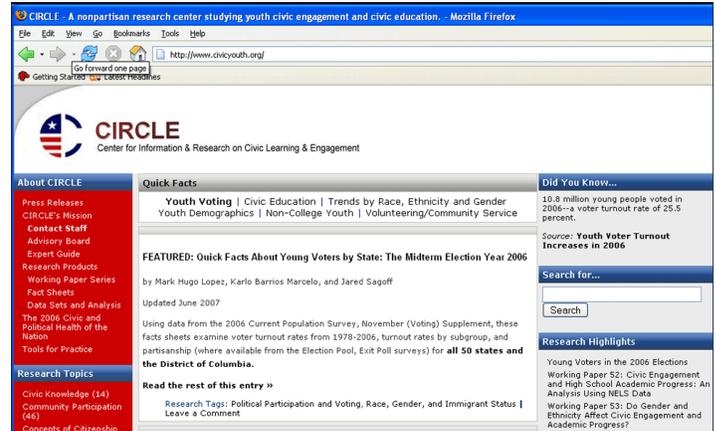
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policies regarding civics to have a significant impact on the student outcomes discussed here. Second, many of the state standards require instruction that is virtually ubiquitous. For instance, around 85 percent of all American students take at least one semester of civics, so it is difficult to detect the impact of this experience.

The CIRCLE Working Paper is entitled "Schools, Education Policy, and the Future of the First Amendment" and is authored by Mark Hugo Lopez & Peter Levine of CIRCLE and Kenneth Dautrich & David Yalof of University of Connecticut. It can be downloaded from [www.civicyouth.org](http://www.civicyouth.org).

### CIRCLE'S WEB SITE GETS A NEW LOOK AND IMPROVED FUNCTIONALITY

Please visit CIRCLE's newly re-designed Web site! The URL is the same ([www.civicyouth.org](http://www.civicyouth.org)) but the new site has an improved look and much improved functionality. For those who are interested in the technical details, our Web site has been rebuilt so that it runs off a database and is no longer simply a set of hand-built html web pages. Every document that we have published is now an entry in the database, which should make it much easier to search our site. Feedback on the new site is welcome!



## CIRCLE

The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement

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