## THE YOUTH VOTE 2008

Nearly two million more young Americans under the age of 30 voted in the 2008 presidential elections as compared to the 2004 elections, according to new Census data analyzed and released by CIRCLE. The increase is a continuation of the trend observed in the 2004 and 2006 elections. Youth turnout was 11 percentage points higher than in 1996, which was the low point after decades of decline. While young people increased their turnout significantly in 2008, older adults voted at lower rates than in 2004 and only slightly above their 2000 level.

Graph 1: Voter Turnout by Age, 1972-2008

Legend: 18-24 Citizen · 25 and older Citizen · 18-29 Citizen · 30 and older Citizen
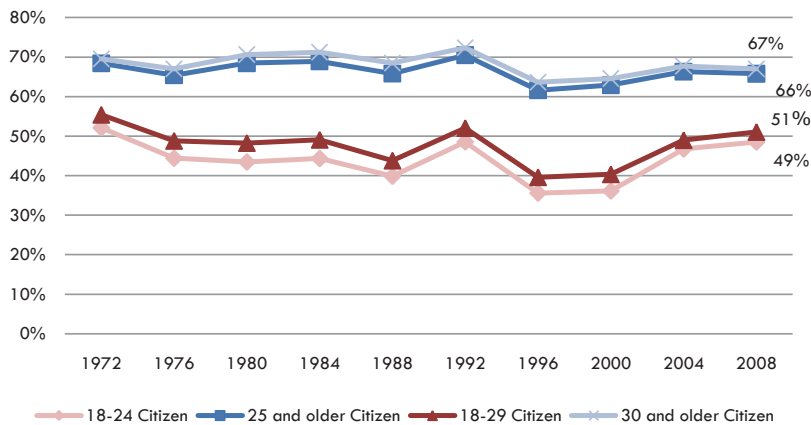
PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG AFRICAN AMERICANS ESPECIALLY STRONG IN 2008

Although overall youth turnout was high in the 2008 presidential election, there were important differences in turnout rates. Young African Americans posted the highest turnout rate ever observed for any racial or ethnic group of young Americans since 1972. Fifty-eight percent of African-American youth voted on November 4th, the highest turnout rate of any youth racial/ethnic group since 1972. Moreover, among young people, African-American youth had the highest turnout: nearly six in ten young African Americans voted in the 2008 election. Turnout among this group rapidly increased between the 2000 and 2008 elections, rising by nearly 20 percentage points. This increase represents the greatest increase in turnout of any racial or ethnic minority group since 1972.

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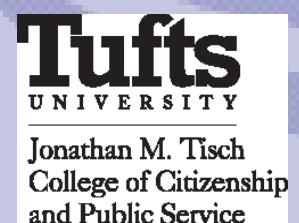
THE RESEARCH ROUNDUP COLUMN HIGHLIGHTS RECENT RESEARCH FINDINGS COMMISSIONED OR GENERATED BY CIRCLE. ALSO INCLUDED IS AN UPDATE ON NEW CIRCLE PRODUCTS SUCH AS FACT SHEETS, RESEARCH ARTICLES, RESEARCH ABSTRACTS, BIBLIOGRAPHIES, AND DATASETS.

WHILE AFRICAN AMERICANS EXPERIENCED NOTEWORTHY INCREASES IN TURNOUT OVER THE PAST DECADE, OTHER RACIAL AND ETHNIC GROUPS ALSO MADE SIGNIFICANT STRIDES.

While African Americans experienced noteworthy increases in turnout over the past decade, other racial and ethnic groups also made significant strides. Turnout among white youth was 52% and unlike most other racial/ethnic groups, whites showed no gain between the 2004 and 2008 elections. Asian-American youth increased their turnout by ten percentage points, and turnout among Latino youth increased five percentage points.

Graph 2: 18-to-29 Year-Old Citizen Turnout, by Race 1972-2008
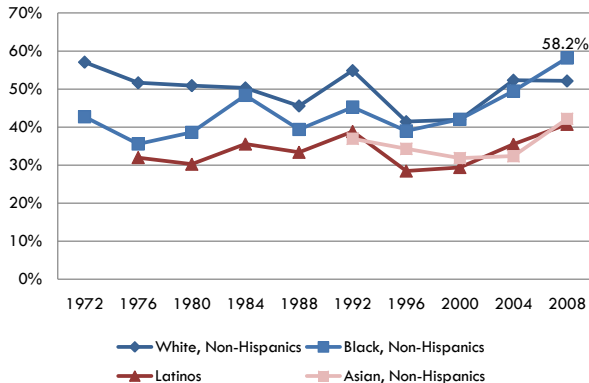
YOUNG PEOPLE WITH MORE EDUCATION ARE MORE LIKELY TO VOTE

The gap in turnout by educational attainment remained large; voter turnout of young people without college experience was 36%, compared to a 62% rate among young people with college experience. (About half of the young adult population has some college experience.) "We have now seen three consecutive presidential elections with substantial increases in youth turnout," said CIRCLE Director Peter Levine. "Compared to the 1980's and 1990's, we appear to have entered a new era of stronger youth engagement—also shown by higher rates of volunteering and community service. But there are persistent

gaps in engagement, with less advantaged youth still mostly left out. We must find ways to engage and expand civic opportunities for this cohort of young people."

Educational attainment has long been understood to be a strong predictive factor of one's likelihood of voting. More-educated individuals—those who have had at least some college education—have consistently been almost twice as likely to vote as those who have received no more than a high school diploma. Between the 2000 and 2008 presidential elections, turnout among college-educated young people increased one point more than it did among lesser-educated youth. Despite the fact that college attendance has grown since 1972, the turnout gap between these two groups has remained relatively constant.

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YOUNG WOMEN HAVE BECOME MORE LIKELY TO VOTE THAN YOUNG MEN

Although in the 1972 general election men and women were equally likely to go to the polls, over the past thirty years the gap between male and female turnout in presidential elections has widened considerably. By 1992, 54 percent of women ages 18-29 voted while only 50 percent of men did so. In 2008, this difference continued to widen to nearly eight percentage points, although both genders posted significant gains in turnout over the 2000 election. Young women also have substantially higher levels of educational attainment today.

STATE-BY-STATE VOTER TURNOUT FOR 2008

In the 2008 election the youth voter turnout was highest in Minnesota (68%), Iowa (63%), New Hampshire (62%) and Oregon (59%). It was lowest in Hawaii (31%), Arkansas (35%), Utah (37%), Texas (39%), and South Dakota (44%).

For the most part, in each state, voter turnout among those age 30 and above was at least 10 percentage points higher than turnout among 18-to-29 year-olds. Iowa, Minnesota, and West Virginia had the smallest gaps between youth and adult turnout rates (under 10 percentage points). The fact sheet on youth voter turnout and trends in 2008 and a 50-state breakdown can be found at http://www.civicyouth.org/?p=339. ★

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THE CHANGING TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD

CIRCLE and the Spencer Foundation released a report entitled *Civic Engagement and the Changing Transition to Adulthood.*The study, written by Constance Flanagan, Peter Levine, and Richard Settersten, argues that life has changed dramatically for people in their 20s. Marriage, childbearing, financial independence, and other aspects of the "transition to adulthood" have been transformed since the 1970s, and are now very different for people with and without college educations. These changes and differences powerfully affect civic engagement. For example, it appears that younger generations have delayed voting, in much the same way that they have delayed marriage and childbearing. But young adults without college experience are permanently missing some aspects of civic engagement—such as group membership—that were common thirty years ago. The full report can be downloaded from CIRCLE's Web site at
http://www.civicyouth.org/?p=327.

(DIS)ENGAGED YOUNG ADULTS

The decline in civic engagement is most stark for young people without college education. The report finds that over the past three decades, civic engagement declined for both youth with and without college experience (see Figures 1 & 2). The authors note, "The non-college group, having begun with lower levels of participation, has now reached a critically low point." As shown in Figure 1, non-college youth are less likely than their college counterparts to participate in all ten measures of civic engagement (2000-2006).[1]
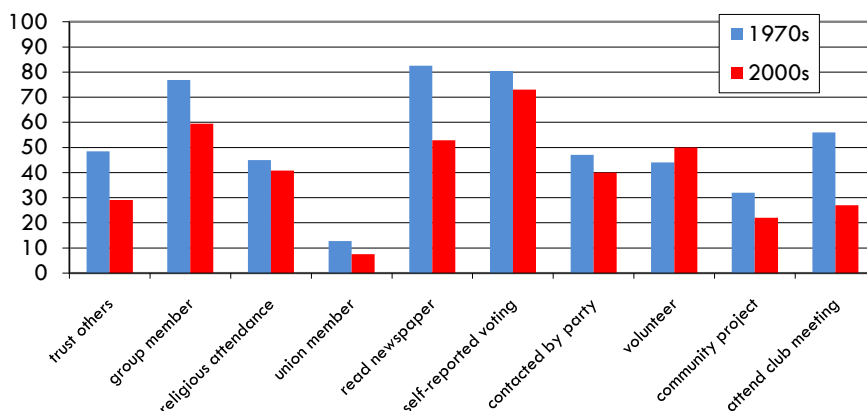
The decline in civic engagement is most stark for young people without college education. The report finds that over the past three decades, civic engagement declined for both youth with and without college experience, leaving the later group at critically low levels.

THE CHANGING NATURE OF LIFE FOR YOUNG ADULTS

According to the authors, "To some extent, the gap in civic engagement between youth with and without college experience can be explained by opportunities and resources in childhood and adolescence." They point to research showing that a student's socio-economic status (SES) and the average SES of the student's school both independently predict the likelihood that the student will receive important civic learning opportunities.

But lack of opportunities and resources in childhood and adolescence do not fully explain the decline in civic engagement. The authors argue that the changing nature of life for young people in their 20s needs to be considered. They examined five key experiences that define the transition to adulthood (leaving home, completing school, entering the workforce, getting married, and having children) and found enormous changes in the timing of when the experiences occur over the past 30 years.   One of these measures, marriage, has declined steeply between 1970 and 2000. This is especially true of non-college youth, for whom marriage rates declined from 71% in 1968 to 31% in 2007.

With the delay in marriage and other adult experiences, the authors argue that young people may also be delaying becoming stakeholders in local communities. According to the report, "Because it takes longer today to launch careers, start families, and set down roots in communities, one wonders whether the civic lives of young adults are also on

Figure 1: Civic Engagement for Age 20-29, With at Least One Year of College

hold—and what risks these delays might bring to individuals and societies. Alternatively, the lengthening period of emerging adulthood may offer unique opportunities for civic engagement."

ACCORDING TO THE REPORT, "BECAUSE IT TAKES LONGER TODAY TO LAUNCH CAREERS, START FAMILIES, AND SET DOWN ROOTS IN COMMUNITIES, ONE WONDERS WHETHER THE CIVIC LIVES OF YOUNG ADULTS ARE ALSO ON HOLD— AND WHAT RISKS THESE DELAYS MIGHT BRING TO INDIVIDUALS AND SOCIETIES. ALTERNATIVELY, THE LENGTHENING PERIOD OF EMERGING ADULTHOOD MAY OFFER UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT."

RECOMMENDATIONS

The report offers several recommendations on how to increase civic engagement among those who do not attend 4-year colleges and universities. They offer two areas to focus on: community colleges and national service programs. According to the report, "Community colleges are the largest and fasting growing sector of higher education. The 1,158 public two-year colleges enroll 45% of all U.S. undergraduates." They suggest that community colleges can be a key institutional setting for recruiting young people into political life. Another promising area to reach disengaged young people is through National Service Programs such as Service and Conservation Corps, AmeriCorps, Youth Build, and Public Allies. ★
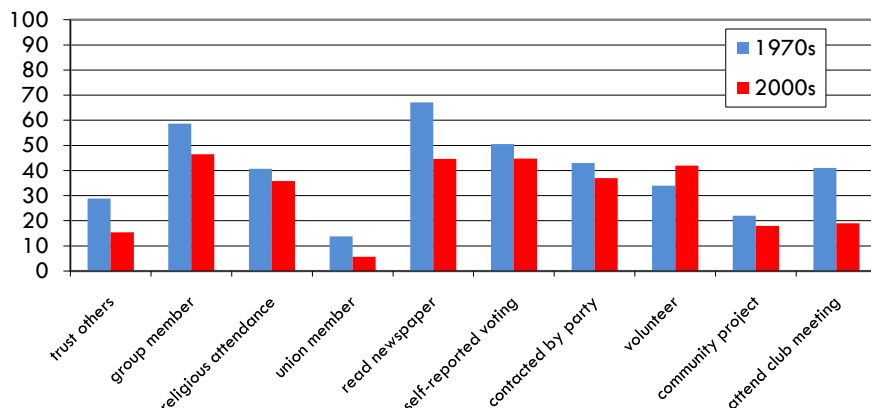
ENDNOTES

1   Ten measures of civic engagement are: trust others, group member, religious attendance, union member, read newspaper, self-reported voting, contacted by party, volunteer, community project, and attend club meeting.

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**Figure 2: Civic Engagement
for Age 20-29, With no College**

MILLENNIALS MOST PROGRESSIVE GENERATION IN 50 YEARS

Young Americans under 30 are much more progressive than any generation since the early 1960s and likely to move the country leftward for decades to come, according to a CIRCLE report. CIRCLE Director Peter Levine, along with Constance Flanagan and Les Gallay of Penn State University, authored a report *The Millennial Pendulum: A New Generation of Voters and the Prospects for a Political Realignment*. The report was funded by the New American Foundation and was officially announced at an event on February 18, 2009 in Washington DC.

THE REPORT FINDS THAT THE MILLENNIALS (BORN AFTER 1982) ARE STARTING THEIR ADULT LIVES MUCH MORE PROGRESSIVE ON ECONOMIC ISSUES THAN ANY GENERATION FROM THE EARLY 1960s TO TODAY.

The report finds that the Millennials (born after 1982) are starting their adult lives much more progressive on economic issues than any generation from the early 1960s to today. The historical analysis shows that each generation has held a fairly stable attitude toward economic issues that has remained durable even as major economic and political events have occurred. Each generation has grown somewhat more conservative as its members have moved through life. But the Millennials are starting to the left of previous generations and are therefore likely to move the country leftward for decades to come.

The study compares three key theories: age effects (people are more liberal when they are young), period/historical effects (people, regardless of age, tend to change their opinions at the same time in response to major events such as elections, social movements, etc.), and cohort effects (people born around the same time are permanently influenced by events that arise when they are young, such as wars, social movements, or 9/11). The full report is available at www.newamerica.net or http://www.civicyouth.org/?p=332.

GENERATIONAL GAP IN PARTISAN PREFERENCES

"The Millennials are more liberal, more Democratic, more tolerant of others, and more trusting of American institutions than their elders," said Peter Levine director of CIRCLE. "While each generation has grown somewhat more conservative with age, the Millennials are starting to the left of previous generations and therefore likely to push a more liberal agenda for many years."

President Barack Obama's victory and unprecedented support of voters under 30 (66 percent) in the presidential election underscored the more liberal leanings of this new generation of voters. In most presidential elections young voters have chosen the same candidate as older voters. However, during the last two presidential elections a new pattern has emerged: a generational gap in the partisan preferences began in 2004 and widened in 2008. This past election, there was a 15-point difference between youth support for Obama and the Democrats' share of the whole popular vote.

"THE MILLENNIALS ARE MORE LIBERAL, MORE DEMOCRATIC, MORE TOLERANT OF OTHERS, AND MORE TRUSTING OF AMERICAN INSTITUTIONS THAN THEIR ELDERS," SAID PETER LEVINE DIRECTOR OF CIRCLE.

ISSUE PREFERENCES: YOUNG PEOPLE MORE SUPPORTIVE OF LARGE INSTITUTIONS

Concern for government waste has been a defining issue for conservatism, especially during Ronald Reagan's presidency, and Millenials were found to be especially liberal with only 29 percent believing government wastes money. In contrast, about 39 percent of those who turned voting age in the 1960's were concerned with government waste when Lyndon Johnson was president. Millenials also are more supportive of government spending on education, health care, and other government services than the rest of the population. In fact, the Millennials' support of increased federal aid to schools was the highest of any generation at any time during the past 20 years.

The study also showed that today's young people trust large institutions such as corporations, banks, government bureaucracies and unions more than average Americans today and the previous generation did when they were young. In fact, they are far more confident in the financial sector than other generations have been at any point in their lives since the 1970s. However, this may change because this research does not include the current major economic crisis and current polls reveal low public confidence in Wall Street.

CIRCLE FACT SHEET

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:

■ STATE ELECTION LAW REFORM AND YOUTH VOTER TURNOUT: describes the relationship between various options for state election law reform and youth voter turnout. The analysis focuses on the 2008 presidential election. Similar studies on previous presidential elections are available as working papers funded by CIRCLE.

■ THE YOUTH VOTE IN 2008: presents trends in youth voting from 1972-2008 using data from the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS) November Voting and Registration Supplements. Additionally, it provides information on differences in youth voting trends among women and men, racial and ethnic minorities, and people of different educational levels.

■ YOUTH VOLUNTEERING IN THE STATES: 2002 TO 2007: provides a 50-state breakdown of volunteering rates for teenagers, young adults, and the population over 25. Vermont, Utah & North Dakota show the highest rates; New York and Nevada are among the lowest.

MILLENNIALS ARE READY TO SERVE; COMFORTABLE WITH DIVERSITY

Millennials are more committed to community service than previous generations. Since 1990, there has been a steady increase in volunteering, with high school seniors who expect to go on to college responsible for most of the increase. This trend may be helped by the institution, in some school districts, of service-learning programs.

Today's young people are also highly tolerant and favorable toward diversity. CIRCLE's 2006 national survey found 53 percent accepted homosexuality compared to 46 percent of older adults. More than half (57 percent) of young people felt immigrants strengthened our country compared with only 43 percent of older adults.

On civil liberties such as support of free speech for gays, racists, and opponents of religion, Millennials reflect the increasing tolerance that has characterized successive generations of Americans. Likewise their views on gender roles and racial equality are more progressive as public opinion has been shifting since the mid 1980s in a more liberal direction.

"We are witnessing a dramatic shift in political attitudes among young Americans. They are much more progressive than their elders," said Levine. "What this change means to our nation's direction is yet to be seen. But as younger generations replace the previous ones as the major share of the voting public, their beliefs and behaviors play a key role in shaping our country's future." ★

CONSIDERING THE ROLE OF CONTEXT IN ADOLESCENTS' CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

A new CIRCLE Working Paper (#64) by Britt Wilkenfeld examines the effects of several systems of influence (schools, families, neighborhoods, etc) on civic outcomes. The author finds that there are processes inherent in each context that can account for the ways in which environments influence adolescents' development. The most important processes seem to involve aspects of interpersonal relationships with parents (especially the level of discourse), patterns of activity within schools, institutional resources within neighborhoods, and the collective socialization that occurs in neighborhoods. Schools, among other settings, matter.

> THE MOST IMPORTANT PROCESSES SEEM TO INVOLVE ASPECTS OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARENTS (ESPECIALLY THE LEVEL OF DISCOURSE), PATTERNS OF ACTIVITY WITHIN SCHOOLS, INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES WITHIN NEIGHBORHOODS, AND THE COLLECTIVE SOCIALIZATION THAT OCCURS IN NEIGHBORHOODS. SCHOOLS, AMONG OTHER SETTINGS, MATTER.

CIVICS COURSES ESPECIALLY BENEFICIAL TO STUDENTS IN HIGH POVERTY NEIGHBORHOODS

The author finds that receiving a civics curriculum "appears to be more beneficial to youth attending schools in high poverty neighborhoods than to those attending schools in low-poverty neighborhoods." For instance, receiving better civics instruction makes by far the most difference to students' plans to vote if they live in poor neighborhoods.

CAUSES OF DISPARITIES IN ADOLESCENT CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The study also explored potential explanations for disparities in adolescent civic engagement by examining different student experiences that may foster civic development. Four consistent patterns emerged:

1. *There is a civic engagement gap among adolescents in the United States associated with students' demographic characteristics.* The most disadvantaged groups are male, black, American Indian, immigrant, and low-SES youth, indicating that there are groups of young people who are not adequately prepared to be functioning members of the polity and society.

2. *Civic learning opportunities in many contexts are related to the civic engagement of young people.* For instance, civic experiences in school enable adolescents to learn through social and democratic processes. Once inequalities in civic experiences in school and the overall school environment are controlled for, the civic engagement gaps between racial minority and white students (and between low-SES and high-SES youth) are greatly reduced.

3. *Contextual effects for characteristics of the school, such as school SES and school climate for open discourse, are found, over and above individual effects.*

4. *Aspects of the neighborhood context influence adolescents' civic outcomes through interactions with the school environment, students' civic experiences, and students' demographic characteristics.* The interactive effects indicate that students who may traditionally be deemed at a disadvantage (either because of poor school or neighborhood conditions) experience more benefits from increases in civic learning opportunities than do more advantaged students.

In the working paper, Wilkenfeld finds systematic variations in the ways in which adolescents are being prepared for functioning citizenship. Parents and peers facilitate preparation by discussing political and social issues, challenging adolescents' construction of knowledge, and providing models of conscientious citizens. Schools provide opportunities for hands-on experiences of democratic processes, supportive environments for sharing different opinions, and learning environments in which democratic ideals are communicated to students. Neighborhoods facilitate civic engagement by enhancing positive experiences in other contexts, specifically in schools. Youth are differentially prepared for active citizenship, but civic experiences within different contexts help to reduce disparities in adolescents' civic outcomes.

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CIRCLE IN THE NEWS

■ "IOWA BRINGS OUT THE '08 YOUTH VOTE," BY ED TIBBETS, QUAD CITY TIMES, 7/21/2009

■ "IT'S THEIR TIME TO GIVE: MORE SCHOOLS ARE MAKING VOLUNTEER WORK A REQUIREMENT," NY DAILY NEWS, 6/7/09

■ "ENTERING THE AGE OF THE YOUNG VOTER," THE OREGONIAN, 5/16/09

■ "NO RACIAL GAP SEEN IN '08 VOTE TURNOUT," BY SAM ROBERTS, THE NEW YORK TIMES, 4/30/2009

■ "YOUTH VOLUNTEERING DIPS, FIRST TIMES SINCE 9/11," BY AP, LOS ANGELES TIMES, 4/23/09

■ "YOUNG OBAMA VOTERS STAY IN THE GAME," BY LAURA ISENSEE, DALLAS MORNING NEWS, 3/28/09

■ "IN IDLE TIME, UNEMPLOYED ARE HELPING OUT," ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH, 3/29/09

■ "THE NEWS COOL KIDS," BY MEGHAN IRONS, BOSTON GLOBE, 3/22/09

■ "MAKE HIGH SCHOOL VOLUNTEER WORK A MUST, SAYS POLITICIAN" NY DAILY NEWS, 1/18/09

■ "TECHNOLOGY MAY BE KEY TO WOO UNDER-30 ELECTORATE," ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS, 12/26/2008

REGISTER NOW FOR THE 2009 NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CITIZENSHIP

The 2009 Annual Conference will be held September 9th at the Library of Congress. The conference will feature the fourth annual "America's Civic Health Index" report, written by CIRCLE and the NCoC. To register for the conference, please visit www.ncoc.net.

THE AUTHOR CONCLUDES, "…THE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT GAP CAN BE NARROWED WHEN THE LEARNING OPPORTUNITY GAP IS REDUCED. SCHOOLS, ALTHOUGH IMPLICATED IN THE EXISTENCE OF A CIVIC ENGAGEMENT GAP, ALSO HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO NARROW THE GAPS BETWEEN DIFFERENT GROUPS OF STUDENTS."

REDUCING THE LEARNING OPPORTUNITY GAP

The author concludes, "…the civic engagement gap can be narrowed when the learning opportunity gap is reduced. Schools, although implicated in the existence of a civic engagement gap, also have the potential to narrow the gaps between different groups of students." Students acquire meaningful concepts, knowledge, and skills through these civic experiences, and schools could better serve students by ensuring that such experiences are available. Effective school practices are especially important in schools located in high-poverty neighborhoods. Essentially, civic experiences in schools contribute to the preparation of youth for active citizenship and equal access to these experiences reduces civic engagement gaps between students of different demographic groups.

The author analyzed data from the U.S. sample of the 1999 Civic Education Study merged with data from the 2000 U.S. Census (including 2,729 ninth-grade students in 119 schools nationwide). The complete findings are contained in CIRCLE Working Paper #64 "Does Context Matter? How the Family, Peer, School, and Neighborhood Contexts Relate to Adolescents' Civic Engagement" which can be downloaded from http://www.civicyouth.org/?p=342. ★

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THE INTERNET AND CIVIC OUTCOMES: NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Many CIRCLE documents have cited the gap in civic engagement between those youth who have college experience and those who do not.[1] Recent research shows that schools may be contributing to this gap.[2] However, a report, the *2008 Civic Health Index,* found that new media, such as email, social networking sites (MySpace, Facebook), Youtube, and text messaging, represent possible avenues for youth with no college experience to participate in civic life. The 2008 survey showed a much smaller gap in civic engagement levels between young people with and without college experience when it came to indicators such as "using a social networking site for civic purposes" and "commenting on blogs."[3]

TO BETTER UNDERSTAND HOW YOUNG PEOPLE WITHOUT COLLEGE EXPERIENCE ARE USING THE INTERNET AND TECHNOLOGY, WE INTERVIEWED STAFF FROM YOUTHBUILD USA, AN ADULT LEARNING CENTER IN VERMONT, A COUNTY CORRECTIONAL FACILITY IN PENNSYLVANIA, AND A COMMUNITY-BASED ARTS AND EDUCATION CENTER IN KENTUCKY.

To better understand how young people without college experience are using the internet and technology, we interviewed staff from YouthBuild USA, an adult learning center in Vermont, a county correctional facility in Pennsylvania, and a community-based arts and education center in Kentucky. While all four organizations used the internet or technology for educational purposes, they used them in various degrees and in different ways with different outcomes. Following are excerpts from the interviews with the four groups. All of the practitioners who contributed to this article work with young people who do not have college experience.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE?

YouthBuild USA: Maanav Thakore is the National Mentoring Manager at YouthBuild USA. "In YouthBuild programs, low-income young people ages 16-24 work toward their GEDs or high school diplomas, learn job skills and serve their communities by building affordable housing."[4] The education and construction components of YouthBuild programs are embedded in a leadership development model that encourages young people to take responsibility for improving their lives and their communities.

In May, the Graduate Leadership Development Department at YouthBuild USA began producing "YouthBuild TV," a live, interactive web-based television show for the network of 226 local YouthBuild programs, with 20 to 40 youth per site. Maanav sees YBTV as a "popular education tool" that will engage current students and graduates on the issues that are relevant to their lives. Programming includes: discussions of world issues, portraits of successful graduates, mini-documentaries profiling neighborhoods across the country in a segment called "MyBlock," reports of organizing efforts by graduates and other organizations, as well as announcements of scholarships, internships, and leadership opportunities for YouthBuild graduates.

YouthBuild TV is a partnership between YouthBuild graduates and YouthBuild USA staff. Each quarterly webcast will be "as participatory as possible" with interactive features such as live chatting, surveying and user-generated content featured in each episode.

The strategy for utilizing live internet video as a tool to promote civic engagement emerged from dialogue between YouthBuild USA staff and graduates from various YouthBuild programs, Maanav says. The Graduate Leadership Department at YouthBuild USA believes user-generated media is crucial to engaging young people.

Vermont Adult Learning/Learning Works (VAL): In Vermont, Wendy Hayward has a different experience of using the internet and technology. Wendy is a staff member at Vermont Adult Learning/Learning Works (VAL). VAL "provides adults with essential skills and education to further their educational, employment and personal goals in order to expand their options and capabilities in the family, community and workplace."[5]

Wendy reports that for youth in VAL's programs the technology most often used is the internet. She notes, "the internet is probably the most often used and required by instructors here hoping that students will find their way around learning to choose appropriate sites, how to cite the material, and how to use it in a presentation." Taking a step back, Wendy's overall experience suggests that, "technology inhibits the students from sharing and participating. I also find that their interpersonal communication skills, oratory skills, spelling and writing skills are not as sharp as students who are not vested in technology."

County Correctional Facility, Pennsylvania: From another perspective, Dawn Rafter teaches youth under 21-years-old in a county correctional facility in Pennsylvania who are working on completing a high school diploma. While no internet access is available during class time, Dawn says that she does "take various re-printable materials from the Internet, discuss[es] social media and [tries] to incorporate technology to the best of my ability inside the prison." Dawn says that "students have a somewhat limited understanding of technology, and only some are eager to learn more." She "believe[s] this stems from their environment - one in which education was not a priority." Upon reflection, Dawn says that "the response to learning is generally increased by how I present the information, as well as the multiple ways I can instruct them in using various technologies."

Appalachian Media Institute (AMI): Rebecca O'Doherty is the Director of the Appalachian Media Institute (AMI).[6] AMI is "a program of Appalshop, a community-based arts and media education center in the coalfields of Kentucky."[7] AMI works with 14- to 22-year-olds. They are "youth who are on parole or who may be valedictorians," as Rebecca says. The youth primarily contribute to the creation of documentaries about issues in their region. Often these documentaries represent "the first time there's media about the issue."

Rebecca talks about the fact that young people in the area of Kentucky where AMI is based grow up with images of themselves and their communities that imply that "to be successful you have to leave the region." For her the "central question" of AMI's work is "how can we help young people develop capacities and knowledge to effect the change they want to see…and stay in [the] region." As a result, there's an intertwined focus of AMI on the "idea that just to get to a point that young people can be effective civic actors, be healthy and happy citizens, there needs to be a re-envisioning."

The youth are paid a stipend, which Rebecca cites as critical because "most kids [are] contributing to family incomes and couldn't do work if [they] weren't being paid." As a part of the

program, participants conduct interviews in the community. She notes these interviews "connect young people to community members who they have never had the opportunity to associate with" and "hear diverse view points." Through these interviews "they [the youth] are bringing people to the table whose voices are never heard and that's a powerful act for them to be able to participate in."

Much research remains to be done on how social media/new technology is used in youth programs. We do not yet know much about the effects on participants or the civic outcomes. Moreover, it's important to note the accessibility gap that still exists – in December 2008 95% of the U.S. population with a college degree reported being internet users "at least occasionally," compared to 67% who have a high school diploma and 35% who have less than a high school diploma.[8] However, our interviews do suggest that social media is being used by a variety of different youth programs in many creative ways.

CIRCLE would like to thank *The Right Question Project* for assistance with this article. *The Right Question Project* is an "educational organization developing new methods and ideas for tapping the potential of tens of millions of people in low and moderate-income communities to become more self-sufficient in their own lives and active citizens participating on all levels of our democratic society."[9] ★
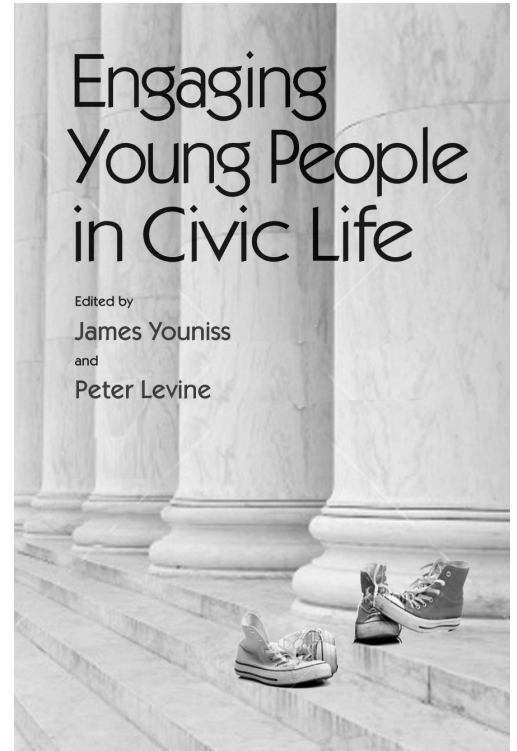
ENDNOTES

1   For more information see "College Attendance and Civic Engagement Among 18 to 25 Year Olds" and "Civic Engagement and the Changing Transition to Adulthood."
2   CIRCLE Working Paper 59: "Democracy for Some: The Civic Opportunity Gap in High School" by Joseph Kahne and Ellen Middaugh.
3   More information about NCOC and the CHI can be found at www.ncoc.net.
4   www.youthbuild.org
5   www.vtadultlearning.org
6   www.appalshop.org/ami/
7   www.appalshop.org
8   www.pewinternet.org. Accessed on May 5, 2009.
9   www.rightquestion.org

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ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE IN CIVIC LIFE

Vanderbilt University Press has published *Engaging Young People in Civic Life*, edited by James Youniss and by Peter Levine, with a forward by former United States Representative Lee Hamilton. This book originated in a meeting organized by CIRCLE and funded by Carnegie Corporation of New York. Many of the chapters are informed by CIRCLE-funded research projects.

In the forward, Hamilton writes, "I can think of no task more important for the future of American democracy than teaching young people about our system of government and encouraging them to get involved in politics and community service. … *Engaging Young People in Civic Life* is tough-minded, data-driven, and unsentimental. It is full of concrete policy proposals for schools, municipalities, service programs, and political parties. It offers all the appropriate scholarly caveats and qualifications. But at its heart, it is a plea to revive American democracy by offering all our young people the civic opportunities they want and so richly deserve."