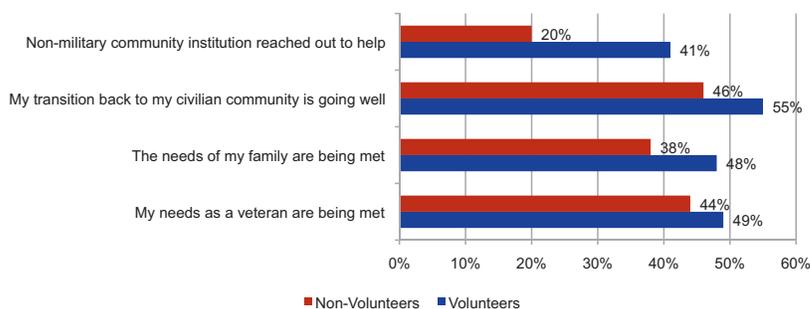


VOLUNTEERING EASES RETURN TO CIVILIAN LIFE FOR YOUNG VETERANS

Recent veterans who have volunteered since returning to the United States show a better adjustment to civilian life than their fellow returned servicemen and women who have not volunteered, according to a new CIRCLE report entitled "Volunteering and Civic Engagement among Recent Veterans."

Graph 1: Transition to U.S. Among Volunteering and Non-Volunteering Veterans



Source: Civic Enterprises OIF/OEF Veterans Survey

The report shows that volunteering helps bolster ties to the community and eases the transition back to civilian life. It draws on information on veteran volunteering trends from Civic Enterprises' survey of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) veterans, the Census 2008 Current Population Survey Volunteering Supplement, and the 2009 Civic Health Index. Fifty-five percent of volunteering veterans say the transition is going well, a full nine percentage points higher than non-volunteering veterans. Forty-eight percent of volunteering veterans also report that the needs of their family are being met compared with 38 percent of non-volunteering veterans.

"America's soldiers who dedicate their service to our country often return with strong skills and seek ways to participate more actively in their communities," said CIRCLE Director Peter Levine. "Veterans have a lot to give, and getting civically involved can help ease the transition back into civilian life and foster valuable relationships among veterans and community members of all ages."

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Tufts
UNIVERSITY

Jonathan M. Tisch
College of Citizenship
and Public Service

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.

VETERANS SHOW COMMITMENT TO SERVICE WHEN GIVEN MEANINGFUL OPPORTUNITIES

Serving in the military may have given a large portion of veterans the opportunity, motivation, and skills to participate more actively in their communities upon their return. For instance, 39 percent of veterans who have volunteered since their return from OIF/OEF were not regular volunteers before serving in the military.

The data showed how service abroad influenced their service back home, suggesting that veterans are looking for opportunities to use the skills they learned in the military. Those veterans who spent most of their time on planning and reconstruction (e.g., rebuilding roads, infrastructure, humanitarian assistance, training local leaders) were slightly more likely to volunteer back home than those who took part in other activities (such as combat, medical assistance, etc.).

Although 61 percent of OIF/OEF veterans strongly agree that American citizens have a basic responsibility to serve the public, the report shows only 25 percent of returned veterans who served after 2001 volunteer—a rate slightly lower than that of the general public. Meanwhile, older veterans volunteer at a higher rate and more frequently than people with no military background, suggesting that established community connections may lead to more opportunities for veterans' involvement.

MEANWHILE, OLDER VETERANS VOLUNTEER AT A HIGHER RATE AND WITH MORE INTENSITY THAN PEOPLE WITH NO MILITARY BACKGROUND, SUGGESTING THAT ESTABLISHED COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS MAY LEAD TO MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR VETERANS' INVOLVEMENT.

MILITARY AND NON-MILITARY INSTITUTIONS COULD HELP ENCOURAGE VETERANS TO SERVE

Veterans' organizations played a potent role in getting returned soldiers civically engaged, as 78 percent of those asked to serve by a

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veterans' organization have done so. Unfortunately, 74 percent of younger, non-volunteering veterans reported they had never been asked to serve by any organization, and 75 percent said they did not possess information on meaningful civic engagement opportunities. When contacted and given meaningful opportunities, veterans have proven to be active citizens.

Despite a lower volunteer rate among recently returned veterans, veterans of all generations were more likely than the general public to have attended a community meeting in the past 12 months, worked on a community project, or collaborated with a neighbor to solve a community problem. According to data from the Civic Health Index, the general veteran population was more likely to say that they would be willing to donate time to help change policies compared to the general public.

LESS DISPARITY BETWEEN WHITE AND LATINO VOLUNTEERING VETERANS COMPARED TO GENERAL PUBLIC

Consistent with the data in previous CIRCLE reports, veterans with more education also volunteered at higher rates. Non-white soldiers were more likely than white soldiers to respond that they had a desire to volunteer during active duty by a difference of seven percentage points.

NON-WHITE SOLDIERS WERE MORE LIKELY THAN WHITE SOLDIERS TO REPORT A DESIRE TO VOLUNTEER DURING ACTIVE DUTY BY A DIFFERENCE OF SEVEN PERCENTAGE POINTS.

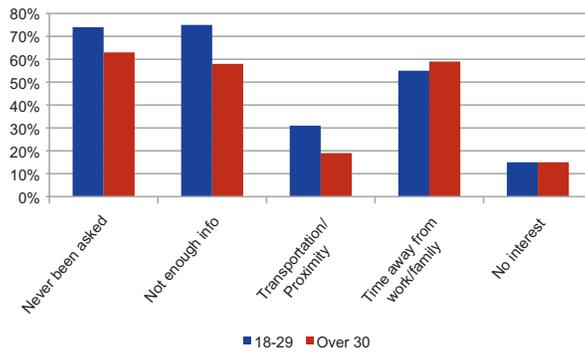
Latino veterans were just as likely as white veterans to become involved in their communities upon returning from duty - closing the volunteering gap that is normally seen between Whites and Latinos.

VETERANS LESS MOTIVATED BY FINANCIAL INCENTIVES

As a whole, veterans were not as motivated by financial incentives to become civically engaged as was the general public. Property tax reductions were shown to be the most appealing incentives for inspiring veterans to volunteer, followed by non-financial training opportunities. Overall, recently returned

soldiers 30 and younger were significantly more likely to get involved with their communities if they were informed of opportunities by a respected fellow veteran. Older veterans were more likely to volunteer if given the chance to volunteer with their spouses or children.

Graph 2: Reasons for Not Volunteering, % of Veterans who Agree/Strongly Agree



Source: Civic Enterprises OIF/OEF Veterans Survey

The fact sheet on volunteering and civic engagement among recent veterans can be found at <http://www.civicyouth.org/?p=364>. ★



VOLUNTEERING AMONG NON-COLLEGE YOUTH AND YOUTH OF IMMIGRANT ORIGIN

Despite the upward trend in youth volunteering, both non-college youth and youth of immigrant origin (those with at least one foreign-born parent) are less likely to volunteer than their counterparts, according to two new CIRCLE Fact Sheets: "Volunteering Among Youth of Immigrant Origin" and "Volunteering and College Experience." The research is based on data from the U.S. Census, Current Population Survey (CPS) and the National Conference on Citizenship's Civic Health Index.

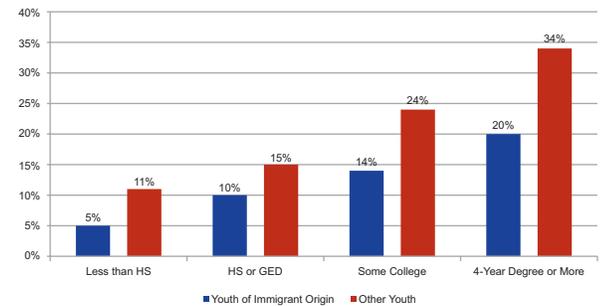
Approximately 43% of the 20- to 29-year-old population has no college experience. In addition, approximately one in four (26%) young people age 18 to 29 had at least one parent who was born outside the United States; 16% of youth aged 18 to 29 were born outside of the United States.

EDUCATION PROVIDES PATHWAY TO VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES

Research shows that young adults (age 20 to 29) with no college experience are half as likely to volunteer compared to young adults with college experience. For youth of immigrant origin, education also had a strong impact on volunteer rates. According to the authors, youth of immigrant origin who were enrolled in any kind of educational institution were almost twice as likely to volunteer as their non-enrolled peers, suggesting that education provides relevant knowledge and skills as well as opportunities to volunteer.

As the authors suggest, not receiving sufficient opportunities in high school could affect the formation of civic identity later in life, which is why providing volunteering opportunities is crucial. According to CIRCLE Lead Researcher Kei-Kawashima-Ginsberg, "This research should encourage schools and community leaders to make sure everyone has opportunities to volunteer, so that regardless of background, no young person slips between the cracks."

Graph 1: Volunteering Among 18-29 year olds by Education and Immigrant Origin



Source: CPS September Volunteering Supplement, 2007

ACCORDING TO THE AUTHORS, YOUTH OF IMMIGRANT ORIGIN WHO WERE ENROLLED IN ANY KIND OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION WERE ALMOST TWICE AS LIKELY TO VOLUNTEER AS THEIR NON-ENROLLED PEERS, SUGGESTING THAT EDUCATION PROVIDES RELEVANT KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS AS WELL AS OPPORTUNITIES TO VOLUNTEER.

YOUTH OF IMMIGRANT ORIGIN FIND VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH ALTERNATIVE VENUES

Youth of immigrant origin were more likely to mention social networks in response to how they got involved with volunteering, whereas non-immigrant youth cited families more often. The report also finds that youth of immigrant origin who either spent more than 15 years in the United States or who immigrated before the age of ten were more likely to volunteer than those who spent less time in the U.S.

The authors suggest that becoming an active participant in the community may take time. It is possible that the families of immigrant youth do not yet have as strong ties to the community as families of non-immigrant youth.

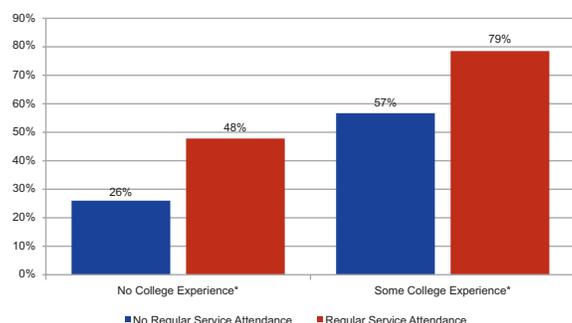


CIRCLE Director Peter Levine notes, “We need immigrants, one of the fastest growing segments of our population, to be involved in our communities. Volunteering benefits those who serve and those whom they help. Communities, policy-makers, and institutions must provide better access to volunteer opportunities for young immigrants.”

NON-COLLEGE YOUTH MAY BENEFIT FROM NEW MEDIA AND RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

The fact sheet “Volunteering and College Experience” shows that religious organizations and new media may offer pathways to volunteering opportunities for non-college youth. Generally speaking, religious service attendance is associated with higher rates of volunteering. For non-college youth, this remains the case: non-college youth who attend religious services are twice as likely to volunteer as those who do not attend services regularly. Moreover, when asked for which type of organization they volunteered, “religious” organizations were the top choice for young people regardless of college experience. Religious organizations could serve as a venue for non-college youth to access more institutionalized forms of volunteering (opportunities that college-bound youth have access to through school).

Graph 2: Volunteering and Religious Service Participation by College Attendance (Ages 18-29)



Source: America's Civic Health Index 2008

The study found that young people who used new forms of media for civic purposes, such as social networking sites (Myspace, Facebook), Youtube, and text messaging, also volunteered at a higher rate than those who did not. Non-college youth who used new media for civic purposes were between 10 and 40 percent more likely to volunteer than those who did not.

NON-COLLEGE YOUTH WHO USED NEW MEDIA FOR CIVIC PURPOSES WERE BETWEEN 10 AND 40 PERCENT MORE LIKELY TO VOLUNTEER THAN THOSE WHO DID NOT.

As the authors point out, the data should be interpreted with caution as the use of new media is also connected with other factors relating to volunteering, such as income. While more research is needed on the topic, new media could be a tool to break down barriers to volunteering by helping youth with no college experience find information related to volunteering opportunities.

Both Fact Sheets can be downloaded from CIRCLE's Web site. “Volunteering Among Youth of Immigrant Origin” can be downloaded from <http://www.civicyouth.org/?p=354> and “Volunteering and College Experience” can be downloaded from <http://www.civicyouth.org/?p=350>. ★



YOUTH VOTER TURNOUT DOWN IN NEW JERSEY, ABOUT THE SAME IN VIRGINIA, COMPARED TO PAST GUBERNATORIAL ELECTIONS

Young voters played a major role in the 2008 presidential election, but less so in 2009. In the New Jersey governor's race, turnout decreased by seven points to 19% between 1997 and 2009. In Virginia, turnout decreased by just one point to 17% between 1997 and 2009. Less than one in five eligible young people voted in both states. A majority of young people preferred the Democratic candidate in New Jersey and the Republican candidate in Virginia.

To produce state-level youth voting estimates immediately following an election, CIRCLE relies on preliminary exit polls, which are subject to revision. We must use 1997 for comparison because no turnout data are available for more recent off-year elections in these two states. Thus we do not know the change since 2005, the most recent gubernatorial election year in Virginia and New Jersey. Comparisons to the presidential election year of 2008 are misleading because turnout is always much lower in odd-numbered years.

Table 1: Turnout in Gubernatorial Elections, ages 18-29

STATE	1997	2009
New Jersey	26%	19%
Virginia	18%	17%

As a proportion of all the people who voted, in 2009, under-30s represented 9% in New Jersey and 10% in Virginia. ("Turnout" is the proportion of all young citizens who voted, shown above.) In Virginia, where Republican Robert F. McDonnell won the election by a large margin, young voters preferred McDonnell to Democrat R. Creigh Deeds by 54% to 44%. In New Jersey, young voters preferred Jon S. Corzine over Christopher J. Christie by 57% to 36%. In New York City, young voters preferred Michael R. Bloomberg to William C. Thompson Jr. by 49% to 48%. These results are based on exit polls conducted by Edison Research.

Data from the 2000, 2004, and 2008 presidential elections show that youth turnout in Virginia, New Jersey, and nationally had been increasing in presidential years:

Table 2: Turnout in National Elections, ages 18-29

STATE	2000	2004	2008
New Jersey	41%	51%	53%
Virginia	47%	43%	59%
National	40%	49%	51%

"Although 17 and 19 percent are low turnout numbers and far from satisfactory, they should be put in context," said CIRCLE Lead Researcher Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg. "Turnout is always much lower in off-year gubernatorial elections than in presidential years." Also, it is a statistical mistake to generalize or make predictions based on a very small sample, such as two governors' races. We do know, however, that gubernatorial campaigns and independent, nonpartisan groups put more resources into mobilizing youth in 2005 than they did in 2009. Other research shows that campaigning to young voters is effective at raising their turnout.

"TURNOUT IS ALWAYS MUCH LOWER IN OFF-YEAR GUBERNATORIAL ELECTIONS THAN IN PRESIDENTIAL YEARS."

As another way of estimating turnout trends, CIRCLE analyzed the number of votes cast in 13 precincts in VA and five precincts in NJ that have relatively high concentrations of college students. These precincts were the focus of non-partisan get-out-the-vote efforts of the Student PIRGs' New Voters Project in 2005. We compared the turnout rate of registered voters from the 2001 and 2005 Gubernatorial Election with turnout of registered voters in 2009 and found that the number of voters decreased by an average of seven percentage points (compared to 2001) in the precincts studied in VA and increased by three percentage points (compared to 2001) in NJ.

Again, it is important to note that the campaign and nonpartisan resources devoted to youth outreach were smaller in 2009 than in 2005. For instance, in New Jersey the PIRGs made 16,000 get-out-the-vote contacts in 2005 and 9,000 in 2009. The PIRGs did not have a get-out-the-vote effort in VA in 2009. ★

* The estimated number of young people who voted in the 1997 VA and NJ Governor's races were calculated using: (1) the number of ballots cast in each race according to the media, (2) the youth share of those who voted, as reported by CNN/ Time Exit Poll, and (3) the estimated number of 18-29 year old citizens taken from the 1997 Census Current Population Survey, March Demographic File.



NEW CIRCLE WORKING PAPERS ON CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Beginning in 2002, CIRCLE began funding much needed research on the civic and political engagement of young people. To date, this funding has resulted in nearly 70 working papers, 15 reports (published by organizations other than CIRCLE), and eight books. The publications represent exciting and diverse additions to the research on civic engagement. At CIRCLE we remain committed to bringing together researchers from multiple fields to create an interdisciplinary collection of research on youth civic engagement. All reports can be downloaded free from CIRCLE's Web site at www.civicyouth.org. The following is a listing of the most recent CIRCLE reports along with a short abstract for each report.

■ McDevitt, M. (2009). *Spiral of Rebellion: Conflict Seeking of Democratic Adolescents in Republican Counties*. (CIRCLE Working Paper No. 68). Retrieved from Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) website: http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/WP_68_McDevitt.pdf

In CIRCLE Working Paper #68, a study of adolescents living in red and blue counties during the 2006 midterm elections shows a striking pattern of Democratic youth thriving in political expression and debate when exposed to Republican ideological climates. Democratic adolescents were more likely to talk with parents and friends about politics, disagree openly, test opinions, and listen to opponents if they lived in Republican counties compared with Democratic youth living in liberal or balanced counties. Compared to Republican youth residing in the same communities, Democratic youth in Republican counties were also more likely to engage in political discussion, to pay attention to news media, and to express confidence in their ability to comprehend campaign issues. The results of the report suggest that Democratic identity is frequently expressed in deliberative and conflict-seeking activities, while Republican identity is often grounded in knowledge. Overall, the study suggests the value of peer-critical discussion as a strategy for youth political mobilization.

■ Finlay, A., & Flanagan, C. (2009). *Civic Engagement and Educational Progress in Young Adulthood*. (CIRCLE Working Paper No. 67). Retrieved from Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) website: http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/WP_67_Finlay_Flanagan.pdf

In CIRCLE Working Paper #67, Finlay and Flanagan study the correlation between civic engagement and educational progress among

young adults (those between the ages of 16 and 30 at baseline) and find that those who make academic progress over a four-year period are also more likely to participate in civic activities such as voting, volunteering, and accessing social media to discuss current events. This relationship holds for young adults from low-income backgrounds as well as high-income backgrounds. The authors note that some groups are more likely than others to make educational progress over the four years. They find that low-income youth who make academic progress over the four years are more likely to participate in sustained engagement, such as volunteering and voting, than low-income youth who make no educational progress. The authors note that factors such as divorce and having young children are especially disadvantageous in furthering educational progress. They propose several interpretations of their findings: educational progress may lead to higher levels of engagement; sustained service may link young adults to opportunities and mentors that assist them in continuing their education; and more motivated young adults may be more likely to continue their education and get engaged in civic affairs.

■ Castle, K., Levy, J., & Peshkin, M. (2009). *Local and Absentee Voter Registration Drives on a College Campus* (CIRCLE Working Paper No. 66). Retrieved from Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) website: http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/WP_66_CastleLevyPeshkin.pdf

In CIRCLE Working Paper #66, authors Kim Castle, Janice Levy and Michael Peshkin assess the outcomes of an in-person campus drive in 2008 in which students were offered a choice of college-state voting in Illinois, or home-state voting by absentee ballot. The study found that the great majority of students who came from swing states chose to vote back home. Students from swing states preferred home-state voting over local voting by an 8-to-1 ratio. The study also found high turnout rates both for students who voted locally and by absentee ballot. 79% of students who registered locally voted, and 84% of students who got an absentee ballot voted. Although absentee voting is more complicated than local voting, most students chose absentee voting. The study concluded that:

- Students can be diligent voters with high turnout, both by absentee ballot and in local voting.
- Students who can vote in their home state or their college state are strongly influenced in that choice by the closeness of the presidential election.

Continued on Page 12



2009 CIVIC HEALTH INDEX REPORT FINDS CIVIC ENGAGEMENT UNDER STRESS IN THE RECESSION

The National Conference on Citizenship (NCO) has released its annual Civic Health Index report for 2009, entitled "Civic Health in Hard Times." As in past years, CIRCLÉ contributed to the design and analysis of the national survey that was the basis of the study and helped with the writing of the report. In addition to the 40 measures of civic participation that compose the Civic Health Index, the survey included timely questions about civic issues. To learn more or to download the report, visit: <http://www.civicyouth.org/?p=353>.

The survey's results reflect the hard choices Americans have made during the downturn, with 72 percent of respondents saying they have cut back on time engaged in civic participation, which includes time spent volunteering, participating in groups or performing other civic activities in their communities. Public perception supports this finding, as 66 percent of Americans say they feel other people are responding to the current economic downturn by looking out for themselves, with only 19 percent saying people around them are responding to the recession by helping each other more. "The economic crisis has triggered civic foreclosure," said Michael Weiser, NCO Chairman, "The good heart of Americans is still very evident, though, as they refocus on basic needs."

"THE ECONOMIC CRISIS HAS TRIGGERED CIVIC FORECLOSURE," SAID MICHAEL WEISER, NCO CHAIRMAN, "THE GOOD HEART OF AMERICANS IS STILL VERY EVIDENT, THOUGH, AS THEY REFOCUS ON BASIC NEEDS."

PROVIDING FOOD AND SHELTER IN TIMES OF NEED

Even though they are disproportionately affected by the economic downturn, low-income Americans are still finding ways to give back to their communities. Thirty-nine percent of respondents with an income less than \$50,000 reported helping others by providing food or shelter, compared to only 27 percent of Americans with a higher income. Overall, 50 percent of Americans gave food or money to someone who was not a relative, while 17 percent allowed a relative to live in their home and more than one-in-ten took in non-relatives.

SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES AND RELIGION MAY OFFER PATHWAYS TO CIVIC PARTICIPATION

The Civic Health Index also explored the relationship between online forms of engagement and community-based civic activities. The results show that Millennials who use social networking sites for civic purposes are far more likely to actively engage in civic participation in their communities.

Religion plays a major role in civic engagement, as 40 percent of respondents who reported they are frequent participants in religious services noted they had increased their level of civic engagement. In addition, individuals who reported they had a high level of social activity – visiting often with friends, eating together as a family or belonging to a local club – also reported an increase in civic engagement. The results indicate that social engagement through church, friends, or even via social networking sites can have a significant impact in countering the negative effect of the current economic downturn on civic engagement.

"God, friends, and Facebook provide a civic safety net," said David B. Smith, NCO Executive Director, "Spending time with others enhances social connections that provide resiliency in tough economic times."

GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES: MILLENNIALS MOST LIKELY GENERATION TO VOLUNTEER

The Civic Health Index also found generational differences. Of those surveyed, Baby Boomers had the lowest volunteering rate at 35 percent, while Millennials had the highest rate at 43 percent. However, in terms of material contributions including providing food, money, or shelter, Baby Boomers were far more likely to provide support (38 percent) compared to Millennials (28 percent).



CIRCLE IN THE NEWS

- **"VETERANS DAY IS A TEACHABLE MOMENT FOR MANY US SCHOOLS,"** BY AMANDA PAULSON, *THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR*, 11/11/2009
- **"FOR TODAY'S TEENS, A POLITICS WEBSITE OF THEIR OWN,"** BY STACY TEICHER KHADAROO, *CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR*, 11/11/2009
- **"TEENS REFLECT ON OBAMA'S FIRST YEAR AS PRESIDENT,"** BY JOSHUA EFERIGHE, *THE MACON TELEGRAPH*, 11/10/2009
- **"YOUNG VOTERS MAY SEIZE ELECTION DAY,"** BY BILL NEMITZ, *PORTLAND PRESS HERALD*, 11/1/2009
- **"DEEDS, DEMOCRATS LOOK TO STUDENTS TO TURN TIDE IN VA GOVERNOR ELECTION,"** BY ERIKA LOVELY, *VIRGINIAN PILOT*, 10/15/2009
- **"DEMS LOOK TO STUDENTS TO TURN TIDE,"** BY ERIKA LOVELY, *POLITICO*, 10/15/2009
- **"STUDENT VOTERS FROM SWING STATES PREFERRED ABSENTEE BALLOTS IN 2008, STUDY FINDS,"** BY LIBBY NELSON, *THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION*, 10/1/2009
- **"UCO TO MARK CONSTITUTION DAY,"** BY SARAH HILL, *THE OKLAHOMAN*, 9/9/2009
- **"CIVIC HEALTH INDEX FINDS AMERICA IN THE MIDST OF CIVIC FORECLOSURE,"** BY THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CITIZENSHIP, *YAHOO! NEWS*, 8/27/2009
- **"CELEBRITIES LEND WEIGHT TO PROMOTE CIVICS EDUCATION,"** BY MARY ANN ZEHR, *EDUCATION WEEK*, 8/25/2009

Continued from Page 8

"We had hoped the economic hardship might trigger more compassion as people saw real suffering and needs," said John Bridgeland, Chairman of NCoC's Advisory Board and CEO of Civic Enterprises. "While this is not true for volunteering, it is true for providing food and shelter. And people with the least means are giving the most."

OTHER KEY FINDINGS

- 31 percent of survey respondents noted they had a "great deal of confidence" in small businesses, making them the most trusted institution. Major companies ranked last on the Index in terms of public confidence (five percent), with banks, Congress and the executive branch garnering six percent.
- 40 percent of African Americans expressed some level of trust in federal government, compared to only 22 percent of Whites.
- 68 percent of respondents said that they would be willing to provide food to those in need.
- 69 percent of respondents said that they would buy U.S.-made products to help foster improved local economic activity.

America's Civic Health Index is released annually in conjunction with NCoC's conference. The 2009 conference was held on Wednesday, September 9, in Washington, D.C. In addition to the national report, NCoC has released a series of state reports measuring civic health compiled with the assistance of CIRCLE. For more information on these reports please see, www.ncoc.net. ★



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.

PRACTITIONER EXPERIENCES OF ELECTION DAY / SAME DAY REGISTRATION AND THE YOUTH VOTE

Conversations about “the youth vote” often focus on the individual motivations of youth much more than other influential factors. Research shows, however, that several factors influence the likelihood that a young person will vote. There are individual and familial factors, environmental factors and institutional factors.

In 2003, CIRCLE released its first publication on state voting policies (an institutional factor) and their influence on the youth vote.¹ CIRCLE has been tracking these policies since 2003 and in July 2009 released an updated Fact Sheet, “State Election Law Reform and Youth Voter Turnout.”² This analysis found that in 2008, on average, 59% of young Americans whose home state offered Election-Day registration (EDR) voted, nine percentage points higher than those who did not live in EDR states.

THIS ANALYSIS FINDS THAT IN 2008, ON AVERAGE, 59% OF YOUNG AMERICANS WHOSE HOME STATE OFFERED EDR VOTED; NINE PERCENTAGE POINTS HIGHER THAN THOSE WHO DID NOT LIVE IN EDR STATES.

This article uses CIRCLE’s recent fact sheet on state election laws to approach the topic from a different angle: the experience of Election-Day registration on the ground.

Election-Day registration, now offered in nine states, does not drastically change how the organizers interviewed for this article approach an election. Organizers from the New Voters Project (NVP) and Democracy North Carolina said that election-day registration is not a complete game-changer.

Samantha Gibb headed up the New Voters Project at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2008. The New Voters Project, a project of the Student PIRGs, “is a nonpartisan effort to register young people and get them to the polls on Election Day.”³ She says that they did not do much differently from her colleagues in states without Election-Day registration.⁴ In fact, Gibb said that they acted as if

they had a deadline, trying to register as many people by Wisconsin’s registration deadline as possible, even though students could register at the polls. While over 400 students registered in just the last 30 minutes before the pre-registration deadline, Gibb said that get-out-the-vote efforts continued since the non-registered were still eligible.

“Same-day registration provided an extra tool to tell youth about when talking about the voting process,” said Adam Sotak, Organizing Director at Democracy North Carolina, who seemed to use a similar approach to Gibb.⁵ (NC offers same-day registration, a similar concept to Election-Day registration.) Democracy North Carolina “is a nonpartisan organization working statewide to fulfill the promise of ‘one person, one vote,’ the bedrock principle of equal rights and self-determination.”⁶ “To most youth, it seems like a common sense approach,” said Sotak about same-day registration. In NC voters can register and vote on the same day during the early voting period. “Many other aspects of youth voter education remained the same,” added Sotak, “Youth are in need of information on candidates and are often intimidated by the voting process.”

State Boards of Elections and County Clerks also interact with young voters and say it is easier to provide youth with information about an election when EDR is involved. Iowa is the most recent state to pass EDR, approving it in 2008. “We have found that public education is easier for all age groups in the sense that, no matter when a voter contacts our office regarding what he or she must do in order to be able to register to vote and cast a ballot, there is an option for him or her to do so,” said Jack Beeson, Assistant to the Elections Director in the Iowa Secretary of State’s Office. “It’s our experience that it takes the same amount of time - or longer - to explain to someone why he or she can’t vote as it does to explain how he or she can register and vote.”⁷ Vickie Zeier is the Clerk of Missoula County, where the University of Montana-Missoula is located. She shared a similar sentiment saying that public education “was easier because our message was that you could register to vote up until 8:00 pm on Election Day.”⁸





Linda McCulloch, Montana Secretary of State, shared data with CIRCLE that indicated that 18-to-24 year-olds were more likely to use Election-Day registration in 2008 than in 2006.⁹ She said, “Youth voters embraced EDR even further in 2008, with 18-to-24 year-olds making up about 32% of the Election-Day registrants.” Specifically in Missoula County, Zeier estimated that “more than 85% of my EDR [voters] are 18-to-29 year-olds. This age bracket definitely uses late registration and EDR more than the other age brackets.” In Iowa in 2008, “34% [of election-day registrants] were between the ages of 18 and 24. 31% were between 25 and 34,” said Beeson. “So, people under 35 made up about two-thirds of the Election-Day registrants, though we also found that Election-Day registration was used by people of all ages.”

Regina Eaton is the Deputy Director of the Democracy Program at Demos, a non-partisan public policy research and advocacy organization.¹⁰ Her job is to focus “on policy issues aimed at increasing voter registration and turn out.”¹¹ Demos has published numerous resources about EDR/SDR. Through their work Eaton says their sense is that young people have tended to use EDR more than other age groups when it’s available.¹² Demos reported that in Wisconsin young voters took advantage of the opportunity to register on primary day in 2008 as “voters under 25 years old made up 74,846 of Wisconsin’s primary day registrants, accounting for over 35 percent of the total.”¹³

These results may be impressive, but there are still challenges to work out with Election-Day registration. Based on his experience in North Carolina, Sotak said that “because we do not have EDR and SDR is only available during the early voting period, that causes some confusion across all age groups.”

Additionally, laws surrounding identification seem to provide a challenge. “The biggest challenge for young people seems to be not having the proper documentation to prove identity and residence,” said Beeson, of the IA Secretary of State’s office. “Particularly, we have found that student IDs don’t usually satisfy the requirements of our law because they don’t typically contain an expiration date. Under our law, all photo IDs must contain an expiration date that has not passed.” This is also an issue that Sotak faced in NC. “In addition to student ID cards, most college students needed additional verification of ID from their universities or colleges (like a list of all students living on a campus provided by a school and sent to the county board of elections office). This was because most college IDs do not include current address information and that information is required by law in order to use SDR in NC. Some colleges were more likely to provide these lists than others.”

On another side of the situation, Missoula County Clerk, Vickie Zeier reflected that “EDR is difficult because you do not know how many individuals will appear to register and vote. The challenge is having enough staff and space for the number of people who appear on Election Day.” As a result, Ms. Zeier shared that she will be “consolidating precincts to reduce the number of election judges needed so that I can put more emphasis on EDR.”

What do these practitioners think needs to be done in the future? MT Secretary of State McCulloch is working on two pieces of legislation that she says “would involve our youth in this important component of our democracy.” One would permit “17 year-olds to vote in the primary election, if they would turn 18 by general Election Day.” The other focuses on recruiting “16 and 17 year-olds as student election judges.”

In North Carolina Sotak suggests that educating people about existing policy is important. “Continued expansion and promotion of early voting as a GOTV tool is needed,” Sotak said. He added, “we need to put a larger emphasis on reaching non-college educated youth.”

“CONTINUED EXPANSION AND PROMOTION OF EARLY VOTING AS A GOTV TOOL IS NEEDED,” SOTAK SAYS.

Samantha Gibb and Sarah Clader, New Voters Project organizers in WI and NJ, respectively, say that EDR does not replace peer-to-peer outreach.¹⁴ Clader suggests that it’s the peer-to-peer experience that gets students to the polls. “With any sort of option you have to talk to people individually...just having SDR or making it easy to register doesn’t get them out to vote,” Gibb says. “In the end of it all, you still have to do tons of outreach.” ★

ENDNOTES

- 1 Fitzgerald, Mary. CIRCLE Working Paper #1: Easier Voting Methods Boost Turnout. February 2003.
- 2 Kawashima-Ginsberg, K., Nover, A., Kirby, E.H. (2009). State Election Law Reform and Youth Voter Turnout. (CIRCLE Fact Sheet). Medford, MA: The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE). Retrieved from <http://www.civicyouth.org/?p=349>.
- 3 <http://www.newvotersproject.org/about-us>
- 4 Phone conversation with Samantha Gibb (November 18, 2009).
- 5 Email from Adam Sotak, Organizing Director, Democracy North Carolina (November 10, 2009).
- 6 <http://www.democracy-nc.org/AboutUs.shtml>
- 7 Email from Jack Beeson, Assistant to the Elections Director, Iowa Secretary of State Michael Mauro (November 4, 2009).
- 8 Email from Vickie Zeier, Missoula County Clerk & Recorder/Treasurer (November 10, 2009).
- 9 Email from Linda McCulloch, Montana Secretary of State (November 9, 2009).
- 10 <http://demos.org/about.cfm>
- 11 <http://demos.org/people.cfm?currentpersonnelid=2784EBBF-3FF4-6C82-563F3174DC96A204>
- 12 Phone conversation with Regina Eaton (November 2, 2009).
- 13 Comstock-Gay, Stuart. “Same Day Registration Delivers Over 300,000 Primary Votes” July 24, 2008. Reprinted in “Voters Win with Election Day Registration” http://www.demos.org/pubs/voterswin_09.pdf. Updated Summer 2009.
- 14 Phone conversation with Samantha Gibb and Sarah Clader, Campus Organizers with the New Voters Project in WI and NJ, respectively (November 18, 2009).

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- Even in the internet era, in-person voter drives reach many students who would not otherwise vote.

- Hutchens, M.J., & Eveland, W.P. Jr. (2009). The Long-Term Impact of High School Civics Curricula on Political Knowledge, Democratic Attitudes and Civic Behaviors: A Multi-Level Model of Direct and Mediated Effects Through Communication. (CIRCLE Working Paper No. 65). Retrieved from Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) website: http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/WP_65_Eveland.pdf.

In CIRCLE Working Paper #65, authors Hutchens and Eveland examine the effects of exposure to various elements of a civics curriculum on civic participation, two forms of political knowledge, internal political efficacy, political cynicism, news elaboration, discussion elaboration, and various forms of interpersonal and mediated political communication behaviors. The data are based on a longitudinal study of high school students in a challenged large urban school district in Ohio. Two approaches to instruction are contrasted: stimulating political communication by discussing media sources and engaging in political debate; and, rote learning of traditional civics content. Both approaches correlated negatively with civic outcomes, but there could be several interpretations of that correlation.

- Torney-Purta, J., & Wilkenfeld, B. S. (2009). Paths to 21st Century Competencies Through Civic Education Classrooms: An Analysis of Survey Results from Ninth-Graders. Washington, DC: Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools and American Bar Association Division for Public Education. Retrieved from Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) website: <http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/CMS-ABA21stCentSkillsStudyFullFinal.pdf>

Civic education, especially when it is interactive and involves discussion of current issues, is an important way to develop the skills young Americans need to succeed in the 21st century workforce. Students who experience interactive discussion-based civic education (either by itself or in combination with lecture-based civic education) score the highest on “21st Century Competencies,” including working with others (especially in diverse groups) and knowledge of economic and political processes. Students who experience neither interactive nor lecture-based civic education have the lowest scores on all of the 21st Century competencies examined. This group, which comprises about one-quarter of all American students, shows not only low levels of knowledge but also a relatively low level of willingness to obey the law.

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