



# CIRCLE

The Center for Information & Research  
on Civic Learning & Engagement

For Immediate Release:  
December 11, 2007

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## **Less is More: Young People Who Watch Less TV are More Involved in Politics and their Communities**

### **But TV Watching May Boost Some Political Activities**

**Washington, DC-** U.S. youth between the ages of 15 and 25 who watch less TV are more likely to be involved in civic engagement activities like voting and volunteering, a recent study by The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE) concludes.

The research found that in nineteen different civic activities young people who watch TV less than two hours a day participated in more civic activities than their peers who watch between two and four hours a day and those who watch four or more hours a day. Most notably light TV viewers were more likely to be involved in solving community problems (23.9 percent), raise money for a charity (30.9 percent) and be an active member of a group (21.3 percent).

The data also looked at TV consumption by youth who are completely disengaged, participating in no civic activities whatsoever. Currently 17 percent of all young Americans qualify as completely disengaged. The light and moderate TV watchers fell below the national average with only 15.7 percent and 12.7 percent fitting into this category. Among heavy watchers, more than 20 percent were completely disengaged.

“Conventional wisdom and research show that excessive TV consumption is rarely associated with positive youth development and often linked to obesity, lower grades and other negative influences,” said Peter Levine, Director of CIRCLE. “While overall our research showed a negative correlation between the amount of TV viewing and involvement in civic activities, we did find some important and interesting exceptions.”

Moderate TV viewers were the most likely to display a campaign button or sign and try to persuade others in an election. Interestingly, the heavy TV watchers (8 percent) were more likely to donate money to a candidate or party than light TV viewers (4.4 percent) and the moderate group (6.8 percent). What this may be attributed to is that those who watch more television see more campaign advertisements prompting them to donate. A fact sheet showing all the findings concerning television consumption and civic engagement among youth ages 15 to 25 can be found at [www.civicyouth.org](http://www.civicyouth.org).

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## Page 2/ Impact of TV on Youth Civic Engagement

Light TV watchers were most likely to voice their political opinions. They also were most likely to contact their public official, boycott and sign petitions – both paper and Web-based petitions. However, the heavy watchers group was the most likely to contact the broadcast and print media; again possibly because this group watches more television.

“While the United States takes the couch-potato crown, leading the world in having the TV set turned on an average of more than eight hours a day, viewership among young Americans has declined nearly an hour since 1982,” said Levine. “This is encouraging and hopefully will lead to great civic engagement among our young people.”

The research is based on *The 2006 National Civic and Political Health Survey*, which was conducted from April 27 to June 11, 2006. The survey sampled 1,700 young people ages 15 to 25, and 550 adults ages 26 and older. The Pew Charitable Trusts funded this survey.

CIRCLE (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, [www.civicyouth.org](http://www.civicyouth.org)) promotes research on the civic and political engagement of Americans between the ages of 15 and 25. Since 2001, CIRCLE has conducted, collected, and funded research on the civic and political participation of young Americans. CIRCLE is based in the University of Maryland’s School of Public Policy and is funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts, Carnegie Corporation of New York and other foundations.