

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, Survey Articles, Research Articles, Research Abstracts, Bibliographies, and Data Sets.

A PROMISING APPROACH: MAKING VOTING METHODS EASIER INCREASES YOUTH TURNOUT

Mary Fitzgerald, author of "CIRCLE Working Paper No. 1: Easier Voting Methods Boost Youth Turnout," recently found that states implementing new, more convenient voting laws witnessed increases in youth voter turnout. Most notably, she found that young people are considerably more likely to vote if they are able to register to vote on Election Day.

According to Mark Lopez, CIRCLE Research Director, the report "represents an important initial inquiry into alternative voting methods such as unrestricted absentee voting, in-person early voting, Election Day registration, and mail-balloting. The findings hold great promise for reversing the decline we have seen in youth voting."

REFORMING OLD VOTING LAWS

In the hopes of increasing voter turnout, several states have reformed old laws to make voting an easier process. To date, more than two dozen states have implemented new, less restrictive voting laws resulting in easy and convenient ballot casting (See Table 2). One reform, unrestricted absentee voting, allows citizens to vote absentee, no explanation required, once they request an absentee ballot. Other states have some type of in-person early voting allowing citizens to vote at the county clerk's office or at a satellite location usually 14-40 days prior to Election Day. A final recent reform allows people to register to vote and cast a ballot on the same day and commonly at the same place.

APPROACHES THAT HOLD THE GREATEST PROMISE

Using aggregate state-level data combined with individual-level data originating from the American National Election Studies (ANES) survey (1972-2000), Dr. Fitzgerald examined the effects state voting reforms have on youth turnout and mobilization by political parties among young people. Her analysis reveals that some alternative voting methods indeed increase youth voting rates as well as increase the likelihood that young people will be contacted by a political candidate.

A key finding shows that Election Day registration increases youth voting activity in presidential years by an estimated 14 percent-

age points, and an estimated 4 percentage points in mid-term elections. Another reform that seems to have raised youth turnout was mail balloting, especially in Oregon where youth turnout increased by an estimated 40 percentage points during presidential election years.¹ Other promising approaches included allowing people to vote early in person at convenient locations and permitting voter registration at state motor vehicle agencies.

According to the report, not all voting reforms have the power to mobilize potential youth voters on Election Day. Voter registration by mail and unrestricted absentee voting during presidential years apparently do not lead to increases in the number of young people voting.

A separate analysis of the data revealed that alternative voting methods also increase the likelihood that a young person will be contacted by a political candidate. Young citizens are 11 percentage points more likely to be contacted by a political party in

To date, more than two dozen states have implemented new less restrictive voting laws resulting in easy and convenient ballot casting.

states with Election Day registration in presidential elections and an estimated 18 percentage points in midterm elections. A previous study released by CIRCLE found that when people are mobilized they are more likely to vote.²

FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

According to Dr. Fitzgerald, "Some alternative voting methods have the real potential to alter the political landscape by changing the way that young people participate in elections, the way that political parties mobilize voters, as well as who participates in elections." For example, Independent and third party candidates could enjoy increased support in states that have implemented alternative voting methods that boost youth turnout. According to the report, it is estimated that between 24 and 44 percent of young people identify themselves politically as Independent. Additionally, new voting laws that increase youth voting could in

1 Southwell, Priscilla, and Justin Burchett. 1997. "Survey of Vote-By-Mail Senate Election in Oregon." *Political Science and Politics* (March): 53-57.

2 Green, Donald P. and Alan S. Gerber. 2001. "Getting Out the Youth Vote: Results From Randomized Field Experiments." Report prepared for the Pew Charitable Trusts as part of an evaluation of the 2000 election efforts of the Youth Vote Coalition.


RESEARCH ROUNDUP

TABLE 2: Alternative Voting Methods in the American States, By Year of Implementation

STATE	UNRESTRICTED ABSENTEE VOTING	IN-PERSON EARLY VOTING	ELECTION DAY REGISTRATION	MOTOR VEHICLE REGISTRATION	MAIL REGISTRATION
Alabama				1995	1995
Alaska	1970	1980		1992	1976
Arizona	1992	1993		1984	1992
Arkansas	Always	1996		1988	1995
California	1978			1995	1976
Colorado	1992	1992		1988	1995
Connecticut				1995	1990
Delaware				1995	1976
Florida				1995	1995
Georgia				1995	1995
Hawaii	1970	1970		1992	1988
Idaho	1994	1970	1994	1992	1995
Illinois				1995	1995
Indiana				1995	1992
Iowa	1991	1991		1992	1976
Kansas	1996	1996		1995	1976
Kentucky				1995	1972
Louisiana				1992	1995
Maine	1990		1974	1990	1984
Maryland				1992	1974
Massachusetts				1995	1995
Michigan				1976	1995
Minnesota			1974	1988	1974
Mississippi				1992	1992
Missouri				1995	1982
Montana	2000			1992	1972
Nebraska	1994	1994		1995	1988
Nevada	1960	1994		1988	1992
New Hampshire			1994	1995	1995
New Jersey				1995	1976
New Mexico	1994	1994		1992	1994
New York				1992	1976
North Carolina	2000	2000		1984	1994
North Dakota	1998		---	---	---
Ohio				1992	1978
Oklahoma	1992	1992		1995	1995
Oregon	1983		1976-1988	1992	1976
Pennsylvania				1995	1976
Rhode Island				1995	1995
South Carolina				1992	1988
South Dakota				1995	1988
Tennessee		1994		1995	1976
Texas		1991		1992	1972
Utah	1992			1995	1976
Vermont	1993	1993		1992	1990
Virginia				1995	1995
Washington	1976			1992	1994
West Virginia				1992	1984
Wisconsin	2000		1976	1995	1976
Wyoming	1999		1992	1995	1995

RESEARCH ROUNDUP

turn encourage candidates to focus on policy issues that are of greater importance to young people.

However, the real potential of the alternative methods may not be truly realized unless more young people register to vote. The U.S. Census estimates that between one third to one half of the youth population is not registered to vote, resulting in large numbers of young people who cannot take advantage of these new, more convenient voting reforms. A copy of the report can be downloaded from CIRCLE's Web site (www.civicyouth.org). 

If you are interested in learning more about the findings from this report, Dr. Fitzgerald will be a participant in the "Institutional Change and Civic Engagement in the U.S.: Diagnoses and Prescriptions" roundtable at the April 2003 61st Annual Conference of the Midwest Political Science Association in Chicago, Illinois.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT: EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP

Each year, many American adolescents participate in extracurricular activities such as student government, sports teams, school newspapers, hobby clubs, vocational clubs, or debate teams. In February of 2003, CIRCLE released a literature review conducted by Mary Kirlin addressing the relationship between adolescent participation in these extracurricular activities and adult political engagement.

Dr. Kirlin, of Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, searched thirty years worth of relevant research in political science, psychology, education and sociology and determined that the volume of directly relevant research was fairly underdeveloped. The review contains approximately thirty studies considered potentially relevant to the question.


AN OVERVIEW OF THE RELEVANT LITERATURE

The literature Dr. Kirlin identified concludes that there is a relationship between adolescent extracurricular activities and adult political and civic activities such as voting and volunteering. In fact, two studies suggest causation attributing between 17 and 19 percent of the direct effect of adult political participation to adolescent extracurricular activity.

Another consistent finding is that different types of organizations generate different behavioral impacts. Research has found that adults who were involved in instrumental organizations (those with a collective goal beyond individual participation such as student government, school newspapers, and debate teams) were more involved in political activities as adults than those involved in expressive activities (such as athletics, band and orchestra, and hobby clubs).

A further important finding is that adolescents from both high and low socio-economic status (SES) families who take part in extracurricular activities participate in adult civic and political life at similar rates. Finally, studies utilizing a developmental approach to political socialization are providing the richest insight into the relationship between adolescent extracurricular participation and adult political engagement.

QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite the consistent and positive findings that have emerged over the past thirty years, there are still many questions about the role of adolescent extracurricular activities in adult political engagement. For example, why does the relationship between adolescent and adult activities exist? Is there direct causation or is there another casual factor that has yet to be considered? Why do adolescents join organizations in the first place? Additional longitudinal research in this area, especially by inter-disciplinary teams, has the potential to help practitioners better prepare the next generation of citizens for civic and political life. A free copy of the literature review can be downloaded from CIRCLE's Web site (www.civicyouth.org). 

NEW STRATEGIES FOR PROGRAMS THAT PROMOTE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Researchers from Child Trends and the University of Michigan led by Jonathan Zaff recently investigated strategies for creating programs and policies to promote positive citizenship. This research challenges the traditional theoretical model that programs designed to encourage civic engagement should focus solely on opportunities to participate in civic behaviors, such as volunteering. Dr. Zaff et al. argue that social and cultural interactions in youths' lives and the development of civic values are also important factors that should