


## 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](http://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](http://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

## RESEARCH ROUNDUP

be included in the model. Data from The Maryland Adolescent Development in Context (MADIC), a large, diverse, longitudinal study, conducted by Dr. Jacquelynne Eccles and colleagues at the University of Michigan, was analyzed in three stages to develop and test a new model of positive citizenship development.

"Socializing Youth for Citizenship," a report on the first stage of the three-part analysis, investigates the predictors of positive citizenship in adolescents. The report provides evidence for the unique effects that informal social interactions have on youth and identifies characteristics that predict later civic and political involvement. One interesting finding was that the culture in which youth are raised can significantly predict youths' citizenship engagement. Particularly, African American parents, who consider their race to be important and who participated in the Million Man March, were found to have children who are more likely to engage in positive citizenship activities.

The second report, "Identity Development and Feelings of Fulfillment: Mediators of Future Civic Engagement," looks at the relationship between civic engagement in adolescence and in adulthood. As reported in this work, multiple factors from multiple social contexts in youth's lives predict their civic participation in

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adulthood. Important influences include social support, socio-economic status and the culture in which youth are raised.

The final report, "Promoting Positive Citizenship: Priming Youth For Action," brings together findings from the first two reports to develop a full model of positive citizenship development. The model suggests that programs designed to promote positive citizenship may need to begin by focusing on: social interactions in youth's lives, such as interactions with parents and peers; the environments in which youth live, such as neighborhoods and schools; and on civic values. The findings suggest that the process of civic development begins with socializing experiences in young adulthood which lead to civic participation in late adolescence. The participation in late adolescence, coupled with social influences at this life stage, then predict civic engagement in early adulthood. The report also calls for additional longitudinal research focused specifically on the development of positive citizenship. ★

## CIRCLE FACT SHEETS

*CIRCLE has produced a number of Fact Sheets which are brief documents with basic information and graphs on various topics. The following Fact Sheets can be found on CIRCLE's Web site:*

- ≡ **Voter Turnout Among Young Women and Men** (January 2003) presents information on one measure of civic engagement, voter turnout, across men and women. It also highlights some of the similarities and differences between young women and young men in their attitudes towards voting.
- ≡ **Civic Engagement Among Non-College Attending 18-25 Year Olds** (November 2002) provides information on the civic engagement levels of non-college attending youth using three measures of civic engagement: voter registration, voter turnout, and volunteering.
- ≡ **Youth Demographics** (October 2002) contains information about the growing population of young people and some of their characteristics such as race, ethnicity, and education level.
- ≡ **Quick Summary of Voting Statistics from the 2000 Election** (October 2002) a quick reference for facts about young voters age 18 to 25 in the 2000 election.
- ≡ **Youth Voter Turnout in the States During the 1998 Midterm and 2000 Presidential Elections** (October 2002) shows the substantial variation in voter turnout rates by state in the 1998 and 2000 elections.
- ≡ **Youth Attitudes Toward Civic Education and Community Service Requirements** (October 2002) contains results from a survey about young peoples' attitudes towards civic education and community service requirements.
- ≡ **Civic Engagement Among Minority Youth** (September 2002) presents information as it relates to minority youth on three measures of civic engagement: voter registration, voter turnout, and volunteering.
- ≡ **Youth Voter Turnout has Declined, by Any Measure** (September 2002) describes difficulties in measuring youth voter turnout. Nevertheless, it estimates the declining rate of youth participation compared to previous generations.