

RESEARCH ROUNDUP

NEXT STEPS: KEEPING YOUNG PEOPLE ENGAGED IN POLITICS

Young people voted in the 2004 election at the highest rate in at least a decade. So now that the presidential election is over, what can organizations do to keep young people interested and active in the political arena? Two CIRCLE reports suggest that political parties and new technology can play important roles in engaging young people in upcoming state and local elections.

WHAT POLITICAL PARTIES CAN DO IN NON-PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

Most political parties recognize that they can make a big difference in getting young people involved in politics. However, a recent CIRCLE study by Dr. Daniel M. Shea and Dr. John C. Green found that many parties with good intentions do not have specific programs designed to attract young voters.

As a follow-up to this report, Drs. Shea and Green conducted interviews with a few dozen political party leaders who seemed to be doing innovative work to attract young voters. The report, entitled "The Fountain of Youth: Political Parties and the

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Mobilization of Young Americans," highlights concrete examples of what different political party organizations are doing to engage young people in elections throughout the year. Following are just a few of the lessons they learned through these interviews.

Lesson #4: Give Young Volunteers Meaningful Work: In Hillsborough County, FL the local Republican party offers an internship program for 10 to 15 area high school students during each election cycle. The interns and other young volunteers are integrated into the party's activities, participating in a range of activities that include fundraisers, rallies, literature drops, telephone banks, and much more. According to the party Chairwoman Margie Kincaid, "There is no substitute for hands-on experience, but the work has to be significant. Like everyone else, young people want to do things that matter."

Lesson #6: Make Use of Different Outreach Technologies: The local Democratic party in Ventura County, CA found that technology is opening up new avenues of communication between the

party and college groups and other younger citizens. The party uses e-mails and posts on Yahoo groups to announce speakers of particular interest to students and younger citizens. Young people are also being brought in to help "jazz up" the party's Web site. According to the County Party Chair Sharon Hillbrant, "Their ideas are much more innovative. You have to be able to know what the kids are doing, and they have so many more innovative ideas than we do."

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USING INTERACTIVE TECHNOLOGY TO INCREASE INTEREST

Research by Dr. Shanto Iyengar also suggests that new interactive technology is helping to bring young people into the political process during non-presidential elections. During the 2002 gubernatorial race, researchers at Stanford University tested whether presenting campaign information in an interactive, entertaining manner increases youth political interest, efficacy, and participation.

To test this hypothesis the researchers conducted a randomized experiment where students were divided into three groups—two treatment groups and a control group. The first treatment group received an "adult" version of a CD containing extensive information about the 2002 California gubernatorial election in an e-book format. The second treatment group received a "youth" version of the CD with the same information contained in the adult version but supplemented with a variety of interactive games, contests and quizzes.

While the sample was somewhat limited in size and location, the experiment did yield findings that suggest that interactive technology can increase youth participation in gubernatorial races. The researchers found that young people who used the interactive, youth version of the CD voted at a higher rate and showed more interest in the campaign than the control group. Moreover, the CD seems to have helped to close the age gap in voting. For example, total turnout in the 2002 gubernatorial election was 36 percent. Among youth in the Youth CD condition, the level of turnout was similar -- 33 percent. Moreover, turnout among 18-

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24 year olds was up 14 percentage points since 1998, the last off-year election for which the Federal Election Commission has compiled age differences in turnout. According to the authors, "Given the typical shortfall in turnout among the young, the fact that turnout in the youth CD treatment nearly matched statewide turnout is revealing of the power of the treatment."


The research was conducted by Shanto Iyengar and Simon Jackman of Stanford University. The complete findings can be found in "CIRCLE Working Paper 24 Technology and Politics: Incentives for Youth Participation." 

TABLE 3: EFFECTS OF CD TREATMENT BY AGE GROUPS

Outcome	Age	Youth CD Effect?	Adult CD Effect?
<i>Turnout</i>	All Ages	Turnout increased 11 percentage points*	
	18-25	Turnout increased 18 percentage points**	
	26-30		
<i>Political Interest</i>	All Ages	Interest increased by 7 percentage points*	Interest increased by 5 percentage points*
	18-25	Interest increased by 9 percentage points**	
	26-30		
<i>Political Efficacy</i>	All Ages		
	18-25		
	26-30		Political Efficacy increased by 6 percentage points+
<i>Civic Duty</i>	All Ages		
	18-25		
	26-30		Civic duty increased by 5 percentage points+

**p>.01, *p<.05, +p<.10

CIRCLE FACT SHEETS

- ≡ **Attitudes of Young People Toward Diversity** (February 2005) summarizes young people's attitudes toward three groups that are sometimes targets of intolerance: gays, immigrants, and racial minorities.
- ≡ **How Individuals Begin Volunteering:** (January 2005) gives a breakdown of how volunteers initially become involved in volunteer activity by state and age group.
- ≡ **Youth Voter Turnout 1992-2004: Estimates from Exit Polls:** (January 2005) estimates youth voter turnout in the 2004 election for 18-24 year olds and 18-29 year olds.
- ≡ **Youth Voting in the 2004 Election** (November 2004) provides information about issues that were

important to young voters, their political preferences, and gives early estimates of youth voter turnout in the 2004 election.

- ≡ **College Students and the 2004 Election** (November 2004) offers findings from the first post-election survey of college students after the 2004 presidential election.
- ≡ **Youth and Adult Voter Turnout: 1972-2000** (September 2004) compares turnout for 18-24 year olds & 18-29 year olds to that of older voters.
- ≡ **The 2004 Presidential Election and Young Voters** (October 2004) provides information about young voters and their interest in the 2004 presidential election.