

## YOUNG PEOPLE SUPPORTIVE OF COMPROMISE AND MORE OPTIMISTIC ABOUT HIGHER EDUCATION'S ROLE IN PROMOTING CIVILITY IN POLITICS

CIRCLE Working Paper #71, "Youth Attitudes toward Civility in Politics," builds upon a recent report entitled "Nastiness, Name-calling & Negativity: The Allegheny College Survey of Civility" which found that average citizens are upset about the incivility in politics, but their views of civility differ by ideology, gender, and media use. CIRCLE Working Paper #71 focuses on new voters and how they differ from their older counterparts. Authors Melissa S. Kovacs and Daniel M. Shea find that overall, younger voters are less likely to believe that civility is possible; however, they do believe that higher education can be gauged to encourage civility.

### PERCEPTIONS OF UNCIVIL BEHAVIORS DIFFER BY AGE

According to the analysis, 58% of all Americans say they pay attention to politics "most of the time." The research shows, however, that this rate differs based on generation. Young people, 18-to 29-year-olds, were the least likely to say they pay attention to politics. Moreover, the authors found age differences in feelings about the civility of the recent healthcare debate. According to the data, young people were the most likely to say that Americans should be proud of the way our elected officials dealt with the health care debate.

ACCORDING TO THE DATA, YOUNG PEOPLE WERE THE MOST LIKELY TO SAY THAT AMERICANS SHOULD BE PROUD OF THE WAY OUR ELECTED OFFICIALS DEALT WITH THE HEALTH CARE DEBATE.

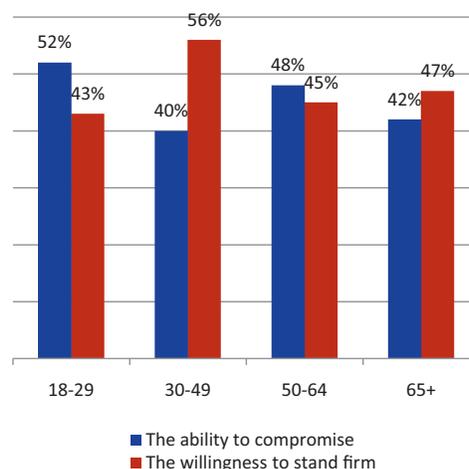
To measure the respondent's perceptions of what "incivility" constitutes, the survey asked what characterizes uncivil behavior. Across all generations, "shouting over someone you disagree with during an argument" was cited as the most uncivil behavior. "Disruptive but nonviolent forms of protest, such as sit-ins," were the least likely to be chosen as an uncivil behavior across all generations.

### YOUNG PEOPLE VALUE COMPROMISE IN POLITICS

When asked about the possibility of "disagreeing respectfully," adults age 30 to 49 were the most likely to respond that disagreeing respectfully is possible; young Americans 18-to 29-years-old were the least likely to say that it's possible.

Despite this, young people were the most likely to say that the ability to compromise is an important quality in a politician. More than 52 percent of 18-to 29-year-olds chose compromise, compared to the 39.9 percent of 30-to 49-year-olds. In fact, respondents age 30 to 49 and age 65 and above were more likely to say that the willingness to stand firm is a necessary quality in a politician, over the ability to compromise (see Figure 1). The research does not indicate why young citizens feel that respectful politics is possible.

Figure 1: Compromise or Stand Firm by Age



Source: Allegheny College Survey of Civility and Compromise in American Politics

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## CIRCLE IN THE NEWS

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- "YOUNG VOTERS ARE IGNORING MIDTERM ELECTIONS, ISSUES," BY JACK BROOM, *THE SEATTLE TIMES*, 8/6/2010
- "CALLING ALL YOUNG VOTERS TO GET RE-ENGAGED WITH POLITICS," *THE SEATTLE TIMES*, 8/6/2010
- "TRICK OR TREAT: ROCK THE VOTE LAUNCHES VOTER REGISTRATION DRIVE," BY NAOMI JAGODA, *USA TODAY*, 8/3/2010
- "ROCK THE VOTE LOOKS TO OVERCOME YOUTH ENTHUSIASM GAP BY MIDTERMS," BY QUINN BOWMAN, *PBS NEWSHOUR*, 8/3/2010
- "POLITICAL PARTIES TRY TO DRAW YOUNG VOTERS TO POLLS," BY NAOMI JAGODA, *USA TODAY*, 7/1/2010
- "A FIRST GLIMPSE AT NOVEMBER'S FIREWORKS," BY HEATHER SMITH, *THE HUFFINGTON POST*, 7/5/2010
- "CALLING ALL APOLOGISTS: APATHETIC ANTHEM UNDERCUTS YOUNG-VOTER ENGAGEMENT" BY ADAM SMELTZ, *STATE COLLEGE NEWS*, 6/21/2010

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### INSTITUTIONS HAVE POTENTIAL TO MAKE POLITICS MORE CIVIL

In addition to measuring perceptions of the current levels of civility in politics, the survey also measured who the respondents felt should take the lead in making politics more civil. Opinions on this matter, like perceptions of incivility, differed based on age. Young people were the most likely to say that colleges and universities should take initiative on curbing the incivility in politics. In comparison, respondents aged 50 and above said that families should take the lead in making politics more civil, and those 30 to 49 were almost as likely to say that it is the duty of political parties and elected officials to make politics more civil. In general, young people favored the role of higher education in decreasing the incivility in today's politics.

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YOUNG PEOPLE WERE THE MOST LIKELY TO SAY THAT COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES SHOULD TAKE INITIATIVE ON CURBING THE INCIVILITY IN POLITICS.

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For a complete copy of CIRCLE Working Paper #71 "Youth Attitudes toward Civility in Politics" please visit:  
<http://www.civicyouth.org/?p=379>.★



### CIRCLE WORKS WITH NCO C TO PRODUCE STATE-LEVEL REPORTS ON CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The landmark and bi-partisan Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, signed into law in April of 2009, directed the Corporation for National and Community Service and the National Conference on Citizenship to collect and report data on our nation's civic health. The first Civic Health Assessment, "Civic Life in America: Key Findings on the Civic Health of the Nation" was released on September 16. To read the issue brief, and for a state- and city-level breakdowns of the data and rankings, please visit <http://civic.serve.gov>

To further expand the work of the Civic Health Assessment, CIRCLE has partnered with NCoC to help release 17 local civic health reports in partnership with institutions across the country. These reports will be released throughout the fall of 2010. For more on these localized reports, visit <http://NCoC.net/states>.